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The Indo-German beginnings of Bombay Talkies, 1925-1939

Eleanor Anne Halsall

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in
Languages and Cultures of South Asia
2016

Department of South Asia
SOAS, University of London

Declaration for PhD Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis charts the involvement of German filmmakers in the development of cinema in Bombay from 1925 until 1939; a partnership that created Bombay Talkies, one of India's major film studios during the 1930s. Drawing on a variety of archival sources, the study takes an interdisciplinary approach, locating the German presence during a critical period in history, as the triangular relationship between Germany, India and Britain came under increasing tension in the prequel to war.

Across these tangled threads, cinema sometimes functioned as a discursive space to articulate socio-political concerns; but it was also perceived as a medium with which to forge national identity and belonging. The study engages with these ambitions, asking how the Indo-German involvement at Bombay Talkies inflected the production of Indian cinema; and what this means for the production of nation-based historiographies. This thesis offers a fresh perspective by re-examining existing material and introducing new information, in the process challenging some of the established narratives. Taking a broader sweep than previous studies, the thesis tracks the German films of Franz Osten and Josef Wirsching, putting them into context alongside the films they produced with Himansu Rai; a process that reveals how, at times, India and Germany shared parallel concerns.

Extending the study beyond a narrative history, the thesis explores how the transition to sound changed the nature of film production and altered the direction taken by Rai and others. By analysing the aesthetic development of the films produced by Bombay Talkies, the study explores whether, and to what extent, the German filmmakers left a legacy that might be traced to the present.

Acknowledgements

Although a thesis is a solitary pursuit, so many people have contributed to this project in different ways. Apart from the scholars whose work has provided a foundation, and who are acknowledged in the text, suggestions, critiques, insights and support have come from many sources over the years.

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In loving memory of
Anne Margaret Halsall (née Roberts)
1935-1987

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Tables

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Abbreviations

BAL	Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, Berlin
BAW	Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv Wilmersdorf, Berlin
BL	British Library
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront
DKB	Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin
MLK	Münchener Lichtspielkunst
ICC	Indian Cinematograph Committee
ICCE	ICC Evidence, volumes 1-5
ICCR	ICC Report
IOR	Indian Office Records
NFAI	National Film Archive India
NSBO	Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation
NSDAP	German National Socialist Workers Party
RFK	Reichsfilmkammer
UFA	Universum Film AG

Orthography, translations and geographical names

Several geographical names have changed since the historical period this thesis investigates. Because this is a historical account, and as the name of the studio, Bombay Talkies, was determined by the studio's location in the city of Bombay, it is this name that is used throughout. References to the city after 1996 use the name Mumbai. The same applies in the case of Calcutta/Kolkata and Madras/Chennai.

Spelling variations in both English and German have arisen through the passage of time, through regional differences and via individual recall. For the sake of consistency, the thesis uses one spelling throughout. Thus, for example, the family name Ostermayr is used, rather than the variations Ostermayer, Ostermeyer and Ostermaier, all of which can be found in the archives.

Film names in Hindi have been left as they appeared in the respective print media. Where Hindi words and phrases are cited in this thesis, McGregor's model of transliteration has been applied.¹

Direct quotes of Hindi names, such as from Edwin Arnold's poem, preserve the original transliteration. Hindi words that are found in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, such as zamindar, are not treated as transliterations.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are the author's and full responsibility is taken for errors.

¹ R. S. McGregor, ed., *The Oxford English-Hindi Dictionary* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993); R. S. McGregor, *Outline of Hindi Grammar* 3rd ed., (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Crawford	What about <i>The Light of Asia</i> ?
Bhavnani	That was not an Indian production. That was a combination of German and Indian.
Crawford	It was produced in India?
Bhavnani	Yes, but partly foreign capital and partly Indian capital, directed and photographed by foreigners.
Irani	It was printed in Germany, developed in Germany and exposed in India. ¹

1 The Indo-German beginnings of Bombay Talkies

1.1 Introduction

Grappling for an appropriate category in which to conveniently locate Himansu Rai's first film, *The Light of Asia*, the panel members and interviewees of the Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC) were clearly in a quandary. What should be the criteria that anchored a film's identity within the context of geographical location and cultural belonging? The debate masked layers of interests and aspirations that were playing out within the sphere of the new medium; one that was beginning to recognise cinema as "more than a mere amusement to millions of people."² As the Committee journeyed around the region, canvassing opinion from those it had invited, the cultural, economic, nationalist, and political interests that were being vested in the respective national and regional film industries, gradually came to light. The growing recognition that cinema had importance as "a powerful instrument for propagandist work and an adjunct to the exploitation of foreign markets," also meant that the issue of a film's national identity would continue to matter.³ Consequently, when the "combination of German and Indian" that Bhavani described became a longer-term collaboration between Rai and Franz Osten, their relationship would continue to come under scrutiny for what it might reveal about their cultural and political allegiances.

¹ Government of India, *Indian Cinematograph Committee 1927-28: Evidence* Vol 1. (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1928), 190.

² Written statement of Rao Saheb C. S. R. Rao, *ICCE*, Vol 2, 1019.

³ *Ibid.*

When Himansu Rai established Bombay Talkies in 1934, he created a cosmopolitan space that brought together a diverse group of people, languages and cultural influences from across India, as well as from Germany and other parts of Europe.⁴ This thesis explores that space, focusing on the involvement of German filmmakers in the development of Indian cinema in Bombay. Several questions arise from this topic. Why did Rai choose to recruit Germans at a time when he was coming under pressure from his compatriots to observe *Swadeshi* practices? Why did the Germans accept his offer to work at Bombay Talkies? How were they received by the film industry in India? What difference did they make? What legacy, if any, did they leave?

1.1.1 The global circulation of filmmakers

After much delay caused by difficulties in obtaining the necessary entry visas from the Government of India to permit them to enter British India, four German filmmakers departed on the SS Cravocia sailing from Trieste to Bombay, where they arrived on 18 February 1925.⁵ Franz Osten (1876-1956), Wilhelm Kiermeier and Josef Wirsching (1903-1967), were all employees of the Munich-based film company, Münchener Lichtspielkunst, popularly known as Emelka.⁶ The fourth member of the group, Bertl Schultes, was primarily a stage actor, recruited to the project by dint of his experience of international travel and his knowledge of English. The Germans were accompanied on the voyage by an Indian writer, Niranjan Pal (1889-1959), a friend and associate of the lawyer, actor and aspiring film producer, Himansu Rai (1892-1940), who had travelled ahead to India.⁷ The

⁴ Bombay Talkies was Rai's third film company. The choice of names for his companies is perhaps instructive, moving from an identification of the personal with the global (Himansurai Indo-International), adapting to the transition to sound (Himansurai Indo-International Talkies Ltd), before anchoring the, now de-personalised, studio in the geographical (The Bombay Talkies, Limited).

⁵ Bertl Schultes, *Ein Komödiant Blickt Zurück* (Munich: Feder Verlag, 1963), 141; the bureaucratic difficulties to which Schultes referred were the result of the Aliens' Restriction Act (1914) and the Aliens' Restriction (Amendment) Act (1919).

⁶ The name Emelka derives from the acronym MLK, used to denote the Münchener Lichtspielkunst.

⁷ Niranjan Pal, *Niranjan Pal : A Forgotten Legend & Such Is Life: An Autobiography*. (London: South Asian Cinema Foundation, 2011), 202.

purpose of their journey was to produce a cinematic version of the early life of the Buddha. Using Pal's adaptation of Edwin Arnold's popular poem, first published in 1879, it would be called *Die Leuchte Asiens* (Light of Asia).⁸ Although no one realised it at the time, for Osten and Wirsching, the journey to India marked the beginning of a long association with the developing film industry in Bombay. In Osten's case, the association would produce a further eighteen films, surviving the transition to sound and only ending with the intervention of the Second World War; in Wirsching's case, the association would last for the rest of his life.

The advent of the moving image introduced ideas, technology and foremost, people, to places beyond their origins; in this respect it mapped the growth of globalisation from the early twentieth century. Acting as a centripetal force, the film industry has always drawn its workforce from diverse backgrounds to fulfil its creative ambitions, in the process disrupting paradigms of cultural and national identity that have shaped, and continue to frame, so much historiography of the film. This was either by material example, such as the journey undertaken in 1896 by the Lumière Brothers' short films as they were exhibited across continents, presenting their quotidian images of factory workers to fascinated spectators, or through the appropriating agency of the travelling cameramen of the early 20th century, commissioned and equipped by companies such as Pathé Frères, whose quasi-ethnographic task it was to capture what they saw in the world and bring it back for the entertainment and edification of what were predominantly Western audiences. The "movies," as they quickly became known, would henceforth always be on the move.

Because it was initially unhampered by language, the moving image enabled performers to seek stardom elsewhere, until sound film arrived to rupture careers. For example, the Danish actor, Asta Nielsen, left Copenhagen for Berlin, where she made the majority of her films, introduced the screen vamp and even performed once as Hamlet, thereby crossing boundaries of nation and gender, in a fusion of

⁸ *The Light of Asia*, directed by Franz Osten, (Emelka, Great Eastern Corporation, 1925).

German, Danish and English cultural influences.⁹ Emil Jannings, the German actor who would later perform in Ufa's *Der blaue Engel*, crossed the Atlantic, drawn towards stardom in Hollywood, only to return when sound cinema intervened to curtail his international career.¹⁰ Meanwhile, technological expertise in the medium enabled practitioners to circumnavigate the globe, their skills less contingent on the exigencies of language, their personal appearances and voices irrelevant to the film. Filmmakers such as Eisenstein and Buñuel were drawn to Hollywood, only to find that their cultural and political values were at odds with Hollywood's normative modes.¹¹ In Britain, producers such as Michael Balcon and Bruce Woolfe looked for, and encouraged, international cooperation, mindful of the benefits that cross-border co-operation brought to the British film industry.¹² In addition to these individuals who were usually travelling under their own volition, must be added the thousands of émigré filmmakers, dispersed by political extremism to locations beyond their homelands, to places where they were not always welcomed with warmth.

Bombay Talkies produced films that challenged the entrenched inviolability of caste; questioned the lack of female self-determination, and alluded to an India that might be free of British rule. Although it had its detractors who queried whether the films really challenged the status quo, the studio opened up the acting profession to “respectable” persons; it raised public expectations about the quality and aesthetics of the productions; and it succeeded in becoming a profitable commercial endeavour while entertaining audiences across India. Rai's decision to locate the studio in Bombay made an important contribution to the development of that city's status as the leading centre of the film industry in India during this period; and his strategy of designating Hindustani for the dialogue of the films, whilst easing transregional circulation across the north of India, arguably

⁹ Manvell and Fraenkel, *German Cinema*, 40–42.

¹⁰ Ephraim Katz, *The Macmillan International Film Encyclopedia* (London: Macmillan, 2001).

¹¹ See Katz, *Macmillan International Film Encyclopedia*, 415–418; 194–195.

¹² Robinson identifies both Michael Balcon and Herbert Wilcox as two British producers whose outlook was internationalist; “British International Pictures,” 40.

contributed to an enduring, and predominantly occidental misperception, that the Hindi film industry in present day Mumbai speaks for all of India.¹³

Until recently, the presence of German filmmakers during this early development of the Hindi film in Bombay has received only sporadic attention from scholars. What has been written has focused mostly on Osten-the-director, whose silent films produced with Rai have been the subject of a handful of monographs, book chapters, articles and documentaries, as well as a number of cinematic retrospectives around the world; these are documented in the literature review below. Osten's name was later rescued from the historical obscurity it was threatened with in the immediate decades after 1945. Perhaps because so much film historiography is shaped from the perspective of auteurism, the remaining Germans who worked with Osten in India have been relatively untroubled by film historians either in India or Germany. Although Karl von Spreiti (1905-1970) is known to political historians, his work as Bombay Talkies' first film architect is unknown outside India, and scarcely known within.

The involvement of foreign filmmakers during the period from 1925-1939 is not exceptional: other Germans, as well as other foreigners, were involved with the film industry as it was evolving across India.¹⁴ Indian filmmakers were themselves relocating within its geopolitical contours, and travelling west, to Germany, Britain, France and America in particular, to gain expertise in film production. Among them were Rai and his wife, Devika Rani (1908-1994), who would become the leading star of Bombay Talkies, and who both spent time at the studios of Universum Film

¹³ With the exception of original quotations, the term 'Hindi' is used throughout this thesis to denote the language that was used for the dialogues of the Bombay Talkies' films. Whilst acknowledging that its use is controversial, a broader discussion about the appropriate use of the terms Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu lies outside the scope of the current project. For more information on the political and colonial debate, see: Christopher R. King, *One language, two scripts : the Hindi movement in nineteenth century north India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994); Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi public sphere, 1920-1940: language and literature in the age of nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Andrew Simpson, ed. *Language and National Identity in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Alison Safadi, "The Colonial Construction of Hindustani." (Ph.D.diss., University of London, Goldsmiths' College, 2012).

¹⁴ For example, a German animation specialist, Bodo Gutschwager, worked with the Indian director, Mohan Bhavnani; and an American sound engineer, Wilford Deming, worked first with Saroj Movietone in Bombay and subsequently with New Theatres in Calcutta.

(Ufa) in Berlin as well as with British Instructional Films and Stoll Studios in London.

Several factors make this Indo-German partnership a subject of interest for film historians. The first is that it provides another example of the transborder production of cinema, whether those borders were national, regional or cultural. The second factor is that it took place during the transition from the silent to the sound era, a development that shaped the filmmaking pursuits of the individuals concerned and had far-reaching consequences for film industries around the world. The third is that it took place within a period of political and economic instability, framed by two global conflicts, as well as the decline of European colonial power. With this in mind, some of the film texts might be read as reflections on what was happening in their respective societies, not in a documentary or realist sense, but as an understanding of how filmmakers were using the medium of cinema as a discursive space for matters that concerned them.

In the spatio-temporal period that frames this thesis, the triangular relationship linking Germany, India and Britain, is held in tension between India's liminal nationhood and its growing disengagement from the British Empire; Germany's colonial aspirations and its sometimes opportunistic support for Indian nationalism; and Britain's struggle to retain its imperial possessions in the face of increasing opposition at abroad and home. Beyond this political nexus, however, filmmakers from all three regions continued to operate individually, crossing borders and forging alliances that were often independent of nationalist or colonial pursuits, until the Second World War interrupted the flow.

This thesis offers three contributions to the history of film. By considering the activities and productions of German filmmakers operating in the film industry in India, and their Indian counterparts who were active in Germany, it explores beyond the narrow categories of the nation, and contributes to the development of a historiography of transnational film. In exploring the tripartite relationship between India, Germany and Britain during a period of substantial socio-political change, it provides context to evaluate how these externalities influenced the actions and lives of the German and Indian filmmakers involved in this particular

history. Finally, by tracing some of the stylistic and technological developments that are evident in the films produced, the thesis adds to the historiography of the film industry in Bombay as well as to the development of the German film industry in Munich, as the medium of the moving image transitioned from silence to sound.

1.2 Reviewing the literature

1.2.1 Historical context and the Indo-German relationship

The historical period within which the current project falls continues to be widely researched. For the purposes of this thesis, the literature on the political and historical context has been limited to a small number of texts, of which the authoritative works of the historian, Richard J. Evans, might be considered seminal to providing an understanding of the experiences of individuals during the rise of National Socialism.¹⁵ Davidson's research into his grandfather's career within the National Socialist organisation complements Evan's work, adding to an understanding of the experience of ordinary Germans. Background detail about Indian citizens who were studying in Germany during the 1930s comes from the biography of his uncle Shanti, produced by Vikram Seth; and that of her father, Ayi Tendulkar, produced by Laxmi Tendulkar Dhaul. In Dhaul's case, this provides additional links to cinema history through the relationship of Ayi Tendulkar with Thea von Harbou.¹⁶ The edited diaries of the Rathbone siblings provide a British perspective of travelling through Germany on a number of occasions between 1930 and 1934, whilst letters from Indira Nehru to her father refer to her experiences of living in Germany during 1935.¹⁷ The relationship between officials

¹⁵ Richard J. Evans, *The coming of the Third Reich* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004); Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in power* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006).

¹⁶ Martin P. Davidson, *The perfect Nazi : unmasking my SS grandfather* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2011); Vikram Seth, *Two lives* (London: Little, Brown, 2005); Laxmi Tendulkar Dhaul, *In the shadow of freedom : three lives in Hitler's Berlin and Gandhi's India* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2013).

¹⁷ Philip Rathbone, and Joy Rathbone, *Twins in Germany : The Travel Writings of Philip & Joy Rathbone* (n.p.: Billingsley Books, 2013); Indira Gandhi, *Freedom's daughter : letters between Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, 1922-39*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).

of the German Government and Indian nationalists such as Subhas Chandra Bose, is examined by Hartog and Hayes.¹⁸

The Indo-German relationship has produced a substantial amount of literature, examining the cultural exchanges that have taken place between Germany and India over several hundred years. Leifer charts the relationship over 500 years, but mostly excludes cinema from his discussion.¹⁹ Equally applicable to producing historiographies of the film, Pernau's text explores the writing of historiography from the newer perspectives of transnational histories that are being increasingly applied by scholars.²⁰ Some of these consider the relationship in the context of a specifically German form of Orientalism, distinguishing it from the colonial relationships of other European nations.²¹ Oesterheld examines some of the links between Germany and India in the inter-war period, and includes comments on Osten.²² One of the more recent additions to this body of work is Manjapra's examination of cultural entanglements between India and Germany, within which context he considers the partnership of Osten and Rai.²³ Kamm's doctoral work on

¹⁸ Rudolf Hartog, *The Sign of the Tiger : Subhas Chandra Bose and his legion in Germany, 1941-45* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co, 2001); Romain Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany : politics, intelligence and propaganda, 1941-1943* (London: Hurst, 2011).

¹⁹ Walter Leifer, *Bombay and the Germans* (Bombay: Shakuntala, 1975); Walter Leifer, *India and the German: 500 Years of Indo-German Contacts* (Bombay: Shakuntala, 1971).

²⁰ For example, see Margrit Pernau, *Transnationale Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

²¹ Suzanne L. Marchand, *German orientalism in the age of empire : religion, race, and scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, ed. Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 76–133; Robert Bruce Cowan, *The Indo-German Identification : Reconciling South Asian Origins and European Destinies, 1765-1885* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010); Robert Bruce Cowan, "The Indo-Germans: An 'Aryan' Romance" (Ph.D.diss., City University of New York, 2006); Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander, and Douglas T. McGetchin, ed., *Transcultural encounters between Germany and India: kindred spirits in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London: Routledge, 2014); Sebastian Conrad, "Rethinking German Colonialism in a Global Age," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 4 (2013): 543–66.

²² Joachim Oesterheld, "Germans in India between Kaiserreich and the End of World War II," in Cho, Kurlander, and McGetchin, ed., *Transcultural Encounters*, 101–14, 2014.

²³ Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

the mobility of German filmmakers during the inter-war period examines Osten's silent productions with Rai.²⁴ Émigré filmmakers have been the focus of several theses and monographs including Bergfelder and Cargnelli who discuss émigrés working in the British film industry.²⁵ Ungern-Sternberg has considered the work of the German Jewish film critic, Willy Haas, including details about his work in India.²⁶

1.2.2 Indian cinema

Vasudevan's short essay addresses some of the problems the researcher of early cinema in India is likely to encounter before beginning to read any history of early Indian cinema.²⁷ Apart from the 1928 publications from the Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC) which provided a specific type of survey of the film industry (a subject discussed in more detail below), the early history of the film in India has suffered from what Bhaumik describes as "cultural amnesia."²⁸ Panna Shah's 1950 doctoral study produced a sociological study of the growth of the film industry, but otherwise the cinema in India remained largely outside academic study until

²⁴ Jessica Elizabeth Kamm, "German Film, World Travel: Berlin, Hollywood, Bombay" (Ph.D.diss., University of Illinois, 2011).

²⁵ Tim Bergfelder, and Christian Cargnelli, eds. *Destination London : German-Speaking Émigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950*. (New York: Berghahn Books., 2008); Kevin Gough-Yates, "The European Film Maker in Exile in Britain, 1933-1945" (Ph.D.diss., Open University, 1990); Maria Hilchenbach, *Kino im Exil: die Emigration Deutscher Filmkünstler 1933-1945*. (München; New York: Saur, 1982); Tobias Hochscherf, *The continental connection : German-speaking émigrés and British cinema, 1927-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Jan Christopher Horak, *Fluchtpunkt Hollywood* (Münster, MAKS Publikation, 1986); Kelly Robinson, "British International Pictures and the Influence of German Cinematographers (1927-1936)," (Ph.D.diss., University of Southampton, 2007); Tomas Rhys Williams, "Tricks of the light: a study of the cinematographic style of the émigré cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan" (Ph.D.diss., University of Exeter, 2011); Christian Cargnelli, "Österreichische Filmschaffende im Britischen Exil ab 1933." (Ph.D.diss., University of Southampton, 2007).

²⁶ Christoph von Ungern-Sternberg, "I am not here to teach, but to learn..." Willy Haas, a German-Jewish scriptwriter exiled in India," *Osian's Cinemaya*, 2005, 43-45; Christoph von Ungern-Sternberg, *Willy Haas, 1891-1973: "ein grosser Regisseur der Literatur."* (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 2007).

²⁷ Ravi Vasudevan, "In the centrifuge of history." *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 1 (2010): 135.

²⁸ Kaushik Bhaumik, "The Emergence of the Bombay film industry : 1913-1936." (Ph.D.diss., University of Oxford, 2001), 1.

recent years.²⁹ Barnouw and Krishnaswamy's *Indian Film*, (1963, revised in 1980) includes information about the Rai/Osten films and Bombay Talkies, but otherwise offers little historical perspective on the early cinema in India.³⁰ Mishra's summary of filmmakers who have been awarded the Dadasahib Phalke prize, includes Bombay Talkies' leading lady, Devika Rani (1908-1994).³¹ Other accounts are comprised of what Hughes describes as general historical surveys charting chronological 'firsts,' with nostalgic recollections of early films.³² Rangoonwalla's 1975 retrospective is one such example, documenting 75 years of Indian cinema in fewer than 200 pages.³³ *50 years of Indian talkies* produced in 1981 was shorter still, and included reprints of articles from earlier decades.³⁴ In both these cases, the films produced by Rai and Osten are briefly mentioned. Das Gupta and Kobe's 1986 monograph, *Kino in Indien*, was intended for the German-speaking market; of its eight essays, two touch on the Rai/Osten films within a historical summary of the film in India, including comments on the Indo-German productions.³⁵ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen's *Encyclopaedia* (1994), provides a basis upon which further work has been added.³⁶ The 2003 *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema* follows a different format to that of Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, providing essays from

²⁹ Panna Shah, *The Indian film* (Westwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

³⁰ Erik Barnouw, and Subrahmanyam Krishnaswamy, *Indian film*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

³¹ D. P. Mishra, *Great masters of Indian cinema: The Dadasaheb Phalke award winners* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2006).

³² Stephen Putnam Hughes, "Is there anyone out there? exhibition and the formation of silent film audiences in south India." (Ph.D.diss., The University of Chicago, 1996).

³³ Firoze Rangoonwalla, *75 years of Indian cinema* (New Delhi: Indian Book Company, 1975).

³⁴ Raghavendra Chattopadhyay, and Ajoy Kumar Dey, eds. *50 Years of Indian Talkies 1981*, (Calcutta: Indian Film Society, 1981); Rajendra Ojha, ed., *80 Glorious Years of Indian cinema : complete filmography of all silent & Hindi films released between 1913-1993*. (Bombay: Screen World Publishing, 1994).

³⁵ Raghunath Raina, "Einführung in die Geschichte des Indischen Kinos," in *Kino in Indien*, ed. Chidananda Das Gupta, and Werner Kobe (Freiburg im Breigau: Wolf Mersch, 1986), 29-53; Gerhard Koch, "Von der 'Münchner Lichtspielkunst' zu den 'Bombay Talkies': Franz Osten," in *Kino in Indien*, 124-144.

³⁶ Ashish Rajadhyaksha, and Paul Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*. Rev. ed. (London: British Film Institute, 2002).

practitioners as well as film historians on a broad range of film related subjects.³⁷ Chabria's 1994 compilation of India's silent film heritage, has recently been revised and expanded.³⁸

The works of Jaikumar, Chowdhry, Kaul, Sinha and Mozumdar explore Indian cinema during the colonial period, intersecting with this project chronologically.³⁹ Garga's *Raj to Swaraj* focuses on the development of the documentary film during the transition from the colonial era to India's independence.⁴⁰ Mulay examines the cinematic portrayals of India in the West and includes a chapter on the Rai/Osten films.⁴¹ Amladi, exploring the film industry between 1919 and 1939, considers Bombay Talkies in his examination.⁴² Evaluating the rise of the film star in India between 1930-1950, Majumdar's discourse includes Bombay Talkies and Devika Rani.⁴³ Taking a regional, rather than a pan-Indian focus, Mahadevan explores the early development of cinema in Bengal, from its antecedents in photography and the visual image; and Gooptu reconsiders and challenges the imaginary of a cinema of Bengal.⁴⁴ Moving from the general to the particular, Chatterjee's recent

³⁷ *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema* (New Delhi: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2003).

³⁸ Suresh Chabria, *Light of Asia: Indian silent cinema, 1912-1934* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2013).

³⁹ Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the end of empire: a politics of transition in Britain and India*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Priya Jaikumar, "More than morality : the Indian Cinematograph Committee Interviews (1927)," *The Moving Image* 3, no. 1 (2003): 82-109; Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the making of empire cinema : image, ideology and identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Gautam Kaul, *Cinema and the Indian freedom struggle : covering the subcontinent* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1998); Chandana Mozumdar, "Swastika and Tiranga: Subhas Bose and Indian nationalism's connection with the Third Reich" (Ph.D.diss., Auburn University, 1999).

⁴⁰ B. D. Garga, *From Raj to Swaraj: the non-fiction film in India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2007).

⁴¹ Vijaya Mulay, *From rajahs and yogis to Gandhi and beyond : images of India in international films of the twentieth century* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2010).

⁴² Parag R. Amladi, "New apprehensions: the ambivalence of modernity in early Indian cinema (1913-1939)" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1996).

⁴³ Neepta Majumdar, "Female stardom and cinema in India, 1930s to 1950s." (Ph.D.diss., Indiana University, 2001).

⁴⁴ Sudhir Mahadevan, "The traffic in technologies: early cinema and visual culture in Bengal, 1840--1920." (Ph.D.diss., New York University, 2009.); Sharmistha Gooptu, *Bengali cinema : an other nation* (London: Routledge, 2010).

exploration of the cinema in Calcutta up to 1939, includes an in depth examination of the records of individual film studios.⁴⁵

Garga's *Art of Cinema* focuses on significant Indian filmmakers and films, mentioning Rai and *Achhut Kanya*.⁴⁶ Bandyopadhyay's edited collection of articles, originally published between 1931 and 1934, provides a contemporary perception of the industry at that time; and includes articles by Niranjan Pal.⁴⁷ A study by Thomas explores the multiplicity of styles and genres that comprise the history of cinema in Bombay.⁴⁸ Dwyer's work frequently references the German filmmakers. The early silent films are discussed in *Filming the Gods*; visual imagery is explored in *Cinema India*; and her compilation text for the BFI includes *Achhut Kanya* as an example of early Hindi cinema.⁴⁹ Dwyer also explores *Mahal*, a film that is discussed at the end of this thesis as representative of Wirsching's achievement.⁵⁰ Other scholarly enquiries into this early period include Kapse's work on melodrama.⁵¹

Several of the works already cited include the transition to sound cinema; Thomas expands on this by providing examples of how it affected Wadia

⁴⁵ Ranita Chatterjee, "Journeys in and beyond the city : cinema in Calcutta, 1897-1939." (Ph.D.diss., University of Westminster, 2011).

⁴⁶ B. D. Garga, *The art of cinema : an insider's journey through fifty years of film history* (New Delhi: Viking, 2005); *Achhut Kanya*, directed by Franz Osten (Bombay Talkies, 1936).

⁴⁷ Samik Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Indian cinema : contemporary perceptions from the thirties* (Jamshedpur: Celluloid Chapter, 1993).

⁴⁸ Rosie Thomas, *Bombay before Bollywood : film city fantasies* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2013).

⁴⁹ Rachel Dwyer, *Filming the gods : religion and Indian cinema* (London: Routledge, 2006); Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel, *Cinema India: the visual culture of Hindi film* (London: Reaktion, 2002); Rachel Dwyer, *100 Bollywood Films* (London: BFI, 2005).

⁵⁰ Rachel Dwyer, "Bombay Gothic: On the 60th Anniversary of Kamal Amrohi's *Mahal*," in *Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood*, ed. Rachel Dwyer and Jerry Pinto (New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 2011), 130–55.

⁵¹ A. P. Kapse, "The Moving Image : Melodrama and Early Indian Cinema, 1913-1939," (Ph.D.diss., University of California, 2009).

Movietone.⁵² Hughes examines the development of music in the early stages of Tamil cinema; the development in Hindi song and film music is explored by Arnold, Morcom, Booth and Beaster-Jones.⁵³ Several biographies and memoirs also reference this period, and include background information on Bombay Talkies. Of these, two focus on Ashok Kumar, the actor whose initial reluctance to appear on film subsequently turned into a career spanning decades; Renuka Devi, who first worked at Bombay Talkies in 1937; and Durga Khote, whose experience as an actor throws light on the multi-lingual nature of the Indian film industry. Sadat Manto's essays provide often colourful background to the film industry in Bombay.⁵⁴

1.2.3 German cinema

As might be expected from a culture that engaged in the professionalisation of knowledge as *Wissenschaft*, scholarly critiques and historical analyses of the film began early in the life of the cinematic medium in Germany. During the 1920s and 1930s, several doctoral theses were produced, of which Bub's 1938 examination of the development of the German film during the First World War is the most relevant to the current project for its comments on the dual film centres of Berlin

⁵² Rosie Thomas, "Distant Voices, Magic Knives: Lal-E-Yaman and the Transition to Sound in Bombay Cinema," in Dwyer and Pinto, ed., *Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood*, 53–76, 2011.

⁵³ Stephen Hughes, "Music in the age of mechanical reproduction : drama, gramophone, and the beginnings of Tamil Cinema," *Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 1 (2007): 3–34; Stephen Hughes, "The music boom in Tamil south India: gramophone, radio and the making of mass culture." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22, no. 4 (2002): 445–73; Alison Arnold, "Hindi Filmiglit: on the history of commercial Indian popular music" (Ph.D.diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991.); Anna Morcom, *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Gregory D. Booth, *Behind the curtain : making music in Mumbai's film studios* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jayson Beaster-Jones, *Bollywood Sounds: the cosmopolitan mediations of Hindi film song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵⁴ Nabendu Ghosh, *Ashok Kumar: his life and times* (New Delhi: Indus, 1995); Kishore Valicha, *Dadamoni: The Authorized Biography of Ashok Kumar* (New Delhi: Viking, 1996); Begum Khurshid Mirza, *A woman of substance : the memoirs of Begum Khurshid Mirza, 1918-1989* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2005); Sadat Hasan Manto, *Stars from another sky: The Bombay film world of the 1940s* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998); Khoṭe, D. I, *Durga Khote : an autobiography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

and Munich.⁵⁵ In addition to these academic works, several technical and professional manuals were produced on the subject of cinematography, and were included in a 1940 bibliography by Hans Traub, the head of Ufa's-Lehrschau division.⁵⁶ In this same capacity, Traub also produced guides about production practices at Ufa.⁵⁷

The post-war texts of Eisner and Kracauer have played a significant role in the perception of the German film, particularly because of the prominence both authors gave to configuring Berlin at its centre, with German Expressionism as its dominant trope. In the case of Kracauer, a causal link was suggested between film production in the Weimar era and the rise of National Socialism.⁵⁸ This interpretation of Weimar cinema as a homogeneous form has been challenged by scholars over the past three decades, who have argued against the narrow focus introduced by Eisner and Kracauer.⁵⁹ Some of these challenges have come from Elsaesser, Hake, Wedel, Horak, and Rogowski, whose histories of German cinema have researched and documented the multiplicity of genres that existed beyond the relatively small canon of the German expressionist film, itself the subject of much discourse, as well as broadening the focus beyond the film industry in Berlin to include Munich.⁶⁰ As Salt points out, the historical record has been distorted by

⁵⁵ Gertraude Bub, "Der Deutsche Film Im Weltkrieg Und Sein Publizistischer Einsatz" (Ph.D.diss., Berlin University, 1938).

⁵⁶ Hans Traub, *Das Deutsche Filmschrifttum : eine Bibliographie der Bücher und Zeitschriften über das Filmwesen* (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1940).

⁵⁷ See for example: Hans Traub, *Der Film als politisches Machtmittel* (München: Münchener Druck und Verlagshaus., 1933); Hans Traub, *Die Ufa-Lehrschau. Der Weg des Films von der Planung bis zur Vorführung* Vol. 3. Filmschaffen Filmforschung. (Schriften der Ufa-Lehrschau, 1941).

⁵⁸ Kracauer's contention that the students in *The Blue Angel* were "born Hitler youths" later met with a rebuttal from the film's Jewish director; Josef Von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 241.

⁵⁹ Lotte H. Eisner, *The haunted screen: expressionism in the German cinema and the influence of Max Reinhard* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973); Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler : a psychological history of the German Film*, rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁶⁰ Sabine Hake, *German national cinema* (London: Routledge, 2008); Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and after: Germany's historical imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000); Thomas Elsaesser, and Michael Wedel, ed. *A second life: German cinema's first decades* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam

a focus on Ufa, whereas this studio produced only 10% of the 2,000 German films that were made during the 1920s.⁶¹ One extension of this scholarly research considers the development of the *Heimat* film, a genre originating largely in Munich and a subject of interest to the current project because Franz Osten was one of its proponents.⁶²

German Expressionism maintains a disproportionate position in the historiography of the German film, invariably acting as a metonym for the whole. It has been necessary to engage with this topic, in particular to understand its regular appearances in critiques of the work of Josef Wirsching. Discussion about expressionism adopts broadly four approaches. The first, exemplified by Coates, maintains Kracauer's thesis of causality.⁶³ A second approach arises in Barlow's more holistic summary, identifying the inherent problem in allowing expressionism to represent any cinema that is not 'realistic;' and Scheunemann's discussion which considers the historiography, citing dissenters such as Elsaesser, Bergfelder, Salt and Sudendorf, and arguing for the multiplicity of forms present during the Weimar era.⁶⁴ The third approach, taken by Elsaesser, questions among

University Press, 1996); Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel, ed. *Kino der Kaiserzeit: zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (München: Edition Text + Kritik., 2002); Christian Rogowski, ed., *The many faces of Weimar cinema: rediscovering Germany's filmic legacy* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010).

⁶¹ Barry Salt, *Film style and technology : history and analysis*, 3rd ed. (London: Star Word, 2009), 184-185.

⁶² For a more comprehensive discussion on the *Heimatfilm* see: Johannes von Moltke, *No place like hom : locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2005); Maria Regina Irchenhauser, "Heimat Im Spannungsfeld Globalisierung: Studien zu Zeitgenossischen Heimatfilmen und Heimattexten," (Ph.D.diss., Queen's University, 2009; Wolfgang Kaufmann, *Das Dritte Reich und Tibet: die Heimat des "Östlichen Hakenkreuzes" im Blickfeld der Nationalsozialisten* (Ludwigsfelde: Ludwigsfelder Verlagshaus, 2009); Gerd. Thumser, *Ludwig Ganghofer : Alpenkönig Und Kinofreund : Ludwig Ganghofer (1855-1920) Zum 150. Geburtstag*. Originalausg. (Munich: Bachmaier, 2005); Paul Cooke, "The Heimat film in the twenty-first century : negotiating the new German Cinema to return to *Papas Kino*," in *Generic Histories of German Cinema*, ed. Jaimey Fisher (Columbia: Camden House, 2013), 221-242; Alexandra Ludewig, *Screening nostalgia: 100 years of German Heimat Film* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014).

⁶³ Paul Coates, *The gorgon's gaze : German cinema, expressionism, and the image of horror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁶⁴ John D. Barlow, *German Expressionist Film*. (Boston: Twayne, 1982); Dietrich Scheunemann, *Expressionist film : new perspectives* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003); Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 184-185; Bergfelder, Tim, "Surface and distraction: Style and genre at Gainsborough in the late 1920s and 1930s," in *Gainsborough Pictures*, ed. Pam Cook (London: Cassell, 1997), 31-46.

other things, the “linear determinants” linking expressionism to film noir.⁶⁵ A fourth approach is offered by Guerin.⁶⁶ Building on Elsaesser’s work and her own doctoral research, Guerin steers the discussion still further away from Kracauer, exploring the use of light in early German cinema and further challenging the political periodisations that she argues have introduced an artificial division into the study of the films. To understand the entry of film noir into this discourse in relation to Wirsching’s later works, the following texts were consulted, in addition to Elsaesser, these include Naremore, Steinbauer-Grötsch and Bould.⁶⁷

Through her examination of film reviews and other associated print media from the early years of cinema, Hake provides insights from which the conditions pertaining to Osten and others might be extrapolated. Filmportal, discussed below, reminds users to consider the ideological control of cinematic production during the period of the Third Reich.⁶⁸ In common with other historical studies this period, within which some of the films made in Germany by Osten, Wirsching and von Spreti fall, continues to be the subject of intense research, only a modicum of which have been consulted, none of which provide specific information on the work of Osten et al during this period.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and after*, 420–44, 2000; Werner Sudendorf, “Expressionism and film: the Testament of Dr Caligari,” in *Expressionism reassessed*, ed. Shulamith Behr, David Fanning and Douglas Jarman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 91–100.

⁶⁶ Frances Guerin, *A culture of light : cinema and technology in 1920s Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

⁶⁷ James Naremore, *More than night : film noir in its contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Barbara Steinbauer-Grötsch, *Die lange Nacht der Schatten : Film noir und Filmexil* (Berlin: Bertz, 1997); Mark Bould, *Film noir : from Berlin to sin city* (London: Wallflower, 2005).

⁶⁸ Sabine Hake, *The cinema’s third machine : writing on film in Germany, 1907–33* (University of Nebraska Press, 1993); “Filme der NS-Zeit sind im Kontext der staatlich beeinflussten Produktion und Rezeption zu sehen.” Accessed 12 November 2014. Filmportal.

⁶⁹ For example, Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001); Susan Tegel, *Nazis and the cinema* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007); Susan Tegel, “Third Reich newsreels-an effective tool of propaganda?” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 1 (2007): 143–54; Lutz P. Koepnick, *The dark mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood* (Berkeley, Calif; London: University of California Press, 2002); Ulrich Liebe, *Verehrt, verfolgt, vergessen : Schauspieler als Naziopfer* (Weinheim: Beltz Quadrig, 1995); Julian Petley, *Capital and Culture: German Cinema 1933–45* (London: BFI, 1979); Josef Wulf, *Theater und Film im Dritten Reich; eine Dokumentation* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1966).

The two German studios with which Rai and Osten were connected, Emelka and Ufa, have been the subject of scholarly research. Putz has produced an historical account of the Münchener Lichtspielkunst (Emelka), with a focus on the economics of cinema during the early period in Germany, whilst Keller traces the history of the studio through to its present identity as Bavaria Film.⁷⁰ Kreimeier's biography of Ufa, has since been added to by the works of Mühl-Benninghaus, Geiss and Beyer, the latter providing a discourse on the Ufa star during the Third Reich.⁷¹

Mühl-Benninghaus has considered German censorship during the First World War, and Kester examines the body of films focusing on Germany's experience in the First World War, some of which were photographed by Wirsching.⁷² Manvell and Fraenkel provide a broad sweep from the beginning of cinema in Germany up to the end of the 1960s and, unlike many others, they do at least mention the Ostermayrs.⁷³ Koch, Schoenfeld, Brandlmeier, Gangar, Fuechtner and Dablé have all contributed monographs and chapters on the work of Franz Osten, and Zedler has produced a short biography on the life of Karl Graf von Spreti.⁷⁴ Bertl Schultes,

⁷⁰ Petra Putz, *Waterloo in Geiseltal: die Geschichte des Münchner Filmkonzerns Emelka (1919-1933) im Antagonismus zwischen Bayern und dem Reich* (Trier: WVT., 1996); Roland Keller, *Die Traumfabrik: Bavaria-Filmstadt Geiseltal: ein Blick hinter die Kulisse*. (Munich: W. Heyn, 1988).

⁷¹ Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa story: a history of Germany's greatest film company 1918-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999); Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, *Vom Augusterlebnis zur Ufa-Gründung: der Deutsche Film im 1. Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Avinus., 2004); Axel Geiss, ed. *Filmstadt Babelsberg: zur Geschichte des Studios und seiner Filme* (Berlin: Nicola., 1944); Friedemann Beyer, *Die UFA-Stars Im Dritten Reich: Frauen für Deutschland* (Munich: W. Heyn, 1991).

⁷² Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, "German Film Censorship during World War I," *Film History* 9, no. 1 (1997): 71-94; Bernadette Kester, *Film Front Weimar: representations of the First World War in German films of the Weimar period (1919-1933)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).

⁷³ Roger Manvell, and Heinrich Fraenkel, *The German Cinema* (London: Dent., 1971).

⁷⁴ Gerhard Koch, *Franz Osten's Indian silent films* (Max Mueller Bhavan, 1983); Koch, "Von der 'Münchener Lichtspielkunst' zu den 'Bombay Talkies': Franz Osten, in *Kino in Indien*, 124-144"; Carl-Erdmann Schönfeld, "Franz Osten's 'The Light of Asia' (1926): a German-Indian Film of Prince Buddha." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 4 (1995); Thomas Brandlmeier, "Franz Osten," *Griffithiana* 53 (1995); Amrit Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies: a journey from Munich to Malad*. (Bombay: Max Mueller Bhavan, 2000); Veronika Fuechtner, "The International Project of National(ist) Film: Franz Osten in India," in Rogowski, ed., *The many faces of Weimar cinema*, 167-181; Nadine Dablé, "Der Filmpionier Franz Osten - Eine Mediengeschichte," in *Analyse, Theorie und Geschichte der Medien: Festschrift für Werner Faulstich*, ed. Carsten Winter and Matthias Karmasin (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2012), 157-168; Jörg Zedler, *Karl Graf von Spreti: Bilder einer Diplomatischen Karriere* (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2008).

who assisted Osten on *Light of Asia*, dedicated a chapter in his autobiography to the expedition to India.⁷⁵

1.3 Methodology and sources

The purpose of this thesis is to produce a narrative history that integrates an analysis of the socio-political context and explores the influences the German filmmakers had on the developing film industry in Bombay.⁷⁶ Part of this analysis considers what Allen & Gomery describe as “generative mechanisms” and how these might have shaped the plans followed by the individuals concerned in this microhistory.⁷⁷ The first of these is the transition to sound cinema which is configured as a series of occurrences and misadventures rather than as one discrete event; this was a transition that led to variable outcomes for film industries and filmmakers in different locations. The second is the political turn towards fascism in Germany and the multiple ways in which this affected or influenced the different journeys undertaken by the principal subjects in this thesis.

The use of Indo-German in the title indicates that the principal focus of the thesis is the relationship between Indian and German filmmakers; nevertheless, this is a relationship that is inevitably inflected by the presence of Britain. Through the Government of India, Britain continued to mediate how the Indo-German relationship would be allowed to unfold: it was involved in granting special permission for the Emelka film crew to travel to India in 1925, and it was an agent in September 1939 when, having declared war on Germany and unilaterally included India in its declaration, it interned all three of Himansu Rai’s remaining German colleagues. Furthermore, Britain’s presence manifested itself through the ICC; and its film industry was involved in three of Rai’s film productions: *Shiraz*, *A*

⁷⁵ Schultes, *Ein Komödiant*.

⁷⁶ Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 283–300.

⁷⁷ Robert. C. Allen, and Douglas Gomery, *Film history: theory and practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993).

Throw of Dice and *Karma*. It was also represented by Sir Richard Temple, appointed by Rai as the managing director of Bombay Talkies. It was in this role that Temple, son of a previous Governor of Bombay, played a part. Although Pal suggested that Temple was more instrumental in founding Bombay Talkies than Rai; no evidence could be found for his involvement in, or influence on, film production itself.⁷⁸

Although each of the three main individuals in this narrative (Himansu Rai, Franz Osten and Josef Wirsching) has a dedicated chapter, this study approaches the production of a film as the collaboration of multiple participants, nevertheless asking whether any of these filmmakers might be considered an auteur. The imbrication of one function of production with another often renders it impossible to define the point at which one ends and another begins; this appears to be most applicable with regard to the work of Karl von Spreti and the shape shifting function of film architect/art director. Other German filmmakers are mentioned throughout the thesis when their names intersect with this project.

Whilst acknowledging the epistemological imperative of categories for the organisation of knowledge, it is noted that much historiography of film has tended to categorise cinematic productions along broadly national groupings, nevertheless, the defining criteria may at times appear arbitrary. For example, where an auteurist methodology of film might opt for the director's nationality to classify a film, an economic methodology might settle for the country of funding or production. As mentioned above, these different approaches are revealed in some of the discussions about *Light of Asia*, discussed in the following chapter. The variability in the historiography about where to locate this body of films means that a non-auteurist approach is not only appropriate when considering films made under a studio mode of production; but is also relevant when considering the films as collaborative outcomes of cultural exchange, both transnational as well as transregional.

⁷⁸ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 236.

Questions regarding cultural and national identity were articulated during the hearings of the ICC (discussed below). Definitions of nationality assumed importance when the demand for national film quotas were being initiated on largely economic grounds. Within the historical period during which Rai and Osten produced their films, these debates can be traced through the evidence collected by the ICC, and are often linked to the demands for Indian independence and support for the *Swadeshi* movement to produce films without foreign intervention. Although the political circumstances differed, similar discussions were being held around the world, gathering momentum when the introduction of sound created opportunities for local languages to gain an advantage over Hollywood's dominance of exhibition markets. Trade magazines across Europe debated how to promote the national film, often from a perspective of enhancing the economy and protecting local jobs.

The chronological frame of the thesis, from 1925-1939, is the core period within which the main body of films were produced; nevertheless, this timeframe is stretched in both directions to enable discussion of thematic development and influences on film style. Thus the overall time scale of the thesis extends from roughly 1911 when Osten directed his first film, until 1949 when Wirsching photographed *Mahal*. The films produced by this group of filmmakers are an important element of this film history and discussion of them includes a study of some of the lesser known examples from Bombay Talkies and from Germany. They are examined from the socio-political context within which they were made, and analysed from the perspective of film style.

1.3.1 Interrogating the archives

Considering its relative modernity, the history of early cinema is often an elusive object to research because, as Allen and Gomery point out: "evidentiary problems afflict film history with particular severity."⁷⁹ In many cases the films themselves no longer exist; those that are extant might consist of only a few frames, yielding little information in themselves. Even when an 'entire' film is preserved in an

⁷⁹ Allen and Gomery, *Film History*, 14.

archive, it might be marked by mutilations, reordered reels, alternative titles, alternative endings, cultural adaptations and censorship; factors that raise the Theseus' Paradox whether *this* film was the version that was exhibited to the public, or whether *that* film was the print endorsed by the studio. Volatile chemicals, economic depression, commercial imperatives, the disdain of officialdom, and two catastrophic world wars, are just some of the agents that have wrought further damage, making the survival of the film texts and their related artefacts and ephemera haphazard at best. The films produced by Rai have fared better than most, however; all three silent films are extant, as is Rai's first sound film, *Karma*, and several of the Hindi language films that were produced by Bombay Talkies. Where films are absent, in particular Osten's early German work, affiliated material such as censor records, newspaper and trade magazines, exhibitor brochures and song booklets have been consulted to fill some of the gaps.

The dearth of surviving films from India's silent era has led to a distortion of the whole by the few, leading to what Rajadhyaksha comments is now established as the 'Phalke syndrome;' the narrative of *Swadeshi* cinema often presiding as the default position.⁸⁰ Yet even within this tiny collection of surviving film prints, the Rai/Osten films are sometimes consigned to the edges in historiographies of Indian film, curiosities that subvert the narrative of the nation because of their involvement with foreign capital and personnel, as well as embracing culturally alien diegetic and aesthetic forms.

Some researchers have done what is ironically referred to as the 'archaeological' research: delving into forgotten corners of godowns and junk stores to rescue fragmented ephemera and, occasionally, strips of exposed film that have survived the silver extractors. The most significant of these are P. K. Nair, Abdoolally Esoofally and Suresh Chabria, and it is through their efforts that the history of Indian cinema continues to be compiled.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "The Film Record," in Chabria, ed., *Light of Asia: Indian silent cinema, 1912-1934*, 97.

⁸¹ Some stories about collecting archival material are included in Chabria, *Light of Asia*; Abdoolally Esoofally's work is described by Radha Rajadhyaksha, "Rescuing cinema from history's dustbin,"

The breadth and accessibility of ephemeral material and film texts has grown significantly over the course of this research project. Since 2010, the expanding and wide-scale digitisation of both primary and secondary source material, responding to the centenary of First World War, has enabled different modes of engagement with archival material. In this respect Filmportal, a German website supported by six official organisations including the Murnau Stiftung, provides a more authoritative, though not infallible, record of German film history than user-generated sources; in some cases this includes film texts, archival documents and other filmic material.⁸² In India, meanwhile, the Public Access Digital Media Archive (Padma) now provides the opportunity to re-examine several early film texts using online editing processes; this has been invaluable in supplementing the viewing of films carried out at Pune's National Film Archives India.⁸³ The Media History Digital Library recently introduced enhanced search facilities across its archives, which now includes media from Germany and India; and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin now offers a range of digitised newspapers.⁸⁴ The ongoing mass digitisation project at the Austrian National Library has enabled an oblique insight into early German cinema and the work of the German film industry in Munich from the perspective of the Austrians.⁸⁵ This latter resource has been particularly useful in locating comments on Osten's early career in Germany; and the absence of personal memoirs has been balanced by the re-discovery of articles Osten wrote for a variety of German language news and trade publications about his work in India. Whilst there is now ever greater opportunity to access archives remotely, however, the haptic process of handling physical objects in a geographically located archive remains essential, compelling and satisfying.

Times of India, 2 October 2004, 2; See also: *Celluloid Man*, directed by Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, (Dungarpur, 2012), a documentary of P. K. Nair's work.

⁸² <http://www.filmportal.de>

⁸³ <http://www.indiancine.ma>

⁸⁴ <http://mediahistoryproject.org> ; <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/>

⁸⁵ <http://anno.onb.ac.at>

As the British government began to lose its grip over India, the India Office files chart a colonial administration that was increasingly concerned with its perception within India and abroad; however, the correspondence between its officials reveals as broad a range of attitudes as the number of individuals participating in the discourse. Although Rai's German filmmakers only appeared in the records when they were interned, other German (and Austrian) citizens were being discussed and monitored.⁸⁶ From 1936, the amount of correspondence regarding German activity in India increased; although occasionally documentation suggested naivety on the part of some officials.⁸⁷ Britain's awareness of a network of propaganda was recorded in reports.⁸⁸ In spite of Osten's party membership and his active involvement in the German Club, however, if concerns were being expressed by the colonial administration regarding the activities of Osten and his colleagues, they have yet to come to light.

Research into the backgrounds of the German filmmakers cannot read off the surface from the limited biographical evidence that emerges from the German national archives because, while this information is instructive, it must be evaluated in the context of the political and social conditions that prevailed, particularly after 1933, and must therefore be treated with discretion when drawing conclusions regarding the political allegiances of individuals. Where more biographical material does exist, as is the case with Karl von Spreiti for example, the scarcity of personal comments relating to his work in India, raises its own questions, and these are discussed in chapter 4. As mentioned, retrospective attempts to understand the decisions taken by the filmmakers discussed in this

⁸⁶ The file held on Alice Schalek, for example, reveals an administration that was troubled by Indian anger towards Katherine Mayo's 1927 controversial publication, *Mother India*. When Schalek, a respected Austrian journalist and noted anglophile, requested assistance for her journey to India to research religious conversion and the plight of the outcast, she was turned down. "Alice Schalek" BL IOR/L/PJ/6/1941, file 1542.

⁸⁷ William Paton, Secretary to the International Missionary Council, misunderstood the tone of *Der Deutsche in Indien*, which he considered to be political but not a Nazi organ. Letter from Paton to Sir S. Findlater-Stewart dated 20 July 1938; "Basel Mission," BL IOR/L/PJ/7/2048.

⁸⁸ For example, officials were aware of the involvement of the Basel Mission, which published *Der Deutsche in Indien*, as well as of the involvement of A. L. Sinha who managed the Indo-German News Service and had met Hitler. "German propaganda in India" BL IOR/L/PJ/12/505.

thesis require consideration of the socio-political contexts within which those decisions were taken, a factor that leads to a broader discussion of the relationship between India and Germany, and how this was inflected by the relationship each had with Britain. Nevertheless, as the historian Richard Evans cautions, this remains an imperfect guide to the actions and motivations of individuals because, “recounting the experience of individuals brings home, as nothing else can, the sheer complexity of the choices they had to make, and the difficult and often opaque nature of the situations they confronted.”⁸⁹ From the German perspective, a handful of publications charts both antipathy towards Britain, as well as the desire to forge stronger links with India.⁹⁰ Towards the end of the Weimar era, German anxiety about its perception abroad was being angrily expressed about certain foreign films it claimed were portraying the German as contemptible and ridiculous; and in March 1931 a bill was proposed to block the importation of films perceived as injurious to the German image.⁹¹

1.3.2 The Indian Cinematograph Committee

Of significance for this research are the five volumes of evidence and the final report produced by the ICC in 1928, the study of which reveals a wide ranging discourse covering censorship and government intervention; the involvement of foreigners; the challenges of multi-lingualism; the pedagogical use of the medium; and the barriers to attracting socially respectable women into the acting profession. It is of no little significance for this study that, in spite of extensive discussion about a number of Indian films, the two films that are given their own paragraphs in the report, *Light of Asia* and *Shiraz*, are the first two films produced

⁸⁹ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, xix.

⁹⁰ See, for example: Ernst zu Reventlow, *Indien: seine Bedeutung für Grossbritannien, Deutschland und die Zukunft der Welt* (Berlin: Mittler, 1917); Keyserling, a follower of Tagore, described Germany as apolitical and sought to distinguish it from the imperial attitudes of Britain and France. Hermann Keyserling, *Deutschland's wahre politische Mission* (Darmstadt: Otto Reichl, 1919).

⁹¹ Letter from Reichswehrminister to Reichskanzler, 25 July 1930, BAL 43-I, 2500; The Bill, entitled, “Entwurf eines Gesetzes: Schädigung des deutschen Ansehens durch ausländische Bildstreifen. 2 March 1931,” is available online. Accessed 4 December 2014.
http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/en_Blatt2_w5_bsb00000134_00371.html

by Rai and Osten.⁹² Having set out to examine, interpret and document the subject of cinema as it hovered on the cusp of sound, glancing back to its roots, the ICC itself becomes the historical subject, a frozen frame that reveals as much about the processes, philosophies and politics of the colonial enterprise as it does about the social standing and entanglements of its participants. Passed on 15 September 1927, the resolution stated:

This Council [of State] recommends to the Governor-General in Council to appoint a Committee to examine and report on the system of censorship of cinematograph films in India and to consider whether it is desirable that any steps should be taken to encourage the exhibition of films produced within the British Empire generally and the production and exhibition of Indian films in particular.⁹³

This initial resolution revealed an occupying administration that was seeking to regulate and shape an indigenous film industry through means of censorship and control over distribution and exhibition, within an area of empire that was becoming increasingly resistant to British rule. The moving image now expanded opportunities for the gaze, via a more universal, less easily regulated form of exhibition, journeying beyond the urban and into the rural environment through the medium of the travelling cinema. This universality began to disrupt social boundaries, as the gaze was returned by greater numbers of people to images outside their normal experience. With this in mind, a British perception that audiences in India would conflate the celluloid images of the British woman with that of her more socially liberal American counterpart, was seen as a threat that risked undermining the gravitas of the ruling elite. For Indian cinematographers, however, cinema's greater mobility provided opportunities to counteract the orientalist prism through which India was perceived in the West, and to create

⁹² Government of India, *Report of the Indian Cinematograph Committee, 1927-1928* (Calcutta: Govt. of India Central Publication Branch, 1928), 191, 195.

⁹³ *ICCR*, xi.

filmic images that might build on the work of the artist, Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906).⁹⁴

The Committee's six members were divided equally between three Indians (the lawyers, D. B. T. Rangachariar and K. C. Neogy, and Sir Haroon Jaffer) and three Britons (Colonel Crawford, J. Coatman, Director of Public Information, and A. M. Green, Member of the Bombay Board of Film Censors). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the potential cost of some of its progressive recommendations, the ICC's report was never acted upon. Nevertheless it remains a rich resource for film historians because of the glimpse it provides into this early period of film history, and the detailed evidence that was compiled about films of the period, partially mitigating the loss of the primary material: the missing films.⁹⁵

Over a period of barely five months, the ICC's panel worked through the 320 questionnaires that had been received (7.4% of the 4325 originally sent out), and interviewed 353 witnesses, some of them *in camera*.⁹⁶ The Committee sat in the cities that fell into the geopolitical spaces of British India, Burma and Ceylon in the late 1920s: Bombay, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Lucknow, Calcutta, Madras, Rangoon, Mandalay, Jamshedpur, Nagpur and Delhi.

Persons who desire to be called as witnesses should apply in writing to the Secretary ... giving their full names and addresses, together with a brief memorandum of the points in regard to which they wish to give evidence.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Varma was described as having "created the first forceful images of some of India's mythological figures." Alif Salim, "Costumes: the essence and fabric," in *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*, 229–242; for more information on Varma, see Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁹⁵ For more opinion on the ICC see, for example, Hughes, "Is there anyone out there.;" Jaikumar, *Cinema at the end of empire*.; Mahadevan, "The Traffic in Technologies;" Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema*.

⁹⁶ Covering four densely packed pages, the questionnaire contained 45 questions that were further sub-divided, the majority of which required an industry level knowledge. For further statistics regarding the ICC's activities, the full Report is available online. Accessed 28 August 2014. <https://archive.org/details/reportoftheindia030105mbp>

⁹⁷ ICCR, xiii.

The names of interested persons who applied is not known, so it is not possible to know whether anyone was turned down. A survey of the names and occupations on the list of those who attended, however, might indicate a bias in selection. Some filmmakers were not present at all, for example, Baburao Painter, and of the handful of actors who appeared, none might be described as socially unacceptable. Perhaps, as Jaikumar has suggested, Painter's wrestlers and courtesans were not considered as suitable witnesses.⁹⁸

Indian filmmakers had been inspired to travel abroad to acquire skills in the new medium of the moving image since the Lumière Brothers' films were first shown in Bombay in July 1896. One of the first of these was Dhundiraj Govind Phalke who, already familiar with Germany as a source of technological expertise in colour printing, subsequently travelled to Germany and Britain in 1909 to buy photographic equipment and learn about cinematography.⁹⁹ In 1922 J. J. Madan from Calcutta, engaged the services of Italian filmmakers at Rome's Cinecittà to make *Savitri Satyavan*. This film was made with an all Italian cast and crew; because it used an Indian narrative it was marketed as an Indian film.¹⁰⁰ Other Indian filmmakers, such as the producer, Ezra Mir, and the cameraman, Dilip Gupta, trained and worked in Hollywood; as did R. D. Mathur who later worked at Bombay Talkies, and had trained in both New York and Hollywood. Other aspiring filmmakers travelled to America from India, later complaining to the ICC that it was too difficult for Indians to gain entrance to Hollywood studios.¹⁰¹ This prompted an American producer to write to the Committee defending his own industry against accusations of isolationism, citing an example of a Hollywood film whose participants included a broad range of nationalities.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire*, 96.

⁹⁹ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 176–177.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰¹ For example, N. D. Gandhi in: Government of India, *Indian Cinematograph Committee 1927-28 : Evidence* Vol 1. (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1928), 439.

¹⁰² Government of India, *Indian Cinematograph Committee 1927-28 : Evidence* Vol 4. (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1928), 328.

Several foreign filmmakers and performers were involved in filmmaking in India during the early stage of the development of the industry as it moved from what might be described as a cottage industry, exemplified by the family oriented productions of Phalke, to the studio system, sometimes modelled on counterparts from Hollywood and Berlin. Foreign names emerge from a variety of sources, including contemporary newspapers and film journals; the evidence collected by the ICC; and the India Office files in London. For example, an Austrian actress, Hilde Madjera, who used the stage name Diana Maya, spent six months in Bombay during 1929 acting the lead role in a Bhavnani film, entitled *Flying Prince*.¹⁰³ Avello Luciam, an Italian who was interned by the British in 1939, listed his profession as cinema operator; and another Italian, T. Marconi, was recorded as having worked in Tamil cinema.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the most famous non-indigenous performer who worked in the Indian film industry from the 1930s onwards, was Mary Evans, the actor who became known as Fearless Nadia, the queen of Wadia's stunt films. Evans was renowned for her bravery as well as for her sometimes worrying mispronunciations of Hindustani.¹⁰⁵ Two Americans – Ellis Dungan and Michael Omalev – worked as directors within the Tamil industry; and an American sound engineer, Wilford Deming, worked first in Bombay with Ardeshir Irani and later in Calcutta with New Theatres; at the latter location with another American sound engineer, Clinton Herberger.¹⁰⁶

1.3.3 Personal accounts

So many decades have passed since the period up to 1939 that it comes as a precious moment to find anyone who worked anywhere in the film industry during this period. Conversations with Oswald Morris (1915-2014) who began his career at Elstree in 1932, provided insights into the role of the cameraman; the intricacies

¹⁰³ "Cine Chat," *Times of India*, 3 May 1929.

¹⁰⁴ "Nominal rolls of internees and parolees in India," BL IOR/L/PJ/8/31, 80.

¹⁰⁵ See Thomas, *Bombay before Bollywood*; Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 155.

¹⁰⁶ "On the road to Mandalay," *International Photographer*, May 1935, accessed 16 November 2014. <https://archive.org/details/internationalpho07holl>

of lighting arrangements on set; and the contribution of émigré filmmakers such as Otto Kanturek, Paul Stein and Karl Grune, from the perspective of an employee in the British film industry.¹⁰⁷ Discussions with the late P. K. Nair, whose early engagement in the preservation of much material that would otherwise have been lost, and who was instrumental in the establishment of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), provided valuable insights into the challenges that went into preserving an archive for the nation.¹⁰⁸

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 examines the first of the Indo-German productions: *The Light of Asia*. It seeks to locate the film in the historiographies of early cinema and analyses how some of the influences on its conception and production came to shape its history during the years 1924-1929; and how these in turn contributed to the formation and development of the Bombay Talkies. Chapter 3 considers the contribution made by Himansu Rai to the development of Indian cinema. It explores his relationship with the German filmmakers against the context of the transition to sound cinema as it occurred between 1928 and 1934, and considers the effect this new technology had in India and in Germany. It explores the Indo-German-British productions of *Shiraz/Das Grabmal einer grossen Liebe* (1928) and *A Throw of Dice/Schicksalswürfel* (1929), as well as Rai's first dual language Hindi/English talkie, *Karma*, and examines the contribution of Emil Schünemann (1882-1964), who photographed all three films discussed here. Chapter 4 contemplates what influences the Germans might have brought to the development of the studio. In this context, it explores the individual contributions of Willy Zolle and Karl von Spreiti in their respective specialisms of laboratory work and set design. The

¹⁰⁷ Oswald Morris, *Huston, we have a problem: a kaleidoscope of filmmaking memories* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁸ For more information about Mr. Nair's considerable contribution to the history of Indian cinema see *Celluloid Man*, directed by Shivendra Singh Dungapur, (Dungapur Films, 2012); and Ramesh Kumar, "On Scavenging and Salvaging: NFAI and Early Indian Cinema," *Framework: the Journal of Cinema and Media* 54, no. 2 (2013): 152-57; Ramesh Kumar "The Making of the National Film Archive of India: Notes from the Archive of the Archive," *The Moving Image* 13, no. 1 (2013): 98-128.

chapter concludes with an analysis of set design in *Achhut Kanya*, and the gradual sophistication of sound design from *Jeevan Naiya* to *Kangan*. Chapter 5 re-evaluates the work of the director, Franz Osten. To provide historical context, it examines Osten's relationship to National Socialism. The chapter discusses some of the films that Osten made in Germany and India, tracing his development as a director and considering his relationship with Rai. Chapter 6 discusses Josef Wirsching and evaluates what is known about his early life and the films he worked on in Germany. A discussion about the Battleship *Emden* provides further historical context as well as opportunity to consider the entanglements between Germany, India and Britain. The chapter considers Wirsching's contribution to technological developments and concludes with a comparison of *Achhut Kanya* and *Mahal* to illustrate his development as a cinematographer.

2 Charting the history of *The Light of Asia*

2.1 Introduction

The involvement of German filmmakers in the evolution of Bombay Talkies began with the production of the *Light of Asia* in 1925, attracting considerable interest in the German-language press. As the first film produced by Himansu Rai and directed by Franz Osten, this was a project around which a broad number of interests were coalescing, one that included maharajas and diplomats and contributed to the film's status as a minor cause célèbre. Nevertheless, its significance extended beyond this Indo-German framing. The film attracted the attention of the colonial authorities as a potential prototype for the British Empire film; it stimulated greater awareness of the developing Indian film industry; and it stands witness to the multiple transborder collaborations and partnerships that occurred during this period.

The first part of this chapter discusses the background to the film and begins by re-examining its history in the light of new evidence, in the process challenging some of the established truths that have become part of its historiography. By examining the intertextuality of the film's narrative within the context of other treatments of the Buddha's early life, the chapter explores why Niranjana Pal chose Arnold's poem as the basis for his script. It considers the transnational nature of this production at a time when film as a cultural artefact was being pressed into the service of individual nationalist projects, exploring the debates this provoked. *Light of Asia's* reception varied across cultures, and the chapter examines the factors that appear to have enhanced its popularity in some countries, yet diminished it in others. The second part of this chapter focuses on the film text and its cinematic elements (direction, photography and mise-en-scène) as a means of tracing the contributions of the German filmmakers who were involved in its production, asking if there is any evidence of a cinematic style that may have persisted into the later films made at Bombay Talkies.

2.2 The chronicle of a film

The *Light of Asia* marks two beginnings: it is the first film produced by the Indo-German partnership between Emelka and the Great Eastern Corporation Limited.¹ And it foreshadows the foundation of Bombay Talkies in 1934, one of the most important film studios in early (north) Indian cinema. Additional claims for its significance might also be made owing to its emergence at the intersection of South Asian and European film cultures. In taking the narrative of the early life of the Buddha as Prince Gautama, the film reclaims it from the intellectual salons of the West where it had settled after Edwin Arnold's narrative had inserted his notion of Buddhism into the cultural landscape, and brings it back to its country of origin. At the same time the film's text is interwoven with an elitist thread that is bound up with the theme of individual sacrifice or relinquishment, one that contributes to narratives of nationalism and recurs in several of the Bombay Talkies' films discussed in this thesis.

Light of Asia challenges the imperial gaze by mediating its own images of the Orient, transplanting them from the synthetic studio sets of the West into genuine, though anachronistic, Indian settings, and in so doing, it continues a practice that is found in Raja Ravi Varma's art of creating alternative visual aesthetics of India by India. The film coaxes high-class female actors onto the screen in the face of societal and familial resistance and advances the cause of the gradual respectability of the acting profession from across a broader spectrum of South Asian society. It is located at the junction between the *Indian* film, the ethnographic film, and the orientalist western production, assuming additional linguistic guises in German as *Die Leuchte Asiens* and in Hindi as *Prem Sanyas*, each of which allow it a direct mode of address to these respective audiences.

Light of Asia's well-documented journey through the annals of the Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC) of 1927-1928 charts some of the challenges faced by an indigenous film industry situated between liminal nationhood and

¹ The Great Eastern Corporation Ltd., owned by P. R. Tipnis, was responsible for most of the film's funding. See Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 30.

decrecent colonial rule, factors that place particular emphasis on it, both as a model for progress and a potential specimen of the British Empire film.² The film's survival in a complete print, together with the two other co-productions from this era – *Shiraz* (1928) and *A Throw of Dice* (1929) – may be attributable to its preservation in British and German archives, a factor that has enabled its transformation from a commercial enterprise to a cultural artefact, thereby allowing its re-presentation to new audiences.³ This is not a fortune enjoyed by the majority of India's silent films, which Suresh Chabria, the former director of the National Film and Television Institute of India, estimates to have exceeded 1,300 productions, a circumstance one needs to recall when asserting the historical precedence of one particular film text over another.⁴

Commercial pressures to recover the film's losses have long since subsided and, unlike other, less fortunate films, *Light of Asia*'s history in recent decades continues to add to and shape its identity. In 1983 it was brought to the attention of new audiences through a retrospective of Osten's work that was held in conjunction with the Max Müller Bhavan, when it was shown throughout the cities of India hosting the Bhavan: Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Pune.⁵ In 1994 it appeared in a retrospective of Indian Silent Cinema together with *Shiraz* and *A Throw of Dice*; this was at the Pordenone Film Festival curated by Chabria. In 1995, *Light of Asia* and *Achhut Kanya* were both listed as part of UNESCO's Memory of the

² Himansu Rai's next project, *Shiraz*, would be made as an Empire film produced in conjunction with British Instructional Film and Ufa.

³ All film archives had problems providing safe storage. For example, a fire at Ufa's Babelsberg Studios in 1928 destroyed the 'foreign negative' of *Shiraz*; "Foreign Film News," *Variety*, 17 October 1928.

⁴ Chabria, *Light of Asia*. The recent celebration of 100 years of Indian cinema in 2013 takes Phalke's film, *Raja Harishchandra*, as the first Indian feature film, yet this position may be challenged by earlier films such as those produced by Hiralal Sen or Dadasaheb Torney. However, Torney's own claim to have made the first feature film, *Pundalik*, has recently been challenged by new archival material that now attributes this film's production to P. R. Tipnis and N. G. Chitra. Unfortunately no copies of the film, which was exhibited in May 1912, have been found so far.

⁵ Koch, *Franz Osten's Indian Silent Films*.

World: National Cinematic heritage.⁶ A revival at the Munich Film Festival in 2001 refreshed the colour tinting in a new print and provided it with a new musical score composed by Pierre Oser. Perhaps the most striking development in the film's evolution so far came about as a result of the research conducted into the work of Niranjan Pal by the South Asian Cinema Foundation, a project that included the screening of a restored print of the film at London's British Film Institute on 6 August 2011. This screening was accompanied by an Indian musical score composed by Pandit Vishwa Prakash and included live singing and voiceovers in Hindi and Sanskrit, a presentation significantly different from its Munich premiere in 1925 when it was accompanied by a score composed by a German, Hansheinrich Dransmann.⁷

The initial research into this history of *Light of Asia* focused on understanding why it provoked such polarised responses during its early exhibition, from its apparently successful reception in Germany and other parts of continental Europe, to the reported difficulties in gaining acceptance with audiences in either Britain or India, and initially none in America.⁸ The film's frequent appearance in the *Evidence and Report* of the ICC, whilst perhaps obscuring the significance of some of its contemporaries, identifies it as a touchstone against which a number of social, nationalist and political concerns were measured. These ranged from the entry of respectable women into the acting profession in order to improve the profile of the film industry; resistance to the involvement of foreign expertise by supporters of the Swadeshi movement; to the manoeuvrings of the Colonial authorities who, in addition to becoming anxious about growing resistance to

⁶ "Splendid photography and the inherent majesty of the subject have secured it a permanent niche in the history of Indian cinema." Suresh Chabria, *Memory of the World : National Cinematic Heritage*. Accessed 10 January 2016. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001103/110379Eo.pdf>

⁷ Dransmann, who also worked under the stage name, Jack Drooning, was responsible for several film scores between 1922 and 1931, including Emelka's silent epic, *Waterloo* (Grune, 1929). Koch Ibid., 21. indicates that there was an additional film score composed for *The Light of Asia* by I. L. Fischer, but it has not been possible to find any contemporary references that confirm this.

⁸ *The Light of Asia* had a brief exhibition in America in May 1928. "Light of Asia Opening" *The Film Daily*, 16 May 1928; in February 1928, Rai told the ICC that he had shown *The Light of Asia* to "Producers like Mr. Laemmle who have been famous for their work ... and they viewed the picture, not once but three times at private shows." *ICCE, Vol. 3*, 1001.

colonial rule, were also hoping to reduce the market share of American films in India and elsewhere in the British Empire in favour of films produced in Britain.⁹

Factual errors relating to the film and its producers emerge when contradictory reports appear in newspaper articles and film reviews from the period. At times, the fallibility of individual memory has resulted in an imprecise chronology of events; this is apparent when reading the accounts written by Pal and Schultes, the latter's account published in 1963, nearly four decades after the film's production.¹⁰ Errors are also evident in secondary accounts and this has sometimes led to speculation or misrepresentation by ICC witnesses, some of whom either had no connection whatsoever, or bore only tenuous links with the film's production.

Thomas cautions that "certain versions of Indian cinema history are becoming fossilised and assumptions and assertions about the form are being uncritically recycled."¹¹ An examination of the history of *Light of Asia* reveals several assumptions that appear less assured when new evidence is considered or existing sources are re-evaluated. An audit of comments from film historians and critics suggests four categories of assertion related to *Light of Asia* that have become established in the historiography, but which contain varying degrees of accuracy when the film's history is re-examined. The first are simple errors, easily corrected by consulting material that is available in the public domain; for example misreporting the number of films that Rai and Osten made together.¹² The second

⁹ Britain had introduced a quota system with the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act.

¹⁰ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*; Schultes, *Ein Komödiant*.; Although Bertl (Albert) Schultes was only involved on the production of *The Light of Asia*, he devoted a chapter in his autobiography to his experience in India; Born in 1881, Schultes was principally a theatre actor and director, although he also appeared in eighteen films between 1918 and 1957. Schultes had spent three years from 1910-1913 touring America with the Teegernseer Bauerntheater and he claimed that his foreign experience and knowledge of English persuaded Emelka's Chief Executive, Wilhelm Kraus to engage him as interpreter and assistant director on the production. Ibid., 140.

¹¹ Thomas, *Bombay before Bollywood*, 2.

¹² Joël Farges, for example, says that Rai and Osten made seven films together. Raïssa Brégeat, *Indomania: le cinéma indien des origines à nos jours* (Cinémathèque française, 1995); Osten himself claimed in one document that he made 17 films at Bombay Talkies. Franz Osten, "Lebenslauf," BAL RK J0079, Images 300-304

are statements that appear contradictory when compared with other information about *Light of Asia*. For example, the film *did* have a long run in London during 1926, but a comparison of the statements recorded in the ICC Evidence with Niranjan Pal's recently published autobiography suggests a more nuanced reality.¹³ In fact, the film made a financial loss in London, a matter that is discussed at length during the ICC interviews with Rai and others.¹⁴ The third type of assertion suggests a nationalist bias, for example, when the greater (or lesser) contribution of either the Germans or the Indians in the film's production is emphasised, depending on who wrote the article.¹⁵ Finally, there are narratives relating to *Light of Asia* that may have been promoted by Pal and Rai themselves, and it is possible that these narratives, such as their motives in making the film, have become exaggerated, not with intent to mislead, but to permit a more nationalist narrative to develop around the film. Some of these narratives have become entrenched in the film's history and attention is drawn to these where other information contradicts them.

2.2.1 Locating *The Light of Asia* in the historiography

The majority of film historians writing about cinema in India or Germany during the silent era refer to *Light of Asia*. From an Indian perspective, entries are included in retrospectives such as Rangoonwalla's *75 Years of Indian Cinema* and Rajadhyaksha and Willemen's *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, the latter attributing the influence of Joseph Wirsching and Charu Roy on the film's photography and style.¹⁶ Both Roy and Wirsching have otherwise received little attention in histories of this film which have tended to focus on Rai and Osten. As far as the photography on *Light of Asia* was concerned, however, it was Wilhelm Kiermeier who, having already made three films, was actually the more

¹³ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*.

¹⁴ *ICCE*, Vol. 2, 202–203; 1071–1074.; *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 998–1015.; *ICCE*, Vol. 5, 24–30.

¹⁵ For example, Himansu Rai, "The Light of Asia: the Buddha's early life shown in a pioneer enterprise of Indian film-making." *Asia: Journal of the American Asiatic Association* 26, no. 9 (1926), 757.

¹⁶ *75 Years of Indian Cinema*.; *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 248.

experienced cameraman on the production, whereas Wirsching credited *Light of Asia* as his first film.¹⁷

In their introductory guide to Indian cinema, *Indian Film*, Barnouw and Krishnaswamy discuss *Light of Asia* within a longer entry on Bombay Talkies.¹⁸ This includes the narrative that *Light of Asia* was one of a trilogy of films on world religions planned by Himansu Rai: “[One film] would be based on the Oberammergau Passion Play. Rai journeyed to Munich, solely to promote this plan.”¹⁹ Gangar asserts that “Rai had an idea of making a series of films on the great religions of the world.”²⁰ This assertion is repeated by Fuechtner and others, with Carl Schönfeld adding that “[Rai] ... now wanted to create the Indian equivalent.”²¹ Kapse describes it as “a film that engages with colonial experience in a religious idiom.”²² Whilst no evidence could be found to confirm that this was actually Rai’s intention, it is possible that by locating the film within a trilogy of religious narratives, a less contentious myth was able to emerge within the increasingly contested space of colonial rule. In terms of popular narratives around Indian cinema, it also places Rai’s contribution to Indian cinema alongside that of Dadasaheb Phalke’s claim that an early film, *The Life of Christ*, provided his own inspiration for *Raja Harishchandra*.²³

Pal’s autobiography suggests alternative interpretations to the proposal of a religious trilogy. In the context of the three silent films made by Rai and Osten, each falls into approximate genres of religious/historical (*Light of Asia*), historical romance (*Shiraz*) and romance/folklore (*A Throw of Dice*). Taken together, these

¹⁷ Wirsching, “Personalbogen,” 4 October 1933. BAL PKJ0121, 964, 966.

¹⁸ *Indian Film*, 90–95.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁰ Gangar, *Franz Osten*, 1.

²¹ Fuechtner, “The International Project of National(ist) Film,” 170.; Schönfeld, “Franz Osten’s ‘The Light of Asia,’” 555.

²² Kapse, “The Moving Image : Melodrama and Early Indian Cinema, 1913-1939,” 78.

²³ Phalke’s epiphany, cited by Chabria, Rajadhyaksha and others, has become a central narrative in historiographies of Indian film.

films might suggest a religious trilogy on the basis that their narratives are framed within Buddhist, Islamic and Hindu contexts respectively. This thesis proposes three arguments against this supposition and the related assertion that Rai specifically intended to make a religious trilogy and chose Emelka because of its experience of filming the Passion Plays at Oberammergau.

The first argument is that a more prosaic interpretation might be derived from Rai's own response at the ICC in 1928:

Shiraz was written by an Indian [i.e. Pal] about five or six years ago and it has been our intention to produce this picture. That is why we gave up our stage activities in London and tried to produce the picture here. But we did not get sufficient funds for the production of *Shiraz*; that is why we produced *The Light of Asia*.²⁴

Shiraz was originally intended as a stage play and Rai was already promoting it to potential investors at the beginning of 1923.²⁵ According to Rai, by the time he suggested making a film, Pal had already written "some twenty scenarios that had been produced with success in England and elsewhere."²⁶ These were scenarios whose subjects ranged from tragedies such as *The Faith of a Child* to a comedy farce entitled *The Magic Crystal* that was staged in London in 1924. Furthermore, Rai's comment suggests pragmatism, a characteristic that enabled him to recognise and benefit from opportunities and to quickly adapt his plans when impediments became intractable or the prevailing cultural climate shifted.

The second argument proposes that, through the inclusion of secular, nationalist and socialist undercurrents, Pal's screenplay for *Light of Asia* subverts the idea of a straightforward trilogy representing world religions, instead drawing this first film into the political sphere with its ideas of equality and a form of socialism. Although Amladi attributes a "secularising impulse" in the films to Rai:

²⁴ ICCE, Vol. 3, 1002.

²⁵ "It is intended to produce in London ... a spectacular play dealing with the historical legend of the Taj Mahal of Agra." "Manchester and the Indian Players," *Manchester Guardian*. 8 January 1923, 12.

²⁶ "Asia," 754.

in stark contrast to Phalke's productions, Himansu Rai's films ... turn their attentions to a more official interpretation of the Indian past. He is more interested in "history" and its presentation and commodification along two axes: the Hollywood construction of the dream of oriental splendour, and British orientalism as providing the text for this performance.²⁷

it is arguably the evolution of Pal's political ideology that permeates these films. This might be traced as far back as his first drama, *Buddha*, written in 1912; it continues with *The Goddess* and *Light of Asia*, and persists in the screenplays Pal produced for Bombay Talkies.

Hailing from the Bengali intelligentsia, Pal's political philosophy is likely to have been influenced by his father's activities within the socially reforming Brahmo Samaj and the latter's subsequent involvement in the campaign for independence from Britain in which Bipin Chandra Pal played a significantly radical part.²⁸ Further political influences might be attributed to Pal's associations in Calcutta as well as with those he forged in London after his arrival in 1908. These included fellow Indian nationalists such as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Virendranath Chattopadhyay, as well as the Irish nationalists he encountered through his friendship with Eva, his father's secretary and the daughter of an Irish rebel.²⁹

Pal produced at least three dramas criticising the level of power the priesthood exerted on society. *Goddess* was an interpretation of Tagore's play *Bisarjan* which censured the priesthood's adherence to animal sacrifice; it was performed by the Indian Players at The Duke of York's Theatre in London in 1922.³⁰ Rai described *Goddess* as "an effective satire directed against what is degenerate in Indian

²⁷ Amladi, "New Apprehensions," 42.

²⁸ Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932) who had himself studied in England, was one of India's most strident nationalists and, along with Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, was referred to collectively as LalBalPal.

²⁹ Pal, *Niranjana Pal*, 106.

³⁰ This Tagore play was also made into a film (*Balidan*) in 1927 and directed by Naval Gandhi for Orient Pictures. Under its English title (*Sacrifice*) it is frequently used as a comparator to *The Light of Asia* during the ICC hearings. In a short preface to *The Goddess*, Pal confirmed that he took *Bisarjan* as his inspiration.

priesthood.”³¹ One of the London reviewers suggested that Rai’s character, the Brahmin priest Ram Das, “reject[s] faith for rationalism.”³² Evoking Luther’s condemnation of indulgences, Ram Das criticises the practice of taking money from poor peasants in exchange for blessings:

What we have to find is a brotherhood without a temple, religion without creed, morals without a priesthood, goodness without a sacrament, and fellowship without caste, class or race.³³

His attitude is controversial among his fellow priests who want to protect their income, inevitably leading to conflict; his promotion of caste equality, meanwhile, is intimately bound up with his love for Maya, a lower caste woman. Furthermore, Pal’s configuration of Ram Das in *Goddess* presages that of *Achhut Kanya*’s altruistic Brahmin shopkeeper, Mohan, who dispenses medicine according to need rather than ability to pay.

The third argument is that if Rai was looking for a studio to make a religious trilogy, Emelka would not have been a natural choice. A list of Emelka’s productions from its formation in 1918, as well as productions by its predecessor, Münchener Kunstfilm Peter Ostermayr, indicates a focus on popular, light entertainment dramas, *Heimat* films and orientalist fare.³⁴ Although Osten would later direct *Der Judas von Tirol* (The Judas of Tyrol) in 1933, the Passion Play element in this film serves purely as a narrative frame to carry the theme of betrayal.

³¹ Rai, “Asia,” 753.

³² “The Goddess,” *Times* (London), 7 June 1922.

³³ Niranjan Pal, *The Goddess* (London : Indian Players., 1925), 16-17.

³⁴ The companies that were making films on the subject of the Oberammergau Passion Plays included Bayerische Film-Gesellschaft and the French company, Pathé Frères, who produced a series of 32 short films in 1905 under the overarching title *Das Leben und Leiden Christi/Vie et passion du Christ*. Retrieved from <http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de/> 30 November 2014. Although this was only a couple of years before Osten himself started producing short films for Pathé and other producers from 1907, there is no indication from information provided by him that he was involved with the making of these films. For a detailed filmography of Emelka, see Putz.

Raghavendra selects *Light of Asia* as one of fifty Indian classics, and argues that it “was sold as an authentic Indian film around the world, and as *Prem Sanyas* it also occupies an important position in the history of cinema.”³⁵ His use of the Hindi title is now common and others, such as Chabria and Bhaumik, also refer to the film under this title.³⁶ It should be pointed out, however, that *Prem Sanyas* appears to have come into general use only retrospectively; the promotional booklet that was circulated to Indian exhibitors in 1926 bears the name *Light of Asia* and not *Prem Sanyas* (Figure 2-1).³⁷ Furthermore, throughout the *Evidence* from the ICC, there is no reference to the film as *Prem Sanyas*. Although several other Indian films are referred to under Indian titles, these might be the only titles they ever had. It is possible that a Hindi title might have come into use when *Light of Asia* was first screened in Indian cinemas in 1926, however, no evidence could be found to support this.

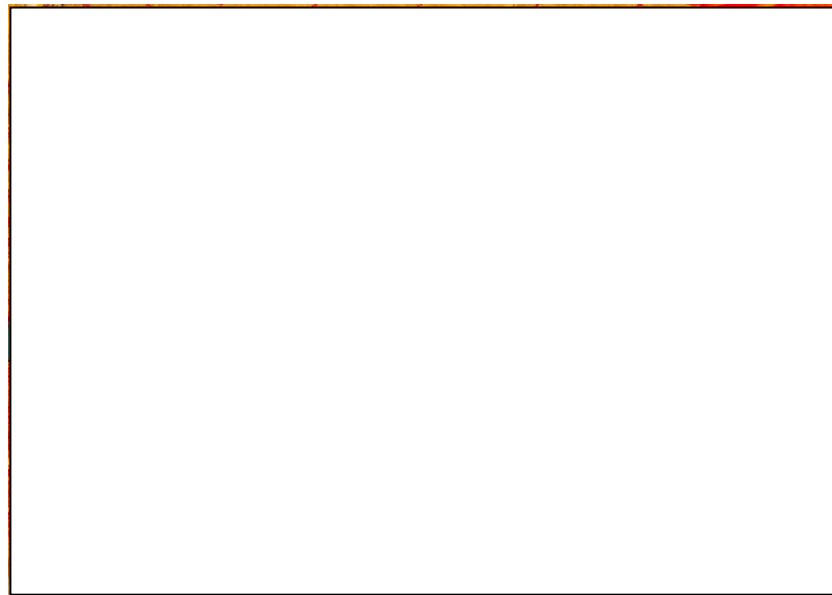


Figure 2-1 1926 Promotional Booklet of *The Light of Asia* for exhibitors in India.

An advertisement for the film’s premiere at Bombay’s Krishna Cinema referred to it as *Light of Asia* and reassured prospective audiences of its Indian

³⁵ M.K. Raghavendra, *50 Indian Film Classics* (Noida, India: Collins, 2009), 3.

³⁶ Bhaumik, “The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936.”

³⁷ This digitised copy is held by the National Film Archive India.

credentials.³⁸ In his extensive study of the early film industry in Bombay, Bhaumik describes the Krishna as “the first upmarket cinema hall to exclusively show Bombay films.”³⁹ Extrapolating from this raises the question why, if the Hindi title was in existence at this stage, the film was not being advertised as *Prem Sanyas*? Given its ambivalent national identity, is it possible that the retrospective application of a Hindi title has allowed it to more easily take its place in historiographies of early Indian cinema?

Dwyer and Patel explore how the imagery on the film’s publicity brochures and posters was culturally adapted to attract the attention of distributors in India and Germany.⁴⁰ Other examples of cultural variations are evident in contemporary advertisements for the film. Where exhibitors in India might be assured of the film’s religious narrative by the image of the Buddha shown in the previous image, German cinemagoers were regaled with the attraction of a tale of love and passion that was configured with the imagery seen in Figure 2-2. This German advertisement lists Osten as director, however, Indian advertisements made no mention of the German involvement (see Figure 2-3 and Figure 2-4).

Dwyer points to the anachronisms in the film’s settings showing “many Muslim buildings as part of classical India’s heritage.”⁴¹ These historical inaccuracies and anachronisms were discussed on at least three occasions in the *Evidence*. Coatman, one of the panel members, drew attention to the “macadamised roads” and a Government of India architect, John Marshall, told the Committee that “the setting of a Moghul place for the life of the Buddha would probably strike most educated Indians as incongruous.”⁴² Neogy, another ICC panel member, asked whether anyone had been struck by the “incongruity in using buildings of the Moghul type

³⁸ “All Indian Respectable Cast; All Scenes taken in India,” “Advertisement for The Light of Asia,” *Bombay Chronicle*, 14 April 1926.

³⁹ “The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936,” 38.

⁴⁰ Dwyer and Patel, *Cinema India*.

⁴¹ Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 21.

⁴² *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 958.; Rai told the ICC that in identifying locations and permissions for *Shiraz*, he took John Marshall’s advice. *Ibid.*, 1004.

of architecture for the production of the film 'Life of Buddha.'" ⁴³ These anachronisms were defended by Rai and supported in a later article when he confirmed that "these were not the historical settings, since the changes of twenty-five centuries rendered their use impracticable, but were genuine palaces, temples and sites of ancient India."⁴⁴ Rai also admitted, "the problem of finding temples that did not show Saracenic influence and that were typical of pre-Buddhist days occasionally involved difficulties."⁴⁵ Through his social contacts and his ability to engage others with his proposals, Rai had succeeded in convincing a number of maharajas to contribute towards his cinematic project; consequently the filmmakers were given access to palaces, and provided with clothing, jewellery, elephants and the services of thousands of extras for crowd scenes; the contribution of the maharajas was frequently acknowledged in the press, adding further respectability to the venture, for example, the British press frequently focused on the royal connections with *Light of Asia*, both the contributions made by the maharajas as well as the Command Performance at Windsor Castle.

⁴³ *ICCE*, Vol. 5, 29.

⁴⁴ Rai, "The Light of Asia," 754.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 808.

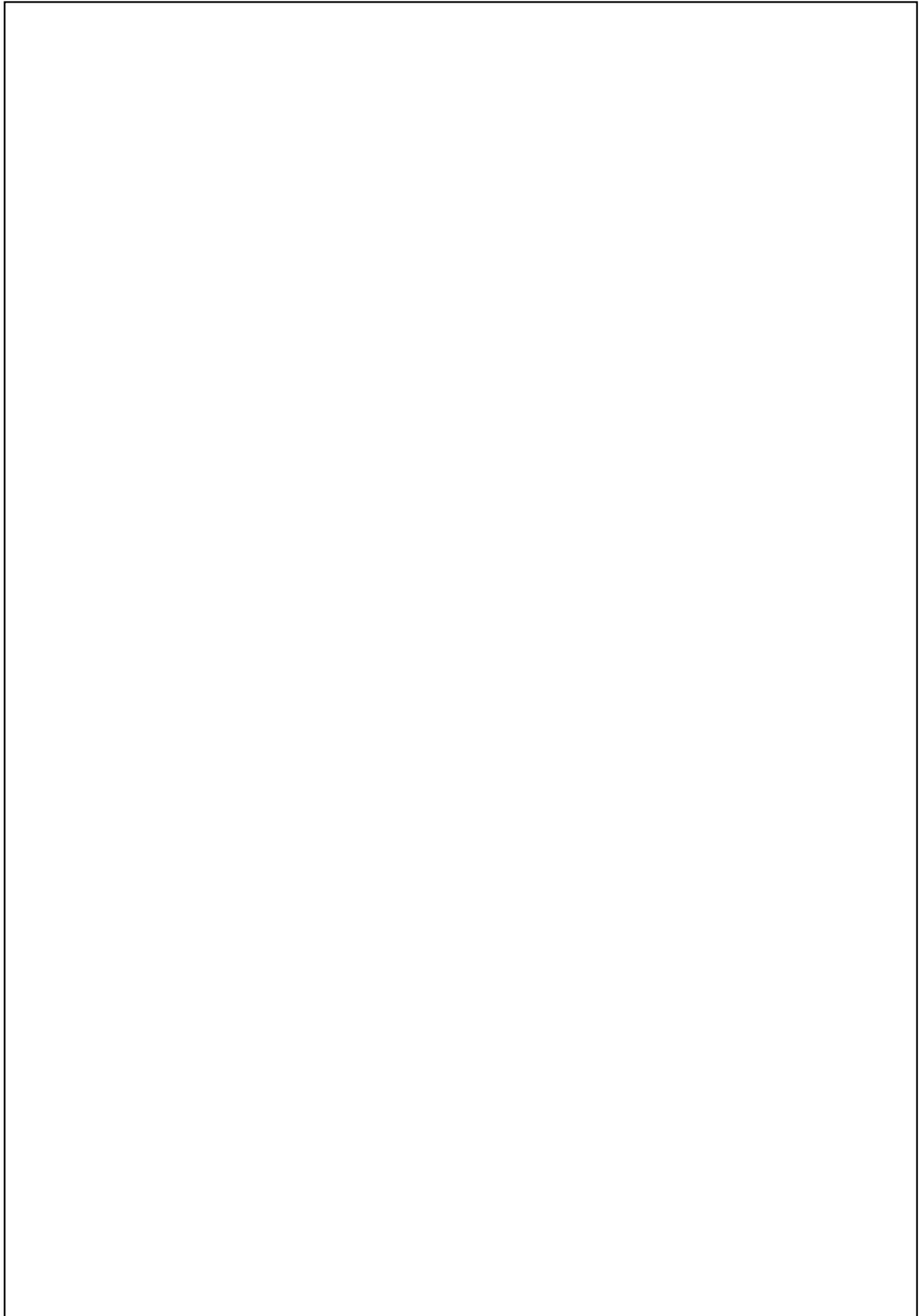


Figure 2-2 "Berlin premiere" *The Light of Asia*, *Berliner Tageblatt*, 3 Nov 1925.

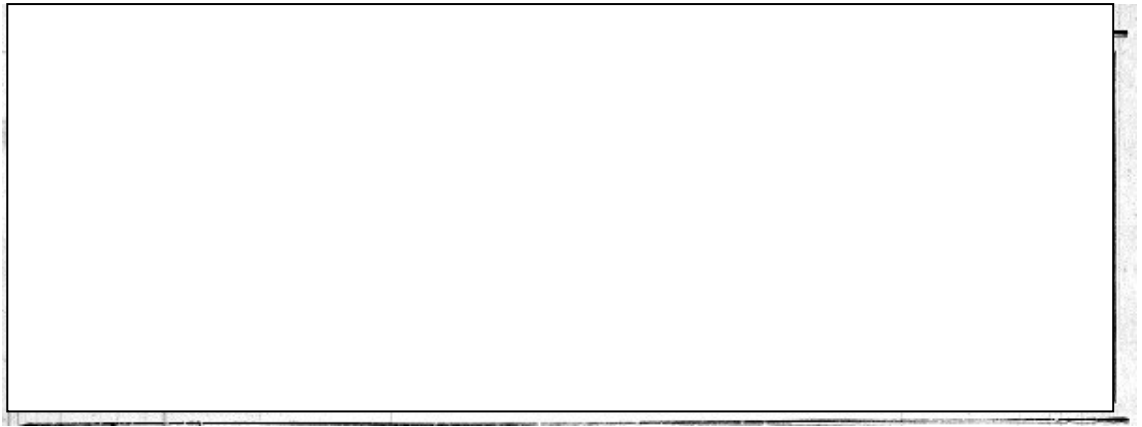


Figure 2-3 *The Light of Asia* opens at the Krishna Cinema, *Bombay Chronicle*

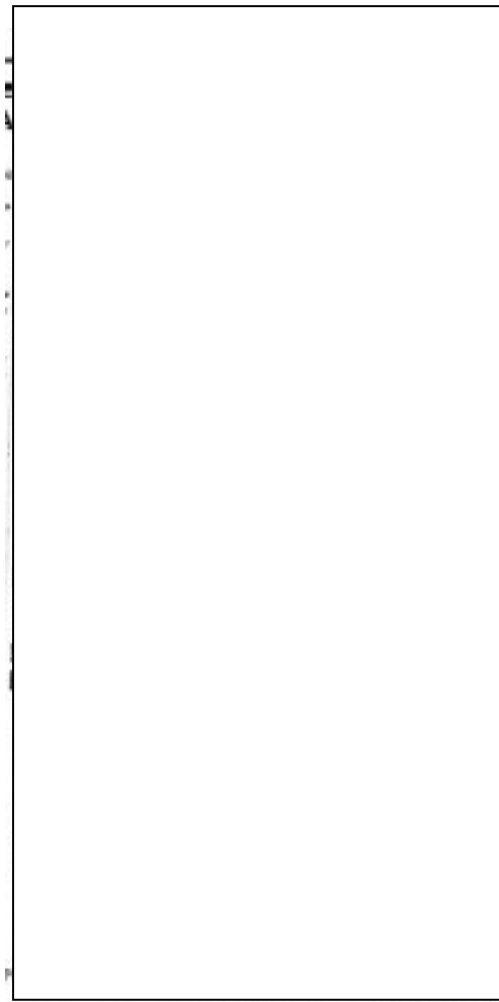


Figure 2-4 *The Light of Asia* at the Krishna Cinema, *Bombay Chronicle*

In the revised edition of his 1994 text published after the Pordenone Film Festival, Chabria, who uses the film's *English* title for his publication, points to Osten's claim that he had made "the first completely Indian film," arguing that the director's claim "is throughout undercut by the all-pervasive orientalism and exoticising of India."⁴⁶ Whether the orientalising and exoticising is Osten's alone is a matter for further discourse. When writing about the film for *Asia* magazine in 1926, Rai emphasised that the production was an Indian one, with some technical support from the Germans. Pal's comments suggest that Osten might have wielded a greater influence on this first film, although he cites occasions when Osten's will did not prevail.⁴⁷ Dwyer questions Chabria's interpretation of Osten's orientalist approach, arguing that "the Orientalist features are not necessarily to be associated with the film's German director, who made many hit films in India outside this genre, including the realist social, *Achhut Kanya* in 1936."⁴⁸

Nevertheless, by this stage Osten was a veteran filmmaker and, although Rai and Pal had some experience of the theatre, they were relative novices to film production. Is it possible that with Osten's twelve years' seniority, cultural conventions might have had a restraining effect on Rai contradicting Osten's judgment? *Reichsfilmblatt* implied that Osten had struggled to direct Rai or Seeta Devi because:

die Hauptdarsteller Himansu Rai und Seeta Devi sind keine Schauspieler im europäischen oder auch nur amerikansichen Sinn. [Osten]... konnte ihnen in den wenigen Wochen, da er den Film in Indien auf die Beine stellte, nicht das Filmen beibringen. ([they] are not actors in the European or American sense ... [and] in the few weeks during which he was to produce the film in India, [Osten] was not able to teach them how to act for the screen.)⁴⁹

Interviewed by Leonhard Adelt, however, Osten praised his main actors:

⁴⁶ Chabria, *Light of Asia*, 66.

⁴⁷ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 208–209.

⁴⁸ Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 176.

⁴⁹ "Münchener Uraufführungen. Die Leuchte Asiens," *Reichsfilmblatt*, 44 (1925): 41.

Entscheidend erleichtert wurde mir meine Ausgabe durch die Intelligenz und den Bildungsgrad der Hauptdarsteller, die ausnahmslos den besten indischen Gesellschaftsstreifen angehören. Mr. Rai war ursprünglich Jurist und hat später als Schauspieler gewirkt. (My task was made considerably easier by the intelligence and educational level of the main actors, all of them, without exception, belonging to the best of Indian society. Mr Rai was originally a lawyer and later worked as an actor.)⁵⁰

There were tensions between Pal and Osten, however, and these would persist after the establishment of Bombay Talkies.

Osten's claim to have made the first completely Indian film may be subjective, nevertheless, there was a sense that the production of a 'purely Indian film' contributed to the evolution of a European cinema that rejected an orientalist aesthetic. Whilst the genre of the Kulturfilm, the ethnographic documentary, was valued for its realism, an orientalist aesthetic persisted in the feature films of Joe May and would appear in other Osten films.⁵¹ By contrast, *Light of Asia* used Indian actors and props in an Indian setting, and it was these factors that were emphasised in some of the advertising, such as this example from the *Lichtbildbühne*:

Ausschließlich in Indien gedreht! Ausschließlich indische Darsteller! Nach einem indischen Manuskript von Niranjan Pal. Sämtliche Kostüme, Dekorationen, Jewelen sind echt und antik. (Filmed exclusively in India! All-Indian cast! Based on an Indian script by Niranjan Pal. All costumes, decorations, jewels are genuine and antique!)⁵²

⁵⁰ Leonhard Adelt, "Der 'Buddha' in München," *Hamburgische Correspondent*, 12 Sep 1925.

⁵¹ For example, this is evident with the Maharaja played by the Norwegian star, Gunnar Tolnæs, in *Die Lieblingsfrau des Maharadschas* (Mack, 1920); Tolnæs also appeared in three renditions of *Maharadjahen's Yndlinghustru* that were produced by Nordisk in 1917 (Dinesen), 1918 (Blom) and in collaboration with Ufa in 1925 (Sandberg); these are discussed in detail by Mulay, who describes a progressively orientalist approach as Tolnæs' Maharaja morphs from an empathetic being into an increasingly misogynistic despot; Conrad Veidt played the Maharaja of Eschnapur in May's Indian Tomb trilogy (*Die Sendung des Yogi/Das indische Grabmal/Der Maharadscha von Eschnapur*, (1921); and the Swede, Jenny Hasselqvist played an exotic dancer in Ernst Lubitsch's *Sumurun* (1923); Osten's use of orientalist imagery is discussed in chapter 5.

⁵² *Lichtbildbühne* "Die Leuchte Asiens," (Oct/Nov 1925?), 24. Incidentally, comparing the text of this advertisement with the April 1926 advertisement in the *Bombay Chronicle* cited above,

This Indian authenticity, however, prompted the critic of the *Reichsfilmblatt* to argue that:

Ein auf Bildwirkung, auf Ausdruck hin stilisiertes, im Atelier gestelltes Indien hat im Spielfilm mehr Bildkraft als das echteste nur auf literarische Werte hin massierte Indien. (The India that is designed and staged in the studio with an emphasis on visual impact and expression has more visual power than the realistic India that is moulded in accordance with literary values.)⁵³

Others praised the film's realism. Writing in January 1926, Béla Balázs criticised those educated German spectators of *Die Leuchte Asiens* who had complained that most of the real Indians came across as inauthentic, and he contrasted it with what he referred to as the *Berlin-Staakener Indienfilmen* of Joe May.⁵⁴ Echoing the *Reichsfilmblatt*, Balázs praised Seeta Devi (whose real name was Renee Smith) for her inadvertent Indian authenticity saying that:

[Seeta Devi] anscheinend viel zu dumm war, um zu begreifen, was der Münchener Regisseur von ihr haben wollte, und darum überhaupt nicht spielt. ([Seeta Devi] appeared to be too ignorant to understand what the director from Munich wanted her to do, and therefore didn't act.)⁵⁵

Nevertheless, Balázs' positioning of Devi as an "Indian child" overlooks her position as an Anglo-Indian and the fact that Devi is an assumed name, a practice common during this early period and used partly for what Majumdar describes as "corralling star identities into a homogeneous Hindu field."⁵⁶ Furthermore this pseudonymic convention would have served to shield the identity of the female actor who dared to appear on screen and thereby protect her family's name.

suggests cultural variations. Where the *Bombay Chronicle* emphasised the respectability of the cast, *Lichtbildbühne* began with the Indian landscape.

⁵³ "Münchener Uraufführungen. Die Leuchte Asiens," *Reichsfilmblatt* 44 (1925).

⁵⁴ Staaken was a film studio outside Berlin which had been converted from a zeppelin hangar. Jan-Christopher Horak, "The strange case of the fall of Jerusalem?: orphans and film identification." *The Moving Image* 5, no. 2 (2005): 26–49, 43.

⁵⁵ Béla Balázs, *Schriften Zum Film. Band 1. Der Sichtbare Mensch. Kritiken Und Aufsätze* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982) 354.

⁵⁶ Majumdar, "Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s to 1950s," 147.

The masquerade of ‘blacking up’ European faces to represent the Other was one with which both Rai and Pal were familiar from their work on the London stage; here they had striven for years to insert Indian actors into dramas about Indian subjects in roles that carried more gravitas than the exotic other or the mute extra. Eventually forming their own theatre company, Indian Players, they were able to perform Pal’s script of *Goddess* in 1922, introducing Indians to the stage in more substantive roles. At least on this occasion. Rai, cited in Schönfeld, admitted to their desire to focus on realism in *Light of Asia* saying “no film can be truly artistic, or, I believe, really popular, unless the out-of-date fakeries of background and camerawork are ruthlessly abandoned.”⁵⁷

Amladi suggests that Rai offered his services to Emelka as an actor and consultant, but this overlooks his agency in the film’s production.⁵⁸ Ascárate proposes a reading of *Light of Asia* that “reveals the historical unconscious of Germany’s troubled relationship with at least one product of modernity, that of cinema itself.”⁵⁹ This is a reasonable argument because anxieties about the speed of modern life and the perceived dangers cinema posed to society’s wellbeing and the mental health of the individual had been expressed in Germany and elsewhere for some time by 1925.⁶⁰ Ascárate also focuses on what he suggests was Osten’s decision to “undertake to represent the lifelong spiritual development of an ancient religious figure.”⁶¹ Evidence that this was Osten’s idea could not be found, however, and comparison with accounts given by Rai appear to contradict this. For example, writing about *Light of Asia* in 1926, Rai said that “for purposes of screen production [the story] was Niranjan Pal’s to tell. And mine to sell,” a statement that places the idea for the film’s scenario back with its Indian author.⁶²

⁵⁷ Schönfeld, “Franz Osten’s ‘The Light of Asia,’” 556.

⁵⁸ Amladi, “New Apprehensions,” 176.

⁵⁹ Ascárate, “Cinematic Enlightenment,” 360.

⁶⁰ See for example Manvell and Fraenkel, *The German Cinema*, 14–15.;

⁶¹ Ascárate, “Cinematic Enlightenment,” 360.

⁶² Rai, “The Light of Asia,” 757.

How much creative control were Osten and his German colleagues were able to exert? Kamm, citing Osten's obsession with achieving realism, asserts that "Osten, as the film's director, was clearly in charge." As mentioned above, however, Pal records instances suggesting this was not always the case and there were, in fact, times when Osten's cultural illiteracy risked compromising the film's production.⁶³ Ascárate repeats the claim made on one of the film's intertitles that Rai and others had relinquished professional careers to "bring about a renaissance of the dramatic art of India."⁶⁴ In one sense, perhaps they had relinquished their professions, however, this appears to have occurred by 1922 when they staged *Goddess*, and possibly even earlier. Rai first enrolled at Middle Temple in November 1917.⁶⁵ He took his exams in 1919 and 1920, each time gaining a third class pass.⁶⁶ The Middle Temple register, however, does not record Rai ever being called to the Bar and it is likely that by this time his interests lay elsewhere. In the article for *Asia*, Rai reported that he had appeared in Rabindranath Tagore's *Maharani of Arakan*.⁶⁷ There were two London productions of an adaptation by George Calderon of Tagore's play. The first was in 1912 when it was performed at the Royal Albert Hall with music composed by Inayat Khan.⁶⁸ The second was performed at the London Coliseum in 1916.⁶⁹ Although Rai's involvement in the 1912 performance cannot be dismissed, it is probably the 1916 performance that he refers to. Either of these pre-date Rai's entry to Middle Temple, suggesting that

⁶³ "German Film, World Travel," 136; Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 207–209; reading Pal's comments, Osten's approach appears at times contradictory. He insisted on a darker baby to play the infant Gautama, yet was apparently insistent that a German woman should be chosen to play Gopa when it was proving difficult to recruit an Indian woman for the role. Their disagreement over blood sports also led to a serious falling out, and Pal relates that he threatened to destroy Osten's script.

⁶⁴ Ascárate, "Cinematic Enlightenment," 361.

⁶⁵ *Register of Admissions to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple. Volume III, 1910 to 1944*. Vol. 3. (London: Butterworth & Co., 1944). 826.

⁶⁶ "Bar Examination," *Times* (London), 18 June 1919; "Bar Examination," *Times* (London), 13 January 1920.

⁶⁷ Rai, "The Light of Asia," 753.

⁶⁸ "The Theatres," *Times* (London), 29 July 1912.

⁶⁹ "The Theatrical Week," *Times* (London), 19 June 1916.

his decision to follow theatrical pursuits might have been established by the time he enrolled at Middle Temple.

Nevertheless, the trope of relinquishment is in tune with *mahâbhinishkramana*, or the Great Renunciation, a central tenet of Buddhism; and by weaving the idea of personal sacrifice into that of the film's narrative, its status as a sacrificial work for the art of India is again emphasised, echoing Phalke's own message of self-sacrifice in the cause of the art.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the idea of relinquishment becomes entwined with the elite status of the film's actors, a dual emphasis that flows through other comments Rai made. For example, in relation to the earlier formation of the Indian Players, he wrote "all the time my conviction grew that the West is interested in the East and that to give it something genuinely oriental would be a grateful task."⁷¹ This decision would result in disinheritance, the withdrawal of allowances and family schisms for some of the actors, Rai included; all twenty-two of them "from high-caste families, representative of the ancient culture of India."⁷² Seeta Devi, who was about fourteen at the time of the film's production, is configured as surrendering the hope of marriage in order to act, working for her art under a "scorching sun" such that the jewels she was adorned with "burned her skin."⁷³ Other Indian ladies meanwhile "stood tireless under the glare until the cameraman gave the signal that the scene was ended, and then they dropped senseless."⁷⁴ Whilst invoking this vivid tableau of suffering, what Rai fails to mention is that similar fates were also befalling the Germans. Bertl Schultes described Osten collapsing in the extreme heat, only to succumb in the same way himself, having taken over from Osten.⁷⁵ Correspondingly, German articles tended

⁷⁰ "ICCE, Vol. 3, 870.

⁷¹ Rai, "The Light of Asia," 753.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 758.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 808.

⁷⁵ Schultes, *Ein Komödiant*, 149.

to stress the arduous climatic conditions under which the film had been produced.⁷⁶

Schönfeld describes the Osten/Rai partnership as one of collaboration, stating that when Rai travelled to Munich looking for partners to make his films about world religions he “hoped that the West would give him technical assistance.”⁷⁷ But Schönfeld also takes a teleological approach in asserting that it was “the desire for national sovereignty [that] led Himansu Rai to employ Europeans like Franz Osten in order to create connections with other countries that were independent of Great Britain” a claim that does not appear to be substantiated.⁷⁸ Quoted in the *Manchester Guardian*, Rai described a project to give the Indian Players a regular base for theatrical productions “to present before the British public the life and customs of their fellow citizens in India” and indicated that he was seeking funding for this:

The success of the scheme ... will be a proof of British sympathy towards India, and will serve as a practical example of the result of Indo-British co-operation, and *this latter fact is bound to be helpful to those in India who are striving hard against the Non-Co-operation policy.*⁷⁹ [author's italics]

Whilst it is possible that Rai had changed his attitude towards Gandhi's policy of non-cooperation by the time he negotiated with Emelka, this 1923 comment does not support the idea that Rai intended to distance his projects from Great Britain in the pursuit of Indian nationalism; instead it suggests someone whose primary concern is to identify commercial opportunities, an argument explored in the following chapter. Speaking to the ICC, J. P. Mathur, who described himself as “one of the actors, technicians and financiers” on *Light of Asia*, told the Committee that

⁷⁶ See for example, “Indienfahrt der Emelka,” *Altonaer Nachrichten*, 17 June 1925; Leonhard Adelt, “Der Buddha in München,” *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 30 August 1925.

⁷⁷ Schönfeld, “Franz Osten's ‘The Light of Asia,’” 556.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “Manchester and the Indian Players,” *Manchester Guardian* (8 January 1923).

Rai had turned to Germany after failing to find support for his project in Great Britain:

We first tried Great Britain but we could not succeed there. Then by some chance we made arrangements with Germany and it was decided that the technicians, actors and the financiers were to divide the profits equally between them at the rate of 33% per cent each.⁸⁰

Is it possible that the chance Mathur alludes to came about via Rai and Pal's associates from the British film industry? In November 1924, *Filmland* reported briefly on a collaboration between Emelka and two English firms.⁸¹ This referred to the deal between Emelka and Michael Balcon's Gainsborough Studios, an agreement that brought Alfred Hitchcock to both Neubabelsberg and Geiseltal.⁸² Given Rai's ability to forge alliances, another argument might be made that his contact to Emelka originated through British channels.⁸³

2.2.2 The intertextuality of Niranjan Pal's script

Arnold's poem seems a strange choice for Pal to use for the screenplay of an Indian film rather than drawing directly on an Asian source, but his decision may have been informed by the significance and popularity of Arnold's text in the cultural history of Europe, America and India over the preceding forty-five years. Furthermore, when it came to contracting with Emelka, the studio's *Justizrat*, Dr Wilhelm Rosenthal, was encouraging film scripts and subjects with literary value, and this may have worked in Pal's favour.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 991.

⁸¹ "Das endlose Celluloidband," *Filmland* (3 January 1925): 89.

⁸² Hitchcock first worked at Ufa as a set designer on the 1925 film *Die Prinzessin und der Geiger*, subsequently directing *Der Bergadler* and *Irrgarten der Leidenschaft* at Geiseltal. For more information about Michael Balcon, see Cook, *Gainsborough Pictures*, London: Cassell, 1997.

⁸³ Rai's connection with Bruce Woolfe, managing director of British Instructional Films, is another possibility.

⁸⁴ Johanna Zosha, an Austrian film critic, described earlier film scripts, claiming: "die Regisseure selbst ihre Filmbücher verfassten....es wurde alles verfilmt, was ihnen nur unter die Finger geriet und was nicht niet- und nagelhaft war ... was für "grausame" Werke dabei herauskamen, ist sicherlich noch in lebhafter Erinnerung." (the directors wrote their own scripts ... they filmed

As discussed below, the 1912 *Buddha* script appears to have originated with Pal. Taken together with *The Goddess* in 1922 and *Light of Asia* in 1925, a genealogy is discernible describing familiar themes and tropes that would appear in Pal's later screenplays for Bombay Talkies; in particular self sacrifice for the social good and the elimination of caste discrimination.⁸⁵ Perhaps by choosing Arnold's narrative, Pal intended to reclaim an Indian narrative which had by now become so integrated into the cultural landscape of the West that, in its numerous permutations, it had yet to make space for Indian artists to participate fully in its performance?

2.2.3 Edwin Arnold's poem

Arnold's text of *Light of Asia* covers Prince Gautama's early life, from the prediction of his birth and his entrapment in the beautiful palace to his renunciation of the world; to his enlightenment and eventual reunification with his wife, Yasôdhara.⁸⁶ It is a poem couched in Christian imagery and iconography: from the miraculous conception of Gautama announced in a dream, to the attendance of angels at his birth, the symbolism of the shepherd and the time spent in the wilderness. Stenerson argues that these factors "created an intellectual landscape familiar enough not to be forbidding but still exotic enough to be intriguing."⁸⁷

First published in 1879, Arnold's poem followed a literary tradition of re-configuring Buddhist mythology for a European audience. Although its appearance was framed by two other accounts (*The story of Gautama Buddha and his creed* by Richard Phillips in 1871 and Sidney Alexander's *Sakya-Muni* in 1887) Arnold's

everything that came into their hands and that wasn't nailed down ... the barbarous works that came out of that are certainly still in living memory.) "Die Münchner Filmerei," *Neue freie Presse*, 17 June 1924.

⁸⁵ For an extended discourse on sacrifice in film, see Kapse, "The Moving Image: Melodrama and Early Indian Cinema, 1913-1939."

⁸⁶ Arnold was a British classicist who had spent five years in India from 1856-61 working at the Deccan Sanskrit College in Pune where he acquired a knowledge of Persian, Turkish and Sanskrit, engaging the latter to translate *The Book of Good Counsels* in 1893.

⁸⁷ Douglas C. Stenerson, "Some impressions of the Buddha : Dreiser and Sir Edwin," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 22, no. 3 (1991): 387.

work caught the zeitgeist.⁸⁸ By the time he died in 1904, the success of his poem had resulted in multiple editions in Britain and America, both authorised and unauthorised and, according to the preface to the 1892 edition by the publisher, Trübner & Co, it had also been translated into “almost every European and numerous Oriental languages.”⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the poem does not seem to have achieved the level of popularity, or to have infused the cultural landscape in the way it did in Britain and America, and one German review described Arnold as, “the bad poet of a boring poem about Buddha.”⁹⁰ This absence may have been to the film’s benefit because German audiences approached it with fewer preconceptions.

The poem’s popularity extended beyond print, appearing in a number of performative forms. In 1886 it was used as the basis for a libretto by the American composer, Dudley Buck; and in 1892 a light opera, entitled *La Luce dell’Asia*, was produced and performed by the popular English composer and singer, Isidore de Lara, the latter published with a parallel Italian translation by Sforza Ruspoli.⁹¹ Joseph L. Röckel composed a one scene cantata entitled *Siddhartha* that was presented at the Bristol Musical Festival in 1896, and Harp Allen reports that verses from *Light of Asia* were recited at society gatherings in New York by the

⁸⁸ Richard Phillips, *The Story of Gautama Buddha and his creed: an epic*. (London, 1871). Sidney Arthur Alexander, *Sakya-Muni: the story of Buddha* (Oxford: A Thomas Shrimpton & Son, 1887) ; Arnold’s text had earlier European antecedents such as Brian Houghton Hodgson, *Illustrations of the literature and religion of the Buddhists* (Serampore, 1841); Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction à l’histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* (Paris, 1844); Emil Schlagintweit, *Buddhism in Tibet* (London: Trübner & Co., 1863); Paul Ambrose Bigandet, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama, the Budha of the Burmese* (Rangoon: American Mission Press, 1866); and first published in 1871, Henry Alabaster, *The Wheel of the Law : Buddhism* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972).

⁸⁹ Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia or The Great Renunciation*. (London: Trübner, & Co., 1892), vii; By 1892, at least two German editions had been published, translated by Arthur Pfungst and Konrad Wernicke respectively.

⁹⁰ Otto Neumann-Hofer, "Ein Englischer Kritiker," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 6 August 1888.

⁹¹ Dudley Buck, *The Light of Asia: a cantata* (London: Novello, Ewer, 1886); William Kingdon, *La Luce dell’Asia: a sacred legend*. (London: Mocatta, 1891); Edwin Arnold, *La Parola di Buddha dalla “Luce dell’Asia”*, translated by Sforza Ruspoli (Torino, 1909).

actor Edward Russell, with similar events taking place in Britain.⁹² Furthermore, a copy of the book made a regular appearance in lists of marriage gifts.⁹³ It was, says Franklin, representative of “the Buddhism steeped Nineties.”⁹⁴ Not everyone was delighted with this success and critics denounced Arnold’s work because it presented a Buddha whose similarities to Christ they perceived as threatening and undermining of Christianity’s dominance in the West.⁹⁵ Interest in Arnold’s text was not restricted to the Anglophone world, and Shils cited him as still being an influential writer for some Indian intellectuals at the time he wrote his article.⁹⁶

In 1912, an Indian living in London, S. C. Bose, put his name to yet another dramatised version based on Arnold’s text.⁹⁷ This amended some of Arnold’s

⁹² Joseph Leopold Röckel, “*Siddartha: a dramatic scene for baritone solo and orchestra, written by F. E. Weatherly*” (London: Office of the Organist, 1896); Matthew Harp Allen, “Rewriting the script for South Indian dance,” *TDR* 41, no. 3 (1997): 63–100.

⁹³ See for example: “Fashionable Marriage,” *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* (16 February 1885).

⁹⁴ J. Jeffrey Franklin, “The Life of the Buddha in Victorian England,” *ELH* 72, no. 4 (2005): 941–74.

⁹⁵ Flanders wrote, “Many intelligent and thoughtful persons, and among them certain clergymen, have had their confidence in the biography of Christ, as told by the evangelists, severely shaken by the story of Gautama, as told in *The Light of Asia*.” G. T. Flanders, *Christ or Buddha? A Review of Edwin Arnold’s Poem: “The Light of Asia”* (Salem, MA: G. A. Bates, 1881); Wilkinson warned that “those who admire Mr Edwin Arnold’s poetry, admire unwisely.” William Cleaver Wilkinson, *Edwin Arnold as poetizer and as paganizer. containing an examination of the “Light of Asia,” for its literature and for its Buddhism* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls., 1884), 11, 14. Wilkinson died in 1920 before learning that there was also to be a cinematic version; Kellogg declared the need to correct the views of “a large class even of Christian people [who] have a most exaggerated idea of the excellence of the great non-Christian religions, and the extent to which their teachings agree with those of the Gospel of Christ.” Samuel Henry Kellogg, *The Light of Asia and the Light of the World. A comparison of the legend, the doctrine and the ethics of the Buddha with the story, the doctrine, and the ethics of Christ*. (London: Macmillan, 1885), v.

⁹⁶ Edward Shils, “The Culture of the Indian Intellectual,” *The Sewanee Review* 67, no. 2 (1959): 240.; Arnold’s text (but not Osten’s film) was received positively by Buddhists, and the King of Siam awarded him the Order of the White Elephant. While in London, Gandhi was introduced to the Buddha’s early life through Arnold’s narrative and Tidrick writes that Gandhi, “accepted Arnold’s account [of *Light of Asia*] as authoritative. Much later he learned that one of his favourite images from the poem, of Gautama carrying a sick lamb while the mother trots beside him, was one Arnold had made up.” Kathryn Tidrick, *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 10.; In Gandhi’s own book on the *Bhagavad Gita*, he acknowledged his early acquaintance with Arnold’s translation of part of the *Gita* as *The Song Celestial*: “On reading [*The Song Celestial*] I felt a keen desire to read a Gujarati translation.” Gandhi, *The Bhagavad Gita according to Gandhi* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 2000), xvi.

⁹⁷ S. C. Bose, *Buddha: being a dramatised version of Sir Edwin Arnold’s “The Light of Asia.”* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1912). Niranjana Pal, 144–145.

Christian iconography by excising the angels from Gautama's birth, as well as the magi arriving from the East and Gautama's protection of the wounded lamb. Although this version omitted the birth narrative and introduced Gautama as a young man, it bore a strong resemblance to Pal's later screenplay. These similarities are not coincidental: Pal later wrote that he had "dramatised [*Light of Asia*] for the stage under [William] Poel's expert guidance" and it is likely that this was actually his work and not Bose's.⁹⁸ Pal describes researching the background in the British Library, and there is a possibility that, prompted by a mysterious German professor, he may have used the Jataka stories for reference.⁹⁹

The Times reported that a forthcoming production of Bose's play would "be supported by a company of Indian actors, composed mainly of students of law and medicine in London."¹⁰⁰ A review of the play in the same paper commended the performance of, amongst others, Niranjana Pal, who says in his autobiography that he played the role of Devadatta, Gautama's cousin.¹⁰¹ Pal had been living in London since 1908 and was, at least notionally, studying medicine.¹⁰² The same review reported that the role of Gautama was enacted by Clarence Derwent, but commented that "some of the parts are played by Indian gentlemen." It also mentioned that the accompanying music was composed by Miss Robinson and played by Miss Rosabelle Watson's string orchestra, inferring a Western style of

⁹⁸ Pal described William Poel as "the greatest authority on the Elizabethan stage." Ibid.

⁹⁹ Bakker suggests that because "of its emphasis on Buddha's humanness, Osten's *The Light of Asia* is closest to the oldest part of Buddhist tradition." *Studies in religion and the arts: challenge of the silver screen: an analysis of the cinematic portraits of Jesus, Rama, Buddha and Muhammad* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2009), 180–181; The mysterious German professor, named by Pal as Dr Otto Heinrich, could not be traced by the editors. Tantalisingly, Pal comments that he might actually have been a German spy; *Niranjana Pal*, 136–137.

¹⁰⁰ "This week's fixtures," *Times* (London), 19 February 1912.

¹⁰¹ "Buddha," *Times* (London), 23 February 1912; Pal, *Niranjana Pal*, 145.

¹⁰² According to an article by his great grandson, Joyojeet Pal, Niranjana Pal had moved to London with his father shortly after the Alipore Bombing in 1908. This was an unsuccessful attempt by the family to separate him from the Bengali revolutionaries with whom he had become entangled, among them Ullaskar Dutt. The attempt failed because once in London Pal soon made the acquaintance of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a factor which caused his father sufficient anxiety to instruct his son to move to a different boarding house. Joyojeet Pal, "Niranjana Pal and orientalism in early Indian silent cinema," in Pal, *Niranjana Pal*, 3.

music. Nevertheless, a display of Indian music and dancing was to be performed *during the intervals* [author's italics], thus configuring the 'exotic' as casual entertainment in opposition to the formal mode of dramatic fare. Highlighting the difficulties that Rai and Pal sought to overcome, this drama about Buddha's early life, adapted for the stage by an Indian, had been performed almost entirely by Europeans.¹⁰³

Although Arnold's poem remained in print, demand had lessened from its peak in the 1890s, and this might explain why the film did not achieve the anticipated popularity in Britain. Nevertheless, after *Light of Asia* was released in 1925, the story of the Buddha's early years continued to inspire new interpretations. In his evidence to the ICC, N. G. Deware, a producer at Kohinoor Film, suggested to the panel that Ernst Lubitsch was intending to make a film about the life of Gautama Buddha; an intriguing possibility, but one for which no evidence could be found.¹⁰⁴ In 1936, Axel Raoul Wachtmeister produced an 'opera-oratorio,' based partly on Arnold's poem, which once again foregrounded the Christian iconography that Pal had removed.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ A cast list for *Collision*, a 1913 musical drama about the "India Condition" in the Punjab, consisted entirely of European names, even though more than half of the play's characters were Indian. "'Collision' A play on India at the Vaudeville," *Times* (London), 2 October 1913; A review reported that the music and dancing were "rehearsed under the direction" of Inayat Khan. "The theatrical season," *Times* (London), 29 September 1913; Khan later advised François de Breteuil on his 1922 musical adaptation of *The Light of Asia*, although from a reading of de Breteuil's score, it may be that Khan's creative input was restricted to adapting western instruments: the score stipulates flutes, harp, trumpets, horns and cornets, trombones, piano, corno inglese, clarinets, violincello, piccolo, oboe and bassoon. François de Breteuil, *The Light of Asia. A Musical Drama in Five Acts. Adapted from Sir Edwin Arnold's Poem*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1922).

¹⁰⁴ *ICCE*, Vol. 1, 592.

¹⁰⁵ Axel Raoul Wachtmeister, *Prince Siddhartha. Opera-Oratorio in Two Acts and Twenty Scenes*. (London: W. Paxton, 1936).

2.3 The Colonial discourse about Indian cinema

It should have been a first-class test case to find out whether Indian films, properly handled and capably produced, would have the chance of a market abroad. But unfortunately the circumstances attending its failure in that direction are such that we cannot draw any safe conclusions from its history.¹⁰⁶

Of particular relevance for this thesis are the discussions that arose during the hearings with regard to the national identity of the film, and the involvement of foreign expertise and capital in the development of the film industry in India. Both lines of questioning are pertinent to the history of *Light of Asia*, not only during the period 1924-1928 and for the later formation of Bombay Talkies, but as an indication of the film's contested status in the nation-centric historiographies that were emerging.

The ICC questionnaire asked about topics such as the challenges posed by India's multi-lingualism and the eventuality of sound cinema arriving; the portrayal of women in cinema; and the possibility of introducing an Empire-wide quota system to reduce Hollywood's domination of the market. Even though some of the responses received were inaccurate (for example, *Light of Asia*, was sometimes confused with Madan's 1923 film, *Life of Lord Buddha*) the predominantly professional, middle class respondents (mostly from outside the film industry), betrayed their personal attitudes towards cinema, censorship, caste and cultural identity. Reading the volumes of evidence, the Committee's questioning, at times rigorous and provocative and occasionally held *in camera*, gives the impression of voluntary witnesses being placed in the position of defendants. To an extent this was true of Rai's interview. Altogether *Light of Asia* was raised on at least seventy-two separate occasions, both in the written statements and/or during the Committee hearings. As the Committee sought to distil the requirements for success in the production of an Indian film industry, *Light of Asia* was frequently compared with two mythological films – Madan

¹⁰⁶ ICCR, 88.

Theatres' 1923 production of *Savitri Satyavan* and Orient Pictures' 1927 film, *Sacrifice*, based on Tagore's play, *Balidan*.

Because the ICC had also been set up to examine the possibility of introducing quotas for Empire films, the discussion inevitably turned on a film's *national* identity. The questionnaire had attempted a definition by asking questions about "Indian-produced" and "Indian" films, and referring to an "Indian film-producing industry" that made films about "Indian life, topical Indian news, and scenes (with Indian actors) depicting stories from the national literature, history and mythology."¹⁰⁷ *Light of Asia*, produced by German filmmakers and partly financed from Germany, left several witnesses, as well as panel members, uncertain where to place it.

In the ICC Report, published in 1928, the Panel admitted "we have been constantly confronted with the opinion that the production of Indian films is 'negligible,' whereas it is very far from negligible."¹⁰⁸ Many films produced by the growing industry in India were rapidly produced on a small budget (between Rs. 20,000-30,000 was cited to the Committee) and the quality was reportedly low, a position that was deplored by D. G. Phalke during his own ICC interview: "Nowadays nobody looks to the quality of the production. Every firm looks to the quantity alone."¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, these films brought in audiences and made money, and were consequently in great demand from cinema managers, many of whom reported to the Committee that they had difficulties in obtaining enough of them.

This picture [*Light of Asia*] shows that there is really great scope for the combination of Indian literary genius with the best technical direction and photography.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ ICCR, para. 6.

¹⁰⁸ ICCR, 15.

¹⁰⁹ ICCE, Vol. 3, 870.

¹¹⁰ ICCE, Vol. 1, 218.

The Light of Asia was constructed in opposition to those cheaply made Indian films that Phalke criticised, and M. Bose said that it had cost “a lakh and a half” to produce.¹¹¹ Framed as an exemplar of respectability and high culture, its opening titles suggested that it was aimed at an international audience, reinforcing the trope of “romantic India ... the land of many wonders and many contrasts.” In this respect, it presented less of an obvious threat to the authorities than might the more incisive social commentaries of a filmmaker like Baburao Painter, whose films Majumdar suggests “could be read as nationalist allegories through their anti-establishment narratives.”¹¹² Jaikumar points out that Rai used high caste actors, a point he was always at pains to emphasise; Painter, by comparison, used male wrestlers and courtesans. Rai’s actor, in the person of “Miss Rainey Smith/Miss Sitadevi” was invited to the ICC’s hearings.¹¹³ Painter and his performers did not appear and it is unlikely that they were ever invited.¹¹⁴

Film production had been an international affair from its beginnings and it was acknowledged by some ICC participants and others, that foreign expertise was essential if the Indian industry was going to develop quickly. This was not a unanimous position, however, and for some of those who adhered more strictly to the principals of *Swadeshi*, the use of any foreign expertise barred a film from entitlement to be described as Indian.

The *Light of Asia* is to be distinguished from the other Indian films. Though the theme is Indian, the scenario was written by an Indian, the cast and the material is all Indian, the direction, photography and the technique is foreign – German and is thus in a class by itself.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *ICCE*, Vol. 2, 1072.

¹¹² Majumdar, “Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s to 1950s.”

¹¹³ *ICCE*, Vol. 2, 894-897.

¹¹⁴ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the end of empire*, 97.; Baburao Painter (1894-1954) began by painting backdrops for the theatre before designing a camera and making his own mythologicals and social films; Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 168–169.

¹¹⁵ P. R. Tipnis, proprietor, New Royal Cinema, Delhi, giving evidence to the Indian Cinematograph Committee. *ICCE*, Vol. 5, 19.

Most respondents to the Committee tended to categorise *Light of Asia* as an Indian film although, as discussed above, it was a “combination of German and Indian.”¹¹⁶ Sometimes the British Committee members emphasised its German associations, or questioned its cultural identity, “it was not, I think, Indian in the sense that it was completely produced, enacted, photographed by Indians.”¹¹⁷ Might this have betrayed lingering anti-German sentiment? Writing a year after the ICC had concluded, Green referred only to ‘non-Indians’ having assisted in production.¹¹⁸ Another factor to consider is whether the Committee’s responses reveal a discomfort with positioning *Light of Asia* in a category (i.e. Indian film) which they themselves denigrated. Jaikumar points out that “Himansu Rai was someone the ICC interviewers could understand well. They shared his respectable educational and class background.”¹¹⁹ The uneducated masses, by contrast, lay largely outside the Committee’s sphere of comprehension and, fearful of indigenous cinema as a potential site of subversion, the Committee sought to mediate and control it, just as the authorities had earlier sought to control other forms of public entertainment.¹²⁰

The ICC sat in the cities that fell in the geopolitical spaces of British India in the late 1920s, and some of the responses refer to regional films as well as variations in local censorship as they listened to respondents from Lahore and Peshawar through to Mandalay, Rangoon and Madras. The regional and cultural variations illustrated the hurdles that would need to be overcome if a quota was to be introduced for Empire films “for the people of the Empire” because, as the Committee reported “Burmese pictures have no attraction for Indians, nor Indian

¹¹⁶ ICCE, Vol. 1, 190.

¹¹⁷ ICCE, Vol. 2, 230.; Ibid., 208.

¹¹⁸ Green, “The Indian Cinematograph Industry,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 15 November 1929, 11.

¹¹⁹ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire*, 94.

¹²⁰ Hughes, “Is there anyone out there,” 111. Hughes describes how the authorities used legislation dating back to the 19th century to further develop regulations concerning “places of public resort.”

films for Burmans.”¹²¹ Producing the quintessential film with universal appeal proved as elusive as it does today.

2.4 Reception in Germany, Britain, India and elsewhere

This section considers how far Rai’s ambition to produce a film with international appeal succeeded in their respective markets.

2.4.1 The use of inconsonant music as a cultural bridge

Hansheinrich Dransmann was credited with producing the musical score for *Light of Asia*; although Koch mentions there was also a score by I. L. Fischer, it is Dransmann’s name that appears on the advertisement at Figure 2-2.¹²² Dransmann’s composition is described as “influenced by original Indian themes,” suggesting a compilation of several musical strands, rather than an entirely original score.¹²³ One German reviewer commented that Dransmann’s score “avoided Indian monotony” perhaps indicating that German audiences were not, at that stage, ready to embrace Indian music.¹²⁴

Had Rai and Pal ever considered using an Indian score? Given their lack of experience with the world of film production, they may have left the decision to Emelka. This is curious, however, because Rai had publicised his desire to give the West “something genuinely Oriental” and the addition of an Indian score might have provided a more authentic experience and thereby reinforced *Light of Asia*’s

¹²¹ ICCR, 40.

¹²² Koch, *Franz Osten’s Indian Silent Films*.

¹²³ Summary of *Die Leuchte Asiens* on Filmportal; for comments on music in the silent era, see Michel Chion, *Film: a sound art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); for contemporary comments on compilation scores for cinema productions, see Tootel, “Music in the Cinema,” *The Cinema and News Property Gazette*, 2 October 1924, 17-19; Osten’s brother and Emelka’s first director, Peter Ostermayr, writing in 1942 about his first feature film, *Ach wie ist’s möglich dann ...* (Oh, how is that possible ... 1913), said that he had commissioned Bruno Müller to compose an original score for piano and orchestra for it rather than use the compilation music that was common at the time. Letter from Peter Ostermayr to Reichsschrifttumskammer, 4 June 1941. BAL RKJ0079, 600.

¹²⁴ “Die Leuchte Asiens” *Der Film* 43 (October 1925).

status as an Indian film.¹²⁵ Perhaps Hughes' analysis of the silent film audience in South India provides the answer? He describes exhibitors seeking to overcome the cultural divide between the Indian audience and the foreign film, suggesting that:

In order to deal with these problems exhibitors in south India appropriated and institutionalized the cinema in culturally specific ways using Indian music, performance styles and languages to help mediate and translate western silent cinema for Indian audiences.¹²⁶

Whilst Hughes is referring to exhibition practices in the south of India where they were using Indian music to "suit the tempo and action of the silent film," might it also be that exhibitors in the West were using western music to provide a similar cultural bridge for foreign dramas and films from or about the East? There were costs associated with accommodating and hiring several musicians, and it may be that generally *Light of Asia's* score would have only been used on special occasions such as for its premières in cities such as Munich and Berlin, but Pal reports that the costs of exhibiting the film in London included the provision of an orchestra, which suggests that when the film was exhibited at the Philharmonic Hall it may have used Dransmann's score.¹²⁷ Pal's description of the screening at Windsor Castle, however, indicates that there was no musical accompaniment whatsoever and that "pin drop silence prevailed" on this occasion.¹²⁸ Analysis of contemporary film reviews suggests that a film's score rarely received any attention: apart from serving to underscore dramatic moments in the film and to mask some of the more distracting noises from the audience, the musical accompaniment to most films was probably little more than a forgettable backdrop.

¹²⁵ "Asia," 753.

¹²⁶ Hughes, "Is there anyone out there," 99.

¹²⁷ Pal, *Niranjana Pal*, 215.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

2.4.2 Die Leuchte Asiens: Germany

Although on the surface, the relationship between India and Germany was not inflected by a colonial presence, German responses and attitudes towards India were at times as ambivalent as those of other European countries.¹²⁹ The nation that revered Rabindranath Tagore; produced respected Indologists; and celebrated the cinematic partnership that had produced *Light of Asia*; was also host to John Hagenbeck's extraordinarily orientalist show that ran at the Berlin Zoo during the summer of 1926. In a setting that presented wild animals for the public gaze, Hagenbeck's apparently popular display featured Indian men, women and children in a form of living tableaux.¹³⁰ Traces of this ambivalence are evident in the film's German language reviews which are sometimes couched in uncompromisingly orientalist language.

Light of Asia's opulent displays of elephants and jewels satisfied a European-wide desire for images of Eastern exotica that had already been stimulated by the cinema as well as several German travel publications which included titles such as *Indien: das Wunderland* by de Fries or Böck's *Indische Wunderwelt*.¹³¹ "What attracts the leisure traveller to India, [wrote Böck] is the desire for change, for sensation, for something completely different."¹³² The announcement of Emelka's involvement with Rai and Pal quickly attracted interest in both Germany and Austria when it was first announced:

Heute wird etwas bekannt, was Sensation machen muss: die Münchener "Emelka" bereitet eine Expedition nach Indien vor, um in Gemeinschaft mit wohlhabenden Indern das Leben Buddhas zu verfilmen. (Today's announcement is sensational: Munich's

¹²⁹ In a recent history, Manjapra explores the nuances of the Indo-German relationship and in particular the German involvement as servants of the British Empire in India, *Age of Entanglement*; see also Oesterheld, "Germans in India between Kaiserreich and the End of World War II."

¹³⁰ Mozumdar, "Swastika and Tiranga," 21–24.

¹³¹ For example, Otto De Fries, *Indien : das Wunderland* (Dresden: Carl Reissner, 1922); Kurt Böck, *Indische Wunderwelt: Reisen und Erlebnisse in Britisch-Indien und auf Ceylon*, (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1925).

¹³² Böck, *Indische Wunderwelt*, 110.

Emelka is preparing a trip to India in order to make a film of the life of Buddha together with wealthy Indians.)¹³³

Heightened interest continued throughout the period of its production with regular reports about the progress of the film and the exploits of the filmmakers.¹³⁴ The film had separate premieres in at least three German cities: Munich, Berlin and Hamburg. In Munich it was a social and media event as well as a cinematic one. Seeta Devi appeared on the front cover of *Kinematograph* and Rai was feted at a reception to which representatives of the press were invited.¹³⁵ In the foyer of Munich's *Kammerlichtspiele*, Emelka's Reiber brothers created an Indian temple, with Rai and Seeta Devi cast as exotic stars.¹³⁶ By the time it was shown in Hamburg, however, the display in the cinema foyer was reduced to *Erzeugnisse indischen Handwerke* (products of Indian handicraft), suggesting either that money for promotion had run out or that interest in the film had diminished.¹³⁷

2.4.3 *The Light of Asia: Britain*

Thoraval and others cite *Light of Asia's* lengthy run at London's Philharmonic Hall during 1926 as evidence of its success, but examination of the ICC evidence suggests a more nuanced history.¹³⁸ Charting advertisements in the London *Times* praising the 'Wonder film of India,' confirms that the film ran for at least eight months from 27 March 1926 until about the end of November 1926. Pal said that it ran for ten months, whilst Rai told the ICC that it was shown "for a long period" in

¹³³ Cinemax, "Das endlose Celluloidband. Ein Film Kalendarium," *Filmland*, 17 January 1925.

¹³⁴ See for example, Ernst Iros, "Film-Munchen lebt noch!" *Bühne*, 16 (1925): 40-41; "Filmwelt-Telegramme," *Filmwelt*, 8 (1925): 2.

¹³⁵ "Seeta Devi, eine junge Inderin," *Kinematograph*, 975 (25 October 1925); "Der Emelka-Tee im Kaiserhof," *Der Film*, 40 (1925): 36.

¹³⁶ "Die Leuchte Asiens," *Lichtbildbühne* 213 (1925): 38; See also Kamm, "German Film, World Travel" 138-141.

¹³⁷ "Passage-Theater, Kammerlichtspiele: Die Leuchte Asiens," *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 9 Nov 1925.

¹³⁸ Yves Thoraval, *Les Cinémas de l'Inde* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

London.¹³⁹ P. R. Tipnis, proprietor and secretary of the Great Eastern Corporation, said that they “tried [*Light of Asia*] for six months there” but it was not successful:

We had to hire the theatre and the receipts were too low. It did not even pay for the hire. There were three parties in the concern. Emelka managing it, Rai and Indian players featuring the film and the Great Eastern Corporation financing it. On the whole it was not a successful venture so far.¹⁴⁰

After a slow start, a Royal Command Performance given at Windsor Castle on 27 April 1927 increased interest in the film and Pal claims this resulted in a full house thereafter.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, this royal endorsement served to reinforce *Light of Asia*’s elite status. Nevertheless, there were heavy financial commitments and the film barely covered the costs of advertising, renting the theatre and paying the orchestra. According to Pal, Emelka, having failed to support the film’s exhibition in London, now demanded 40% of the takings, and was only compelled to renegotiate terms once the General Strike “came to our rescue.”¹⁴² Contractual arrangements meant that Emelka would have the distribution rights for continental Europe, whilst the Great Eastern Corporation would retain the rights for Asia. Talking to the ICC, Rai claimed:

Niranjan Pal contracted with Emelka. He approached Emelka and got the exhibition rights in Great Britain. He got the rights for a time only. The rights have gone back to Emelka now.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 218.; *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 1000.

¹⁴⁰ *ICCE*, Vol. 5, 26.

¹⁴¹ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 215.; The Austrian journalist, Alice Schalek, mentioned that a screening of *The Light of Asia* was also requested by the Dutch Queen (*The Light of Asia* was exhibited in the Netherlands under the title *Het licht van Azië*). This royal reference may have originated from Rai, although no further information could be found. “Der neue indische Grossfilm „Shiraz.“ Himansu Rai, der erste indische Filmstar,” *Neue freie Presse* (18 August 1928); What was found, however, was that *A Throw of Dice* was shown in the Netherlands “geprepareerd op last van den koning” (shown by order of the king) “De dobbelsteen van het noodlot,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 2 February 1930.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 215–216.

¹⁴³ *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 999.

Of the handful of ICC respondents who had seen the film in London one, Lala Lajpat Rai, said:

I went twice to the film in London and the house was very thin. The galleries were entirely empty and only in the middle of the hall there were a few people, and I consider and many people consider that the film was a well done film. But it didn't attract large audiences.¹⁴⁴

In response to the ICC's questionnaire, Ram Prasad Tripathi, a reader in modern Indian history, wrote, "I can well remember the enormous interest created in England by the film *Light of Asia*. I was then in London and had myself seen the film. Although it was neither good nor correctly historical it had a pretty long run in London and was much talked about."¹⁴⁵ Rai admitted to the Committee that "Receipts were very poor. You cannot get such receipts in the Philharmonic Hall."¹⁴⁶ The difficulties in the film's exhibition in London, to what should have been one of its main audiences outside India, receive considerable attention in the oral evidence given before the ICC. In his evidence to the committee, Rai claimed that Pal had not approached British exhibitors "through the proper channel" and had failed to invite them to a trade presentation; but Modhu Bose, who was also interviewed by the Committee, said that a presentation to the trade had taken place.¹⁴⁷

The Philharmonic Hall, situated in Great Portland Street, was not an ideal venue for any film hoping to reach a good audience, let alone a unique foreign film that was hoping to break new ground. Although it lay only a short distance outside the main cinema district of the West End, the location was an unfortunate choice. The Hall had first opened in 1893 as Queen's Hall, a large concert venue with a smaller room at its top that was intended for chamber music. It was this smaller hall that

¹⁴⁴ ICCE, Vol. 2, 202.

¹⁴⁵ ICCE, Vol. 4, 128.

¹⁴⁶ ICCE, Vol. 3, 1000.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.; Bose also told the Committee that he had been connected with the film in Germany and Austria, and that he had been an actor. ICCE, Vol. 2, 1071.

was eventually converted into a cinema, although it appears to have functioned in this capacity only sporadically.¹⁴⁸ This was, however, the same venue that had exhibited Lowell Thomas' controversial film, *Through Romantic India*, in 1923 after it had moved from Covent Garden's Royal Opera House.¹⁴⁹ Pal described his anger at Thomas' film in which "the women of India were rather monstrously misrepresented" and claimed that he had been part of a demonstration outside the venue.¹⁵⁰ Evoking Phalke's epiphany, Pal claimed that it was this chance encounter with Lowell Thomas that had led him to filmmaking.¹⁵¹ Might it have been with ironic intent that Pal subsequently incorporated Thomas' title into *The Light of Asia's* opening titles "Every winter large numbers of European tourists are attracted to romantic India?" "It is not the usual entertainment centre" said Mr. Lala Lapat Rai in his evidence before the committee.¹⁵² Evidently it did not work well as a picture house and this was probably to the detriment of *Light of Asia*.

¹⁴⁸ The Philharmonic Hall had also been a venue for a variety of programmes ranging from the annual proms; bi-weekly talks and slide shows by luminaries such as Sir Ernest Shackleton; and photographic exhibitions and talks. Its difficult fortunes might be inferred from advertisements in the press that announced its sale in 1920, in 1922 and again in 1927; by 1928 it seems to have become a location for car vendors. "Philharmonic Hall sold," *Times* (London), 19 July 1920; Sale advertisement for Philharmonic Hall, *Times* (London), 15 November 1922; "For sale by auction," *Times* (London), 20 June 1927.

¹⁴⁹ "Entertainments," *Times* (London), 29 May 1923.

¹⁵⁰ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 136.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁵² *ICCE*, Vol. 2, 202–203.

2.4.4 Prem Sanyas: India

Hitherto the Light of Asia has stood to Bombay residents for tea and ham and eggs ... Not so now. Mr B. P. Sharma, Managing Director of the Great Eastern Corporation Ltd., announces an all Indian film of that title.¹⁵³



Figure 2-5 The Light of Asia restaurant, Mumbai

Although Kapse argues that *Light of Asia's* four week appearance in Bombay contradicts notions of the film's lack of popularity, it made no money in India, *Light of Asia* encountered difficulties securing exhibition in some parts of India and it was banned in Burma and Ceylon because it depicted the Buddha.¹⁵⁴ In Calcutta it was allegedly heckled at the opening night "because there [were] some technical mistakes in Indian life."¹⁵⁵ Perhaps its identification as an Indian film inhibited its exhibition in cinemas that catered to educated Indian and European audiences and only showed western productions, of which Madan Theatres was a typical example?¹⁵⁶

Advertisements forewarned spectators that "thousands would be turned away" due to the film's popularity (Figure 2-3 and Figure 2-4). *Light of Asia* was initially shown at Bombay's Krishna cinema on New Charni Road before moving to the

¹⁵³ "Current topics: The Light of Asia," *Times of India*, 14 April 1926.

¹⁵⁴ Kapse, "The Moving Image : Melodrama and Early Indian Cinema, 1913-1939," 91.; Madan's 1923 production *The Life of Lord Buddha* had also been banned.

¹⁵⁵ "Foreign Markets," *The Film Daily* 37, 22 August 1926.

¹⁵⁶ For an analysis of genre determining audience decisions on which films to watch, see Hughes, "Is there anyone out there," 152-153.

Excelsior on Ravelin Street in the Fort area of Bombay.¹⁵⁷ Many of those who saw the film were positively inclined towards its beautiful photography; but it also attracted a similar number of criticisms, some of which concurred with those coming from the West: the photography was beautiful, but the plot was too slow and the acting too staged. Furthermore, Mulay points to the tendency of the Indian press to categorise *Light of Asia* as a foreign film; a factor that might have also been to its detriment.¹⁵⁸

2.4.5 Other regions

Light of Asia was exhibited in other European countries apart from Germany and Britain. Speaking at the ICC, M. Bose told the panel that it had been shown in Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia.¹⁵⁹ A search of other European newspapers reveals that during 1926 it was reviewed at least twice under the Spanish title, *Buda, el Profeta de Asia*; and it had a run in the Netherlands from November 1925 under the title *Het licht van Azië*.¹⁶⁰ The Swedish film database has a record for it as *Mot det stora Okända*, indicating that it was exhibited there.¹⁶¹ American exhibitors were allegedly unwilling to take the film, citing its slowness of action; another factor, however, may have been because the country was largely closed to any foreign films, a complaint that was often articulated by the German film industry. Rai later recognised that American audiences were not interested in watching a “prince become a beggar” and Pal recounted that he was told the film’s anti-materialist message and downbeat ending would put off British viewers.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ For information on audience demographics in early Bombay cinema, see Bhaumik, “The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936;” Kaushik Bhaumik, “Cinematograph to Cinema: Bombay 1896-1928” *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 2 (January 2011): 41-67.

¹⁵⁸ Mulay, *From Rajahs and Yogis*, 277.

¹⁵⁹ *ICCE*, Vol. 2, 1072.

¹⁶⁰ “Revista cinematográfica,” *La Época* (23 February 1926); “Frente,” *Popular Film* (26 August 1926); “Dramatische (Film) Kroniek. Een film over het leven van Boeddha,” *Het Vaderland*, (1 November 1925).

¹⁶¹ <http://www.sfi.se/sv/svensk-filmdatabas/Item/?type=PERSON&itemid=229810> Accessed 10 January 2016.

¹⁶² Rai, “The Light of Asia,” 754; Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 211.

2.5 The first Indo-German co-production

2.5.1 Production and direction

In an otherwise detailed description of the making of *Light of Asia*, Rai wrote that, “for all the practical detail of photography, equipment, technical advice, we turned to the West, since this was something India could not supply.”¹⁶³ He failed to name the director, Franz Osten, the assistant director Bertl Schultes, or the cameramen Wilhelm Kiermeier and Josef Wirsching; neither did he refer to Emelka’s role in developing and printing and later distributing and promoting the film. If the “revival of the dramatic art of India” is configured as an Indian sacrifice, and thereby contributing to a nationalist objective, however, does this explain Rai’s attempts to understate the German contribution to the project? If the film’s intended audience included the British, understating the role of a recent adversary might also do no harm. Schultes was more generous, by comparison, referring to Rai in glowing terms:

Himansu Rai, unser Hauptdarsteller, hatte alles aufs beste vorbereitet. Wie wir ohne diesen großartigen Schauspieler, der früher einmal Rechtsanwalt gewesen sein soll, je mit dem Film hätten fertig werden können, weiß ich nicht. (Himansu Rai, our main actor, had prepared everything superbly. I don’t know how we would have ever managed to complete the film without this fantastic actor who was once apparently a lawyer.)¹⁶⁴

The relationship between Pal and Osten fractured over cultural divergences that arose in this initial co-production.¹⁶⁵ Arguably these contributed to Pal’s absence from the production of the two films that followed: although he wrote the scripts for both *Shiraz* and *A Throw of Dice*, he asserted that he was not involved directly in the films’ production, and did not travel to India with the production team; later intimating that this might have been because Osten’s services as director were

¹⁶³ Rai, “The Light of Asia,” 757.

¹⁶⁴ Schultes, *Ein Komödiant*, 147.

¹⁶⁵ Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Indian Cinema*, 85.

retained.¹⁶⁶ Comments made by Rai during his ICC interview indicate that Pal had been paid for his script for *Shiraz* and had no further financial interest in the film.¹⁶⁷

Pal also later expressed reluctance to join Bombay Talkies when he learned that Rai was employing the Germans.¹⁶⁸ His autobiography cites three instances of bitter disagreement between the two that almost led to Pal's departure from the production of *Light of Asia*. One problem he encountered was Osten's apparent failure to appreciate the dissonance between promoting scenes of genuine animal bloodshed as a cinematic attraction for distributors, in a film that was about the origins of Buddhism; on this occasion, Osten's arguments were overruled and alternative challenges were devised for Gautama to undertake.¹⁶⁹ Further problems occurred during casting, hinting at cultural ambivalence from both parties. When a suitable actor could not be found to portray Gautama's wife, Yasôdhara, Osten allegedly insisted that they look for a German woman so that shooting could finally get underway.¹⁷⁰ This proposal might not seem strange in isolation, except that Osten subsequently rejected Pal's choice of "a baby boy of about two years old" to play the infant, Gautama.¹⁷¹ On the one hand, Osten might have perceived a darker complexioned baby to be more congruent with Rai's ambitions of ethnic realism; on the other hand, however, Osten's vision of an oriental child as dark and therefore sufficiently different to distinguish him from a German one, hints at the very orientalism that Rai was seeking to overcome. On this occasion, Osten's will prevailed and the "sickly child of an elephant trainer was ultimately chosen to represent the baby Buddha." What Osten may not have

¹⁶⁶ Although Pal does not explicitly state that Osten's presence was the reason for his absence, his praise for Rai's production skills is juxtaposed with the news that Osten would direct: "both films were directed by Franz Osten under Rai's supervision." Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 219.

¹⁶⁷ *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 1002.

¹⁶⁸ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 234.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 208-9.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 206-7.

¹⁷¹ Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Indian Cinema*, 85.

realised, was that the child introduced by Pal was the nephew of Sarojini Naidu, and Osten's rejection of what he described as this "beautiful specimen of healthy childhood" inadvertently became a rejection of cultural *and* social nuances that the German director was unable to comprehend.¹⁷² Raghavendra suggests that "where Franz Osten only saw an 'Indian child,' Niranjan Pal apparently saw 'the baby Buddha'."¹⁷³ Pal questioned the ability of non-Indians to make Indian films, yet his own response may hint at concerns over caste identification.¹⁷⁴ Incidentally, neither Osten nor Pal appeared concerned whether a two year old might realistically represent a newborn infant.

Schönfeld quotes from Osten's diary to illustrate how the director strove for authenticity, but his desire for cinematic realism had an unexpected outcome. When he requested an extra who could play a dying man, he was presented with someone who was genuinely dying; an incident that illustrated the cultural gaps that would need to be negotiated in future co-productions.¹⁷⁵ Whether Osten intended his request to be taken literally is a moot point. Kamm suggests that Osten "scoured the Indian countryside looking for someone who was really dying." What is certain is that Osten, and his assistant director, both misread the cultural nuances in this exchange.¹⁷⁶

If I have learnt anything during my twenty-two years' stay in Europe [wrote Pal] it is this: the average European is born with certain preconceived notions about us poor heathens... [and] make it their business to nourish the prejudices and bias of centuries.

¹⁷² Educated in the UK and India, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was a writer, feminist, and leading member of India's Congress Party. Her connections with Rai, as well as Germany, are discussed throughout this thesis.

¹⁷³ Raghavendra, *50 Indian Film Classics*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.; See also Phalke's comment to ICC: "Indian customs and manners are quite different from European customs and manners. So also is the case in dress and everything else. The English company can only be the capitalist and they can supervise photography. They can do nothing else." *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 880.

¹⁷⁵ Schönfeld, "Franz Osten's 'The Light of Asia.'"

¹⁷⁶ Kamm, "German Film, World Travel," 136.

How can it be possible, under existing circumstances, for any European to interpret us truthfully and correctly?¹⁷⁷

Osten and Pal's relationship appears to have been consistently problematic and this may have contributed to Pal's impetuous, and final, departure from Bombay Talkies in 1937.¹⁷⁸

The benefits to Rai and Pal of obtaining German expertise for their first film are clear; they were bringing technical expertise for the Indians to learn. But what attracted the Germans to accept the offer to make this film? The ICC heard that Germany was more open than other countries to receiving Indians who wanted to learn the trade and that its people "are very anxious to know all oriental and Indian civilisation, culture, habits and traditions."¹⁷⁹ For Emelka it represented a prestigious project and an opportunity to expand its influence beyond Germany, something they had already achieved with co-productions in Hungary and the agreement with Gainsborough Pictures, discussed above.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, at a time of economic and political uncertainty, the opportunity to travel to India probably represented an exotic adventure for Osten, Wirsching, Schultes and Kiermeier.

Engaging Europeans to co-produce Indian films had precedents. For example, Madan Theatres employed Italian directors such as Eugenio de Liguoro and Giorgio Mannini, as well as Italian specialists who tinted and toned *Nala Damayanti* (1920) the first of a 'dozen Indian dramas.'¹⁸¹ *Dhruva Chiritra* followed in 1921, described by an Austrian publication as the "first Sanskrit film."¹⁸² *Savitri Satyavan* made in 1923, was filmed entirely in Italy, using Italian locations; although the narrative was based on a figure from Indian mythology and was marketed as an Indian film, it was produced, directed and performed entirely by

¹⁷⁷ Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Indian Cinema*, 85.

¹⁷⁸ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 241.

¹⁷⁹ *ICCE*, Vol. 1, 419.

¹⁸⁰ Using the distribution company W&F. "Das endlose Celluloidband," *Filmland* (January 1925): 89.

¹⁸¹ "Indian Film Making: A Madan Development," *Times of India* (10 January 1921).

¹⁸² "Der erste Sanskrit-Film," *Neue Kino Rundschau* 231 (1921): 11.

Italians, yet offered “Hindu mythology [...] with all its sweet simplicity and magnificence.”¹⁸³ Also in 1923, *Filmwelt* reported that two Austrian filmmakers had been engaged by Rabindranath Tagore to set up a ‘Filmstation’ at Shantiniketan.¹⁸⁴ Rai, keen to emphasise that the German involvement was not creative, told the ICC the “German interest was by their supplying the technicians and the equipment required for camera work.”¹⁸⁵ As discussed above, this is highlighted in Indian advertisements for their films that make no reference to the Germans. Osten’s own reports to the German-speaking press, meanwhile, tended towards the proprietorial when he spoke about *his* actors and *his* film.¹⁸⁶

Rai said that “Pal began to write his scenario, adapting his material to create the illusion of dramatic reality just as a playwright does in making use of historical characters.”¹⁸⁷ Might this also explain the theatrical structure of *Light of Asia* that divides the film into six acts, which Mulay attributes to their “penchant for theatre?”¹⁸⁸ Pal’s decision to structure the screenplay of *Light of Asia* with a theatrical format, may suggest his lack of experience in creating narrative for the screen, however, another possibility raises the question of the extent of Emelka’s influence on the film’s screenplay.¹⁸⁹ *Um Liebe und Thron* a film directed by Osten

¹⁸³ “Classified Ad. 14,” *Times of India* (27 January 1925).

¹⁸⁴ They were named as Rolf Freiherr von Ehrenfels and Wilty Schuster von Bodmershof. “Filmwelt-Telegramme,” *Die Filmwelt* 3 (1923): 15.

¹⁸⁵ *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 999.

¹⁸⁶ For example, “Das Leben des Buddhas im Film,” *Die Bühne* 51 (1925):43-44.

¹⁸⁷ “Asia,” 754–755.

¹⁸⁸ Mulay, *From Rajahs and Yogis*, 274.

¹⁸⁹ German producers continued to use the practice of advertising the length of its films by the number of acts they contained this as a guide for exhibitors, and examples exist up to at least the beginning of 1929. The use of this structural identifier may have served two purposes. In the early stages of cinema its purpose transposed a theatrical aesthetic onto film scripts, dividing the narrative into acts. Advertisements in trade magazines in German-speaking countries indicate that this theatrical format persisted until the late 1920s. Another interpretation for the enduring use of this dramatic format for screenplays might be found in the ongoing tension that persisted between the stage play that was configured as art form, and the film that was classified as public entertainment and was subsequently subject to the *Lustbarkeitssteuer*, the entertainment tax, Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine*, 10; many German screenplays were still being structured in a theatrical format, dividing the narrative into acts, and films were still being advertised according to

in 1922, has similarities to *Light of Asia*. From its narrative structure as a five act stage drama; to colour tinting; use of circular dissolve; outdoor shooting in natural light; and travelogue elements as the characters journey slowly down the Rhine. Although coincidental, both films have at their heart the dilemma of a royal dynasty whose male heir is missing. These similarities not only suggest the influence of Osten's direction of *Light of Asia*, they arguably indicate that Emelka's more conservative style of filmmaking had not evolved in the three years between the two films.

One of the opening titles of *Light of Asia* announces "Every winter large numbers of European tourists are attracted to romantic India – the land of many wonders and many contrasts." On one level, the film functions as a cinematic frame for European fantasies about the East. Couched in documentary style, it introduces important historical sites to a group of Western tourists, taking care to portray a sense of community by locating three of the main world religions within this historical context, and each time ministering to European expectations of Indian spirituality. But the mode of address used for the film's intertitles also serves to place the Indian viewer in a third person position outside the frame, reinforcing the sense that this film is intended for a non-Indian audience. Schultes' retrospective account of making *Light of Asia* provides a sense of art and life merging as he expresses his own wonderment of India.¹⁹⁰ Fuechtner suggests that by framing the narrative with modern Europeans, the film enables the cinematic gaze to travel in both directions: the European tourists in their strange flapper dresses becoming the curiosity as the gaze is returned.¹⁹¹ But by illustrating the tourists' ignorance about the role of Gautama in India's history – and this in spite of the popularity of Arnold's text – Pal comments on colonial knowledge. Arguably, Gautama's rejection of kingship, and his embrace of hardship to pursue a path of sacrifice is inherently political, given the circumstances within which the script

the number of acts they promised, an approach for which examples persist from the Munich film industry until the late 1920s; Even as late as 1927, Osten's film *Die raffinierteste Frau Berlins* in 1927 was divided into six acts, which were announced with intertitles; this film was produced for Peter-Ostermayr Produktion.

¹⁹⁰ Schultes, *Ein Komödiant*, 146.

¹⁹¹ Fuechtner, "The International Project of National(ist) Film," 172–174.

was produced, and considering the nationalist leanings of its author. Through a combination of worldly ignorance and an emphasis on physical luxuries, King Suddhodana strives to keep Gautama from learning about death and poverty; nevertheless, it is eventually outside the king's control to prevent knowledge of the outside world from seeping in, arguably a metaphor for attempts by the colonial authorities to suppress information (without the material benefits). Thus Pal adds a nationalist undercurrent to the film's narrative.

2.5.2 Intertextuality of the mise-en-scène

An aura suggestive of an Arabian Nights fantasy suffused the promotion of *Light of Asia*, figuratively extending its diegetic space into written and visual forms. The first example of this is found in Rai's description of filming at an isolated location outside Jaipur:

We needed a street where the architecture would be appropriate and also give the effect of age ... we settled on a deserted city in the heart of a forest fifteen miles from Jaipur. It had once been the stronghold of a band of robbers whose activities had spread throughout the northwest Province. It was now the haunt of wild beasts. We made that dead city live again. To it we transported five thousand men and women. We had to bring our own acetylene lights, and we turned the single street in which we worked into a fortress ... each night at dusk as we heard terrifying roars or piercing calls in the distance, we were reminded that we had penetrated into the world of the jungle – of tigers, jackals, owls, perhaps of ghosts! The place belonged to them. We were the intruders.¹⁹²

Rai's narrative continues, commenting on the enormous task of transporting 5,000 extras and "the largest number of [animals] that we had ever used," to this rural location.¹⁹³ His reward for this undertaking was a comment from a passing hunting party:

On the day when the procession scene was to be completed, a pleasant little surprise came to us. Just as I was ready to mount

¹⁹² Rai, "The Light of Asia," 810.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

my elephant, we heard the clear call of a bugle in the distance. A party of Englishmen and ladies, attended by fifty jungle-beaters and shikaris, was approaching... "it's like the Arabian Nights!" exclaimed one of them.¹⁹⁴

Schultes waxed lyrical about the sights, describing the image of the town [presumably Jaipur] as they returned after filming:

Die Nacht kommt plötzlich und wenn wir dann von unserer Aufnahmearbeit heimwärts führen, bot sich uns die Stadt in einer märchenhaften Beleuchtung. (Night arrives promptly and when driving home after filming, the town was illuminated as in a fairytale.)¹⁹⁵

Elsewhere Schultes invokes the Arabian Nights to describe Jaipur.¹⁹⁶ An Austrian magazine published an article about the Emelka film crew in India:

Diese Stadt [Jaipur] hat nichts von ihrer Echtheit eingebüßt und im wesentlichen noch den Charakter wie vor fünfhundert Jahren - ein Anblick, der verständlicherweise jeden Filmregisseur in Entzücken bringen muss." (This town has surrendered nothing of its originality and most importantly retains the character of 500 years ago, something that must certainly thrill every film director.)¹⁹⁷

The second example occurs in the extra-diegetic set created in the cinema foyer referred to above. This was designed by Willy and Ludwig Reiber, two of Emelka's long-standing set designers who would later share responsibility for training Karl von Spreti. Kamm describes this set in detail, pointing to the Arabian Nights' atmosphere that it created.¹⁹⁸ As discussed above, the attendance of Rai and Seeta Devi at events connected with promoting the film, integrated them within the mise-en-scène, arguably making them part of the performance but at the same time recalling Hagenbeck's anthropological exhibits.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 810.

¹⁹⁵ Schultes, *Ein Komödiant*, 146.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 145.

¹⁹⁷ "Das Leben Buddhas. Indienfahrt der Emelka," *Die Bühne*, 30 July 1925.

¹⁹⁸ Kamm, "German Film, World Travel," 137-140.

Part of the agreement between Rai, the Great Eastern Company and Emelka, was that the Germans would provide people with expertise in filmmaking: a director, assistant director and two cameramen. Whether the negotiations had ever considered the provision of an art director is unclear. Had Emelka offered, Rai may have refused because his comments to the ICC indicate that he intended to control the *mise-en-scène* himself.¹⁹⁹ Rai also claimed to have worked as an oriental consultant for stage plays in London and he frequently emphasised his intention to produce an Indian film in response to the orientalist productions that were being made in the West, an aspiration reinforced in one of the opening intertitles that the film was made “without the aid of studio sets, artificial lights, faked-up properties or make-ups.”²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, Osten and his colleagues reportedly travelled with a baggage train of “50 trunks, with everything from make-up, to lighting and camera equipment, all emblazoned with Emelka’s logo.”²⁰¹

Charu Roy was credited with responsibility for the costumes on *Light of Asia*.²⁰² Roy was an artist as well as a member of the Indian Players; he acted in Pal’s play *The Goddess* when it ran in Calcutta in the autumn of 1925; and he provided the illustrations for the play’s publication to coincide with the performances in India.²⁰³ Roy later directed several films himself, and he became an art director within the Bengali film industry; also contributing to film publications such as *Bioscope* and *Rangmahal*.²⁰⁴ Perhaps further research may reveal more about his contribution to *Light of Asia*?

¹⁹⁹ ICCE, Vol. 3, 1007.

²⁰⁰ Rai, “The Light of Asia,” 753.

²⁰¹ “Film-München lebt noch!” *Die Bühne*, 25 February 1925, 40.

²⁰² *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 248.

²⁰³ Pal, *The Goddess*.

²⁰⁴ Rajadhyaksha and Willemsen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 201; the authors also cite Roy’s acknowledgement that Osten and Wirsching influenced both his performative style and his use of lighting. Roy and Wirsching only worked together on *The Light of Asia*, however, although he might have been influenced by Wirsching’s later work at Bombay Talkies.

A detailed analysis of the regional aesthetic of the costumes used in *Light of Asia* lies outside the scope of this thesis, however, it is worth noting some of the comments made at the ICC. For example, Phalke told the ICC:

I am coming from the Bombay side. If I produce Shivaji's life, it will never be appreciated in Bengal or Madras; or if I produce any social film, it will not be appreciated anywhere except in Bombay. That is the chief difficulty here.²⁰⁵

Romesh, a correspondent from Madras, criticised *Light of Asia*, saying that "the costumes of the women characters in this film were ... quite misleading. Custom and costumes were here at a strange variance," later adding that "generally Indian pictures come from the Bombay side, and they are not very popular in the Madras Presidency on account of their costumes and dresses."²⁰⁶ Speaking about Indian cinema in general terms, Kale, an exhibitor who was interviewed at Nagpur, told the Panel that "attention to dresses and selection of costumes is very essential."²⁰⁷ As mentioned above, it is Rai's own evidence to the ICC that supports the notion that Roy might not have had full control over the costumes, "I am advising right through. The scenario has been developed according to my advice, the costumes and the mode in acting all these are according to my advice."²⁰⁸ Nevertheless, in spite of this avowed position, Rai would later appoint a German film architect, Karl von Spreti, to manage the department at Bombay Talkies.

2.5.3 Cinematography

Emelka supplied four filmmakers for the production of *Light of Asia*, only one of whom, Osten, had any substantial experience. For Wirsching, this was the first film he was credited on as a cameraman. Wilhelm Kiermeier had worked on five films, three of them with Franz Koch. In this respect Kiermeier might be described as the

²⁰⁵ *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 881.

²⁰⁶ *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 447.; *Ibid.*, 451.

²⁰⁷ *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 829.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1007.

senior cameraman of the team that travelled to India.²⁰⁹ What did this mean for the first of these Indo-German collaborations? An analysis of the photography suggests that their relative lack of experience as cameramen at times detracted from the quality of the images, resonating with some of the reviews the film received at the time, several of which are discussed above. As has often been pointed out by film historians, Osten strove for realism whilst Rai, determined to counteract what he saw as the negative influence of Orientalism in film, always stressed that their film about Buddha's early life would be free from any artificial interventions. Whether this included the means for enhancing and rectifying the available light is not described, leaving only the film text as evidence.

Whether Wirsching recorded his impressions of this trip or not, they are probably lost.²¹⁰ For any European cameraman at the time who might have learnt most of his skills in the studio, filming *Light of Asia* presented new challenges in terms of light and heat, both of which can be harsh towards film.²¹¹ Schultes described these problems in his account, but only in relation to himself and Osten; he referred only once to 'Wirsing' and twice to Kiermeier, spelling the latter's name

²⁰⁹ Wilhelm Paul Kiermeier was first listed as a cameraman on a film called *Der Löwe von Venedig*, when he worked with Franz Koch, a cameraman who was often paired with Osten and Wirsching.²⁰⁹ Perhaps persuaded by Kiermeier's experience of making *The Light of Asia* in India, Emelka gave him joint responsibility with the Africa explorer, Max Grühl, for the production of a series of documentary films about Abyssinia. "Willy Kiermeier, durch seiner Mitarbeit an der vorjährigen Indien-Expedition der Emelka geschult, leitete gemeinsam mit dem Afrikaforscher Max Gruehl die Aufnahmen." *Der Abessinienfilm der Emelka*, *Österreichische Film-Zeitung* (15 Jan 1927), 8; There are no listings for Kiermeier on Filmportal between 1925 and 1934, when he is credited as the still photographer for a Franz Seitz film, *Zwischen Himmel und Erde* (Between Heaven and Earth, 1934); A search in the *Bundesarchiv* found two documents, both originating in the Third Reich, and serving to illustrate the difficulties experienced in dealing with the regime. Kiermeier needed work, but was unable to provide evidence of his father's ethnicity, the latter having disappeared (da mein Vater aus Wiesbaden unbekannten Aufenthaltes verzogen ist.) Letter from Kiermeier to Reichsfilmkammer, 3 November 1933, BAL RKJ0055, 2498.

²¹⁰ Georg Wirsching indicates that the family home was bombed during the war, destroying "all of Josef Wirsching's records and possessions in Germany." This may have been the address at Müllerstraße 48 in Munich that was provided in his RFK application.

²¹¹ Schünemann described two adverse effects during filming in the heat: the shimmering caused by heat and the stretching of the film; Emil Schünemann, interview by Gerhard Lamprecht, 6 January 1956, transcript, Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.

differently on each occasion; and he failed to give either cameraman much attention, once referring to 'Kiermaier' as an *Operateur* (operator).²¹²

Schultes' description of filming *Light of Asia* provides an idea of the challenges they faced when making the film: the multiplicity of languages spoken by the extras; the extreme heat and its effect on people and photographic material; the brevity of dawn and dusk. He explains the length of time it took to get all the extras and the animals corralled into positions ready for the day's shoot, invariably starting to film only in the middle of the day once the temperature had reached its maximum.²¹³ This is evident in many scenes where the shadows indicate that the sun was directly overhead. These factors would have compounded the difficulties faced by Kiermeier and Wirsching: the bleaching effect of the sun's zenith at midday and the absence of intensely saturated oblique light that occurs at dawn and dusk; the challenge of unloading and reloading raw film in the intense heat that required the exposed film to be quickly developed at a cooler, higher altitude, necessitating a journey to a hill station, probably Mussoorie. The image at Figure 2-6 indicates midday filming, creating shadows tight to the subject.



Figure 2-6 "European tourists," *The Light of Asia*.

In Figure 2-7 the image of Queen Maya has been taken in bright sunlight, creating strong shadows that have left her eyes in darkness and have flattened the

²¹² Schultes, *Ein Komödiant*, 140-156.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

perspective so that her face blends into the background. These shadows mask the strong emotions Maya is experiencing and fail to convey them to the spectator.

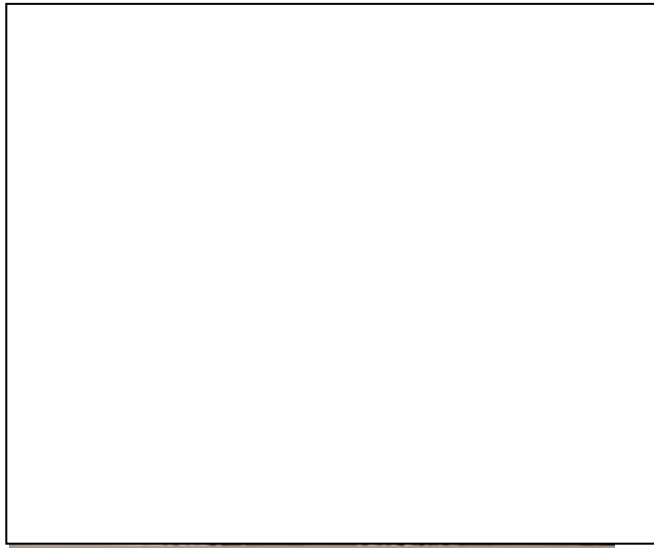


Figure 2-7 "Queen Maya," *The Light of Asia*, 1925.

The photography on *Light of Asia* sometimes fails to lift the subject from the background in a way that creates interest and focus on the individual concerned. This is either because the depth of field used was too great, thereby bringing everything in the profilmic space into focus, or because the subject has been positioned too close to a background full of superfluous detail. Had the filmmakers felt obliged to acknowledge the generosity of the maharajas by including every artefact and object that had been loaned to them? From tripod height the camera records all movement across the profilmic space – whether human or animal – sometimes failing to engage with it in a way that creates dynamic interest. The scenes from the hunt (Figure 2-8), are an example of this failure to capture the movement and produce imagery that is cinematic rather than merely recording images: in this short clip, the escaping deer are barely present at the top of the image and the camera has captured mostly empty space.

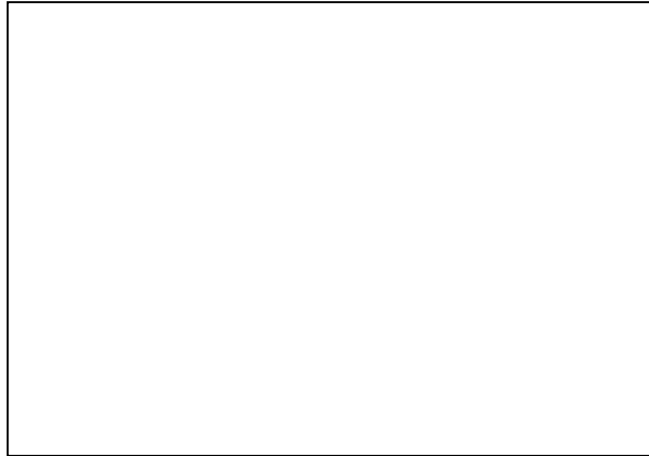


Figure 2-8 "Hunting scene," *The Light of Asia*.

On those occasions when the camera does focus on individual faces, cropping close to exclude extraneous detail, the result is more powerful. The image at Figure 2-9



Figure 2-9 "Gautama's dilemma," *The Light of Asia*.

shows Gautama when he is deciding whether to remain in his luxurious life as a monarch, or to embark on an uncertain future and "wander crownless, homeless, friendless, alone!" In this image, the lighting is more softly balanced across his face and light is reflected in his eyes; the lighting level in this interior shot fluctuates as the scene progresses and, together with the sometimes rapid movement of the drapes, suggests that natural lighting through open windows might have been the main source illuminating the scene, possibly with the aid of reflectors.²¹⁴ It is difficult to imagine that this portrait of Gautama could have been achieved without such manipulation. Although Schünemann did not work on this first film, he later

²¹⁴ Guerin differentiates between what Rai would refer to as artificial light and "technically manipulated light;" *A Culture of Light*, xix.

admitted that reflectors were used for *Shiraz*.²¹⁵ If reflectors were used, however, the question arises why they were not used consistently, especially to counter the harsh effects of bright sunlight? Strong images are created elsewhere in *Light of Asia* by framing shots using the striking architectural features available (Figure 2-10) or by

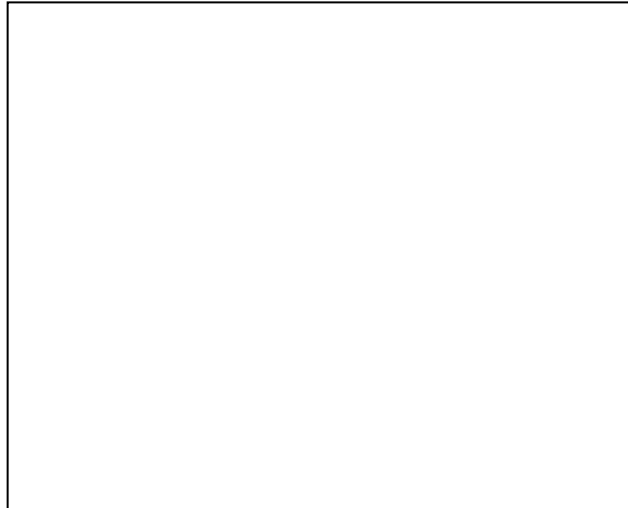


Figure 2-10 "Palace scene," *The Light of Asia*.

framing with natural scenery, such as trees; a visual motif of Wirsching's that reappears in later films and is discussed in chapter 6.

Although the *Light of Asia* was popular in Germany, Emelka lost interest in any further transnational collaborations, a factor that meant Kiermeier and Wirsching would not be involved with Rai's next ventures; Schultes returned to his stage career.²¹⁶ Eventually Rai made arrangements to produce *Shiraz* and *A Throw of Dice* with British Instructional Films and Universum Film (Ufa).

²¹⁵ Schünemann, interview.

²¹⁶ Putz, 71; Wirsching's activities after returning from India are evaluated in chapter 6; Kiermeier appears to have become involved with documentary films. After filming *Light of Asia*, Kiermeier travelled abroad again, this time to Abyssinia to work with the German explorer, Max Grühl, on another Emelka film. Beyond this point, however, it has not been possible to identify what films he might have been working on up to 1934; after this date he is only credited for film stills.

2.6 Concluding remarks

This chapter has discussed the early phase of the Indo-German relationship and explored some of the factors that first brought these filmmakers together. It has argued against some of the narratives that have configured the Indo-German relationship as an anti-British statement, but has nevertheless argued that Pal's script for *Light of Asia* might be seen as political. This framing also disrupts the narrative that Rai planned the production as the first in a religious trilogy, suggesting instead that his approach was based on pragmatism, and focused on acceptability of the script.

The chapter has considered the inadequacies of defining films through the prism of national identity and, by illustrating how the production of cinema has frequently been transnational, it argues for its inclusion in the historiography of transnational cinema. In considering the film's cultural specificity, beginning with its adaptation from an English poem, to its visual references and its musical accompaniment, the chapter has explored how these factors inflected its reception around the world.

The following chapter focuses on the activities of Himansu Rai as he expanded his international network to include British involvement in what had so far been an Indo-German collaboration. This was for the production of two more silent films, and his first sound production, the dual language film, *Karma*.

Himansu Rai such den Ruhm, aber nicht nur für sich, sondern zur Verherrlichung seines Vaterlandes. (Himansu Rai desired fame, not for himself but for the glorification of his country.)¹

3 Himansu Rai: Producer

3.1 Introduction

It was in the summer of 1928 when an Austrian journalist, Alice Schalek, first encountered Himansu Rai during a voyage on the Lloyd Trestino ship, *Pilsna*. Attracted to what she described as Rai's "wraithlike appearance" and "melancholic features," Schalek approached him as an equal, a comment extending beyond allusions to social class, to depict mutual recognition between pioneers.² Their discussion resulted in her article on the front page of Austria's *Neue freie Presse* in August 1928, this prominent placing indicative of the interest accorded to certain high-status Indians in the German-speaking countries, in particular, Rabindranath Tagore.³ Having met with the Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC) in February, Rai had been overseeing the production of *Shiraz*, and was now travelling to Europe. Schalek was returning from an extended trip to India where she had been researching conversion to Christianity and the status of the outcast, a pursuit that had ensnared her in the bureaucracy of a colonial authority which conflated her intentions with those of Katherine Mayo.⁴

¹ Alice Schalek. "Der neue indische Großfilm 'Shiraz' Himansu Rai, der erste indische Filmstar," *Neue freie Press*, 18 August 1928.

² Schalek, the first female war reporter in Austria during the First World War, was a photographer, journalist, writer and solo traveller whose subjects included the Middle East and South Asia. Jewish by birth and a convert to Christianity, Schalek later emigrated to America.

³ The Tagore name acts as a fulcrum around which Rai's respectability is invoked both by himself as well as journalists, keen to establish the celebrated association: Rai the scholar of Tagore's, the alumnus of Shantiniketan.

⁴ Schalek is of interest to the current project because her connections with India illustrate how the relationship between India and, in this case a German-speaking country, was inflected by the relationship with Britain. The controversy that had followed publication of Katherine Mayo's, *Mother India*, which Schalek refers to as 'the notorious book,' led to her own intentions being viewed with deep mistrust and rejection by the Government of India when she requested support with train travel and contacts for a research trip to India. BL IOR/L/PJ/6/1941, File 1542.

This chapter considers the influence and agency of Himansu Rai as he travelled between Europe and America and India from 1925 to 1933, promoting the cause of Indian cinema and developing his role as an international film entrepreneur. It asks why Germany was particularly attractive to Indian filmmakers during this period and charts the developments in this particular Indo-German relationship against the socio-political background. By providing context of the technological changes that modulated the production and reception of these films during the period when film industries were converting to sound, the chapter examines the two silent films that followed *Light of Asia* (*Shiraz* and *A Throw of Dice*), and Rai's first sound film, *Karma*. It considers the presence of Rai and Devika Rani at Ufa and explores how their experience there may have influenced the production of *Karma* as well as the films produced at Bombay Talkies. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the cinematographic style employed by the German cameraman, Emil Schünemann, arguing that his contribution not only brought a distinctive style to all three films but may have influenced Wirsching's own work at Bombay Talkies.

3.1.1 Biographical information

In spite of his significant role in the development of Indian cinema in Bombay, a comprehensive biography of Himansu Rai has yet to be produced. Rai's early life in Bengal remains to be explored in depth, an undertaking outside the scope and purpose of the current project which focuses on the Indo-German relationship at the heart of Bombay Talkies. Himansu Nath Rai was born during 1892. One source lists his place of birth as Cuttack, but neither this, nor his actual date of birth could be verified. On enrolment at London's Middle Temple in 1917, he gave his address in India as Nawagram, Manikgunje, Dacca. His father, Hemendra Nath Rai, was a law graduate and the manager of Baikunthapur Raj (Estate) Bengal.⁵ Rai is reported as having completed his first degree in law at Calcutta, and having also trained at Tagore's Shantiniketan. Some sources cite the presence of a theatre in the family home, implying an early theatrical influence on Rai as a young man.⁶

⁵ *Register of Admissions to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple*, 826.

⁶ See "The Road to Bombay Talkies," Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*.

3.1.2 Locating Rai in the historiography

Bhattacharya's monograph brings together a selection of contemporary articles and film reviews, but it lacks a deeper analysis of Rai and the world he moved in.⁷ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen provide a short overview of Rai's career; Barnouw and Krishnaswamy devote a chapter to Bombay Talkies, much of which is repeated by Bose; and Chabria briefly discusses Rai in the context of his three silent films.⁸ Gangar and Fuechtner mention Rai briefly, but more as an adjunct to Osten.⁹ Manjapra explores the collaboration of Rai and Osten within the wider context of multiple Indo-German links.¹⁰ Here too, this thesis focuses on the Indo-German collaboration between Rai and Osten, exploring Rai's role in instigating and nurturing that partnership, asking how his experiences in Germany might have influenced him. What emerges from this study, is the question of Rai the producer as auteur; his extraordinary ability to forge networks across international borders; and his aptitude to participate in ways that enabled him to transcend the orientalist framing that sought to configure him as an object of curiosity. In this way, he was able to participate in Emelka's exotic display surrounding the premiere of *Light of Asia*, but also to attend, as the Indian delegate, the first International Film Congress that was held in Paris in 1926.¹¹

Sarojini Naidu described Rai as "a patriot and internationalist," a designation that provided a significant endorsement against those critics who had earlier cast doubt on the patriotic allegiance of Rai's international projects.¹² Naidu's support, together with that of Tagore and other representatives of India's social elite,

⁷ Indranil Bhattacharya, *Visions of Splendour: Himansu Rai and Indian Cinema* (Pune: National Film Archive of India, 1999)

⁸ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 183-4; Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*; Bose, *Bollywood: a history*; Chabria, *Light of Asia*.

⁹ Gangar, *Franz Osten*; Fuechtner, "The International Project of National(ist) Film."

¹⁰ Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*.

¹¹ *Bulletin Municipal Officiel de la Ville de Paris*, 9 October 1926.
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6428012d> [Last accessed 6 November 2015]

¹² Cited in: "The Bombay Talkies, Limited," *Times of India*, 9 August 1934.

arguably contributed to the rapid development and success of Bombay Talkies, a phenomenon that is explored in the following chapter.

Himansu Rai, der es über zahllose Schwierigkeiten hinweg bereits in jungen Jahren zu Welterfolgen gebracht hat, ist der Gründer der künstlerischen indischen Filmindustrie. (Himansu Rai, who overcame countless difficulties in his younger days, is the founder of India's art film.)¹³

It has not been possible to verify exactly when Rai first travelled to Germany or how the initial contact with Emelka was established. Suresh Chabria speculates whether Rai may have been in Germany earlier than 1924, but this could not be confirmed either way.¹⁴ Pal reports them leaving for Munich and staying for several weeks, but he provides no dates, claiming only that their agreement with Emelka was concluded "within a few hours," although they had to stay in Germany while the script was finalised.¹⁵ Intriguingly, Pal also claims that it was during this brief stay that Rai met and married his first wife, a German woman who Colin Pal names as Mary Hainlin.¹⁶

Kamm refers to an *Ufa-Feuilleton* from 1919 containing an article by Rai about Indian cinema; and Manjapra suggests that this article indicates Rai's interest in cinema dated back to at least 1919.¹⁷ An Ufa publication of that title was only published between 1929 and 1933, however, indicating that 1919 may be a

¹³ "Filmschauspieler in Indien," *Illustrierte Wochenpost*, 14 July 1933.

¹⁴ In discussion with the author, February 2012.

¹⁵ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 201; although Pal's recollection of dates is sometimes unreliable, this trip might have taken place at any point after 25 December 1923 when Pal's son was born, and several weeks before January 1925 when Pal had to return to Munich to accompany the Germans to Bombay.

¹⁶ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 202; Colin Pal stated that Rai had met and married a German woman, Mary Heinlin, in 1924, and a daughter, Nilima, had been born in 1928. He alleged that whilst Rai subsequently married Devika Rani, he never divorced Heinlin and that the two women became good friends. "Secrets of diva Devika Rani," *Times of India*, 11 August 1995; Mukherjee names her as Mary Hainlin. Research in the German archives failed to find either Mary/Maria Hainlin/Heinlin, or the date of the marriage, and it is possible that these records have been lost. Debashree Mukherjee, *A Filmi Twist of Fate: An Interview with Peter Dietze*. Accessed 5 December 2014. https://indiancine.ma/texts/zi:A_Filmi_Twist_of_Fate:_An_Interview_with_Peter_Dietze,_Grandson_of_Himansu_Rai

¹⁷ Kamm, "German Film, World Travel"; Manjapra, *Age of Entanglements*, 258.

transcription error. Whilst Rai might have been interested in cinema at this earlier stage, it is unlikely that an Ufa publication would have accepted an article about cinema from an unknown Indian who was, at that point, training to be a barrister in London. Placing the date between 1929 and 1930, however, makes this a realistic proposition, because by this stage Rai had not only produced three films, he was also actively engaged within Ufa and was writing about Indian cinema for the *Ufa-Feuilleton*.¹⁸

As suggested in the previous chapter, Emelka's motivation to collaborate on *Light of Asia* arose during a period when the German studio was pursuing international contacts; such collaborations intended to bolster European film industries against the encroachment of Hollywood.¹⁹ In this respect, they had common cause with India, which also sought to break what Pal described as the "octopus-like grip" that Hollywood exerted over the market in India.²⁰ As argued in the previous chapter, however, it is unlikely that the Indo-German collaboration was a political decision to avoid British involvement. Pal's script for *Light of Asia* had originally been bought by Charles Urban, and the production only failed when Urban's company went into liquidation, and it may simply be that Rai and Pal contracted with Emelka because British film producers had shown little interest in their project.²¹ Peter Dietze has suggested that the original introduction to Emelka might have come through Mary Hainlin.²² This is one possibility, but another may be that it was enabled through existing Anglo-German networks that included both Ufa and Emelka.²³ Rai's connection with Emelka would only last for *Light of Asia*

¹⁸ For example, see "Notes taken from reviews and papers," *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, October 1929 (4) 490.

¹⁹ "The Film World," *Times* (London), 24 March 1925.

²⁰ "Empire Films For India," *Times* (London), 13 September 1926.

²¹ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 149–150.

²² Peter Dietze, the grandson of Himansu Rai, told Debashree Mukherjee that Mary Hainlin had been a member of the Indian Players and he thinks that the contact to Emelka might have come through her. "A Filmi Twist of Fate."

²³ Michael Balcon's Gainsborough Studios concluded agreements with Germany's two leading studios in 1924, a relationship that brought Alfred Hitchcock to Germany, see Cook, *Gainsborough*

and he encountered difficulties persuading Emelka to invest further, eventually making an agreement with Ufa and British Instructional Pictures for the production of *Shiraz* and *Dice*, the transnational funding of which was passionately debated at the ICC hearing.²⁴

Indian and European journalists, eager to speak with Rai, often mention chance encounters and snatched moments with him as he travelled between Europe and America and India, before finally settling in Bombay at the end of 1933 and devoting himself exclusively to Bombay Talkies.²⁵ For example, while appearing in *The Goddess* in 1923, Rai travelled to Manchester, a city he recognised as “most intimately connected with India” and the co-operation of whose citizens he hoped to enlist for his project to provide “a continuous series of essentially Indian plays in London and the provinces and the establishment of a permanent Indian repertory theatre.”²⁶ According to Pal, Rai was successful in raising £6,000 from “hard-boiled merchants with connections in India.”²⁷ In spite of this sum, however, the scheme does not appear to have been developed further, and this may be one of the reasons why he decided to try film production. Rai later indicated that the Indian Players had received offers to perform *The Goddess* in France, Italy and Egypt, but were unable to take these up due to illness within the cast.²⁸ *Goddess* was performed in India during the autumn of 1925, although Rai did not take part in these performances himself and had returned to Germany.

Pictures; There was also an agreement between Emelka and Frank Tilley to produce *Venetian Lovers*. “Das endlose Celluloidband,” *Filmland: Deutsche Monatschrift*, January 1925; “The Film World,” *Times* (London) 24 March 1925.

²⁴ “On account of the *Light of Asia* we had many disagreements, and finally the break came and eventually I began to negotiate with other parties.” *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 1003. The relationship between Brandenburg and Bavaria, Berlin and Munich was often tense, politically and culturally. Emelka had sought to position itself as the major south German competitor to Ufa and, after Hugenberg took control of Ufa, Emelka’s independence took on extra significance. Whatever the course of Emelka’s reluctance, it had probably gained more from the partnership with the Indians than Rai or Pal, who both claimed to have lost money on the venture. See Putz; *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 1003–1004.

²⁵ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 236.

²⁶ “Manchester and the Indian Players,” *Manchester Guardian*, 8 January 1923, 12.

²⁷ *Niranjan Pal*, 196.

²⁸ Rai, “The Light of Asia,” 753.

As soon as the contract had been agreed with Emelka, Rai left for India to raise funding for *Light of Asia*, leaving Pal behind to travel with the Germans to India.²⁹ Once filming was complete, Rai returned to Munich with the Germans, enjoying a celebratory dinner at Emelka where he gave a speech and later participated in the promotional events that framed the Munich premiere in October 1925.³⁰ The German press liked him, describing him as *außerordentlich sympathisch* (exceptionally likeable) and emphasising his status as a scholar of Rabindranath Tagore and a friend of Gandhi; *Kinematograph* even claiming that both had provided their expert advice on the film's manuscript.³¹

To persuade American exhibitors to take *Light of Asia*, Rai travelled to America at some point between November 1925 and March 1926; however, he was unsuccessful.³² Returning to Europe, he appeared as the Indian delegate at the first international convention on cinema that was held in Paris in October 1926; an event hosted by the League of Nations.³³ How Rai had been appointed to represent India could not be established. In 1929 he was back in Berlin, appearing on the front of *Film-Magazin* (see Figure 3-1) suggesting his status as a person worthy of recognition within the German film industry.³⁴

²⁹ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 202.

³⁰ Schultes, *Ein Komödiant*, 156; "Tee mit Himansu Rai," *Kinematograph* 972 (October 1925), 27; "Der Emelka-Tee im Kaiserhof," *Der Film* 40 (October 1925), 36.

³¹ "Er wurde von Eingeborenen bearbeitet, und keine geringeren als Rabindranath Tagore und Mahatma Gandhi haben sich um das Manuskript gutachtlich bemüht." "Die Leuchte Asiens," *Kinematograph* 977 (November 1925), 19.

³² *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 1008.

³³ "Réception des membres du Congrès international du cinématographe," *Bulletin Municipal Officiel de la Ville de Paris*, 9 October 1926. Accessed 6 November 2014.
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6428012d/f1.image>

³⁴ Advertisement for *Schicksalswürfel*, *Vossische Zeitung*, 18 August 1929.

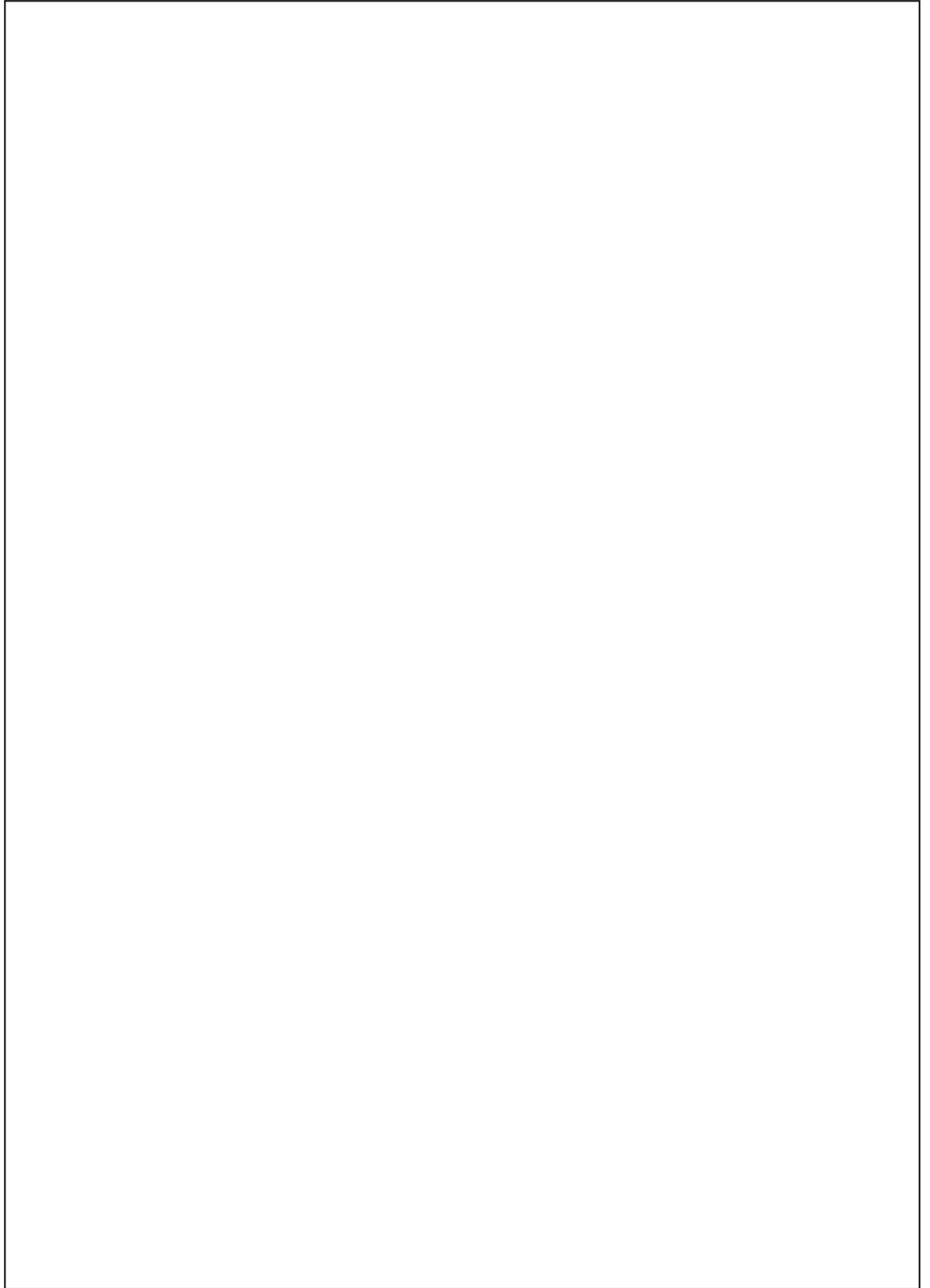


Figure 3-1 Himansu Rai, *Film-Magazin*, 31 August 1929.

Following the release of *Dice*, Rai and Devika Rani toured Europe introducing their latest film and performing an additional show of singing and dancing to accompany the screenings.³⁵ This promotional tour of Europe included Zurich, Basle, Lausanne and Berne, as well as Stockholm and Oslo.³⁶ Some of these appearances can be traced through contemporary European newspapers. For example, from 8-14 November, Rai and Devika Rani were in Lausanne, where the film ran under the title *Les Dés du Destin*; a programme of mime and dance to Indian music, performed by Himansu Rai and Devika Rani, complemented the film on the screen.³⁷ On 21 February 1930, the couple were in Oslo, where the film had its Norwegian premiere.³⁸ From here they must have returned promptly to Berlin, where they were holding an “Indische Woche,” a mini film festival to show all three silent films; a practice they later adopted at Bombay Talkies.³⁹ A letter sent to the Reichskanzler, Hermann Müller, invited high ranking officials and other members of society’s elite to attend a screening of *Shiraz* on 27 February in the presence of Rai and Devika Rani. The letter informed the recipient that other officials had been invited, along with members of the diplomatic corps, pointing out that the British Ambassador had already confirmed his attendance.⁴⁰ Whether Müller attended is not known, and his priorities doubtless lay elsewhere; exactly one month later, his government would resign, marking what Evans describes as “the beginning of the end of Weimar democracy,” an event that would have repercussions for all of the filmmakers.⁴¹

³⁵ “Indian Film Star’s Success,” *Bombay Chronicle*, 27 May 1933; *Varieties Weekly*, 1 January 1934, 51.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *La Tribune de Lausanne*, 11 November 1929.

³⁸ “Les dés du sort en Norvège,” *Les Spectacles*, 21 February 1930.

³⁹ From 2-14 April 1938, Bombay Talkies held a film festival at the Roxy, showing eight previous films. “Classified Ad 15,” *Times of India*, 30 March 1938.

⁴⁰ Letter from ‘Kamera mit der Wurlitzer’ to German Chancellor, 25 February 1930, BAL R 43-I/2500, 18; no further information could be found regarding the status of Kamera mit der Wurlitzer.

⁴¹ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 147.

In the autumn of 1930, a Spanish newspaper reported that Rai and Devika Rani had accompanied Rabindranath Tagore to the set of *Die Drei von der Tankstelle*, that was being filmed in Erich Pommer's studio at Neubabelsberg.⁴² This was one of Ufa's major productions, a multi-language (English, French, German) musical comedy directed by Wilhelm Thiele, starring Lilian Harvey and Willy Fritsch. Tagore travelled frequently to Germany where he was highly respected. Connections that illustrate the extent of Rai's networks, not only to the elite of Indian society, but also with those of Germany and Britain. Several sources suggest that Rai left Ufa because of the political situation, but the extent to which the decisions taken by Rai and Devika Rani to return to India were influenced by this is unclear. Initially they travelled to India for the production of *Karma*, made in collaboration with Stoll Studios in London.

3.2 Seeking German expertise

One aim of the ICC when it was announced on 15 September 1927 was to "consider whether it is desirable that any steps should be taken to encourage the exhibition of films produced within the British Empire."⁴³ Part of this discourse focused on how Indian filmmakers might acquire the expertise they needed in filmmaking, with broadly two possibilities emerging that were not mutually exclusive. One was to invite foreign filmmakers to come for fixed periods to train Indians; the other was to provide government scholarships to send suitable young men abroad to learn cinematic technique. In advising that "India needs the assistance of all the Western nations for learning the technique and art of the industry," the ICC Report recommended Britain, Germany and America.⁴⁴ Other countries were also discussed; for example, France was frequently praised for the standard of its

⁴² "Rabindranath Tagore y el cine hablado," *La Libertad*, 5 October 1930; *Die Drei von der Tankstelle*, directed by Wilhelm Thiele, (Ufa, 1930). Distributed in French and English as *Le chemin du paradis* and *Three Good Friends*; Tagore was a frequent visitor to Germany.

⁴³ ICCR, xi. "Their film divas are among the queens of the new Republic, and never was a greater flutter caused by the appearance of a Hohenzollern in public than is caused by Henny Porten (or Fern Andra, or Pola Negri) when she enters her box at a premiere, accepting bouquets with her sweetest smile and signing picture postcards by the dozen for her young admirers."

⁴⁴ ICCR, 77.; *Ibid.*, 103.

educational films and Jaya Gopal Pillai told the Committee that he had spent time training there.⁴⁵ Mukherjee reports that Savak Vacha, Bombay Talkies' sound engineer, had also trained in Paris.⁴⁶

Although the ICC might have favoured Britain as a supplier, the discussions reveal that for many Indians the doors to British film studios remained closed, either literally, or because the fees they charged were prohibitive. Germany offered a suitable alternative. Its economy had suffered from significant political disruption and violence; the hyperinflation of 1923, although adjusted to some extent with realignment via the Dawes Plan the following year, meant that its creative and technological expertise became available at a more attractive price than that of Britain or America.⁴⁷ Indeed, Indians had been travelling to Germany for many years, and for a variety of reasons; notably, they included Raja Ravi Varma and Govinder Phalke, both of whom sought technical expertise for printing and, in the case of Phalke, for film making. The main disadvantage cited by the ICC, was the need to know German, a factor that Rai and others argued would be straightforward for Indian students.⁴⁸

Several interviewees argued specifically for Germany. N. D. Gandhi told the Committee that he believed only Germany, France or Italy would be good places to learn cinematic technique.⁴⁹ Raghupathi Prakasa explained that he had trained in England for one year, learning photography, directing, and scenario-writing at Barkers' Motion Pictures Studio, paying £500 for his tuition.⁵⁰ Mohan Bhavnani, however, was negative about his experience in Britain:

⁴⁵ *ICCE, Vol. 2*, 687.

⁴⁶ Debashree Mukherjee, Notes to *Achhut Kanya* (blog), 30 May 2014. Accessed 6 November 2014. <https://indiancine.ma/>

⁴⁷ Vikram Seth writes that his uncle chose to study dentistry in Berlin in the early 1930s, because it was cheaper than Britain; *Two Lives* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), 73.

⁴⁸ *ICCE, Vol. 2*, 1024.; *ICCE, Vol. 3*, 1008.

⁴⁹ *ICCE, Vol. 1*, 439.

⁵⁰ *ICCE, Vol. 3*, 135.

I tried to get into a studio in England, and I found it very difficult. There was the concern called the Automatic Film Printers. I was more interested in the production side of it than the developing side. They did not care to take me on. They wanted me to invest a certain sum of money and also to accept a condition that after I had been trained, they would send me back to India and that I should organize a studio in India on their behalf. But the sum they demanded was something like £3,000, and it was too much for me. They said they would fully train me up and send me back to India. They said that it would take me about 2 years. Evidently they did not want me, I could quite see that. I went over to Germany ... it was not very difficult. I advertised for a camera man who would take me up as an assistant and that I was willing to pay a premium. I got a man who took me up for £15 a month and he introduced me to several studios.⁵¹

Bhavnani's experience does not appear to have been exceptional, and post-war correspondence at the India Office suggests an ongoing reluctance on the part of the British to offer assistance to Indian filmmakers that continued after Independence.⁵² Whether this was a conscious effort to dissuade foreign filmmakers from training in Britain, is debatable. Pal indicates that, although racism was common during the period when he lived in London, he and Rai received support and encouragement from individuals such as Charles Urban and Guy Bragdon.⁵³

Furthermore, many film industries were adopting protectionist strategies, partly in response to the dominance of Hollywood, but also because film

⁵¹ *ICCE, Vol. 1*, 181.; In his memoirs, Willy Haas described Bhavnani as an "extrem antibritischer Nationalist." Christoph von Ungern-Sternberg, *Willy Haas, 1891-1973: "ein grosser Regisseur der Literatur"* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 2007), 186.

⁵² Writing from the Education Department at India House, M. S. Sundaram advised that "I have run into a great many difficulties with regard to placement of students from India who specially come to this country for the study of techniques of cinematography." Letter from Sundaram to BFI, 7 September 1948, BL IOR/L/I/1/717; On 22 November 1948, the British Film Institute expressed concern that facilities were inadequate, pointing out that a co-ordinated scheme was lacking; the will to create suitable facilities appeared to be missing from all organisations involved. BFI to Gordon-Walker, 22 November 1948, BL IOR/L/I/1/717; In 1950 the Technical Cooperation Scheme was launched under the Colombo Plan, eventually leading to support for filmmakers. See for example, "Indian trainees in U.K.," *Times of India*, 25 May 1954.

⁵³ Urban gave Pal employment at his studio and Bragdon supported Pal and Rai in forming the Indian Players. Pal, *Niranjan Pal*.

production was being increasingly entangled with national identity.⁵⁴ For example, reporting on the foundation of the British Empire Film Institute in March 1926, *Kinematograph* wrote that “its weight has been lent to the patriotic, as distinct from the Trade, efforts to rehabilitate British films.”⁵⁵ In India, the *Swadeshi* campaign opposed foreign involvement in the Indian film industry and examples of the debate about the relative benefits or disadvantages of employing foreign technicians can be followed from the discourse in India’s *Filmiland* magazine.⁵⁶ By the mid 1930s, when the Nazi regime was taking the discourse of what constituted German cinema towards a destructive conclusion, émigré filmmakers were leaving the country in significant numbers and many were travelling to Britain. Whilst the British Association of Cine Technicians articulated this as a threat to British jobs, however, the industry’s leaders were keen to stress the benefits to the British industry in employing experienced film technicians.⁵⁷

As mentioned above, the low exchange rate of Germany’s currency after the First World War made it cheaper than Britain or America and this was reflected in the cost of studying there. For example, the Munich Film School, established by Peter Ostermayr and others in 1921, was reportedly only charging £25 per year for tuition in 1928.⁵⁸ The economic argument in favour of Germany was made by George Mooser, Metro-Goldwyn Film Corporation’s representative in India who advised the Committee, “I would send them to Germany. It is closer, living is

⁵⁴ *Kinematograph Year Book 1927*, 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ See Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Indian Cinema*.

⁵⁷ “And still they come,” *Cine-Technician*, August 1936, 39-41; David Cunningham, “And still we need them,” *Cine-Technician*, December 1936, 108-111; An example of these experts is provided in the autobiography of the late cinematographer, Oswald Morris, who began his career at Elstree, and worked with Paul Stein, Otto Kanturek and Karl Grune, each of whom had achieved eminence in the German film industry and all of whom had worked with Emelka. Oswald Morris, *Huston, we have a problem* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006), 8–9; Stein, Kanturek and Grune all became émigré filmmakers in Britain. Karl Grune directed several films for Emelka, including the silent classic, *Waterloo* (1929). He worked with Emelka from 1928 until 1932; the Hungarian-born director, Paul Stein, directed an early film for Emelka, *Der Löwe von Venedig* (The Lion of Venice, 1923) on which Wilhelm Kiermeier was a cameraman alongside Franz Koch.

⁵⁸ “Comment and Review,” *Close Up* 2, no. 1 (January 1928), 80.

cheaper, and they have every facility so far as the technical side is concerned.”⁵⁹ Seth Walchand Hirachand told the ICC that he believed there was a greater empathy in Germany towards Indian culture:

The people of Germany are the best of the lot. A Sanskrit Chair was, I think, first instituted in Germany, We have many of our Sanskrit PhD.s from Germany, and they in Germany are very anxious to know all oriental and Indian civilisation, culture, habits and traditions.⁶⁰

When asked by the ICC about *Light of Asia*, Mr. Yajnik attributed the film’s technical quality to its German contributors:

If [*The Light of Asia*] had been taken by Indians only the whole thing would have been spoiled. Not only was the negative taken in Germany, but it was printed in Germany [...] this picture shows that there is really great scope for the combination of Indian literary genius with the best technical direction and photography.⁶¹

A member of the Indian Players, Jaya Gopal Pillai, told the Committee:

There are no specific facilities available in England. I have been to Germany and I received my training there. There are abundant facilities in Germany for Indian students.⁶²

Germany also provided scholarships for Indian students, however, the research did not find any examples of these being provided specifically for filmmaking.

Bhavnani had trained for several years in Germany and Austria; and he turned to Ufa for the post-synchronisation of his production of *Vasantasena*.⁶³ Another

⁵⁹ ICCE, Vol. 1, 458.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 419.

⁶¹ Ibid., 217.

⁶² ICCE, Vol. 2, 682.

⁶³ *Filmland*, Puja Number 1932, 74; “The Arabian Nights: Indian film titled ‘Magic Flute’,” *Times of India*, 8 February 1929; “Indian film notes,” *Times of India*, 31 January 1930; Early anticipation of what was probably only a partial sound film may have been optimistic. When *Vasantsena* was finally released in January 1931, less than two months before India’s first sound film, *Alam Ara*,

director, J. P. Advani, followed “a complete course in Cinema technique” in Germany.⁶⁴ Prabhat’s leading director, V. J. Shantaram, travelled to Ufa with his first exposed colour film, *Sairandhree*, in 1933; although it was reported that he had “considerable difficulty in securing visits to studios and laboratories” when he took his film for processing.⁶⁵ Shantaram’s difficulties may have been compounded because of the turmoil wrought upon the industry by the new laws requiring proof of a reconfigured German ancestry. Not only did this policy result in the expulsion of an estimated twenty percent of film industry personnel, it also left a sizeable minority unable to work until their status could be verified.⁶⁶

Germany under the Nazis is, I fancy, a far less pleasant place for Indian students and residents than the Germany of old. The fantastic racial theories of Hitler and his colleagues are not exactly conducive to amity between the while and the coloured peoples although the Japanese have, I gather, been made 'Honorary Aryans' ...Herr Hitler is inclined to be pro-British.⁶⁷

Some Indian students in Germany may have been experiencing discrimination by this stage, but opinions about the extent of discrimination differ, depending on the source. Leah Goldberg, a Jewish writer, later fictionalised her experiences as a student in Bonn during 1932 where she claimed to have been subjected to anti-Semitism, and suggesting that Indian friends from her university were not.⁶⁸ In

there was no mention that it had sound. *Vasantsena*, directed by Mohan Bhavnani, (Mayashanker? 1931).

⁶⁴ “Indian art productions. Syt. Bhavnani’s new picture,” *Bombay Chronicle*, 28 May 1931, 4.

⁶⁵ (Vankudre) Shantaram was the founder of Prabhat Studios, one of Bombay Talkies’ main competitors. See also Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 213–214; on *Sairandhree*, Rangoonwalla reports that there were technical problems with the film and “audiences rejected the faint colours.” Firoze Rangoonwalla, “The emergence of talkies,” in *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*, 47; “Indian multi-colour film,” *Times of India*, 1 December 1933.

⁶⁶ For example, Wilhelm Kiermeier, who had worked on *Light of Asia*, was unable to work until he could provide evidence of his father’s ethnicity, the latter having disappeared (da mein Vater aus Wiesbaden unbekannten Aufenthalts verzogen ist.) Letter from Kiermeier to Reichsfilmkammer, 3 November 1933, BAL RKJ0055, 2498.

⁶⁷ “Indians and Nazi regime,” *Bombay Chronicle*, 16 November 1937.

⁶⁸ A Jewish writer, Leah Goldberg, later fictionalised her experiences as a student in Bonn during 1932 where she experienced anti-Semitism, but those of her fellow students who were Indian did not experience discrimination in the same way. See Yfaat Weiss, “A small town in Germany: Leah

March 1933, Indian students were advised by the Indian Committee of the German Academy of Munich to “refrain from political activities [to be] always ensured of friendly reception in the German high schools.”⁶⁹ This statement probably referred to J. Naidu, the son of Sarojini Naidu, and A. C. Nambiar, her brother-in-law, who were both accused of political agitation and, having been mishandled by the Nazis, were ordered to leave the country by 31 March 1933.⁷⁰ A series of letters to the *Times of India* alternatively claimed that Germany was hospitable towards Indian students, or that it had begun to attack them.⁷¹ In 1934, a group of Indian students resident in Berlin dismissed claims that they were unwelcome in Germany:

The object of [...] scholarships is to encourage Indians to come to Germany, and if the Germans did not want us here, these scholarships would not be offered.⁷²

Indira Nehru, who was living in Germany while her mother was receiving medical treatment there, wrote to her father in July 1935:

There is a lot of propaganda against Indians in the papers because of the foreign policy to be friends with England. Hence it is not agreeable sometimes.⁷³

Her comment evokes the complex and paradoxical twists of the triangular relationship between Britain, Germany and India that were playing out in the political sphere; Hitler, an avowed admirer of British imperial power, would have preferred an alliance with Britain, but other supporters of National Socialism were

Goldberg and German orientalism in 1932.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 200–229.

⁶⁹ “Indians in Germany,” *Times of India*, 28 March 1933.

⁷⁰ Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany*, 77–78.; Nehru later appointed Nambiar as India’s first ambassador to the Federal German Republic. Dietmar Rothermund, “Indo-German Relations: From Cautious Beginning to Robust Partnership.” *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 66, no. 1 (2010): 1–12.

⁷¹ For example Dr K Habib Hasan complained “The hardships suffered by our students there and the restrictions placed on them by the new regime are difficult to describe.” *Times of India*, 5 December 1933; whereas T C Wasson related “In the course of studies I have come across people of different shades of opinion and have received uniform courtesy and cordial treatment. They are rather anxious to meet Indians and to know about Indian culture.” *Times of India*, 30 January 1934.

⁷² “Reader’s Views: Indian Students in Germany,” *Times of India*, 5 February 1934.

⁷³ Gandhi, *Freedom’s Daughter*, 190.

in favour of supporting Indian nationalism. Vikram Seth writes that his uncle Shanti, a student in Berlin, was required to obtain special dispensation to finish his dental studies in Berlin, in spite of his academic excellence. Nevertheless, Shanti claimed not to have felt excluded as a foreigner.⁷⁴ Ayi Tendulkar, an Indian engineer who married Thea von Harbou following her divorce from Fritz Lang, observed that it became increasingly difficult to find scholarships or work.⁷⁵

In 1932, German companies were advertising Berlin's sound film schools in Indian film publications.⁷⁶ By December 1937, *FilmIndia's* editor, Baburao Patel would joke in response to a reader's enquiry about the esteem with which German film training was now held in India:

You may first proceed to Germany and take your training there and then come back to India and earn back the expenses of your trip. Even if you go as far as Aden and return shouting at the top of your voice that you have been working in the Ufa studios in Berlin, producers will fall over one another to secure your services. On the ship don't forget to read a couple of books which are even not good enough for amateurs as thereby you will get enough knowledge of the hackneyed phraseology which impresses our producers. There are plenty of men like this earning a comfortable income every month in our studios ... one more in you won't be objected to.⁷⁷

Possibly through contact with K. S. Hirlekar, founder of the Motion Picture Society of India, who was at Ufa in 1939, Patel included Germany in a world trip visiting "leading film studios."⁷⁸ Starting in the spring of 1939, Patel returned from this five month trip in December 1939, by which time Britain, and by default British India,

⁷⁴ Seth, *Two Lives*, 93.; *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁵ Dhaul, *In the Shadow of Freedom*, 120.

⁷⁶ German sound film schools advertised in India. Tonfilmschule Doblin, Grunewald, Berlin; Tonfilmschule der Reimannakademie, Schonberg, Berlin; and Tonfilmschule des Sternchenkonservatoriums, Wilmersdorf, Guntzelstr. Berlin. *FilmLand*, June 1932, 18.

⁷⁷ "Letter from K. V. N. Bangalore," *Film India*, December 1937, 17.

⁷⁸ "Tour of Film Studios," *Times of India*, 23 June 1939.

were once again at war with Germany.⁷⁹ A later article by Patel omitted any reference to his visit to Germany, in fact making no reference whatsoever to the country.⁸⁰ For the foreseeable future, Indian connections to the German film industry appeared to be at an end, and this would have implications for Bombay Talkies when its remaining German employees were interned in September 1939 during the production of *Kangan*.

3.3 Making films for Empire

3.3.1 *Shiraz/Das Grabmal einer grossen Liebe*, 1928

[Shiraz] wird einen Siegeszug durch die ganze Welt machen.
(Shiraz will conquer the whole world.)⁸¹

When Rai appeared before the panel of the ICC on 26 February 1928, work had already begun on *Shiraz*. Osten and Emil Schünemann had arrived in Bombay in late January that year and filming was expected to finish by the end of May 1928.⁸² Contemporary reports in the *Times of India* emphasised the significance of Rai's attendance for the proceedings and, when the Committee's chairman, Rangachariar, opened the interview, he told Rai that he wanted to know details about Rai's new company as well as the funding arrangements for the *Light of Asia*.⁸³ Sir Haroon Jaffer appeared to take exception to Rai's international pursuits, suggesting to him that "it would help the development of the Indian industry if you remained in India helping the films here instead of selling your services."⁸⁴ The ICC report later expressed concern:

⁷⁹ Baburao Patel, "German film industry," *Film India*, September 1939, 27-37.

⁸⁰ "Foreign Films and India. Mr. B. Patel returns," *Times of India*, 4 December 1939.

⁸¹ Alice Schalek. "Der neue indische Großfilm 'Shiraz' Himansu Rai, der erste indische Filmstar," *Neue freie Press*, 18 August 1928.

⁸² "Passengers by 'Aquilaia'," *Times of India*, 23 January 1928.

⁸³ *ICCE*, Vol. 3, 998.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1014.

From the description given by Mr. Himansu Rai of the terms and conditions under which this partnership is working for producing Shiraz the majority of us are not satisfied that that is the sort of combination which should be looked for or desired. ... the finance is entirely non-Indian ... the entire work of production is done out of the country ... The whole business management is non-Indian. All the experts except one are non-Indian and scarcely any Indian has any interest in the profits.⁸⁵

Although Rai initially turned down the opportunity to be interviewed *in camera* by the ICC, it is clear that the press and public were absent while he was being asked about his personal interest in *Shiraz*.⁸⁶ Otherwise the entire proceedings were witnessed by the press and reported on almost daily, adding to the theatrical spectacle of the Committee as it travelled around India. At this special sitting, Rai told the ICC's panel that he had been in India for several weeks, identifying locations and persuading financiers to invest in the film.⁸⁷ In contrast to *Light of Asia*, however, *Shiraz* was in fact an Indo-German-British collaboration that was being cast as an empire film. The involvement of Bruce Woolfe, Managing Director of British Instructional Films, was of sufficient interest for London's *Times* to report that his forthcoming journey was "at the request of a number of persons interested in the growth of the Indian film industry."⁸⁸ Although Woolfe did not meet the ICC panel in person, he submitted a written statement informing them that:

My Company has recently contracted to produce an all Indian film for the world market, and, with this end in view, has already despatched a part of the producing unit to India. The whole of the cast will be Indian; the directors and cameramen will be European.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ ICCR, para. 195.

⁸⁶ "Great future for Indian Films: Producer's Evidence," *Times of India*, 27 February 1928.

⁸⁷ The ICC had concluded its interviews by the time the panel and Rai were able to meet. "Great future for Indian films. Producer's evidence," *Times of India*, 27 February 1928.

⁸⁸ "The Film World," *Times* (London), 14 December 1927.

⁸⁹ ICCE, Vol. 4, 291–292.

Apart from Osten and Schünemann, British Instructional Films supplied a cameraman, Henry Harris, whose name precedes Schünemann's on the credits; and an assistant director, Victor Peers. Neither of the British filmmakers were credited on *Dice* which was produced afterwards, although Peers actually supervised the post-synchronisation of *Dice* in Berlin.⁹⁰ Written by Pal, *Shiraz* was the script that Rai had tried to bring to the stage in 1923.⁹¹ As discussed in the previous chapter, although Pal collaborated with British Instructional Film's scenario writer William A. Burton, he had no further involvement in its production.

The triangular love story at the heart of *Shiraz* subverts the orientalist narratives of Joe May's *Das indische Grabmal* and the serial depictions by Gunnar Tolnæs who played a maharaja in the Nordisk/Ufa films that were discussed in the previous chapter.⁹² Pal's imaginary tale, spun out of the history of Shah Jehan's building of the Taj Mahal, contrasted with European orientalist fare, by configuring its eponymous hero (played by Rai) as both Indian and honourable. The infant daughter of Nur Jehan, left for dead after an ambush, is adopted, named Selima and raised with Shiraz, until adulthood shifts the imagined parameters of kinship and Shiraz declares his love for Selima. When she is kidnapped and sold by slave traders, Shiraz tries to buy her back, only to be outbid by Emperor Shah Jehan (Charu Roy). The love that grows between Selima and the Shah upturns the dreams of others, leading to betrayal and accusation. On the cusp of execution, Shiraz is pardoned and commits his life to adoring Selima, now Mumtaz Mahal, from afar. On her death, 18 years later, his design for her monument wins. The Shah's command that the successful designer should be blinded so that nothing can

⁹⁰ Peers and Harris seem to have travelled directly from India to Germany where they worked with Anthony Asquith on *Priscilla's Fahrt ins Glück* (Priscilla's journey to happiness, 1928), an Anglo-German production with Länder-Film of Berlin. This was another of Woolfe's international productions during a period when Anglo-German collaboration was at its peak; "The Film World," *Times* (London), 9 October 1929.

⁹¹ "It is intended to produce in London ... a spectacular play dealing with the historical legend of the Taj Mahal of Agra." "Manchester and the Indian Players," *Manchester Guardian*, 8 January 1923.

⁹² For a detailed analysis of Tolnæs' depiction of a Maharaja between 1917 and 1925, see Mulay, *From Rajahs and Yogis*.

compete with the beauty of the Taj Mahal is irrelevant: Shiraz is already blind after years of work and devotion.

Shiraz was shown to members of the British Film Industry on 21 September 1928 and ran briefly in London in early December 1928.⁹³ The original German censor certificate, dated 27 August, had classified it with a *Jugendverbot*, a classification that would have prevented it from being shown to anyone under 16.⁹⁴ Ufa appealed and it was approved subject to cuts.⁹⁵ Was it these changes that had caused the delay to its release? Eventually it was approved in Germany as *volksbildend* (educational).⁹⁶ It had its premiere at Berlin's Ufa-Palast am Zoo on 28 December 1928, receiving polarised reviews.⁹⁷ Due to its circulation by Ufa, *Shiraz* had a wider release than *Light of Asia*.⁹⁸ In India it was distributed by Madan's, making a brief appearance at the Empire Theatre "owing to innumerable requests from our patrons."⁹⁹

⁹³ "Cinema reciprocity," *Times of India*, 7 January 1928; other European countries included France (*Chant Hindou*), Sweden (*Lidelsernas slav*), Netherlands (*De Slavin van Bagdad*) and Estonia (*Suure Armastuse Tempel*). It was also released in Canada: "Novel silent feature proves box office hit," *Motion Picture News*, 22 February 1930.

⁹⁴ BAW Prüf. Nr.: 19886.

⁹⁵ The cuts all related to imminent violence: Selima being threatened with a knife at the throat; Shiraz lying prone as the elephant's foot approaches his head; and the appearance of the branding iron that would take out Shiraz' eyes. These cuts do not appear to have been made in any of the versions of the film viewed for this research.

⁹⁶ Classified under category III: *Spielfilme ernsten Inhalts* (Feature films with serious subject matter) and described as *durchaus dezent* (thoroughly decent).

⁹⁷ Leo Hirsch, "Elefanten, Maharadschas und arme Leute," *Berliner Tagesblatt*, 23 December 1928; "Das Grabmal einer grossen Liebe," *Hamburger Nachrichten*, 10 February 1929; "Das Grabmal einer grossen Liebe," *Reichsfilmblatt*, December 1928; "Das Grabmal einer grossen Liebe," *Film Kurier*, 21 December 1928; Betz, "Das Grabmal einer grossen Liebe," *Der Film*, 22 December 1928.

⁹⁸ "Cinema Reciprocity," *Times of India*, 7 January 1928.

⁹⁹ "Advertisement for 'Shiraz'," *Times of India*, 1 April 1929.

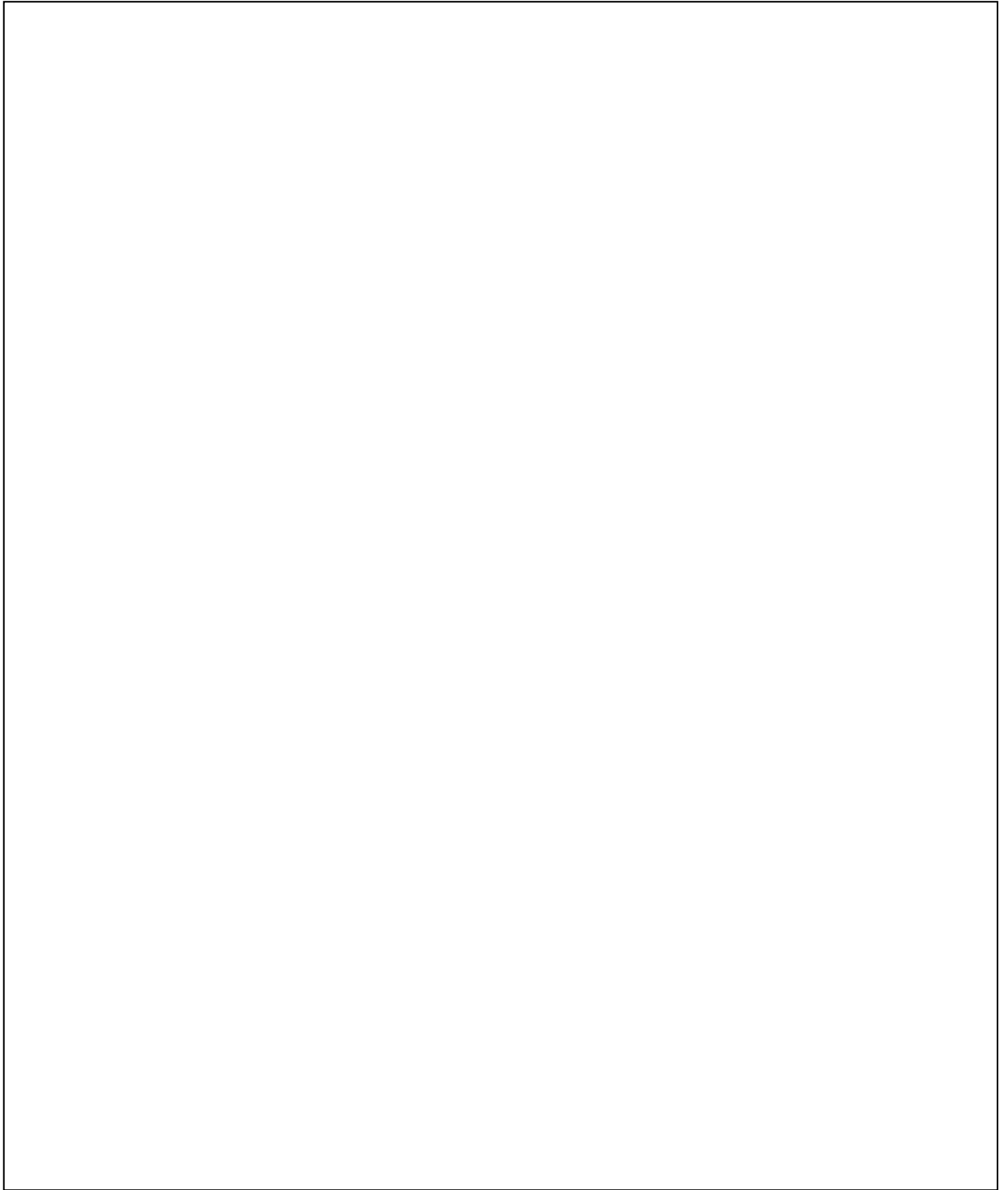


Figure 3-2 *"Shiraz."* *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 31 January 1929.

3.3.2 A Throw of Dice/Schicksalswürfel, 1929

Ein grandioser Film aus dem indischen Wunderland. (A wonderful film from the Indian wonderland.)¹⁰⁰

Shortly after the German release of *Shiraz* in August 1928, European publications were announcing that Rai's next film venture was to be *Vasantasena*, and would be directed by Osten.¹⁰¹ *Vasantasena* was a Sanskrit drama (*Mṛcchakaṭika*/The Toy Cart) that had first been produced as an Austrian film in 1919 under the title *Der Mord an der Bajadere*.¹⁰² As late as May 1930, Rai was reportedly planning to make a sound version of *Vasantasena* with Osten and Schünemann, promising that his version would be derived from the original Sanskrit.¹⁰³ That he did not mention the prospect of Bhavnani's production of *Vasantasena*, an event that was reported in the German press in June 1930, suggests it was this latter production that caused Rai to change his plans.¹⁰⁴ Rai had not mentioned *Dice* at his ICC interview, and it was not until December 1928 that it was announced that *Dice* would be his next film.¹⁰⁵ *Dice* was another script by Pal, to be produced under the same collaboration of Ufa/British Instructional Films and Himansu Rai Films that had made *Shiraz*. This time, however, Osten would not have an assistant director and Schünemann was credited as the sole cameraman, although it is not clear what prompted this change.

¹⁰⁰ Advertisement on front page, *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 23 November 1929.

¹⁰¹ For example, "Le metteur en scène Franz Osten va s'embarquer pour les Indes, où il tournera son troisième film hindou, *Vasantasena*," "En Allemagne," *Le Matin*, 5 October 1928; "Vom Film," *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 14 October 1928. *Le Matin*, 5 October 1928; "Filmnieuws" *Het Vaderland*, 31 October 1928.

¹⁰² Directed by Franz Ferdinand. *Neue Kino-Rundschau*, 19 July 1919; *Vasantasena* had also been dramatised for the stage by the German playwright, Leon Fuchtwanger in 1926, "Leon Fuchtwangers 'Vasantasena' im Burgtheater," *Die Buehne* (97): 13.

¹⁰³ "Aus aller Welt. Wenn Asiaten ins Kino gehen," *Tagblatt*, 23 May 1930, 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Vasantasena*.... ; one article referred to Bhavnani's film as "Der erste All-Indien-Film," *Scherls Magazin*, June 1930.

¹⁰⁵ "Clamour for Indian films: vogue in Europe. plans for producing several new pictures," *Times of India*, 13 November 1928.

Pal had adapted the story from a tale in the *Mahabharata* which introduced two cousins, rival kings, Ranjit (Charu Roy) and Sohat (Rai), who fall in love with the same woman. This time Rai was cast as the villain who plots to murder his rival. In scenes that foreshadow the al fresco chess players in Satyajit Ray's 1977 film *Shatranj ke Khilari* (The Chess Players), the two kings play dice outdoors, the stakes becoming ever higher until Ranjit has pledged his kingdom which Sohat duly wins with his loaded dice.¹⁰⁶ Described by its UK distributor, Pro Patria, as a film for "Good Class Houses," the photographic quality of *Dice* received the most admiration.¹⁰⁷ The *Times of India* was impressed; however, the *Österreichische Film Zeitung* was not.¹⁰⁸ German reviews were generally positive, with Lotte Eisner praising an honest portrayal that avoided *Orientpomp*, and put the Maharadscha films in the shade.¹⁰⁹ *Dice* was advertised in Britain as the first sound film from India and its arrival was delayed while the music and sound effects were synchronised; a process that heralded Rai's move to Bombay.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Vijaya Mulay recounts an occasion when she and Ray watched *Dice* together; *From Rajahs and Yogis*, 278; whilst it is tempting to imagine that this might have influenced Ray's film, there is no evidence to suggest that. Ray described *Dice* as "a cross between *A Thousand and One Nights* and the *Mahabharata*" and he praised the sophistication of the film's technique. Satyajit Ray, *Satyajit Ray on Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) 56-57.

¹⁰⁷ Advertisement, *The Bioscope*. 23 October 1929, 36.

¹⁰⁸ *Times of India*, 6 December 1929; "Schicksalswürfel," *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 4 January 1930.

¹⁰⁹ L. Eisner, "Ein neuer Indianfilm," *Film Kurier*, 17 August 1929.

¹¹⁰ "The first Indian sound-film: A Throw of the Dice, enacted by Indians in natural Indian settings," *Illustrated London News*, 2 November 1929; Its co-director, Victor Peers, supervised the synchronisation in Berlin. *The Times* (London), 9 October 1929.

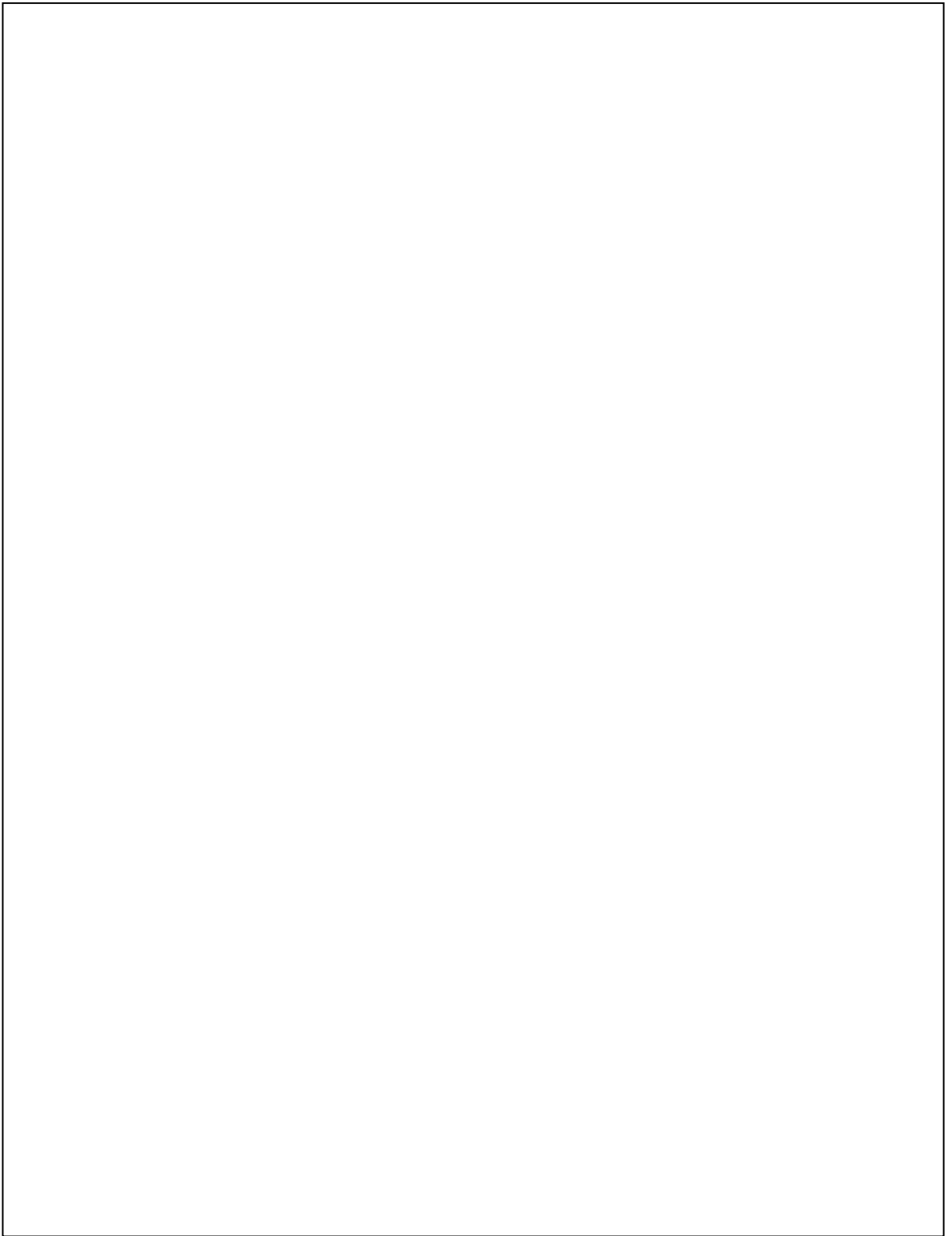


Figure 3-3 *"A Throw of Dice," Österreichische Film Zeitung, 15 June 1929.*

3.4 The staccato arrival of sound

The silent mode of film production had matured over three decades, developing its own aesthetic and employing visual idioms and motifs to communicate in the absence of aurally expressed dialogue emanating from the screen; many were now reluctant to embrace the arrival of what they suspected would be an inchoate and imperfect art form.¹¹¹ The period of transition was beset with a series of trials and setbacks marked by an escalation in patent applications, as intellectual property rights for the new technologies were fiercely contested, leading the *Times of India* to argue that “the fundamental problem of sound film is one of patents and not of persons.”¹¹² Kreimeier points out that “fifteen different systems involving 3,000 patents were competing with each other” in Europe.¹¹³ It was a situation that enabled a handful of manufacturers to dominate worldwide via a series of short-lived and frequently ruptured cartels.¹¹⁴

Der Übergang der Filmindustrie vom stummen Film zum Tonfilm bringt eine Umwälzung der bisherigen Arbeitsmethoden mit sich, deren Umfangs sich bis vor kurzem nicht einmal der Fachmann bewußt war. (The Industry’s transition from silent to sound film creates such an upheaval in working practices, the extent of which even the professionals had not anticipated.)¹¹⁵

Sound technology presented different challenges in India and Germany, upending the plans of Rai and Osten and paving the way for the emergence of Bombay Talkies in 1934. An evolution rather than a revolution, the repercussions of the new technology varied according to regional circumstances. Beyond merely enabling the voice to be heard, sound film affected everything: from casting and performance, to production and exhibition, its arrival demanded new modes of

¹¹¹ Resistance to talking pictures was common and included artists like Chaplin who continued making silent films into the middle of the 1930s. See “One More Silent Film: Charlie refuses to speak,” *Times of India*, 18 August 1934.

¹¹² “British Talkies: the great offensive begins,” *Times of India*, 24 May 1929.

¹¹³ Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story*, 179.

¹¹⁴ Douglas Gomery, *The Coming of sound: a history* (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹¹⁵ Correll, Ernst Hugo, “Wesen und Wert des Tonfilms,” *Film Magazin*, 16 June 1929.

working from every professional in the industry. It also disrupted the monopolies of global corporations by briefly conferring the advantage of linguistic hegemony on industries that were making films in languages other than English and, as discussed below, this factor would have different outcomes in Germany and India. The cost of installing sound equipment was prohibitive for many exhibitors and substantial investment was required to make cinemas sound proof; meanwhile fluctuating exchange rates and high inflation in some countries compounded the increased costs of licensing. This meant that outside America, the renovation of cinemas took place erratically, generally radiating from the urban areas outwards. These factors complicated exhibition and had the effect that a market for silent films remained for some years, particularly in India.¹¹⁶ Because the technology could now integrate a musical soundtrack, orchestras and musicians were only needed at the production stage and the majority lost their employment.¹¹⁷ On the other hand the dual requirements of cushioning the noise from audience footfall and introducing greater luxury into cinemas to reflect the growth in middle-class audiences, boosted sales of soft furnishings.¹¹⁸

The transition to sound cinema in Germany

Although a 1922 presentation of the Tri-Ergon process had been received enthusiastically by the German public, distributors and cinema owners remained unconvinced.¹¹⁹ In 1923 Ufa commissioned Guido Bagier to investigate the possibilities of sound film and by 1925, Ufa produced its first full sound film under the guidance of Josef Massolle, one of Tri-Ergon's three inventors.¹²⁰ The result was a short film entitled *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern* (The Match Girl)

¹¹⁶ Chabria's text shows that silent films continued to be produced in India until 1934. Chabria, *Light of Asia*.

¹¹⁷ See Buhler, *Hearing the Movies* 294; "Talkies and the League," *Times of India*, 23 August 1929.

¹¹⁸ An Austrian trade magazine reported that there had been a boost for the carpet industry as a result of the largest cinema in Glasgow fitting carpets. "Sprechfilm und Teppichindustrie," *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 3 August 1929.

¹¹⁹ Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story*, 183.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

that was shown in Berlin on 17 December 1925.¹²¹ The film began well but the premiere was a technical disaster, and Bagier and others suspected sabotage by the Americans.¹²² Irrespective of the truth behind the allegations, the incident illustrated the tensions that existed between the rival film industries during a period when Hollywood productions dominated worldwide and America had imposed import levies on foreign films.¹²³ Where a spirit of innovation had existed in Germany during the First World War and the attendant import restrictions had prompted innovators such as Oskar Meßter to explore creative alternative solutions on limited budgets, the challenges of sound technology appear to have had a more paralysing effect and were “greeted with mistrust” in Germany as one trade paper complained.¹²⁴ Ufa’s deteriorating financial situation no doubt contributed to its decision not to continue with sound.¹²⁵ Emelka too, had experimented with sound in 1926; directed by Osten, *Sonja* attempted a union of stage and screen. This is discussed in chapter 5.

In June 1928, an Austrian publication reported that Tri-Ergon’s inventors had developed a system in recording the voice directly onto the film strip, declaring it as “the latest wonder of modern technology.”¹²⁶ At this stage, Germany began to invest heavily in sound technology, rapidly overtaking Hollywood in the number of sound feature films that were shown in its home market by 1930 as can be seen from Table 3-1.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Die Legende der Sabotage bei Tri-Ergon” from *Das Ufa Buch*, 247. reproduced on Filmportal. Accessed 5 November 2014. <http://www.filmportal.de/thema/die-legende-der-sabotage-bei-tri-ergon>

¹²³ “German Films,” *Times* (London), 19 August 1921; Reviews of German films in the American magazine, *Variety*, reveal that the relationship was not a warm one.

¹²⁴ “German Films,” *Times* (London) 30 December 1919; “Atlantic und die Pola Negri,” *Die Bühne*, 14 November 1929.

¹²⁵ *The Ufa Story*, 102.

¹²⁶ “Tonfilm-Première in Wien,” *Die Bühne* 188 (June 1928).

¹²⁷ Thomas J. Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 223.

Year	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
Silent films	185	242	224	175	47	2	0
Sound films	0	0	0	8	99	142	132

Table 3-1 Sound film production in Germany, 1926-1932.¹²⁸

A cartel, of which Ufa was a member, divided the filming and recording process for sound under System Tobis-Klangfilm, and the projection and reproduction of film under System Klangfilm-Tobis; this raised the barriers to entry for the smaller film studios and cinema owners, slowing down the process of adaptation of cinemas to sound so that conversion was not complete in Germany until 1935.¹²⁹

The high cost of transition resulted in financial difficulties for the majority of small and medium sized companies in Germany. Among these was Emelka, whose large budget silent film, *Waterloo*, directed by Karl Grune in 1929, coincided with the arrival in Europe of Al Jolson's second sound film *The Singing Fool* (1928).¹³⁰ Under a treaty proposed in 1930, the so-called Paris Agreement, greater harmonisation was agreed and the global market for sound cinema was divided between American and European companies; one of its outcomes would be that the American companies gained control of the market in India.¹³¹ This might have been a factor in Rai's decision to use Visatone at Bombay Talkies.

How did these developments affect Rai? *Shiraz* premiered in Berlin on 28 December 1928 under its German title, *Das Grabmal einer großen Liebe; A Throw of Dice/Schicksalswürfel* followed on 16 August 1929; both films imbricated with the

¹²⁸Table compiled with information from *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 8 August 1931, and Julian Petley, *Capital and Culture : German Cinema 1933-45* (London: BFI, 1979), 41.

¹²⁹ By 1929 nearly 50% of American cinemas had been converted for sound, whereas by 1932, only 60% of German cinemas had been converted. Douglas Gomery, "Economic struggle and Hollywood imperialism: Europe converts to sound," *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 80-93; it would not be until 1935 that all German cinemas were converted; Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story*, 182-184; "the cost of Tobis-Klangfilm apparatus, with its installation plus license fees, constitutes an economic burden beyond the capacity of the ordinary movie theatre." "Protest high cost of talkie devices," *New York Times*, 11 February 1930.

¹³⁰ See Putz, 7; *Waterloo*, directed by Karl Grune (Emelka, 1929).

¹³¹ This agreement was never ratified, however, and it was not until 1936 that a second Paris Agreement was agreed. See Gomery, "Economic Struggle," 86-87.

Berlin premiere of *The Singing Fool*.¹³² Not every sound film had been synchronised simultaneously; as mentioned above, silent films were being post-synchronised in order to extend circulation. As discussed above, Ufa was advertising *Dice* to Austrian exhibitors as the “original India sound film from Ufa.” (Figure 3-3). In reality, however, *Dice* was actually shown as yet another partial sound film.

The transition to sound cinema in India

In India, the advent of the talking picture made a difference even more revolutionary than it produced in the West.¹³³

Sound cinema came to India bringing challenges for the industry as it had done elsewhere, but three developments in particular would make a enduring mark on Indian cinema. In spite of Aamir Khan’s 2001 promotion of synchronised sound on Gowariker’s *Lagaan*, post-synchronisation remains the common practice in India.¹³⁴ The second development was the multiple language version film; although this practice rapidly fell out of use in Europe, it persisted in India, supporting transregional exhibition between India’s polycentric film industries. The third development was playback technology that enabled songs to be pre-recorded. Booth describes the “specific cultural outcomes” of this system, which remains the standard in India.¹³⁵ By the time Imperial released *Alam Ara* in 1931, India’s film industry had peaked at an annual production of 200 silent films.¹³⁶ Because a

¹³² Jolson’s first *partial* sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, had been exhibited as a wholly silent film to German audiences in September 1928. Douglas Gomery, *The Coming of sound: a history* (London: Routledge, 2005) 73; Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin*, 224.

¹³³ Dewan Sharar, “The Cinema in India: its scope and possibilities,” *The Asiatic Review*, July 1937, 459-489. Copy held in “Dewan Sharar” BL IOR/L/I/1/1510.

¹³⁴ “The system of dubbing is much more than the technique of recording sound. It is part of a work culture.” Satyajit Bhatkal, *The Spirit of Lagaan* (Mumbai: Ramdas Bhatkal, 2002), 51.

¹³⁵ Booth, *Behind the Curtain*, 38.

¹³⁶ Bhaumik, “The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936.”

market still existed to meet the needs of the outlying areas that had not yet converted to sound, silent films continued to be produced until around 1934.¹³⁷

Jolson's first sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, had been released in America on 6 October 1927 as a silent film with sound *elements*; Raina points out that this coincided with the inauguration of the ICC.¹³⁸ These events were to have particular resonance for Rai. In the first place, as Jaikumar points out, Rai's appearance at the ICC marked him out as a person worthy of official attention.¹³⁹ Secondly, the arrival of sound technology forced Rai to reconsider his own film production plans.

Indians who can read English do not like talkies; Europeans in India prefer them to silent films.¹⁴⁰

Newspapers, trade publications and fan magazines chart the typical concerns and reactions articulated during these final years of the silent era: from the producer's warning that sound would bring additional complications in production, to the cinemagoer's perception that it would result in poorer quality productions.¹⁴¹ The arrival of the voice generated a discourse that concerned both the aesthetics and the economics of this new form, a medium that was perceived as a threat to the silent film.¹⁴² One article commented that "some are inclined to disbelieve in the innovation [of talking pictures]" introducing ontological doubt into a debate on scientific enquiry.¹⁴³ Similar patterns of resistance had occurred when the moving image had first appeared thirty years earlier. As was seen in

¹³⁷ Chabria, *Light of Asia*.

¹³⁸ Raghunath Raina, "Einführung in die Geschichte des indischen Kinos," in *Kino in Indien*, 28–53, (Freiburg im Breigau: Wolf Mersch, 1986) 36; arguably, however, the resolution on 15 September 1927 to appoint a Committee has an equal claim.

¹³⁹ Jaikumar, *Cinema at the end of empire*, 94.

¹⁴⁰ "Language Problems: Films now national not universal," *Times of India*, 9 August 1930.

¹⁴¹ "I dread the day when films will be able to speak." "Talking Films," *Times of India*, 15 April 1919; "Personally I would not welcome the "talkies" at all. There are pictures, silent ones, that seem to linger in one's memory forever." "Does India want 'talkies'?" *Times of India*, 1 March 1929.

¹⁴² One of these voices was that of Charlie Chaplin: "Talking films: Why Chaplin dislikes them," *Times of India*, 15 June 1929.

¹⁴³ "Have sound films come to stay?" *Times of India*, 19 September 1928.

chapter 2, transnational collaborations in silent productions had occurred across the globe, enabling the medium to transcend borders. Although some of these collaborations were now threatened, alternative forms of collaboration arose with the production of multiple language versions as well as the engagement of technical experts beyond their native industries.¹⁴⁴

The economic consequences of converting cinemas and studios for sound led the *Times of India* to comment that:

the installations that have been made and are still in progress in America are costly, and at that rate it will never be possible for more than a few theatres in the 'key cities' of India to install them.¹⁴⁵

As had happened in Germany, many of the smaller studios in India ceased production because the costs of investing in the new technology necessary for sound film production were so prohibitive.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps the most significant casualty was Madan Theatres, whose domination in India during the silent era, arose through a process of vertical integration that spanned film production from distribution to exhibition, and was discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁴⁷ By producing films in Indian languages and thereby reducing the demand for films from abroad, sound films finally enabled Indian cinema to gain a foothold at home.

¹⁴⁴ For example, Imperial Films engaged an American sound engineer, Wilfred Deming, to assist with the production of India's first sound film, *Alam Ara*. Afterwards, Deming was invited to Calcutta to work with New Theatres.

¹⁴⁵ "'Silent' or 'Talkie'?" *Times of India*, 15 February 1929.

¹⁴⁶ "there are many companies producing Indian films, but not of the vocal type as a talkie studio apparatus is a very expensive undertaking." "Language Problems," *Times of India*, 9 August 1930.

¹⁴⁷ "Parts of India are as good as monopolised by Madan Theatres," "Written Statement of the Bombay Cinema and Theatres Trade Association," *ICCE, Vol. 1, 2.*; "Madan Theatres Ltd "import and exhibit a large proportion of American films, with a few British and Continental pictures ... there has been a certain amount of complaint from the exhibitors that they cannot obtain the best Western films as the supply of these is alleged to be cornered by Madan, Ltd. ... [however] there is nothing here which is remarkable or which is unfair, or which calls for any interference." *ICCR*, 20–23.

Madans' reliance on imported films probably weakened its position, although other factors contributed.¹⁴⁸

3.4.1 The challenge of Babel

The talkie [...] introduced into cinema the division of Babel.¹⁴⁹

Although America had dominated the world's exhibition market since 1918, sound films temporarily limited its access to many of its foreign markets.¹⁵⁰ European and American film companies, anxious to preserve their lucrative foreign markets, looked for ways to recapture the international appeal of the silent film. One method that initially promised a solution and attracted significant investment, was to produce feature films in multiple language versions (MLVs). MGM calculated that MLVs would reduce production costs of subsequent versions by about 30% if the script could be re-used and filming could take place on the same set.¹⁵¹ One trade journal anticipated this as a way to enjoy quality American films:

Man wird also Gelegenheit haben, auch eine Reihe der hervorragendsten amerikanischen Filme, insbesondere jene, die mit ganz grossem Kostenaufwand hergestellt sind, bei uns, und zwar in deutscher Sprache zu sehen und zu hören. (This will be the opportunity for us to see and hear, in German, several of the most impressive American films, especially those that have been produced at great expense.)¹⁵²

In 1930, a newly formed organisation called Paramount-Continental announced plans to produce talking pictures at studios in Joinville, outside Paris. The majority of them would be made in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Swedish and Hungarian, although some films were to be made "in all European languages" and

¹⁴⁸ See Gooptu, "An Alternative Imaginary," 11–12.

¹⁴⁹ Chion, *Film, a sound art*, 85.

¹⁵⁰ "British Pictures Abroad," *Times*(London), 6 November 1929.

¹⁵¹ Gomery, *The Coming of Sound*, 107.

¹⁵² "Deutsche Tonfilm Produktion," *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 14 June 1930.

ambitious plan that was not realised.¹⁵³ The films would alternate technicians and actors, dependent upon language skills and cultural suitability. Although Ufa continued to make dual language versions in French and German into the 1940s, most other European production companies ceased making MLVs after about two years.¹⁵⁴ The promised cost savings had not materialised, the films did not achieve the desired popularity and, in the meantime, dubbing technology had improved.¹⁵⁵

In the silent era, actors could be chosen irrespective of linguistic ability or aural aesthetics; a pleasing appearance or looks appropriate to the role had sufficed. Sound cinema now demanded native or near-native language skills to successfully carry the script, as well as a voice that matched the role. For Rai, the changes forced him to take a decision on language, partly because Seeta Devi, the leading lady in his silent films, did not have the linguistic ability in Hindi to act in a sound film.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the static microphone restricted actors to a narrow spatial orbit until emerging technology improved flexibility, and a different performance aesthetic could evolve.¹⁵⁷

The language decision was straightforward for film industries that were established in areas of *relative* linguistic hegemony: the Germans would choose German, the British and Americans would choose English, and so on.¹⁵⁸ The nascent sound film industry in India had to deal with language plurality on a scale much greater than in other countries, mindful that whichever language was

¹⁵³ "The Film World," *Times* (London), 18 June 1930; "Paris Film Centre," *Times of India*, 20 May 1930.

¹⁵⁴ Ufa's programme for 1939-40 includes 6 feature films and 32 cultural films to be made in German and French. BAL R43-II/390, 26;

¹⁵⁵ Gomery, "Economic Struggle."

¹⁵⁶ Mihir Bose, *Bollywood: a history* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), 109.

¹⁵⁷ "It has not followed that because a screen actor ... was a success in action in the silent film that they had an equal appeal in dialogue. Diction has ousted hectic movement and in this respect the Englishman or woman is a more convincing deliverer of the King's English than anyone else." "Language problems: Films now national, not universal," *Times of India*, 9 August 1930.

¹⁵⁸ For comments on the use of Hindi in the cinema, see Dwyer and Pinto, ed., *Beyond the boundaries of Bollywood*, xv; Bhaumik, "The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936."

chosen, the range of a film's exhibition market would be limited. The language debate within the film industry was paralleled in the public sphere, where Hindi was often the leading choice.¹⁵⁹ During the period framing this thesis, Gandhi and Congress were promoting the idea of Hindi as the national language of independent India, although this was not universally accepted.¹⁶⁰ When he met the ICC panel, Rustomji Dorabji even recommended making English the national language; whilst during another interview, Rangachariar suggested that everyone should learn Hindi.¹⁶¹

Rai told the Germans "we have an even bigger hubbub of languages."¹⁶² The ICC Report commented on the "confused murmuring" that greeted the reading aloud of intertitles that was performed for the benefit of illiterate spectators; in addition to this, the screen was often obscured by up to six different sets of subtitles, including English, a costly process that disrupted the spectacle and lengthened screen time.¹⁶³ Hughes refers to exhibition practices in South India during the silent era including a variety of techniques to engage audiences with a film's narrative.¹⁶⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, live Indian music was performed as a bridge to

¹⁵⁹ "The only possible all-India language is Hindustani. Already it is spoken by a hundred and twenty millions and partly understood by scores of millions of others. Even those who do not know it at all at present can learn it far more easily than a foreign language. There are many common words in all the languages of India, but what is far more important is the common cultural background of these languages the similarity of ideas and the many linguistic affinities. This makes it relatively easy for an Indian to learn another Indian language." Jawarhalal Nehru, *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 August 1937.

¹⁶⁰ Gandhi's idea of Hindi as a language integrated with Urdu was not shared by other members of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (HSS) whose intention was to excise the influence of Urdu. "Hindustani must be lingua franca of India," *Bombay Chronicle*, 10 February 1934; Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 111–112.; Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*; Safadi, "The Colonial Construction of Hindustani."

¹⁶¹ *ICCE*, Vol. 1, 364.; *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁶² "Wir haben ein noch grösseres Sprachenbabel," Himansu Rai, "Indiens nationale Filmproduktion," *Tagblatt*, 23 May 1930.

¹⁶³ *ICCR*, 41.

¹⁶⁴ Hughes, "Is there anyone out there," 104; See also, Bhaumik, "The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936," 43.; Chabria, *Light of Asia*, 39; Harold Sintzenich, Kodak's technical consultant in India also commented on the volume of noise in a cinema as several people translated in their local languages for others in the audience. "Making movies in India" *American Cinematographer* (January 1932), 14.

accompany the culturally unfamiliar films from the West that made up the bulk of cinema exhibition in India during this period.¹⁶⁵ Even this might have been unsuccessful at times due to the cultural variations across India, a factor discussed in the previous chapter, and one that may have worked against the reception of Rai's silent films, the aesthetic of which was predominantly north Indian.

One and every nation wants talking pictures in the mother tongue."¹⁶⁶

During the 1930s, several Indian film production companies chose to make films in more than one language.¹⁶⁷ These included Bombay Talkies' biggest competitors: New Theatres in Calcutta and Prabhat Studios in Poona who were both producing dual language films in combinations of Bengali/Hindi and Marathi/Hindi respectively.¹⁶⁸ Having established a film studio in Bombay, with its dominant local languages of Marathi and Gujarati, Rai, whose own knowledge of Hindi was allegedly weak, nevertheless stipulated that Hindi would be used for all of the studio's feature films. Unlike his main competitors, however, he chose not to produce dual language films, a decision that may have been made because of the difficulties he experienced in producing *Karma*, but arguably one that was also based on commercial grounds. Numerous articles appeared in the Indian film press discussing the issue of language and criticising producers in India's other main film industries:

Soon Bengal and Madras too will have to produce talkies in Hindi if they desire to succeed commercially; but in these two provinces a keen sense of racial superiority over people of other provinces in matters of literature, art and intellect is giving them the suicidal

¹⁶⁵ Hughes, "Is there anyone out there," 99.

¹⁶⁶ N. Roy, "Talkie Revolution," *Filmiland*, 6 August 1932, 1.

¹⁶⁷ For examples of the production of multiple language versions in India, see Arnold, "Hindi Filmiglit." Although multiple language versions are no longer as common, a recent example was *Raavan/Raavanen* directed by Mani Ratnam in 2010 in both Tamil and Hindi versions, using two bilingual actors, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Vikram, in both versions.

¹⁶⁸ Actors still needed to have the right combination of Indian languages to satisfy film producers. For example, Durga Khote, bi-lingual in English and Marathi, had to learn Hindi to work with Prabhat, and Bengali to work with New Theatres. Khote, *I, Durga Khote*, 59, 69.

habit of judging this commercial matter more with sentiment than with prudence.¹⁶⁹

Filmland's editor added to the discussion commenting that "cinema language [...] should be a fusion of Hindi and Urdu so that a great percentage of each community may easily follow the talkie."¹⁷⁰ Another argued that "the only language which is most widely intelligible is the colloquial language of Hindi or Urdu technically known as Hindustani," a comment supporting the pragmatism of Rai's decision.¹⁷¹ While the Bengali film industry focused on adapting literary works, such as Chattopadhyay's *Devdas*, Rai insisted that all film dialogues were written in the simplest style in order to reach the widest public.¹⁷² This avoided the risk of what Orsini describes as the potentiality for Hindi to be "implicitly exclusive, both of Indo-Persian culture and, in a largely illiterate region, of uneducated speakers who had not mastered 'pure' Hindi."¹⁷³ Nevertheless, the simple language and the speed of dialogue would have an effect on the performative mode, a point that is discussed in chapter 4.

Sound films had been appearing in cinemas across India since the "talking, singing and sound films" were first exhibited at The Capitol in Bombay on 15 December 1928.¹⁷⁴ On 14 March 1931, India's first sound film, the "all-living breathing, 100% talking" *Alam Ara* was shown.¹⁷⁵ Films in other Indian languages followed quickly that year, including Bengali (*Jamai Sasthi*), Tamil (*Kalidoss*) and Telegu (*Bhakta Prahlada*).¹⁷⁶ Silent cinema was on the way to becoming an historical artefact: a victim of chemical instability, harsh climactic conditions and

¹⁶⁹ Abhoy Charan Lahiri, *Filmland*, Puja Number (1932), 50.

¹⁷⁰ *Filmland*, 12 November 1932, 1.

¹⁷¹ Shrivastava, "The Language for our Talkies," *Cinema*, 1 July 1932, 21.

¹⁷² For more information about the development of Bengali art cinema, see Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema*.

¹⁷³ Orsini, *The Hindi public sphere*, 13.

¹⁷⁴ "British Talkies at the Capitol," *Times of India*, 15 December 1928.

¹⁷⁵ Advert for *Alam Ara*, *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 March 1931; *Alam Ara*, directed by Ardeshir Irani, (Imperial, 1931).

¹⁷⁶ Chattopadhyay and Dey, *50 Years of Indian Talkies 1981*.

commercial indifference; and only a fraction of the films made within this early period would be saved to be re-appraised and re-presented as novelties to the audiences of future decades.

3.4.2 Erich Pommer's sound unit

Barnouw and Krishnaswamy place Rai and Devika Rani at Ufa immediately after completing *Dice*.¹⁷⁷ Devika Rani stated that she had completed her screen training at Ufa where “there were plenty of chances to study the technique of production.”¹⁷⁸ Of Ufa's five production teams, it was Pommer's unit that focused on sound; the other four, including Fritz Lang's, continued to produce silent films for a while.¹⁷⁹ The Rais' presence in Pommer's unit provided them with an opportunity to observe developments in sound technology and how this influenced modes of performance.

Der blaue Engel, 1930

Engel was a dual language film produced in English and German, that included music and dance. In this respect, it provided the Rais with a practical introduction to sound technology for the subsequent production of *Karma*. *Engel* was made entirely in the studio at Neubabelsberg and filming took place between 4 November 1929 and 22 January 1930.¹⁸⁰ Fuechtner suggests that Devika Rani

¹⁷⁷ Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, 92–94; it is also likely that Rai was involved in the production of a documentary for Ufa. An article in an English-language journal reported that Rai had written about his documentary work on the inhabitants of the State of Mewar. *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 1 October 1929, accessed 14 December 2015. <http://archive.org/stream/internationalre01inte#page/490/mode/2up>

¹⁷⁸ “Indian film star's success. Devika Rani, heroine of Karma, dazzles London audiences,” *Bombay Chronicle*, 3 June 1933.

¹⁷⁹ Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story*, 182.; Thomas Elsaesser, “Erich Pommer: ‘Die UFA’ and Germany's Bid for a Studio System.” In *Weimar Cinema and after*, 106–142.

¹⁸⁰ Wahl, “Babel's Business,” 238; see: Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, 92; Cary Rajinder Sawhney, “Devika Rani: Queen of Two Worlds.” In *Bollywood's Top 20: superstars of Indian Cinema*, ed. Bhaichand Patel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2012), 19; Manjapra, *Age of entanglement*, 270; Rai's attendance during filming is also likely and von Sternberg later commented that *Engel's* set was immensely popular, attracting even Max Reinhardt. Von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*, 143.

would draw on aspects of Dietrich's style for *Jawani-ki-Hawa*; arguably a similarity in star portraiture is detectable in the following images.¹⁸¹

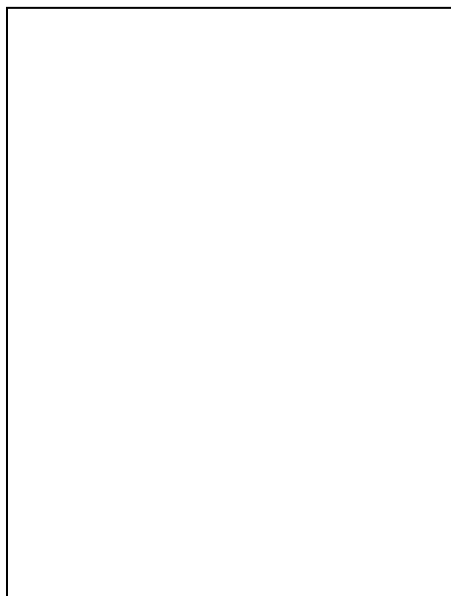


Figure 3-4 Marlene Dietrich. *Der blaue Engel*, 1930.

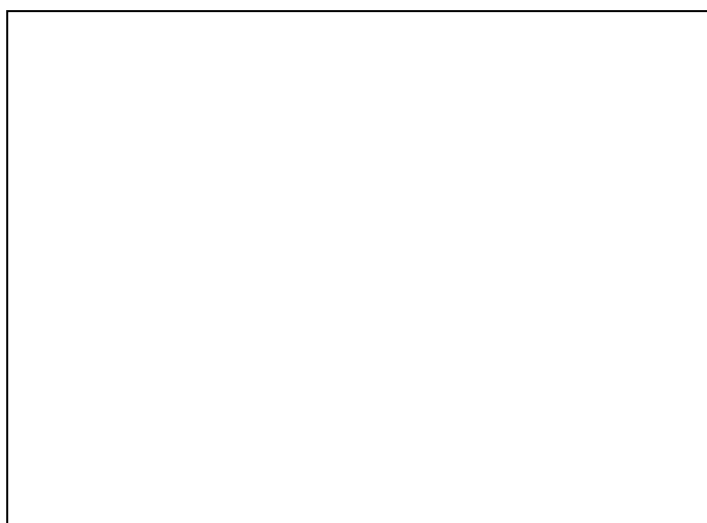


Figure 3-5 Devika Rani. Booklet for English version of *Karma*, 1933.

Engel was Ufa's first dual language production, a film it hoped would "demonstrate the artistic possibilities of sound."¹⁸² *Engel* illustrates some of the

¹⁸¹ Fuechtner, "The International Project of National(ist) Film," 169.

¹⁸² The first was *Melodie des Herzens*. Christoph Wahl, "Babel's Business - on Ufa's multiple language film versions, 1929-1933," in *The many faces of Weimar cinema*, 235-248; Stephen Brockmann, *A critical history of German film* (Rochester, NY : Camden House, 2010) 98; Chion discusses what he calls the "X-27 effect" that was used on *Engel*, explaining this as a diegetic sound alternating between audibility and silence as doors open and close. Chion, *Film, a sound art*, 53.

difficulties many performers experienced in making the transition to sound. Although *Engel* made Dietrich a star, von Sternberg never made another dual language film.¹⁸³ He later recounted the problems he experienced in directing both of the main actors: Jannings spoke his lines “embellished with archaic inflections that had not been heard since the Middle Ages,” failing to understand the requirements of the new medium and insisting that he would not speak “in an alien tongue” when it came to the English version.¹⁸⁴ Dietrich supposedly struggled with “vowels and consonants that were beyond belief” when it came to speaking in English, but she was also subject to “directorial censure” when it came to speaking German.¹⁸⁵ *Engel* was shown in Britain and India, where it received reasonable, although sometimes understated reviews, possibly attributable to the articulation of the dialogue.¹⁸⁶

3.4.3 *Karma*, 1933

At some point during 1932, Rai and Devika Rani began work on the production of *Karma*.¹⁸⁷ Dewan Sharar, a poet and writer credited with the story and who appeared as the Prince’s father in the film, mentioned that the idea for making it had originated in early 1932.¹⁸⁸ *Karma* functions as both a landmark and a curiosity in the history of Indian cinema. It introduced Devika Rani to the screen as Rai’s new star, at the same time as it marked his final appearance on film.¹⁸⁹ It was

¹⁸³ Kreimeier, *Die Ufa-Story*, 346.

¹⁸⁴ Von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*, 140–144.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁸⁶ “[von Sternberg] has produced as good a work as was possible within the limitations of a well-worn theme.” “The Blue Angel,” *Times* (London), 4 August 1930. “The greatest attraction is a singer and dancer called Lola,” “The Blue Angel,” *Times of India*, 24 June 1933.

¹⁸⁷ Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, 93–94.

¹⁸⁸ “New Indian talkie for London cinemas: praised by critics,” *Times of India*, 20 May 1933.

¹⁸⁹ *Karma*, directed by J. L. Freer-Hunt, (Himansurai Indo-International Talkies Ltd. & Indian and British Productions Ltd, 1933); “*Nagan Ki Ragni*, the first film to be produced in this country with a Hindustani as well as an English version, has been completed at the Stoll studios at Cricklewood.” “A Hindustani ‘Talkie’,” *Times* (London), 1 December 1932.

promoted as continuing Rai's ambitions of producing films with global appeal.¹⁹⁰ *Karma* may have been India's first dual language film, at least in an English/Hindi combination, and it appeared at a time when most of the large film production companies in the West had mostly abandoned the practice of producing multiple language versions of their major films.¹⁹¹ It is the film's soundscape that marks it out as a curiosity, however, and this is discussed below.

Described as "a love drama of an Indian princess" *Karma*'s narrative presents the clash of modernity and tradition, it relates the story of two lovers, the Prince of Jayanagar (Rai) and the Maharani of Sitapur (Rani). Hinting at autobiographical touches, the Maharani is an ardent advocate of progress who has recently returned from England and is intent on introducing progressive ideas into her conservative world, a project that inevitably encounters difficulties. Lejeune, a writer who in 1929 had given *Dice* a positive review, commented:

The story is incredibly naive and the production qualities negligible, but there is a certain freshness in the contemplative values it substitutes for action; the settings are new, and Devika Rani is a lovely and intelligent woman whose personality comes clearly though on to the screen.¹⁹²

Karma emphasises many of the other themes that featured in Rai's earlier films, themes that would continue at Bombay Talkies: self-sacrifice, modernity and progress, and female agency. Set in an imaginary present, however, *Karma*'s mise-

¹⁹⁰ "A company, the Indian and British Production Limited, has been formed in England to produce films of Indian life made by British directors." "Pictures from India," *Times of India*, 3 January 1933, 11; "The Himansurai Talkies are shortly undertaking a programme of production featuring Devika Rani in six Indo-international talkies. Each picture will be made in English and Hindustani for simultaneous distribution in India and abroad." "*Karma*: the first Indian talkie" *Times of India*, 31 May 1933; "...there was a great demand for Indian films, but the introduction of speech and its accompanying technical problems called a temporary halt to [Rai's] highly successful enterprise." "New Films in London," *Times* (London), 8 May 1933.

¹⁹¹ "The first Indian talkie with English dialogue" "Advertisement," *Bombay Chronicle*, 3 February 1934; Ezra Mir's production of *Noor Jehan* (1931) may have a stronger claim to this title of first dual language combination, although it was described as a partial talkie. Mir was another Indian filmmaker who had trained abroad; in his case in America. "Indian Super Talkie at the Majestic," *Times of India*, 24 October 1931; Ufa continued to produce multiple language versions beyond the outbreak of war.

¹⁹² C. A. Lejeune, "Films of the Quarter," *Sight and Sound* 2, no. 6 (Summer 1933), 59-60.

en-scène displays historical settings that recall aspects of *Light of Asia*, its “oriental splendour” once again evoking an India configured for the West.¹⁹³ At times this creates a dissonance between the film’s progressive message and its aesthetic style. A degree of confusion is also introduced with the multiple titles under which the film is documented: *Karma*/*Fate*/*Nagan ki Ragani*/*Song of Serpent*. Although intended as the first in a series of films for distribution in India and all English-speaking countries, after its completion, Rai changed his plans.¹⁹⁴

Some footage was filmed on location in India, but *Karma* was largely produced by Stoll Studios at Cricklewood. Its British director, John L. Freer-Hunt, had limited experience of film production; shortly before making *Karma*, he had directed a play about submarines at The Prince of Wales Theatre in London.¹⁹⁵ Why it was Freer-Hunt, and not Osten, who directed *Karma* is unclear. The decision may have been taken by Stoll, or may simply indicate that Osten was not available; his film records during this period suggest he was involved in a number of other projects in Germany. The *Karma* production team did include Schünemann, however, thereby maintaining a solitary German link in what was otherwise an Indo-British coproduction.¹⁹⁶

Karma had a relatively successful run in Britain when it opened on 14 May 1933. It received several favourable reviews, the majority of which focused on the qualities and appearance of Devika Rani. That it was first screened in India on 5 February 1934 “by the command of Their Excellencies the Viceroy and the Countess of Willingdon,” placed it in the same context as *Light of Asia* which had similarly been the subject of a command performance in April 1926.¹⁹⁷ *Karma*’s

¹⁹³ As with the silent films, the opening titles of *Karma* emphasise the realism and historical exclusivity of the settings. The making of the film thereby opens up privileged worlds to the spectator.

¹⁹⁴ “Scope for Indian Talkies,” *Times of India*, 5 Dec 1933.

¹⁹⁵ “Below the Surface,” *Times* (London), 20 February 1932.

¹⁹⁶ Opening credits on the film’s English version describe it as a joint production by Himansuraj Indo-International Talkies Ltd. Bombay and Indian & British Productions Ltd. London.

¹⁹⁷ “Editor’s Desk,” *Varieties Weekly*, 16 December 33, 3.

promotional booklet included a foreword by Sarojini Naidu. The booklet included eight pages of positive press reviews from Britain, and Naidu referred to its success in other European countries. Apart from a French review which appeared in 1935, however, there is little evidence of other locations where the film might have been screened. It is unlikely that it was ever released in Germany, however; a point discussed in chapter 5. Naidu's foreword referred to "immense difficulties and incredible delays" in the completion of the film, re-iterating the theme of hardship and personal sacrifice that had been used to promote the three silent films; one that would continue throughout the evolution of Bombay Talkies.

Rai reported that the Hindi version, *Nagan ki Ragani*, had been received with great success in Stockholm and Oslo.¹⁹⁸ Perhaps his claim only indicated responses from potential exhibitors? An archive search by Stockholm's Riksarkivet reported that it could not have been released in Sweden because it was never registered for exhibition with the Swedish National Board of Film Classification under any of its possible titles.¹⁹⁹ Rangoonwalla writes that this version "proved to be a damp squib [and] was also criticised for peddling India's poverty."²⁰⁰ Unfortunately, without sight of the Hindi version, it has not been possible to establish whether there were differences between the two productions. An English version of *Karma* is preserved at the NFAI and it is this version that is discussed here.

The soundscape for the English version of *Karma* is its biggest drawback. Its opening musical score was billed as "an original composition" by Ernst Broadhurst and Roy Douglas, creates a dissonance with the imagery of Indian landscapes. Whether this was in accordance with Rai's wishes or whether Stoll imposed a Western style of music to act as a cultural bridge, is purely speculative. Although critics praised Devika Rani's acting and Schünemann's camerawork, the "school bench enunciation" of the English dialogue presented a melodramatic mode of strangled vowels and unnatural consonants that distanced audiences and became

¹⁹⁸ "'Karma' well received in Norway and Sweden," *Times of India*, 5 December 1933.

¹⁹⁹ Riksarkivet, email correspondence with the author, 17 September 2014.

²⁰⁰ Rangoonwalla, "The Emergence of Talkies," 47.

the film's main disadvantage.²⁰¹ These were possibly typical problems at the time, however, rather than specifically related to *Karma*, again highlighting the difficulties some actors experienced in adapting to sound.²⁰² One reviewer attributed Karma's slow pace to the fact that the dialogue was in English; again, because a comparison could not be made with the Hindi version, this could not be verified.²⁰³ A later French review was particularly trenchant:

Although [Karma] is a sound film, it does not represent any progress over the earlier productions: all it achieves is to expose peculiar tones of voice, the artificial diction painfully forced and too mannered; in a silent film, the clumsiness of the improvised performances would have been less conspicuous.²⁰⁴

What were the immense difficulties that Naidu referred to concerning the film's completion? The English version of *Karma* gives the impression of a film struggling against its creators. Lacking the harmony that had suffused *Dice*, it suggests a tension between the director, the producer, the writer and the photographers, resulting in a film that fails to evolve into a coherent whole. Was there greater coherence in the Hindi version? Rangoonwalla's comment cited above, suggests otherwise.

²⁰¹ "the pity of it is that the artists speak English." "Karma," *Times* (London), 11 May 1933. "[the actors] give the impression of having been rehearsed sentence by sentence. Their pronunciation is wonderfully correct, but spontaneity is too high a price to pay for correctness." *The World of the Kinema*, *Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1933, 724; "Films", *The Saturday Review*, 20 May 1933, 495.

²⁰² The *Bombay Chronicle* had already warned against this style of enunciation in 1931: "In several British talkies of late I have been annoyed to hear "stage accents", you know the sort of thing: "Listen deah, I'm fearfully sorry" "fawncy that" "how demnable" etc. Both male and female players are equally guilty of using this mincing English. It seems strange that most of the offenders are artistes recruited from the legitimate theatre. Even American nasal sounds are preferable to these terribly "refaned" accents that masquerade as English. Dialogue should be uttered with vigour: it is not necessary to try and convince your listeners that you were at a public school." 17 September 1931.

²⁰³ *The Saturday Review*, 20 May 1933, 495.

²⁰⁴ "Karma," *La Revue des Vivants*, 1 January 1935.

Rai would make one more film without Osten, this was *Melody and Rhythm*, produced at the beginning of 1934.²⁰⁵ Mr. Elliott, a sound engineer from Gainsborough Pictures, and Gaston Quiribet from Kodak, a Frenchman who would later support Ashok Kumar's laboratory training at Bombay Talkies, were both involved in the production of *Melody and Rhythm*.²⁰⁶ Rai's next move would be to create films for Indian audiences, using an Indian language, and this is the subject of chapter 4.

3.5 Emil Schünemann's camerawork

Following the rupture with Emelka and the new agreement between Rai, British Instructional Films and Ufa, Rai would now work with two new cameramen. British Instructional Films supplied Henry Harris (1899-1971) and Ufa supplied Emil Schünemann (1882-1964). Although Harris' name is credited before that of Schünemann on the titles for *Shiraz*, this was only his sixth film; it was the German cinematographer who had the greater experience, and it is arguably his style that shaped the film, a contention supported by a study of *Dice*, which Schünemann photographed alone.

Born in Berlin, Schünemann had been active as a cameraman since 1903 and later described himself as a film pioneer.²⁰⁷ He was a co-founder not only of Deutsche Bioskop, but also of Union-Film, which eventually became subsumed into Ufa; and, in common with many of his peers, he had been in active service from 1915 until the end of the First World War. By the time he joined Rai and Osten to make *Shiraz*, he had produced at least fifty-seven films. Schünemann's experience was extensive, and he had worked with Fritz Lang, Joe May and Urban Gad, but perhaps most significantly with Karl Freund, whose 'unchained camera' had

²⁰⁵ The narrative of *Melody and Rhythm* was not described, and the article focused on its sound production. It is credited as the first production at Film City, a studio set up by Fazulbhoy. The sister of Sarojini Naidu, Sunalini Devi, was credited as the dancer. "The Cinema World," *Bombay Chronicle*, 3 February 1934, 17.

²⁰⁶ "Ashok Kumar – an actor to inspire," *Screen*, 28 September 1984, 22.

²⁰⁷ "Fragebogen," 1 October 1933, BAL RKJ0102, 608-610.

introduced previously unimagined mobility into Murnau's 1924 film, *Der letzte Mann* (The Last Laugh).²⁰⁸

Given the breadth of his experience, perhaps it is not surprising that Schünemann's photography on *Shiraz* contrasted significantly with the photography on *Light of Asia*. Schünemann also claimed to have had experience of working in the tropics with Kodak dating back to 1902.²⁰⁹ His Berlin background was not rooted in the more conservative mode of filmmaking that was typical of the industry in Munich that had shaped the style of *Light of Asia*. Whereas filmmakers in Berlin had been known for their innovative, and often more daring approach to visual style, evident in the films of Lang, Wiene and Wegener and frequently associated with German Expressionism, their colleagues in the south viewed with scepticism the cultural modernism these directors presented.

3.5.1 Photography on *Shiraz* and *A Throw of Dice*

From the standpoint of photography it is a thing of rare beauty.²¹⁰

As discussed above, Satyajit Ray was impressed with the quality of Schünemann's photography when he watched the film years later. Although the opening credits on *Shiraz* make a similar claim to *Light of Asia* that "no studio construction or artificial lighting has been used" the difference in photographic style between *Light of Asia* and *Shiraz* is considerable. Perhaps this change reflected the public's growing demand for improved cinematic quality:

Man hat längst erkannt, daß die starre Kamera veraltet ist. Die Kamera darf nicht mehr der kühle Beobachter sein, sie muss auch mitspielen [...] Man sieht also, daß man bald verlangen wird, dass der Kameramann neben seinem technischen Können sich als Sensationsdarsteller im Nebenberuf ausbildet. (It has long been recognised that the static camera is antiquated. The camera can no longer be a passive observer, it has to play along [...] it is now

²⁰⁸ For example, see Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, 212.

²⁰⁹ Schünemann, interview.

²¹⁰ "Opinions on Pictures," *Motion Picture News*, 30 November 1929.

obvious that in addition to his technical knowledge, the cameraman will need to add stuntman as a sideline.)²¹¹

Schünemann later talked about making *Shiraz* and described using reflectors for all of the interior shots.²¹² In contrast to *Light of Asia*, Schünemann's camera is not static, its hyper mobility offering a variety of perspectives to pull the spectator into the drama. For example, in the opening scenes of the ambush, a combination of camera mobility and editing, and rapid intercutting alternates the viewer's perspective. In Figure 3-6 the camera looks down upon the royal caravan as it crosses the desert, interspersing the view from a variety of elevations:

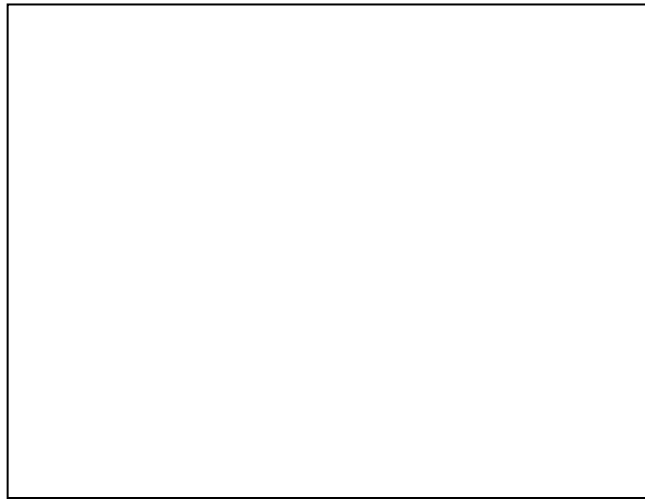


Figure 3-6 "Preparing to ambush the caravan," *Shiraz*, 1928.

In Figure 3-7 it points up towards a sentinel on a hill:

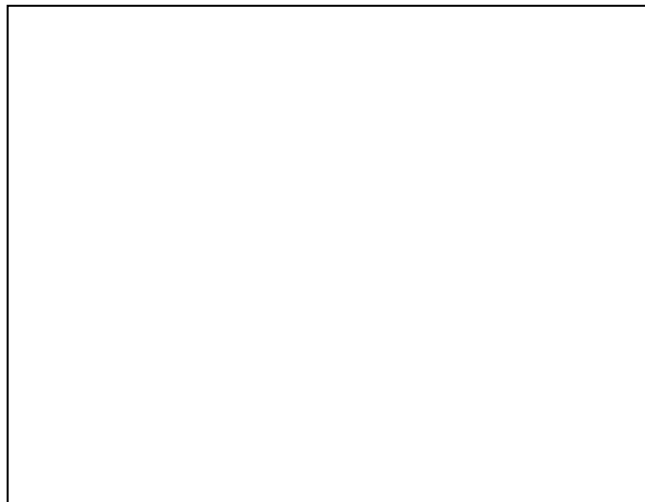


Figure 3-7 "Sentinel," *Shiraz*.

²¹¹ "Der Kameramann als Artist," *Mein Film*, Issue 138, August 1928, 9.

²¹² Schünemann, interview.

and in Figure 3-8 it rolls at ground level as the caravan passes along *beside* it.

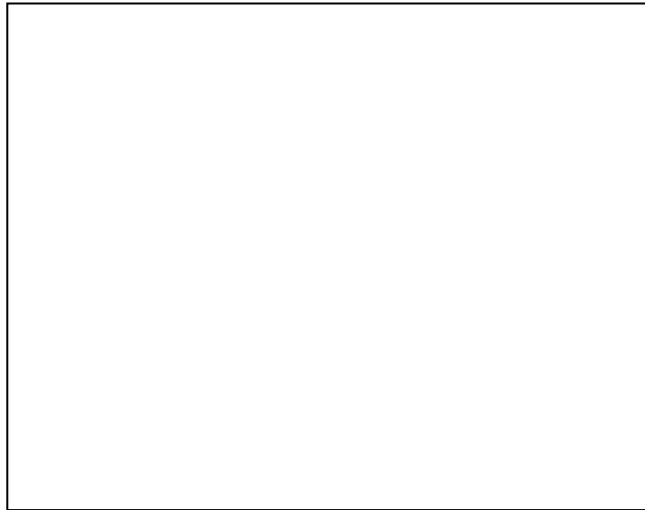


Figure 3-8 "With the caravan," *Shiraz*.

The human face is privileged much more in *Shiraz* than in *Light of Asia*. This is achieved either by framing the face, in one instance using the material covering the caravan as in Figure 3-9:

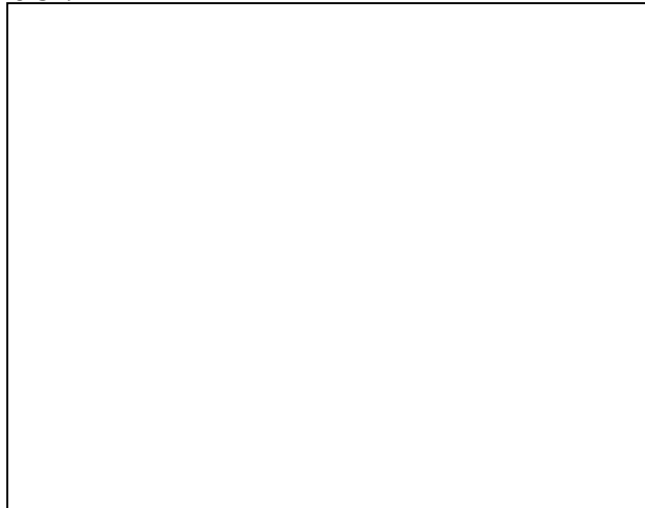


Figure 3-9 "Framing the face," *Shiraz*.

and an almost identical look, although significantly stronger, is repeated in *Dice*:



Figure 3-10 "Framing the face," *A Throw of Dice*, 1929.

Privileging the face is also achieved by lighting the face and darkening the background as in Figure 3-11,



Figure 3-11 "Privileging the face," *Shiraz*.

or by using a shallower depth of field in order to hold the subject at the image's centre (Figure 3-12) for example, when Shiraz is anxiously following the bidding in the slave market to rescue Princess Selima.

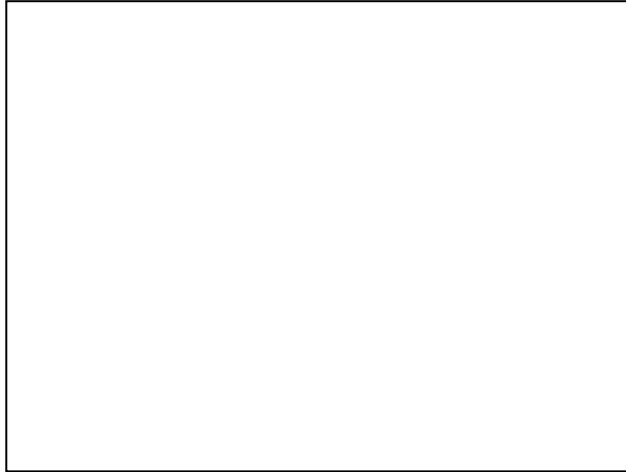


Figure 3-12 "Shiraz at the slave market," *Shiraz*.

Because Schünemann was solely responsible for the photography on *Dice*, provides an opportunity to compare cinematographic style; reinforcing the argument that Schünemann's contribution had the most influence on the visual style of *Shiraz*. Unlike the two earlier films, *Dice* is not presented to audiences with any claims about natural lighting, and examination of the photography indicates that artificial light *has* been used to enhance it, as in the carefully framed portrait of King Ranjit (Charu Roy) in Figure 3-13; an image that would probably have been impossible using only natural light. Mulay reports Satyajit Ray's comment, "look at the texture of the skin on Charu Roy's cheeks. How realistic it looks. Such clean and beautiful camera work and such excellent lighting!"²¹³

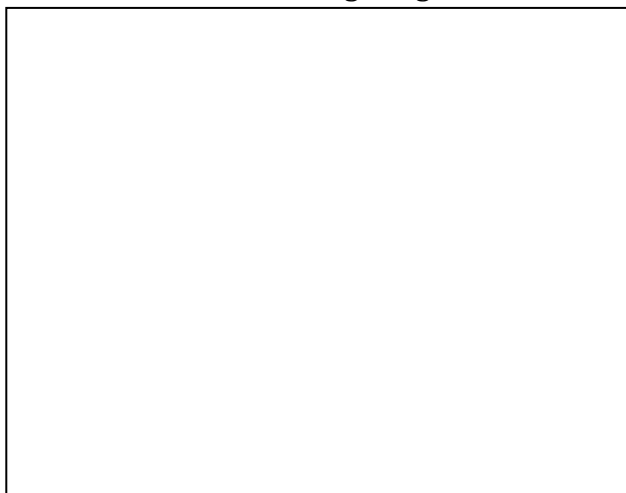


Figure 3-13 "King Ranjit," *A Throw of Dice*.

²¹³ From *Rajahs and Yogis*, 278.

Writing about *Dice*, Lejeune commented, “the photography is generally very good, at times achieving extraordinary stereoscopic effects.”²¹⁴ The framing and composition of *Dice*, although separated from *Light of Asia* by barely four years, illustrates a sophistication largely absent from the first film. This is clear from the following two images, the left hand one from *Light of Asia*, the right hand one from *Dice*. In the first image, the faces are obscured and marred by overhead sunlight causing intense shadows on the faces; in the second image, although the sunlight appears at its zenith, the lighting has been balanced, possibly with the aid of reflectors, to lift the shadows from the faces.

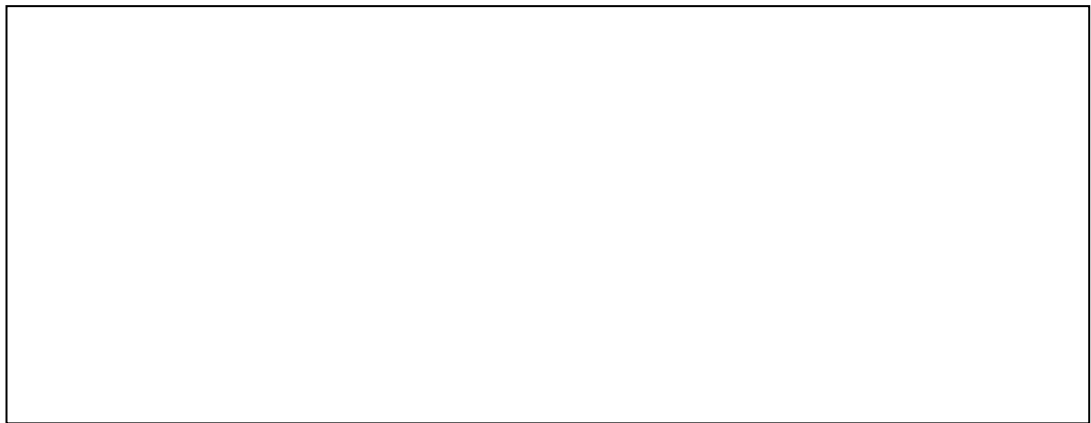


Figure 3-14 “Lighting contrast,” *Light of Asia* (left) *A Throw of Dice* (right)

Dice differs from both of the earlier films by making even greater use of camera mobility than had been introduced in *Shiraz*. In *Dice* the camera moves *towards* the actors, rather than waiting for the actors to come towards it. This is exemplified with three clips lasting ten seconds that appear towards the end of the film. They follow the progress of Ranjit’s army as it marches towards Sohat’s castle to avenge his dishonour of being cheated with loaded dice. The sequence of images leading up to this begin with the standard trope of armies on the march: in extreme long shot it shows a line of distant figures moving across a landscape, intercut with another line of riders on horseback.

At Figure 3-15 the camera cuts to a long shot taken at dusk or dawn as indicated by the lengthened shadows and the strongly contrasted tones of light and dark that

²¹⁴ C. A. Lejeune, “A Throw of Dice,” *Manchester Guardian*, 23 January 1929, 8.

structure the image. This shows a watchman surveying the approaching army as it crosses the landscape towards Sohat's castle.

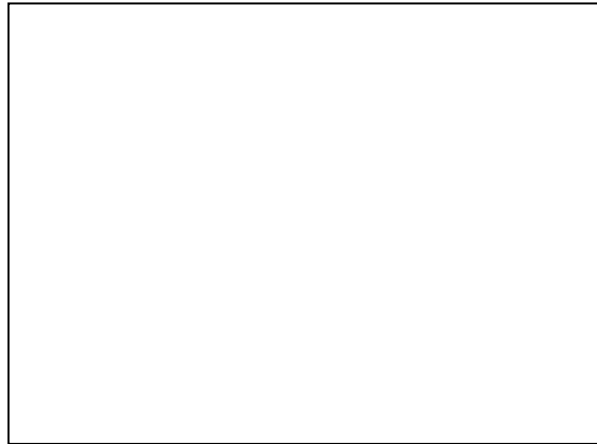


Figure 3-15 "King Sohat's Watchman," *A Throw of Dice*.

Then the camera does something unexpected, creating a visual crescendo. The audience's gaze is suddenly at the foot of the marching army as the soldiers march towards it on one side, the horses and riders on the other (Figure 3-16).



Figure 3-16 "At the foot of the marching army," *A Throw of Dice*.



Figure 3-17 "Marching army," *A Throw of Dice*.

These images are then superimposed with further footage showing the men's heads in close up until the image gradually shifts to a side view of two lines of marching men, distant and close up in Figure 3-17. After this the scene shifts back to the watchman who realises the scale of the threat and calls the alarm. It is the quality of these images that distinguishes Schünemann's photography and was arguably the reason why Rai engaged him on his next film.

3.5.2 Photography on *Karma*

The credits on *Karma* give prominence to Desmond C. Dickinson for whom this was his fourteenth film. Given Schünemann's lengthy experience, however, it is arguably his work that defines much of the film's photographic style. It may also have influenced Wirsching's later work at Bombay Talkies, a point discussed in chapter 6. The quality of the photography on *Karma* exceeds the quality of its soundscape, reinforcing the sense of a film created by filmmakers who are not working in harmony. As it was in the two previous silent films, Schünemann's camera is mobile and fluid, capturing scenes from a variety of angles and making full use of focal ranges from extreme long shot to extreme close up, as in Figure 3-18, the latter emphasising the sense of menace that pertains to the character.



Figure 3-18 "Extreme close up," *Karma*.

Chiaroscuro lighting composes painterly images with sparse detail, as in Figure 3-19 and Figure 3-20.

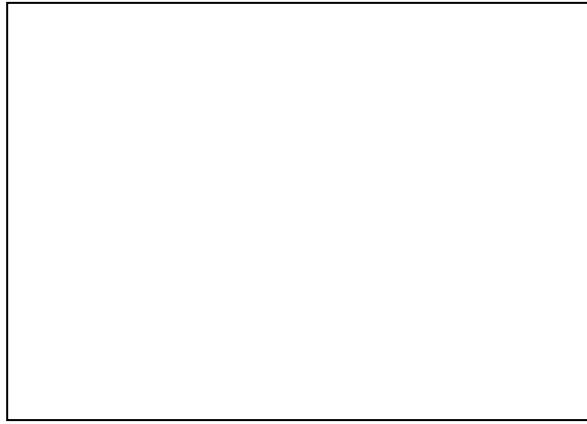


Figure 3-19 "Climbing figure," *Karma*.

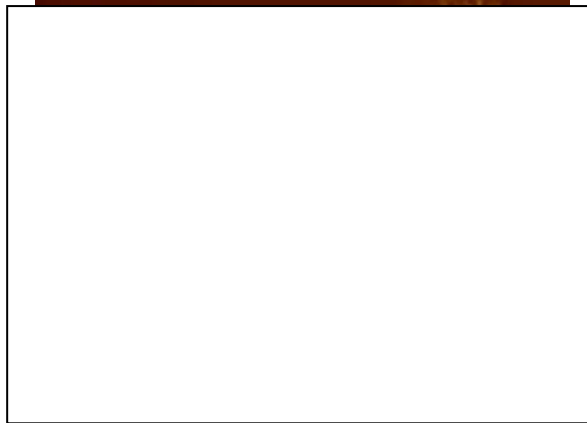


Figure 3-20 "Watchman," *Karma*.

By using shadows to anticipate human movement (Figure 3-21) and by presenting less orthodox and faceless perspectives of actors (Figure 3-22), Schünemann creates abstract images that not only capture the visual imagination, but present a degree of psychological menace as spies approach the palace.



Figure 3-21 "Shadows," *Karma*.

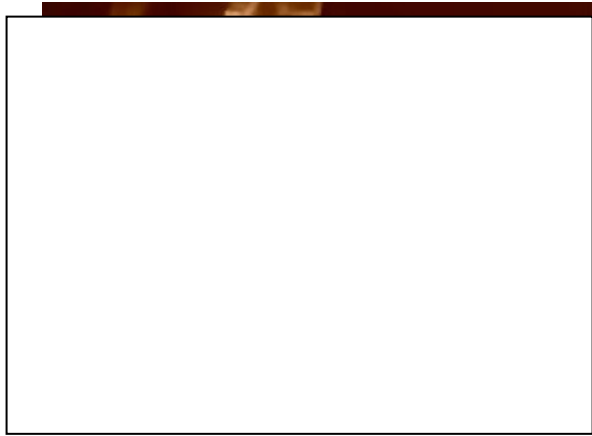


Figure 3-22 “Abstract bodies,” *Karma*.

The architectural framing used in Figures Figure 3-23 and Figure 3-24 is bold and minimalist, its single human figure blending into the frame, suggesting a modernistic narrative evocative of Lang’s *Metropolis*.



Figure 3-23 “Architectural framing,” *Karma*.



Figure 3-24 “Architectural framing,” *Karma*.

In Figure 3-25 below, Schünemann's camera gradually pans in from a small image at the corner of the frame, until Devika Rani's face fills the frame.

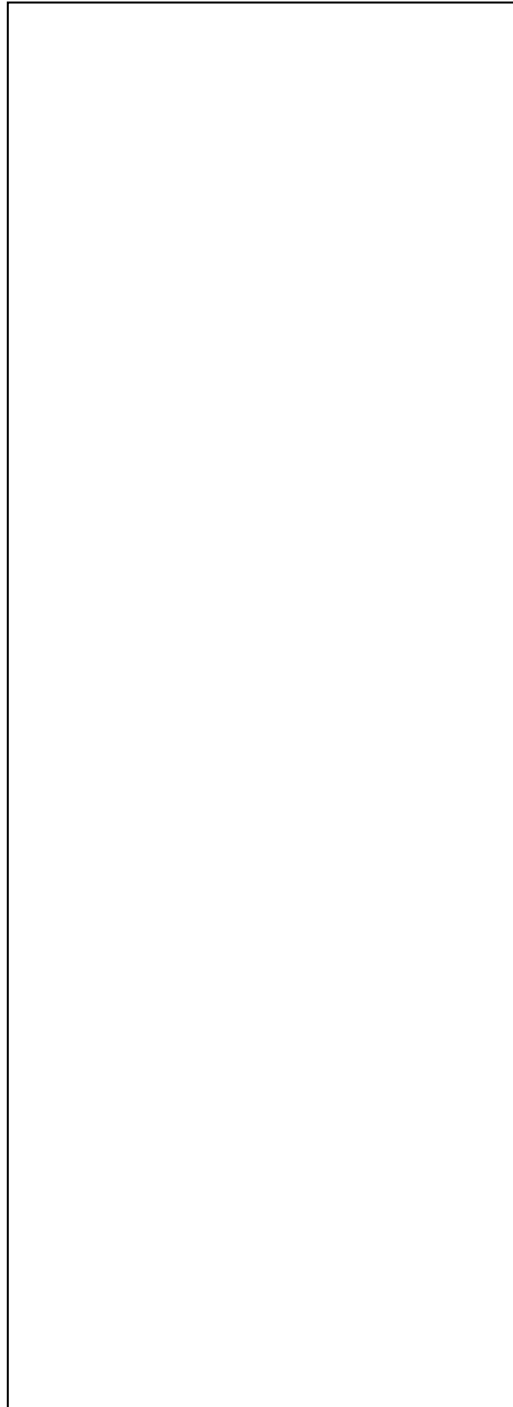


Figure 3-25 "Camera movement," *Karma*.

Karma's photography is burdened by a weak script. The dissonance between Schünemann's imagery and the dialogue is stark: while the imagery evokes suspense, the stilted nature of the dialogue inhibits it. After completing his work on *Karma* and photographing a musical, *Maid Happy*, for British and Dominion Studios

at Elstree, Schünemann returned to Germany towards the end of 1933, resuming work within the German film industry.²¹⁵ Whether Rai ever offered Schünemann a position at Bombay Talkies is entirely speculative.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, the three films he produced with Rai arguably made an impression on the style of Bombay Talkies' films.

3.6 Concluding remarks

Sarojini Naidu's endorsement of Rai as a 'patriotic internationalist' serves not only to illustrate the socio-political nexus within which he operated; it also reflects his ability to forge associations across a variety of networks, at home and abroad. This chapter has shown how Rai continued to promote the cause of Indian cinema after the release of *Light of Asia*; acquiring a level of respectability that subsequently enabled him to fulfil his role as a film entrepreneur. Rai's engagement with Emelka, his collaborations with Ufa, and the coproduction of *Karma* at Stoll Studios, provided him with the experience to shape his own ideas about filmmaking, allowing him to transplant structures and styles from Germany, Hollywood and elsewhere, to create his own vision for Bombay Talkies.

Discussing the frequency of transnational collaborations in film production, the chapter has shown how Germany functioned as a magnet for foreign filmmakers, including those from India and Britain. The three films described here, illustrate the technological and performative changes that were modulating the production and reception of cinema during the transitional period from silent to sound. This transition, and the opportunities it brought for film production in regional languages, in particular, it would have a pernicious influence on the German film industry, where the discourse around national identity spiralled towards an increasingly racist ideology.

²¹⁵ Schünemann's filmography indicates that he had sufficient work after 1933, including Nazi propaganda films, *Ich für Dich, Du für mich* and *Die Reiter von Deutsch-Ostafrika*; *Hamburger Anzeiger*, 3 November 1934, 22.

²¹⁶ Koch suggests that Leni Riefenstahl hoped to persuade Schünemann to join her film crew for *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will, 1935) but he refused, Koch, "Von der 'Münchener Lichtspielkunst' zu den 'Bombay Talkies': Franz Osten," 129.

Finally, the chapter has argued that Schünemann played a more significant role in shaping the cinematographic style of Bombay Talkies' films than has previously been acknowledged, a contention that is discussed in more detail in chapter 6. The following chapter continues the discussion of the Indo-German partnership and its involvement in the establishment of Bombay Talkies.

The Company [Bombay Talkies] has been formed for the purposes [...] of undertaking the production and exploitation in India and abroad of talking films of various types.¹

4 Establishing The Bombay Talkies

4.1 Introduction

The half page advertisement that appeared in the Indian press on 9 August 1934, presented the share proposal for the new studio, Bombay Talkies.² Harnessing the studio's function to its geographical location, represented lexically and later visually (see Figure 4-1), it signalled Rai's intention to produce films in a region that was already identified with commercial cinema; but it also hinted at the ongoing migration of influence from the former colonial capital of Calcutta. Couched in legal language and imbued with a social gravitas emanating from the involvement of an elite board of directors, the proposal framed Rai's vision of cinema as a medium for education and an endeavour worthy of respect, exceeding what might be considered its primary charge as an object of entertainment. By configuring filmmaking in this manner, the proposal signalled that the status of this new studio would be distinct from the enterprises of the moneymen whose cheap productions had fallen foul of the arbiters at the ICC. The share offer extolled the achievements of Rai and Devika Rani, praising their skills and the experience they had gained in Europe as essential to the success of the new company; yet it made no mention of the German involvement that would come to act as a signifier for some of the Indian press of the quality behind the studio's productions and, occasionally, a source of parody.

The first section of this chapter discusses the foundation and early development of the Bombay Talkies, asking why two Bengalis, Rai and Devika Rani, chose to establish their studio in Bombay rather than Calcutta. It considers how far the

¹ "The Bombay Talkies, Limited," *Times of India*, 9 August 1934; "The Bombay Talkies," *Bombay Chronicle*, 9 August 1934.

² Ibid.

social and educational anchoring of the studio might have contributed to its rapid success. It looks at how the studio was organised and asks to what extent it was designed on a German model. Separate chapters discuss Osten and Wirsching in more detail; here the discussion turns to the involvement of Karl von Spreti and Wilhelm Zolle in shaping the functions in which they specialised: set design and laboratory processing respectively. The second section of the chapter explores settings and soundscapes in a selection of Bombay Talkies' films. The 1936 production of *Achhut Kanya* is analysed for what it might reveal about the restrictions placed on set design by the demands of sound recording, as well as exploring the use of space at Malad. A comparison of the 1936 film, *Jeevan Naiya*, with the 1939 production of *Kangan*, charts the growing sophistication of the soundscape.

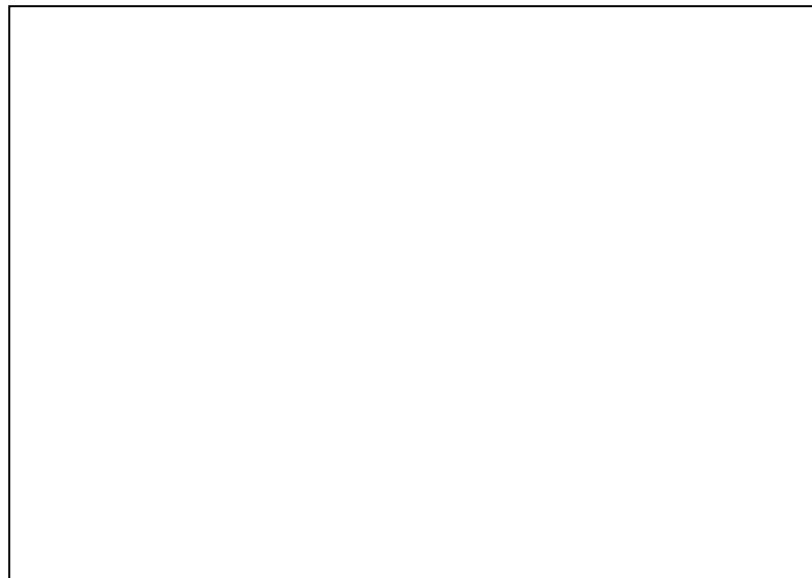


Figure 4-1 "Opening titles," *Jeevan Naiya*, 1936.

4.2 An Indian Hollywood in Bombay?

[The motion picture] is the only form of communication entirely international in language and scope.³

Shortly after the British premiere of *Karma* in May 1933, Devika Rani advised the press that she and Rai planned to establish “an Indian Hollywood at Bombay.”⁴ This identification with the American film industry is juxtaposed within a narrative describing the training that she and Rai had received at Ufa, adding that they intended to engage technical experts from *Europe*, and to use these specialists to train their Indian staff.⁵ Her use of Hollywood as a comparator is instructive because it highlights the totemic power that Hollywood retained around the globe; power that was gradually granting the American industry metonymic status, and would eventually insinuate itself onto the film industry in Bombay via the mimetic term Bollywood.⁶ At a time when the German industry, with which the Rais had become familiar, was entering into a racially homogeneous period, might Devika Rani have been referring specifically to Hollywood’s status as a cosmopolitan model to strive for?⁷ *Motion Picture Magazine* later described Bombay Talkies as “designed on the plan of the most advanced studios of Europe and America.”⁸

³ Anonymous Hollywood producer writing to the ICC. *ICCE*, Vol. 4, 328.

⁴ “Indian Hollywood in Bombay: Plans completed,” *Times of India*, 5 June 1933.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The term ‘Bollywood’ only became consolidated during the 1990s, but earlier examples of this mimetic form can be seen in the 1930s when, for example, the film industry in Calcutta, located at Tollygunge, was sometimes referred to as ‘Tollywood.’ See for example “Advertisement for Tollywood’s Social Hit, Mr. and Mrs Bombay,” *Bombay Chronicle*, 17 February 1937.

⁷ Refuting allegations of Hollywood’s insularity, the anonymous producer cited above, told the ICC about a Hollywood set that included “an Austrian director, a Canadian star, a Danish costume designer, and Irish set designer and a Bavarian who was superintending the mechanical effects. On the set with these star performers were an English actress, a former Hungarian hussar, a former Finnish cavalryman, a Chinese girl, a half caste Filipino girl, a Hawaiian dancer and the whole ensemble was being photographed by two cameramen, one a Dane and the other a Sicilian.” *ICCE*, Vol. 4, 328.

⁸ “Bombay Talkies: The Studio that revolutionised the Indian motion picture world and the men behind it,” *The Motion Picture Magazine*, October 1937, 10-12.

Nevertheless, from the experiences of Rai and Devika Rani at Ufa, and the presence of German filmmakers, Bombay Talkies carried a strongly German influence.

Accompanied by Sir Richard Temple, Rai and Devika Rani had arrived in Bombay on the 4th of December 1933.⁹ They brought with them a copy of *Karma* which they planned to release in India in early 1934.¹⁰ They were welcomed at the pier by Rai Sahib Chuni Lall as well as “friends and admirers from Bombay and from distant parts of the country [and] many representatives of the press.”¹¹ Sarojini Naidu greeted them at the Taj Mahal Hotel, before they went to meet Devika Rani’s great uncle, Rabindranath Tagore, and later to spend the evening with Sir Chimanlal H. Setalvad. This social constellation illustrates the ongoing shift that had been taking place since the ICC had engaged with Phalke, Rai and others, pulling the medium of the film away from what Bhaumik calls the “demimonde of Indian cultural life,” shifting it towards recognition of its potential as an endeavour worthy of respect.¹² There were two stages in this process. In the first place, by adopting a rhetoric that emphasised their social status, educational achievements and physical beauty, the image of the star was being consciously developed around Devika Rani, much as it had been around Seeta Devi.¹³ Secondly, the studio the Rais were establishing would be positioned within a social nexus whose members included some of the elite of Indian, British and German society, illustrating the multiplicity of bonds that linked Rai and Devika Rani, Tagore and Sarojini Naidu to both Germany and Britain.¹⁴ Bhaumik proposes that it was “the educated young

⁹ “Arrival of ‘Victoria’,” *Times of India*, 5 December 1933.

¹⁰ *Karma* was released in Delhi on 5 February 1934. “Command Show of ‘Karma’: Viceroy honours Indian talkies producers,” *Times of India*, 7 February 1934.

¹¹ *Varieties Weekly*, 16 December 1933, 2-3; Rai Sahib Chuni Lall was appointed a director of Bombay Talkies in August 1934.

¹² Bhaumik, “The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936,” 1.

¹³ Other Indian studios also emphasised the educational achievements of their stars. Majumdar, *Wanted cultured ladies only!*, 61; nevertheless, this was not universally praised: an earlier article in *Filmland* had berated the “craze for artistes with university education [as] indefensible.” “Editorial notes,” *Filmland* 2, no 53, (1931).

¹⁴ Sarojini Naidu was an Indian poet, freedom activist, feminist and eventually, the first woman to become President of the Indian National Congress. She had studied in London and knew Rai. Her

who ultimately made the cinema acceptably respectable.”¹⁵ In the case of Bombay Talkies, however, this was consolidated by the gravitas of an older, respected cadre of individuals who were about to take up positions as directors of Rai’s new company.

The share proposal listed the eight men who would sit on the board of directors: all Indians, they included three people who held knighthoods from the British establishment, as well as senior representatives of the commercial and business world.¹⁶ The social bonds between the Rais, Sir Richard Temple and Lord Brabourne, the Governor of Bombay, are hinted at from meetings that took place earlier in 1934; from visits by the Governor to the studio’s sets at Malad, as well as the presence of the Rais at society dinners hosted by the Governor.¹⁷

The company was floated on a wave of public confidence, applications for shares poured in from all parts of India, the necessary capital was subscribed in next to no time.¹⁸

The aura of respectability framing Bombay Talkies would come to be revered by employees and an attraction for shareholders.¹⁹ There was arguably another effect, however, and that was to deflect the attention of the Censor from some of the more contentious socio-political messages, such as the covert thread of nationalism that suffused the 1936 film, *Janma Bhoomi*, discussed in the following chapter.

sister, Mrs Rajam, acted in *Light of Asia*, *ICCE*, Vol. 1, 218.; Mrs Naidu’s son, Dr. M. Jaya Surya, married a German woman, “Mrs Naidu’s son weds,” *Times of India*, 25 June 1935.

¹⁵ Bhaumik, “The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936,” 1.

¹⁶ Sir Phiroze Sethna, Sir Cowasji Jehangir and Sir Chimanlal H. Setalvad; F. H. Sidhwa was an officer of the Cinema Association of India; Jamnadas Morarjee was president of the Bombay Bullion Exchange; and Chunilal B. Mehta was an official in the Rotary Club of Bombay.

¹⁷ Temple met the Governor of Bombay with Rai and Sir Chimanlal Setalvad in May 1934. “Social & Personal,” *Times of India*, 22 May 1934; “Bombay Talkies Studios: Governor’s Visit,” *Times of India*, 17 May 1935; “Photo Standalone 2,” *Times of India*, 21 May 1935; “Social & Personal,” *Times of India*, 9 February 1934.

¹⁸ “Bombay Talkies: The Studio that revolutionised the Indian Motion Picture World and the Men Behind It,” *The Motion Picture Magazine*, October 1937: 10-12.

¹⁹ “To belong to Bombay Talkies in those days itself was something of an achievement. Like being in the Congress party today. Its board of directors was made up of eminent persons and it had a social status.” Dilip Kumar, “Those were my formative years,” *Screen*, 5 October 1984.

The social positioning of the new studio was also intended to signal to high caste women – and their families – that the film industry could be a suitable place of work for women.²⁰ This was an aspiration that would be strongly tested when the first production, *Jawani-ki-hawa*, upset the Parsi community.²¹ One critic described the screen as unsuitable for women claiming that it was: “more mercenary than honourable [...] more flighty than steady [...] more artificial than natural [...] more degrading than elevating,” a criticism that ran counter to Rai’s own vision.²² Two Parsi sisters, Korshed Minocher Homji and Maneck Minocher Homji, were involved in the production of this first film and, when the studio refused to agree to demands from the Parsi community to re-shoot scenes to exclude the sisters, three of the Parsi board members resigned.²³

Rai’s choice of Bombay rather than Calcutta may have been influenced by several factors, including access to finance, flatter audience demographics and regional cultural preferences. Mahadevan points out that Bombay had a longer history of commercial activity than Calcutta, which suffered from a lack of financial backing.²⁴ Gooptu proposes that this lack of capitalisation was a contributory factor in the slightly delayed arrival of sound cinema in Bengal; but also because “Bombay cinema’s consolidated networks of distribution and production at the end of the 1920s had largely outstripped Calcutta.”²⁵ Mahadevan proposes that

²⁰ For example, Rai had to make a direct appeal to the husband of Renuka Devi (Begum Khurshid Mirza) to allow her to work at Bombay Talkies. See Begum Khurshid Mirza, *A woman of substance : the memoirs of Begum Khurshid Mirza, 1918-1989* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2005).

²¹ Korshed Minocher Homji (later Saraswati Devi) was employed as music director and (Maneck Minocher Homji (later Chandraprabha) became an actor. The response to their presence on and behind the screen was negative and Bombay Talkies was accused of having “deeply hurt the Parsi community ... [in] a display ... injurious and dangerous to the morality of the females of the community”; In an interview in 1980, Saraswati Devi revealed that their involvement led to death threats and an attempt at abduction that was only foiled when Rai referred to her as Devika Rani. Shashikant Kinikar, “Lasting Lady, Khurshid-Saraswati,” *Cinema Vision* 2, no. 2 (1980): 70-72.

²² B. F. Barucha, “Why Parsis are opposed to inter-communal marriage, and appearance of girls on screen or stage,” *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 September 1935.

²³ “Screen not for Parsi women,” *The Times of India*, 5 September 1935.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 284; 287.

²⁵ Gooptu, “An Alternative Imaginary,” 41; 79.

“film entrepreneurs were in a much more advantageous situation in Bombay [which] also possessed a large industrial working class, unlike Calcutta.”²⁶ Bhaumik lends weight to this theory, arguing that:

Bombay cinema was not a significant marker of class difference. The educated youth did not necessarily scoff at Bombay cinema or cinema derived from the Parsi theatre as lower class entertainment, as they did in Calcutta.²⁷

Bhaumik also suggests that Bombay had become an option for those Bengalis who preferred to avoid the hegemony of Madan. Madan’s influence was greatly reduced by 1933, however; according to Gooptu, it was relegated to the level of “bad” cinema in the discourse of the educated Bengali, for whom the literary productions of New Theatres, such as Chattopadhyay’s *Devdas*, held greater attraction.²⁸ Returning to the *Evidence* of the ICC, it is clear from the interviews that Bombay and Calcutta were culturally distinct; their films were often not mutually successful and were sometimes prey to the particular sensitivities of regional censors.²⁹

F. E. Dinshaw’s offer of his twenty-one acre estate and mansion at Malad for the siting of the new studio would have been an obvious attraction; although this offer may have come after Rai had made his decision. This thesis suggests additional factors underpinned Rai’s choice of Bombay.³⁰ The first is that Rai wished to make a distinction between the literary productions favoured by Calcutta’s filmmakers. The films to be produced by Bombay Talkies, as well as auxiliary productions such as newsreels and advertisements, would need to turn a profit for shareholders by having broader appeal. The second is that Rai might have envisaged that Bombay’s geographical position could function as a pivot between the collection of regional

²⁶ Mahadevan, “The Traffic in Technologies,” 42.

²⁷ Bhaumik, “The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936,” 141.

²⁸ Bhaumik, “The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936,” 120; Gooptu, “An Alternative Imaginary,” 63.

²⁹ For example, see *ICCE, Vol. 1*, 169; 338.

³⁰ By comparison, Prabhat’s Prabhat Nagar in Poona extended only to 12 acres. “Poona’s New Film City: Some of the Unique Features Possessed by India’s Largest Studio,” *Times of India*, 18 October 1934.

Indian film industries on the one hand and those of Europe and Hollywood on the other. By 1934, Rai had gained the majority of his experience abroad and, as is clear from the share proposal, he clearly still hoped that his films might appeal to international markets:

The Company has been formed for the purposes [...] of undertaking the production and exploitation in India and abroad of talking films of various types ... entertainment, educational, interest, news and advertising.³¹

Arguably it was Rai's international outlook that provided the strongest impetus shaping the studio's early development.

4.2.1 Establishing the studio: people, functions and structure

All communities are represented in Bombay Talkies, thus imparting to it the character of a national institution in the best sense of the term.³²

Within a short period, Bombay Talkies emerged as a confluent, cosmopolitan space drawing people together from regions within India, as well as transnationally, and representing a broad spectrum of communities, cultures and languages, all working together to produce films in what was being promoted as the unifying medium of Hindi/Hindustani. By the end of 1935, the studio had grown rapidly to "a staff of more than 400 artistes and technicians."³³ To achieve this, Rai toured India, principally searching for candidates who were at least matriculates.³⁴

The share proposal avoids mention of non-Indian involvement. This may have been a deliberate strategy to promote the Rais' venture as a purely Indian endeavour to attract interest from Indian shareholders and to pre-empt the recurrence of the earlier criticisms Rai had encountered; but it might also indicate that in August 1934, Rai had not yet decided to employ the Germans.

³¹ "The Bombay Talkies, Limited," *Times of India*, 9 August 1934.

³² "Bombay Talkies," *The Motion Picture Magazine*, October 1937: 10-12.

³³ "The Romance of Bombay Talkies," *Screen*, 28 September 1984.

³⁴ "Situations Vacant," *Times of India*, 14 January 1935.

The city [...] was agog with the news that as many as five foreigners would be handling the key departments of production.³⁵

The four Germans and one Briton would each be responsible for a technical function.³⁶ Osten became the chief director, as he had once been at Emelka. Wirsching was responsible for cinematography; Zolle managed the processing laboratory; Leonard Hartley oversaw the sound recording on Visatone and Karl von Spreti was appointed film architect with responsibility for set design.³⁷ In all five cases, the intention was that they would train Indian colleagues who would eventually succeed them, a promise that Rai allegedly made to Pal.³⁸ According to Manto, Rai wanted Bombay Talkies “to resemble a dignified academic institution.”³⁹ Leela Chitnis later described the training they received as one of the studio’s attractions for candidates:

Graduates from universities were offered various positions in Bombay Talkies with the assurance of being trained by foreigners as well as Indian experts in different sections of movie production.⁴⁰

³⁵ “The Romance of Bombay Talkies,” *Screen*, 28 September 1984.

³⁶ Paul Perry, an American cinematographer who travelled the world for three years recalled: “I was surprised to see so much activity in motion picture production [...] the most important studios which I either worked in or visited in Bombay were the Bombay Talkies. All of the heads of all departments were Germans, directors, cameramen, soundmen, laboratory men, art directors, etc.” Paul Perry, “God’s gift of colour sense to the world,” *The International Photographer*, February 1937, accessed 1 December 2015.
<http://www.archive.org/stream/internationalpho09holl#page/n57/mode/2up>

³⁷ With regard to sound recording, Hartley is only credited on the studio’s first film, *Jawani-ki-hawa*, suggesting that he may have returned to Britain immediately afterwards leaving Sashadhar Mukerji and Savak Vacha in charge.

³⁸ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 234.

³⁹ Manto, *Stars from another sky*, 186.

⁴⁰ Leela Chitnis, “The glory that was Bombay Talkies,” *Screen*, 5 October 1984.

Incidentally, Savak Vacha introduced a further foreigner to the studio's workforce in the person of his French wife who, as Madame Andrée, is credited with responsibility for makeup on five films.⁴¹

Descriptions of the manner in which Bombay Talkies was organised suggest a model similar to many of those in the West. Ashok Kumar later said that Bombay Talkies had "a library, a dispensary, a laboratory, a canteen run by the famous Brandons and acres of open space and a beautiful garden."⁴² The Governor of Bombay and his wife were given a tour of the new studio on 16 May 1935, following which an article in the *Times of India* enthused about "the most up-to-date cinematograph studios in India" that were designed "on a systematic and careful plan."⁴³ The stress on modernity, mobility, speed and efficiency of appliances and apparatus was perhaps nowhere clearer than the effort to control the natural resources of air and water and noise, all active enemies in the sensitive processes of film production. Bombay Talkies was not simply a film producing venture; the studio was intended as a marker of modernity, adding to the narrative that was to distinguish it from many of its peers. Notwithstanding its modernity, however, although Bombay Talkies might employ foreign workers and prefer foreign technology for the "complicated machines for intricate purposes," it also stressed that "what apparatus could be constructed in this country such as development and drying plant has been produced by Indian labour."⁴⁴

Who was responsible for this planning? Osten, who had arrived in February 1935, later implied that it was his influence:

Auch in Indien hatte ich mit großem Erfolg das neue Unternehmen nach deutschem Muster aufgebaut, immer bedacht deutsche Maschinen und sonstige deutsche Erzeugnisse einzuführen, was mir auch gelang. (...in India I was also highly successful in

⁴¹ Debashree Mukherjee, "Notes to Achhut Kanya," (blog) accessed 14 November 2014. <https://indiancine.ma>

⁴² Dilip Kumar, "Those were my formative years," *Screen*, 5 October 1984.

⁴³ "Bombay Talkies Studios: Governor's Visit," *Times of India*, 17 May 1935.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

developing the organisation according to a German model, always mindful to introduce German technology and products, in which I was successful.)⁴⁵

The Rais' experience at Ufa (and potentially at Stoll Studios) must also be considered as an influence on how the studio was designed. Whatever Osten's claims, Rai was reported as "[buying] the best equipment available"⁴⁶ Even Sir Richard Temple, who later travelled to America to observe "American film methods and practices" in Hollywood, may have returned with further ideas for Bombay Talkies, although what these might have been was not discovered by the research.⁴⁷ Whatever influences this transcultural exchange of ideas and personnel may have brought to the shape of the studio, however, it was clearly Rai who took the final decisions.

4.2.2 Rai: the producer as auteur?

Rai's vision of the ideal film studio was inevitably shaped by his personal experiences working in foreign studios. With its shareholders, foreign experts and social endorsements, Bombay Talkies represented a new model film studio, producing commercial cinema in Hindi that was aimed at a pan-Indian market. Managed by Rai as a business, efficiency, punctuality and technical quality were lauded. The studio was also noted for its egalitarian working style and inclusivity:

The unit [at Malad] is entirely self-contained and in and around the studio has developed a complete film colony, the members of which live, eat, work and play together in conditions of corporate existence such as one might expect to find in a university or college but hardly in a work-a-day business organisation.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Osten, "Lebenslauf", BAL PKJ0079.

⁴⁶ "Modern cameras, the latest sound recording apparatus, a triple set of automatic film developing and printing machines, editing tables, several batteries of high-powered arcs, and the only set in India of the newly invented playback apparatus." "The Romance of Bombay Talkies," *Screen*, 28 September 1984; in one of the photographs belonging to the Wirsching family, Josef is seen operating a French camera, possibly the Parvo 35mm, a camera favoured by Eisenstein, and also used by Riefenstahl on *Triumph des Willens* in 1936.

⁴⁷ "Bombay Pictures Executive studies Hollywood Methods," *The Film Daily*, 13 October 1936.

⁴⁸ "Bombay Talkies," *The Motion Picture Magazine*, October 1937: 10-12.

Because it produced feature films in Hindi only, Rai's insistence on simple dialogue and precise enunciation led to the studio evolving its unique style of onscreen performance.⁴⁹ With its cohort of foreign filmmakers; a leading lady who, having been educated abroad, exhibited foreign behaviours; these factors became its identifying characteristics, both as markers of quality, but sometimes as objects of parody. For example, as Majumdar points out, Prabhat's 1939 film, *Manoos/Aadmi*, contains a scene with two characters stumbling upon a film shoot of a song. At the time, this would have been seen as an obvious reference to Devika Rani and Ashok Kumar's rendition of *Main ban kī chīriya* in *Achhut Kanya*.⁵⁰ In common with other studios, Bombay Talkies was subject to the mordant wit of Baburao Patel, the editor of *Film India* who, occasionally mocking the studio's German ties and commercial strategy, introduced a touch of irony into a discourse that offered enthusiastic praise.⁵¹

Osten was the perfect director for Rai: highly experienced, technically competent and definitively non-auteurial, characteristics that enabled Rai himself to emerge as the auteur, with ultimate control over all aspects of production. According to Ashok Kumar, Rai brooked no dissent and used to "scold and shout a lot;" another report suggested that he slapped Vacha, causing temporary deafness.⁵² Rai apparently forbade changes once the script had been finalised, suggesting that Osten had little say in this area. Nevertheless, the high degree of control exercised by Rai raises the question whether his intransigency might have sometimes marred the artistry of the productions?⁵³ It is also possible that Rai's charismatic leadership, illustrated by his paternalistic management style, may eventually have been a factor in the studio's decline after his death in 1940.

⁴⁹ Although censorship records show that Bombay Talkies produced educational films such as *The Magic Word* in Gujarati and Marathi.

⁵⁰ For an extended discourse on this reference, see Majumdar, *Wanted cultured ladies only!* 88-89.

⁵¹ See for example, *Film India*, July 1935, 27; "Letter from K. V. N. Bangalore," *Film India*, December 1937, 17.

⁵² "The Romance of Bombay Talkies," *Screen*, 28 September 1984.

⁵³ "In Bombay Talkies, unlike New Theatres and Prabhat, the producer was the real film maker." V. P. Sathe, "One of its kind," *Screen*, 5 October 1984, 6.

Nevertheless, even though Rai is generally referred to as the ultimate arbiter in his role as producer, the very collaborative nature of filmmaking allows others to have some influence, however small, over the studio's development and aesthetics. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rai's experience with sound film consisted of his own productions of *Karma* and *Melody and Rhythm*, as well as the time he spent in Pommer's unit. Here he is likely to have observed production of von Sternberg's *Engel* and Wilhelm Thiele's 1930 trilingual production *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* (Three Good Friends). Such observation would have exposed him to the innovative ways sound could be used to progress the narrative. For example, a telephone scene in *Jeevan Naiya* (discussed below) has similarities with a scene in *Tankstelle*, from the actors jostling around the device, to the deliberate confusion of the dialogue. Osten's experience of making sound films, a transition he appears to have struggled with at times, is discussed in the following chapter.

Section 4.4 examines three Bombay Talkies' films for what they reveal about the mise-en-scène and the aesthetics of the soundscape. *Achhut Kanya* is considered for what it might reveal about the way in which sets were constructed and the spaces at Malad were used; *Jeevan Naiya* and *Kangan* are examined to explore how the studio changed the way it used sound.

4.2.3 Wilhelm Zolle: Laboratory Technician

There is an up-to-date laboratory for the development, fixing, drying, cutting and synchronisation of films. No expense has been spared to ensure efficiency, no money has been wasted on lavishness [...]...the complicated machines for intricate purposes have been imported [...] water has to be filtered and cleansed [...] the air throughout the laboratory has to be carefully filtered.⁵⁴

The invisibility of the work of the laboratory technician is exaggerated further because work took place during the night so that the rushes could be shown to Rai by 08:30 the following morning.⁵⁵ Because Zolle's own voice appears to be absent from the archives, what is known arises obliquely through the references of others:

⁵⁴ "Bombay Talkies Studios: Governor's Visit," *Times of India*, 17 May 1935.

⁵⁵ R. D. Mathur, "The Film Patriarch," *Screen*, 28 September 1984.

letters from Karl von Spreti; the personal recollections of Bombay Talkies' personnel; India Office records of internment. Zolle's presence at the studio is never explicitly stated and it is only from the song booklets that the laboratory's existence is inferred in the statement that films were "produced and processed at The Bombay Talkies' Studios, Malad." Why was this? The booklet for *Jawani-ki-hawa* provides the names of twenty-one technicians and thirty-seven actors, the majority of whom had minimal roles, yet it neglects to name the person in charge of the laboratory.

A letter from von Spreti to the Reichsfachschaftfilm (RFK) in Berlin advised that Zolle had already been working at another (unnamed) studio in Bombay for at least a year by the time he was employed by Rai to run the laboratory at Bombay Talkies.⁵⁶ Zolle's motive for travelling to India in 1932, and the name of the studio he was originally working for, could not be established. A listing was found for Zolle when he was formally admitted to the Society of Motion Picture Engineers.⁵⁷ On internment, the *Bombay Chronicle* referred to him as "Laboratory Incharge Zolle;" however, these records list his occupation as "merchant."⁵⁸ Josef's grandson, Georg Wirsching, has added a little more information: Zolle remained in internment in India until after the war, subsequently emigrating to America with his Indian wife, where he set up his own business hiring out cinema equipment to various Hollywood film studios.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ The purpose of von Spreti's letter was to ask for arrangements to be made for Zolle to join the RFK; Wirsching would act as guarantor. Letter from von Spreti to Rath, 13 November 1936, BAL RKJ0096, 318-319.

⁵⁷ "Society announcements," *Journal of the Society and Motion Picture Engineers* 4, 467.

⁵⁸ "Echoes of War in local studios," *Bombay Chronicle*, 6 September 1939; BL IOR/L/PJ/8/31 "Nominal rolls of internees and parolees in India," document 15; there is also a request from Zolle that the German government be informed of his internment, "Nominal rolls and monthly returns of internees and parolees in India; supply of information concerning internees," BL IOR/L/PJ/8/32, 283.

⁵⁹ In correspondence with the author, 24 September 2015.

Little is known about Zolle's work at the studio, apart from references to Ashok Kumar's presence in the laboratory.⁶⁰ *Film India's* reviews included comments about laboratory and editing work, and in November 1938, the magazine ran an article explaining the Factories Act that had recently been introduced in Britain, complaining that "film laboratories in India with the exception of a few, are no better than birth homes of disease and ill-health."⁶¹ Several studios *were* criticised for poor work in the laboratory, but Bombay Talkies consistently received satisfactory comments. If this means that Bombay Talkies was one of the exceptions, one might speculate that Zolle's management of the laboratory was at least satisfactory.

4.3 The creative collage of the mise-en-scène

A 1941 Ufa guide by Hans Traub summarised the role of film architect:

Die erste Bildformung erfährt der Film durch den Filmbildner (Filmarchitekt). Er schafft den Raum für das Bild, das Spiel und die Bewegung des Films ... der Filmbildner muss aufs engste mit dem Kameramann zusammenarbeiten. (It is the film architect who first gives the film a shape. He makes the space for the image, the action and the film's flow ... the film architect must work closely with the cameraman.)⁶²

Bergfelder, Harris and Street, in their examination of European set design in the 1930s, point to this collaborative nature with respect to industrial and artistic practices during the 1930s.⁶³ Given the variety of skills engaged in the design and construction of film sets, it is perhaps not surprising that the function is referred to under multiple names, encompassing a shifting range of activities that differs from one film industry to another, as well as between studios within industries. On the matter of professional background, Tashiro argues for the importance of a

⁶⁰ "Ashok Kumar: an actor to inspire," *Screen*, 28 September 1982, 22;.

⁶¹ "The new Factories Act in England," *Film India* 4, November 1938, 13.

⁶² Traub, *Die Ufa-Lehrschau*, 3:26.

⁶³ Bergfelder, Harris and Street, *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination*, 31.

professional grounding in art or architecture.⁶⁴ Ward cites a film architect who worked on *Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari*, who claimed that the profession of film architect came about from the sets for the film.⁶⁵ Horak, who has written extensively about the film industry in Munich, argues that “art direction was an important criteria of value in an expanding film market;” given earlier failures in this area, in 1918, Emelka included an artist, Ludwig von Wich, and an architect, Prof. Theodor Fischer, to its cultural advisory board.⁶⁶ Bergfelder et al point to the clash between painting and architecture in early German set design, arguing that it was in Britain that architecture and film were most closely linked.⁶⁷ Ede, meanwhile, argues that art direction in Britain was “treated very much as an afterthought,” whereas in Germany it was taken more seriously, a factor he suggests attracted others to train there.⁶⁸ Early film reviews in Germany tended to focus not only on the film stars, but also on the design of the mise-en-scène, and that this was often reflected in the films’ promotional material.⁶⁹ In another German article, the term film architekt was equated with the American term art director in an early interview with Victor Sjöström.⁷⁰

From the perspective of Indian film history, there has been little in-depth analysis of the nature of set design during the early period of cinema. This lack of

⁶⁴ Charles Tashiro, *Pretty pictures: production design and the history film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 3.

⁶⁵ Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: urban visual culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 143. *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, directed by Robert Wiene, (Decla-Film Ges., 1920).

⁶⁶ The idea of a film’s set design becoming passé is shown by Horak who relates Peter Ostermayr’s experience when the decor in his first feature film in 1910, *Die Wahrheit*, was considered too outmoded for exhibitors in Berlin to want to buy his film. Horak, “Munich’s First Fiction Feature: *Die Wahrheit*,” 88–89; Announcement of Emelka’s establishment: *Neue Kino Rundschau*, 29 June 1918, 60.

⁶⁷ Bergfelder, Harris and Street, *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination*, 46; 93.

⁶⁸ Ede, *British Film Design*, 27, 22.

⁶⁹ Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine*, 15.

⁷⁰ See for example: “Erstklass. bekannter und eingef. Filmarchitekt [Rudolf Mosse] nimmt Schüler an.” “Film-Architekt,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, 23 April 1921; “Arbeitsweise und Mentalität in Filmamerika: ein Interview mit Victor Sjöström,” *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 6 July 1924.

attention may be partly attributable to the absence of archival material, but it also suggests that less importance was attached to the function during the early stages of cinema. Sharmista Roy writes: “For years a film’s director would merely indicate his requirements [to the art director] by drawing a rough design with a stick on the ground.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, by 1934 a newspaper article reported that Prabhat Studios employed “more than seventy workers” who were responsible for “scenery, property, posters and all the various artistic requirements for film production,” indicating the growing industrialisation of the function.⁷² It is tempting to speculate that this structure might have been influenced by Prabhat’s leading director, V. Shantaram, who had also spent time at Ufa. Dwyer and Patel discuss the *mise-en-scène* of early films in India, including the design of related ephemera of posters and song books in their study.⁷³ Rajadhyaksha comments on individual art directors such as Vishnupant Damle and Baburao Painter and mentions von Spreti as Bombay Talkies’ set designer, but without further discussion.⁷⁴ Dwyer and Patel have also explored the related ephemera of publicity brochures and posters.⁷⁵

Bombay Talkies used the designation Film Architect for Karl von Spreti and subsequently Y. E. Hate; this set it apart from other major Indian studios that were using the more Anglophone term, Art Director.⁷⁶ The film credits and song booklets for Bombay Talkies’ films also highlight the shifting range of activities that contribute to the composition of the *mise-en-scène* and, correspondingly, the challenges in determining who might have had overall responsibility. For example, the song booklet for *Jawani-ki-Hawa* lists von Spreti as film architect and J. K. Roy

⁷¹ Sharmista Roy, “Art Direction: Sets, Reality, and Grandeur,” in *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*, 222.

⁷² “Poona’s New Film City: Some of the Unique Features Possessed by India’s Largest Studio,” *Times of India*, 18 October 1934.

⁷³ Dwyer and Patel, *Cinema India*.

⁷⁴ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*; *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*.

⁷⁵ Dwyer and Patel, *Cinema India*.

⁷⁶ For example, Prabhat’s 1932, *Ayodhyecha Raja*, credits S. Fatelal for art direction.

as art director. How this combination came about and who Roy was, could not be determined; Roy's designation only appears in connection with this first film. *Savitri's* song booklet credits Y. K. Shukla as art *supervisor*, another isolated term that appears only once. On the film credits, however, the term 'settings' is generally in use. Were different terms used for distributors and audiences?⁷⁷ Produced in 1937, *Savitri* was Bombay Talkies' only attempt at a mythological film and, given the culturally specific nature of the subject, it is likely that Shukla was responsible for advising von Spreti.⁷⁸

4.3.1 Karl von Spreti: Film Architect

Karl Graf von Spreti is better known to historians for his involvement in post-war German politics; and for a diplomatic career that took him to Luxembourg, Cuba, Jordan and the Dominican Republic, before he was taken hostage and murdered in Guatemala in 1970.⁷⁹ Overshadowed by his work as a politician and diplomat, von Spreti's role as film architect is barely remembered in India and is unrecognised in Germany, yet he regularly received acclaim for the films he worked on with Rai. This section asks why he chose to work as a film architect in India; it considers what he had been doing before arriving in India; and it explores how his professional training may have influenced not only the design of the film sets, but the shape of the site at Malad.

Whether or not it was a factor in his recruitment to Bombay Talkies, von Spreti fitted Rai's vision of bringing together a socially elite, highly educated workforce. Their backgrounds had similarities: hailing from an aristocratic German family with a lineage that could be traced back several centuries, von Spreti was born at

⁷⁷ German films tended to differentiate between the title on the film credits (Bauten) and the titles used in production (Film Architekt).

⁷⁸ [Rai] explained that his aim was to appeal to the common factor in all classes of people - i.e. to the average humanity. [He] thinks that the protean variety of modern Indian life would provide a better scope for Indian films than the hackney themes of Indian mythology. "Himansu Rai thinks," *Bombay Chronicle*, 24 March 1934.

⁷⁹ On April 5th 1970 Karl von Spreti was murdered by left-wing guerrillas. He had been taken hostage on 31 March 1970 in what was the third diplomatic kidnapping that month. "Bonn envoy kidnapped in Guatemala" *Times* (London), 1 April 1970; "Murder of an Ambassador," *Times* (London), 7 April 1970.

Schloß Kapfing, in a small village to the north east of Munich, on 21 May 1907.⁸⁰ According to Zedler, von Spreti avoided the traditional career path for an aristocrat of Jurisprudence, choosing instead to study architecture.⁸¹ Although there is no suggestion that this choice caused conflict with his family, it provides an incidental comparison with Rai and Ashok Kumar, both of whom were also originally destined for the legal profession.⁸²

Von Spreti left scant information about his work as a film architect; and, although he occasionally referred to his time in India, he later re-configured this experience as preparation for his political and diplomatic career.⁸³ Might he have later considered his foray into the world of film production to be a disadvantage for his political ambitions? The suggestion that he worked in India with Richard Eichberg, a narrative that was introduced into his obituary, is almost certainly incorrect.⁸⁴ Information about von Spreti's involvement at Emelka can be traced through the bureaucracy of the Third Reich. The files held at the Bundesarchiv contain at least 58 items of correspondence between Karl von Spreti and various organs of the National Socialist regime; considerably more than for Osten and Wirsching combined, a factor that is partially explained by von Spreti's

⁸⁰ Zedler, *Karl Graf von Spreti*, 17.

⁸¹ Ibid., 26.

⁸² "It had been a tradition for generations in our family that the oldest son should study law." Rai, "The Light of Asia," 753.; Valicha, *Dadamoni*, 2.

⁸³ "Die dreijährige Aufenthalt in Indien [...] habe ich ebenso immer als politische Auslandschulung angesehen." PA AA, Personalakt Karl von Spreti, Band I, 57937, reference in Zedler, 35.

⁸⁴ Von Spreti's death was reported on the front pages in India, and briefly mentioned his connections with India: "Count Karl Von Spreti had spent three years in India early in his life designing film sets for two German films [...] he was in India during the pre-war period to design film sets for the German films *The Indian Sepulchre* and *The Tiger of Eschnapur*. "Kidnapped Envoy murdered; Bonn retaliates," *Times of India*, 7 April 1970; Although von Spreti had worked in India for nearly three years between 1935 and 1937, he was actually designing the sets for ten Indian feature films as an employee of Himansu Rai's Bombay Talkies. No evidence was found to support von Spreti's involvement with either of the Eichberg films cited in the obituary and there is no mention of them in his later correspondence. Jörg Zedler's research also failed to connect von Spreti with either of Eichberg's films. Eichberg arrived in Bombay in January 1937 to film on location in India. "German films of India: troupe of artistes and cameramen arrive," *Times of India*, 15 January 1937; The Tobis Film Expedition included the cameramen Hans Schneeberger and Willy Meyer-Bergelt. Schneeberger also worked as a cameraman on *Der blaue Engel*; as discussed in chapter 3; Meyer-Bergelt remained in India and was interned there during the war.

appointment as *Abteilungsobmann*, NSBO representative for the film production unit of the industry in Munich.⁸⁵ These records provide insights into Karl von Spreti as a person, revealing an assuredness in dealing with Nazi officials, possibly a legacy of his aristocratic upbringing; he is precise and, at times, pedantic, appearing to derive satisfaction in composing long, detailed letters, raising queries that demanded comprehensive responses and exhorting consistency from officials.⁸⁶ But they also indicate some of the problems that arose within the German film industry once the National Socialists seized power, enabling further arguments to be made regarding the reasons why Osten, Wirsching and von Spreti might have chosen to leave Germany and take up work at Bombay Talkies.

Zedler writes that von Spreti began his architectural studies at the Technische Universität München in September 1930 where he completed seven semesters and graduated with a Foundation Diploma in Architecture in March 1933.⁸⁷ It is likely that he entered Emelka during 1932 in a capacity enabling him to put the theoretical training from his architectural studies at the University into practice.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ From his youth, von Spreti was politically engaged. Zedler writes that he described himself as *ganz rechtsstehend*, firmly on the right, but not a National Socialist; and he detects in him a shift by 1929 towards being a *Vernunftrepublikaner*, a pragmatic supporter of the Weimar Republic. *Karl Graf von Spreti*, 23–24. In common with many of his peers, and possibly on grounds of expediency after Hitler came to power, he joined a number of Nazi organisations during 1933, among them the SA and the Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation (NSBO), the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization that had replaced all trade unions as the only official representation for workers after 2 May 1933; this eventually became subsumed into the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF). See Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 456–462. It was with this latter organisation that von Spreti was actively involved in the position of *Abteilungsobmann*. Letter from von Spreti to Allwörden, 25 July 1933, BAL RKJ0096, 364–366; Making representations on behalf of his colleagues, von Spreti’s regular correspondence complained about delays caused by the bureaucratic process of proving ethnic eligibility; a position that left many trapped, unable to secure work in the film industry until they had collated the necessary documents to prove the ethnicity of their parents and grandparents. Ibid; Von Spreti himself only managed to supply all the necessary paperwork towards the end of 1934. Letter from von Spreti to Kontingentstelle, 18 October 1934, BAL RKJ0096, 356.

⁸⁶ For example: “[ich bitte] um baldige Antwort: Entweder Toleranz oder Nicht-Toleranz. Aber zuerst das eine und dann das andere machen Prinzipien nur zur Ironie. (I request a quick response: either tolerance or non-tolerance. But first the one, and then the other, turns principles into parody.)” Letter from von Spreti to Allwörden, 25 July 1933, BAL RKJ0096, 364–366.

⁸⁷ Zedler, *Karl Graf von Spreti*, 27.

⁸⁸ Why von Spreti chose film architecture is not clear; in one document, he simply states “[ich] wechselte dann zum Film über” (I moved across to film), BAL RKJ0096, 242.

Given that Emelka had among its cultural advisors Theodor Fischer, who was a professor of architecture at the same university, this suggests a well established route for students.

It was not unusual for architects to join the film industry. For example, Lucia Steinmetz, said that the role of film architect gave her the opportunity “meine Luftrahmen zum Spiel [realisieren]” (to build castles in the air).⁸⁹ For her, this contrasted with the more mundane work of an architect:

Der Architekt ist ja leider das Stiefkind unter den bildenden Künstlern ... abhängig, unfrei ... daher seine Zuflucht zum Film, zur Möglichkeit des Unmöglichen, zur Kulisse an Stelle des positiven Materials. (The architect is the poor relation among the fine artists ... dependent, shackled ... hence this escape to film, to the possibility of the impossible, to scenery rather than solid matter.)⁹⁰

Transferring to film architecture was not to be understood as an easy option, however, and the industry demanded people with genuine skill, rather than those who were unable to find work elsewhere.⁹¹

When von Spreti applied to join the RFK in 1933, he listed five films on which he claimed to have worked in a supporting role, as well as two films he describes as “selbstgebaut” implying that by this stage he had sole responsibility for set design.⁹² *Der Schützenkönig*, directed by Franz Seitz, is the earliest film von Spreti lists in this application, a film that was first shown in September 1932.⁹³ Of interest to the current project are the names of the specialist who von Spreti worked with at Emelka. He names four referees, of whom the first three were art directors.

⁸⁹ “Architekt und Film,” *Die Filmwelt*, 1921, 4-5.

⁹⁰ Lucia Steinmetz, “Architekt und Film,” *Die Filmwelt*, 1921, 4-5.

⁹¹ “die Filmindustrie kann Architekten, die keine Beschäftigung finden, auch nicht brauchen, sondern sie verlangt gerade hervorragend tüchtige Architekten.” (The film industry also has no use for architects who are unable to find work, indeed it demands exemplary architects.) “Der Architekt im Film,” *Berliner Volkszeitung*, 19 December 1922.

⁹² “Personalbogen,” BAL RKJ0096, 382.

⁹³ Ibid.

These were the brothers Willy and Ludwig Reiber who had been working with Emelka and its successor, Bavaria Film, and had worked with each of the three Ostermayr Brothers (Franz, Peter and Othmar) designing sets at Geiseltasteig.⁹⁴ As discussed in chapter 2, the Reibers were also responsible for designing the promotional sets for *Light of Asia's* premiere in Munich in 1925, a marketing practice which *Lichtbildbühne* attributed to Hollywood.⁹⁵ Von Spreti also refers to 'Vollbrecht' without providing a first name. This is probably Karl Vollbrecht, a renowned film architect who had worked on Lang's *Metropolis* and others.⁹⁶ During 1933, Vollbrecht was working on *Der Tunnel* for Bavaria Film production, and the contact to von Spreti may have come about at this stage.⁹⁷ The name of a fourth referee is not legible; it may have been someone from the University, or it may have been a personal referee.⁹⁸

Other possible influences during von Spreti's work at Geiseltasteig included several prominent directors, cinematographers and film architects, several of whom were later forced to emigrate. Max Ophüls was directing *Die verkaufte Braut* (The bartered bride) in 1932, a film on which Wirsching was working as a cameraman; and Karl Grune was directing *Das gelbe Haus des King-Fu* (The yellow house of King-Fu) in 1931. The cinematographers Eugen Schüfftan, inventor of the eponymous process, and Otto Kanturek, were also working at Geiseltasteig.⁹⁹ Of

⁹⁴ "Weltreise um den Film," *Filmland*, 28 April 1925.

⁹⁵ "Die Leuchte Asiens," *Lichtbildbühne* 213 (1925): 38.

⁹⁶ Vollbrecht worked with Lang on *Metropolis*, *M*, and *Das Testament des Dr Mabuse*.

⁹⁷ *Der Tunnel*, directed by Kurt Bernhardt, (Bavaria Film AG, 1933); Von Spreti raised concerns regarding the engagement of 'non-Aryans' on the dual-language production of *Der Tunnel*; and he complained about the insistence of the Employment Office in Munich that the film industry recruit Stormtroopers. The Bavaria Film production of *Der Tunnel* was directed by Kurt Bernhardt and partly designed by Heinz Fenchel, both of whom were now designated as 'non-Aryans' and for whom special permission had been granted for their work on this film; regarding the attempt at forced engagement of SA members, von Spreti, who had himself joined the SA on 1 July 1933, argued that "In my opinion it is not right that the director or producer of a film should be told who to engage." Letter from von Spreti to Allwörden, 7 August 1933, BAL RKJ0096, 370-372.

⁹⁸ Kuaache/Knaache/Kmaache?

⁹⁹ With the process that takes his name, Schüfftan provides one of many examples of the close collaboration between film architecture and cinematography. See for example, Williams, "Tricks of

the film architects involved with Emelka during this period, Ernö Metzner, Hans Jacoby and Julius von Barsody may also have influenced von Spreti's work. No further record could be found of any films that von Spreti may have worked on after July 1933 and a letter to the RFK dated 15 January 1934, suggests that employment opportunities for film architects were becoming limited, a factor that may have attracted him to the work at Bombay Talkies.¹⁰⁰ Zedler discusses how von Spreti's move to Bombay Talkies might have come about, suggesting that the contact possibly came through Osten; speculating whether von Spreti might have taken this decision for political reasons.¹⁰¹ Although Osten was no longer working at Emelka after 1926, von Spreti may have come into contact with Wirsching and through him with Osten.

Karl von Spreti left Germany for Bombay in March 1935, where he had been given a contract for three years to work as film architect at Bombay Talkies.¹⁰² A letter from Bombay Talkies described him as "Film Architect [...] in charge of the Setting Department."¹⁰³ In a rare reference to his work in India, von Spreti told his family "die Arbeit sei viel und reichlich aufregend" (There is plenty of work and it is quite exciting).¹⁰⁴ Von Spreti had another role for which he has not so far been accredited, however, and this was that he would work as an architect in addition to designing sets:

the Light: A Study of the Cinematographic Style of the Émigré Cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan."; Bergfelder and Cargnelli, *Destination London*; Gough-Yates, "The European film maker in exile in Britain, 1933-1945."

¹⁰⁰ In January 1934 he wrote again, this time expressing concern that two film architects from Berlin were being recruited to work on a film that was being produced at Geiseltal, "*ohne Zuziehung eines Münchener Architekten*." This alleged failure to engage an architect from Munich possibly had a direct implication for his own ability to find work in this field; but might it also suggest that the tensions between the rival film industries were re-surfacing as work was becoming scarce? The film von Spreti complained about was possibly *Klein Dorrit*, designed by Erich Zander and Willi Depenau. *Klein Dorrit*, directed by Carl Lamac, (Ondra-Lamac-Film, Bavaria Film, 1934). Letter from von Spreti to Auen, 15 January 1934, BAL RKJ0096, 350, 352.

¹⁰¹ Zedler, *Karl Graf von Spreti*, 27.

¹⁰² Letter from Bombay Talkies to Reichsfachschaft Film, 12 August 1935, BAL RKJ0096, 242.

¹⁰³ BAL RKJ0096, 332.

¹⁰⁴ Karl von Spreti writing to his family from Bombay in July 1937; cited in Zedler, *Karl Graf von Spreti*, 28.

nachdem ich die staatliche Anerkennung als Architekt erhielt (License to act as a Surveyor, granted under section 355 of the city of Bombay Municipal Act 1888), war ich als verantwortlicher Architekt aufgestellt für den Unterhalt und bauliche Veränderungen auf dem Gelände der Bombay Talkies. (after I received recognition from the local authority to work as an architect (...) I was appointed as architect responsible for the maintenance and building conversions on the premises of Bombay Talkies.)¹⁰⁵

Given that this license had been granted by August 1935, is it possible that Rai had appointed him specifically because he could fulfil this dual role? Unfortunately no further information has emerged about the precise nature of the architectural and building work that von Spreti might have carried out at Malad; but it allows speculation that he might have been involved in work that extended beyond the ephemeral elements of the *mise-en-scène* to include structures at Malad that may have outlasted his stay in Bombay. Von Spreti also describes having responsibility for “construction, film settings and interior design,” a comment that encourages further speculation that he might even have had an influence on designs that went beyond the cinema screen and into people’s homes.

Interviewed in 1984, the actor Jairaj recalled that von Spreti had designed:

sets [that] were four-sided to enable the director to shoot from any angle (the sides could be removed on rollers, the sets were almost of the normal size, looked real and lived in), the background was painted with fast colours and was without a joint. The system of set-making was devised by the film architect Karl Von Spreti. Also it was first erected in the carpentry department, the director was consulted for any changes and to avoid alterations on the finished set which was finally erected in the studio.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Application to Reichskammer der bildenden Künste, 3 July 1938, BAL RKJ0096, 242.

¹⁰⁶ Jairaj, “The Romance of Bombay Talkies,” *Screen*, 28 September 1984, 20.

Examples of this form of construction can be seen in photographs of the production of *Jawani-ki-hawa* that are held by the Wirsching family and are available to view online.¹⁰⁷

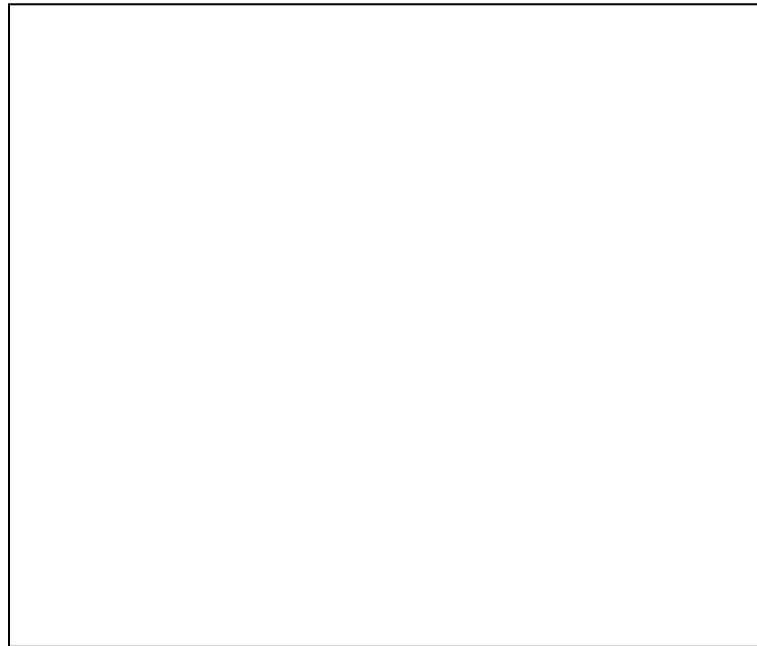


Figure 4-2 "Bombay Talkies' studio," *Izzat* songbook.

It is clear from these photographs that many of the films' settings, specifically those with dialogue, were constructed in the soundproof space of the studio (Figure 4-2). Consequently, von Spreti and his team needed to employ a variety of techniques to achieve the desired *mise-en-scène*. For example, in one behind-the-scene photograph taken on the set of *Jawani-ki-hawa*, a large, circular frame is visible. With its painted backdrop facing outward it was presumably designed to rotate to provide a sense of movement.

On the surface, Rai's decision to employ a foreigner for a role concerned with the presentation of Indian aesthetics onscreen appears at odds with his earlier responses to the ICC that were discussed in chapter 2. Firstly, von Spreti's status as a qualified architect who could plan and construct the necessary modifications to the site at Malad might have offered an attractive combination. Secondly, von Spreti's professional training probably helped instil a rigorous discipline to the way sets were designed and built. Concerns about the safety of actors and

¹⁰⁷ Accessed 11 December 2015, <http://wirschingarchive.com/>

technicians involved in film production, were regularly raised following fires and drownings.¹⁰⁸ The April 1939 edition of *Film India* published a proposal from the Cine Finance & Banking Corporation of India – of which Richard Temple was a director – bemoaning “the lamentable shortage of every class of technician and expert required by the Cinema industry in India” adding “so acute is the need for trained technicians that it is not yet possible for the Government and other responsible authorities to introduce legislation for the safety of the public such as that in operation in other parts of the world.”¹⁰⁹ Although the absence of reports of serious accidents at Bombay Talkies is not in itself evidence that they did not occur, subsequent comments from Bombay Talkies’ employees describe a disciplined and structured working environment, practices that might have prevented serious accidents.

Von Spreti remained at Bombay Talkies until December 1937 when he returned to Germany, an event reported by the *Bombay Chronicle*:

[Karl von Spreti] who has been responsible for designing of sets of all Bombay Talkies producing so far - building from the mud huts of Achhut Kanya to the palaces of Savitri [...] is now proceeding to Germany to renew his acquaintance with modern architecture. On his return he may set up in Bombay as an independent architect.¹¹⁰

This last comment is interesting, but no further information could be found to substantiate whether this was von Spreti’s intention. Although he had already secured a position with an architectural practice in Ulm, a letter to the RFK in November 1937 indicated that he still wanted to work in film.¹¹¹ By June 1938, however, he requested a change in his membership to the *Reichskammer der*

¹⁰⁸ For example, Ram Kamble, a cameraman who was working at Film City; the report into his death revealed that he was electrocuted because the high voltage cables had deteriorated: *Film India* 31 March 1939; and three actors drowned during the shooting of a film by Mohan Pictures: “Film actors drowned,” *Times of India*, 11 May 1938; concerns were also raised about the risks posed by unqualified projectionists to the safety of the cinema-going public: *Film India*, June 1938.

¹⁰⁹ *Film India*, April 1939: 41.

¹¹⁰ “Karl von Spreti,” *Bombay Chronicle*, 29 December 1937.

¹¹¹ Letter from von Spreti to Reichsfachschaftfilm Berlin, 20 November 1937, RKJ0096, 324.

bildenden Künste (Chamber of Fine Arts), a request that suggested he did not expect to work in the film industry again and had decided to pursue his career in architecture.¹¹² This decision, which meant that he was mostly excused military service on account of his occupation of *architektonische Arbeit* appears to have involved him designing villages once more; this time, however, they were not film sets:

Graf Karl von Spreti [...] war Architekt und als solcher einberufen, um Wehrdörfer für die besetzten und noch zu erobernden Gebiete zu entwerfen. (Count Karl von Spreti [...] was an architect and in this capacity he was enlisted to design military villages for the occupied territories and for those which remained to be conquered.)¹¹³

Whether the comparative safety of being in a protected profession was a motive for leaving the film industry is entirely speculative. Zedler mentions that von Spreti considered moving to India during the years 1947-48, but had not intended to return to making films.¹¹⁴

4.4 Interrogating film texts

In the absence of documentation describing how the mise-en-scène and the soundscape were planned at Bombay Talkies, this section considers what might be observed from the film texts. *Achhut Kanya* is explored for what it reveals about set design and use of spaces at Malad; *Jeevan Naiya* and *Kangan* are discussed to illustrate the growing sophistication of Bombay Talkies' soundscapes.

4.4.1 Iconography and settings in *Achhut Kanya*, 1936

Bombay Talkies' productions might be seen on a continuum, a Möbius strip serving to reiterate the impulse for social change that looped back and forth between the films and their producers. Although *Achhut Kanya* pushed against the boundaries

¹¹² Letter from von Spreti to Reichsfilmkammer, 17 June 1938, BAL RKJ0096, 246.

¹¹³ Zedler, *Karl Graf von Spreti*, 30; Dietzsch-Kluth, *Ein Sandkorn im Getriebe der Zeitgeschichte*. 91.

¹¹⁴ Zedler, *Karl Graf von Spreti*, 34.

of caste, it did so gently, self-consciously presenting the great-niece of Rabindranath Tagore in the role of the untouchable girl. Where Indians had finally played Indians in *Light of Asia*, however, it seemed that audiences were not ready to accept realism in caste representation onscreen. Nevertheless, if the dissonance of caste between *Achhut Kanya*'s Harijan character, Kasturi, and Devika Rani, the film star, disturbed cinemagoers, they could later be reassured by her performance as a Brahmin in *Jeevan Prabhat*.¹¹⁵ By writing Kasturi's death into the film's script, Bombay Talkies reaffirmed the notion of sacrifice that had been a core theme since *Light of Asia* but, more significantly, it avoided the dilemma of appearing to endorse a marriage between Pratap and Kasturi, a problematic resolution that would undoubtedly have incurred censorship difficulties or outright bans.¹¹⁶ When the film went before the Bombay Censor on 17 July 1936 for a premiere at the Roxy the following day, initial reservations caused it to be referred to "higher authorities."¹¹⁷ An advertisement later declared that it had been "saved from Censor's scissors," a reminder that compromises were demanded of filmmakers in order to avoid the commercial disadvantage that restrictions on a film's exhibition might have.¹¹⁸ Exactly what the censors' concerns were, was not mentioned explicitly, but the film's socially reformist undercurrent, from which nationalist sympathies might have been inferred, may have been an additional cause.

Colin Pal suggested that *Achhut Kanya* was the first Hindi language film to take up the case of untouchability, but a Hindi version of *Chandidas*, an historical film dealing with caste, had been directed by Nitin Bose in 1934, itself a remake of the

¹¹⁵ "Achhut Kanya turns Brahmin," *Bombay Chronicle*, 20 October 1937; Ashok Kumar later revealed his discomfort of physical contact with Devika Rani during performances.

¹¹⁶ In 1975, social mores dictated that the death of the hero, Jai (played by Amitabh Bachchan), was more acceptable than an onscreen portrayal of widow re-marriage in Ramesh Sippy's film, *Sholay*; more recently, Deepa Mehta's 2005 portrayal of child widows in *Water* resulted in violent responses from Hindu extremists.

¹¹⁷ "Achhut Kanya passed by censors" *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 July 1936, 3. A half page advertisement that accompanied a review of the film declared it had been "saved from censor's scissors." *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 July 1936, 10.

¹¹⁸ "Advertisement for Achhut Kanya," *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 July 1936.

1932 Bengali original directed by Debaki Bose.¹¹⁹ Untouchability had also featured in Prabhat's dual language (Hindi/Marathi) film, *Dharmatma*, directed by Shantaram in 1935 and set in a historical context of the sixteenth century Marathi poet and social reformer, Eknath.

Achhut Kanya still appears regularly at retrospectives and film festivals and has been broadcast on Indian television; correspondingly, it is the Bombay Talkies' film from the Osten/Rai period that is most firmly established in the historiography; and, in common with another Rai/Osten production, *Light of Asia*, it has also been recognised as part of India's film heritage.¹²⁰ On a visit to Germany towards the end of 1937, Osten claimed to have shown a copy of *Achhut Kanya* at Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry; although whether Goebbels himself was present is not recorded.¹²¹ Osten's precise connection to the Ministry is unclear; it may have come about through his brother, Peter, who appears to have been a more enthusiastic supporter of the regime; however, an earlier letter from von Spreti also points to ongoing communication between the Germans working at Bombay Talkies and the film industry in Germany.¹²² *Achhut Kanya* also became popular because of its film music, in particular for *Main ban kī chīriya*, mentioned above.¹²³ Shah describes the film's significance as a landmark, adding that "what contributed

¹¹⁹ Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*, 13; The story of Chandidas originates from the fourteenth century. He was a high caste Vaishnavite poet who fell in love with Rami, a low-caste washerwoman.

¹²⁰ See for example: Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*; Thomas, "Not Quite (Pearl) White: Fearless Nadia, Queen of the Stunts"; Dwyer, *100 Bollywood Films*; Bose, *Bollywood: A History ; Memory of the World : National Cinematic Heritage*. Accessed 10 January 2016. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001103/110379Eo.pdf>

¹²¹ Osten, "Lebenslauf," BAL PK J0079.

¹²² The question regarding Osten's ability to gain admission to show his film may possibly be traced back to a reference in a letter to the Reichsfachschaftfilm from Karl von Spreti dated 16 November 1936: "We shall soon send you a report and some images about the work we are doing at present. Furthermore we are always willing to respond to any film-related questions regarding films in India." Letter from Karl von Spreti to Landeskreisleiter Schneider, 16 November 1936, RK J0096, 326.

¹²³ Joshi attributes the birth of film music popularity to Shantaram who returned from Germany with pressings of the songs from *Sairandhree* which "opened up a vast potential market for film music." G. N. Joshi "A Concise History of the Phonograph Industry in India," *Popular Music* 7, No. 2, (May, 1988): 147-156.

greatly to the film's phenomenal success was its lilting music steeped in the traditional classical ragas."¹²⁴

Achhut Kanya is significant for introducing a cinematic template of the Indian village, referred to by Rajadhyaksha and Willemen as the "*Anglicised* fantasy of an Indian village."¹²⁵

Thatched cottages, complete to the last detail, and every feature typical of Indian rural life, dot the grounds to create an astonishingly realistic impression of the Indian countryside. The studio architect, von Spreti, has done his work with remarkable precision.¹²⁶

This stylised screen village subsequently became a regular feature in later films, appearing in at least *Janma Bhoomi*, *Izzat* and *Durga*, as well as fleetingly in *Nirmala*. This imaginary space with its imagined community, created for the screen, is interesting for two reasons. It arose during a period when the "Gandhian ideology of rural India" was encapsulated in an "indological fantasy of an unchanging India."¹²⁷ It also raises the question of creative authorship: who actually designed the village? Was it von Spreti, who had grown up in a castle in rural Germany, but who might nevertheless have been influenced by the intense visual iconography of India that was available in Germany?¹²⁸ Or were the aesthetics of the screen village determined by his Indian colleagues, simply leaving von Spreti to render their images architecturally so that synchronous sound

¹²⁴ Nalin Shah, "The musical odyssey of Bombay Talkies," *Screen*, 5 October 1984.

¹²⁵ Rajadhyaksha, and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 265.

¹²⁶ "The Romance of An Untouchable Girl," *Times of India*, 12 June 1936.

¹²⁷ Prasad, "The Imagined Village: Representations of Rural Life in Indian Cinema," 250; this definition also resonates with aspects of the ineffable German concept of *Heimat*, discussed in the following chapter.

¹²⁸ For an analysis of images of India in German cinema, see Jörg Schöning, *Triviale Tropen*.; Although there is no evidence that von Spreti ever participated with Kraft durch Freude (KdF) excursions, *Der Deutsche in Indien* contains a reference to one KdF trip around Bombay's islands, describing, in quasi militaristic terms, the "storming of a nomadic village, bagging a rich supply of film and photographs." *Der Deutsche in Indien*, April 1938, 20.

recording could take place? Ultimately, however, von Spreti's imagination of the Indian village might be as reliable as those of his elite, urban Indian colleagues.

Without sketches or plans, information about how the sets were designed is limited. Some details might be gleaned from contemporary reports, however, and, taken together with an examination of the film text and what is known about the restrictions imposed by synchronised sound recording at the time, tentative proposals might be made about von Spreti's planning. Playback technology provided greater latitude for outdoor filming, and an analysis of scene editing in *Achhut Kanya* supports the theory that, whilst the majority of the scenes are shot using sets constructed within the soundproof space of the studio, others are able to make use of recorded and ambient sound to film in outdoor spaces.

Thatched cottages ... dot the grounds. [...] In the sound-proof studio itself, the interiors of village huts have been built with meticulous regard to the correct details.¹²⁹

Thus, when Kasturi signals to the approaching train – obviously an outdoor scene – there is no dialogue, only the ambient sound of the passing train. Once this sound fades into the distance and Kasturi reopens the gates, the music takes over (probably using playback) signalling the arrival of Meera and Pratap's wedding procession. These outdoor scenes are intercut with dialogue scenes that appear to have been filmed in the studio: where there had been wind movement, the background appears static and the density of the shadows cast by the actors shifts from subtle to pronounced, the latter feature suggesting the use of studio lights.

The two walls seen in Figure 4-3 and Figure 4-5 representing the single storey home of Kasturi and her father, Dukhia, appear to be solid structures in the grounds at Malad, whereas the space in Figure 4-4 is constructed within the studio. The suggestion of seamless spatial movement leading from the building's exterior to the interior of their home is a conceit created by the camera and the editor; the two spaces cannot exist side by side in reality because of restrictions of space required for camera, sound recording equipment and people.

¹²⁹ "The romance of an untouchable girl," *Times of India*, 12 June 1936.

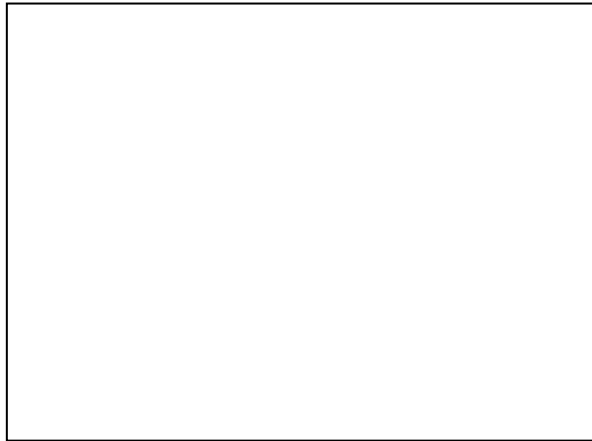


Figure 4-3 “Kasturi and Dukhia’s home,” *Achhut Kanya*.

Incidentally, is the 34 on the building intended to denote the year of Bombay Talkies’ foundation? This number identifies the same building when it reappears three years later in *Kangan* (Figure 4-6). Are these visual cues significant? Is the brief appearance of the level crossing in *Kangan*, another film dealing with inter-caste love, a form of homage to *Achhut Kanya*? Did Bombay Talkies deliberately employ such referential gestures or are these connections unintentional?



Figure 4-4 “Inside Kasturi and Dukhia’s home,” *Achhut Kanya*.

Colin Pal credited von Spreti with constructing the railway platform that was built in the studio grounds for the production of *Jawani-ki-Hawa*.¹³⁰ Although there are some differences in terms of cosmetic finish, this may be the same set that appears in *Achhut Kanya* and *Kangan*, with train lines running in front of the building (Figure 4-5). Thus this particular set exhibits what Ramírez refers to as

¹³⁰ Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*, 14-15; an image of this set can be seen at www.wirschingarchive.com.

the metempsychotic nature of the film set, constantly reincarnating to represent alternative places in different films.¹³¹

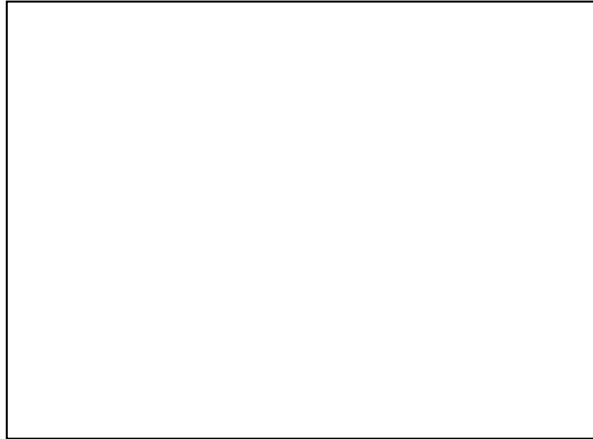


Figure 4-5 "Level crossing," *Achhut Kanya*.



Figure 4-6 "Level crossing," *Kangan*, 1939.

Whether or not von Spreti was responsible for the aesthetic design of the sets, there are scenes in *Achhut Kanya* that emphasise the importance of engaging a professionally trained film architect. Serious accidents and fatalities were common during film production around the world; if any of these occurred at Bombay Talkies while von Spreti worked at Bombay Talkies, they have not been identified.¹³² Apart from collaborative planning to allow for the cameras and sound recording to be able to work around the set, von Spreti would have also been

¹³¹ Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen*, 102.

¹³² Elison relates a legend he was told regarding the ghost of a foreign technician who fell to his death in the studio. Whether or not this accident took place, his suggestion that the fatality was likely to have been one of the German employees, is incorrect. William Elison, "Immanent domains: Gods, laws, and tribes in Mumbai." (Ph.D.diss., The University of Chicago, 2007).

responsible for designing sets that could safely accommodate crowds (for example, the scenes at the mela); and that could control a fire (the arson attack on Mohan's shop). Together with his training of Hate and others, perhaps von Spreti's most significant contribution to Bombay Talkies might have been to encourage a robust standard of safety.

4.4.2 Sophistication of sound: from *Jeevan Naiya* to *Kangan*

In the early days sound recording just had to be clear and loud. The microphone was placed near the mouth and since there was no dubbing even whispers were spoken loudly.¹³³

Beyond dialogue and music, sound technology gifted the cinema with a medium that extended the possibilities of diegetic expression. Although it quickly lost favour elsewhere, playback technology would achieve enduring cultural significance for Indian cinema. It had arrived in India around 1935 and its first use is generally credited to Nitin Bose's 1935 production, *Dhoop Chhaon*.¹³⁴ Saraswati Devi claimed that she introduced it at Bombay Talkies, however, Colin Pal attributes it to the Germans, citing it as one of their most important contributions.¹³⁵ Arnold points out that the earliest playback technologies employed in India were actually from America, where they had been in use since the mid 1920s.¹³⁶ In 1937, an American visitor described the system at Bombay Talkies as "the only set in India of the recently perfected playback apparatus," suggesting that the studio kept up to date with emerging technologies.¹³⁷ Although Ashok Kumar did not attribute playback specifically to the Germans, his comment provides further information about its use:

¹³³ Ashok Kumar cited by Siddharth Kak, "The Bombay Talkies School," *Cinema Vision* 1, 80.

¹³⁴ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 262; Bagishwar Jha, *B. N. Sircar: a monograph* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1990) 5. and Garga, *The Art of Cinema*, 39.

¹³⁵ Kinikar, "Lasting Lady, Khurshid-Saraswati," 70-72; Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*, 19.

¹³⁶ Arnold, "Hindi Filmigit: on the history of commercial Indian popular music," 94.

¹³⁷ "Bombay Talkies," *Motion Picture Magazine*, October 1937, 10-12.

Bombay Talkies was the first to introduce the playback system but they kept the technique a secret for two to three years. Outsiders were not allowed inside the studio. The first film using playback was *Jawani-ki-hawa* [...] here they followed the old system as well but by and large this was the beginning of playback.¹³⁸

Jawani-ki-hawa was the studio's first film, which suggests that, according to Kumar, Bombay Talkies experimented with playback from the outset. Expectations for the new studio had been raised during the course of its production, and critics praised it when it was released on 16 September 1935:

In respect of photography, lighting, recording and all the tricks and devices that make up the technique of talking picture production ... *Jawani ki Hawa* is ... the best product hitherto of the Indian film industry... The fact that all this is the work of a highly competent staff of foreign technicians is no detraction from its merit either, because it is the result none the less of Indian enterprise.¹³⁹

The principal technical roles required for Bombay Talkies to produce good quality sound films were initially filled exclusively by foreign technicians, including briefly, that of the British sound engineer, Len Hartley. Hartley had worked with the Visatone system, and the song booklet for *Jawani-ki-hawa* names his assistants as Sashadhar Mukerji and Savak B. Vacha.¹⁴⁰ Hartley is not cited on any further films made by Bombay Talkies and this suggests that after the first film Mukerji and Vacha assumed responsibility for this function. Had it always been the intention that Hartley would only work on the first film? His whereabouts between 1935 and 1940 could not be established.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Rai had chosen Hindi/Hindustani for all of the studio's feature films and, by insisting on a lower linguistic register to avoid what was later described as "chaste Hindi and high-flown Urdu," he introduced a

¹³⁸ An interview with Ashok Kumar. Siddharth Kak, "The Bombay Talkies School," *Cinema Vision* 1, no. 2 (1980): 79-81.

¹³⁹ "Bombay Talkies' first picture makes a sensational debut," *Times of India*, 20 Sep 1935.

¹⁴⁰ Vacha himself is recorded as having worked for Wadia Movietone as a sound recordist. Debashree Mukherjee, "Notes to Achhut Kanya," accessed 14 November 2014. <https://indiancine.ma>

democratisation of dialogue, perhaps contributing to the development of *filmi* Hindi that characterises the present industry in Mumbai.¹⁴¹ In the case of the early Bombay Talkies' films, dialogue articulation was deliberately slow and emphatically enunciated, with the result that expression sometimes sounded stilted and lacked dramatic potency.¹⁴² Sathe argues that this style of dialogue delivery changed cinema's performative mode, eliminating the "melodramatic theatrical exchange of dialogue" that had existed previously.¹⁴³

Beyond dialogue and music, the question remains how far Rai and/or Osten designed the films' soundscapes and explored the artistic possibilities of diegetic sound? Applying Chion's terminology, this section explores examples from some of the Bombay Talkies films to consider how sound was being used.¹⁴⁴ What follows is an exploration of the diegetic use of sound as it moved from technologies that restricted performative movement in the 1936 film, *Jeevan Naiya*, to the seamless flow of movement and sound in *Kangan*, completed in 1939.

Jeevan Naiya was released on 16 May 1936; it was the studio's fourth film and it introduced Ashok Kumar as the studio's new hero opposite Devika Rani. With its narrative themes of intercaste conflict, the unfavourable position of women, and anxieties about identity, it anticipates *Achhut Kanya*. Focusing on the relationship between the wealthy Ranjit (Kumar) and Lata (Devika Rani), the daughter of a dancing girl, who has been brought up by a foster father, Mathuradass (Kamta Prasad). Alternating between the concealment and revelation of fragmented knowledge, the film employs a variety of visual and auditory tropes to progress the plot. Lata discovers she is adopted, but Mathuradass does not want her background to be known because he fears Ranjit will reject her. Chand, an archetypal villain, kidnaps her and she is only saved by Ranjit's intervention

¹⁴¹ "The Romance of Bombay Talkies," *Screen*, 28 September 1984, 6.

¹⁴² The slow articulation of the dialogue may also have helped Osten, who spoke no Hindi, to follow the romanised script more easily.

¹⁴³ V. P. Sathe, "Simple, wholesome entertainment," *Screen*, 5 October 1984, 6.

¹⁴⁴ Chion, *Film, a sound art*.

(Figure 4-17). In a twist reminiscent of *Othello*, Chand blackmails her, taking a necklace that Ranjit has given her, an identifiable heirloom. When Chand attempts to sell this, Lata's situation unravels and Ranjit rejects her; not because of who she is but because she had not placed her trust in him. An accident later blinds Ranjit, and Lata disguises herself, re-entering her husband's home as a nurse so she can care for him. Signalling the pre-eminence of sound, their relationship is only restored when Ranjit recognises her by her voice.

The songs in *Jeevan Naiya* appear to have been pre-recorded and function as ambient sound. For example, when the singer Yogini (Chandraprabha) moves in and out of visual range, the volume remains consistent throughout the duration of the song.¹⁴⁵ Mukerji and Vacha recorded the synchronised sound together; after this production, they alternated responsibility for films. The film's opening music, composed by Saraswati Devi, accompanies an image of Bombay (Figure 4-1), overlooking Chowpatty Beach. The second static image, a contra-jour shot looking out to sea against a setting sun in a style typical of Wirsching, provides the backdrop for the cast list and resonates with the image on the front of one version of the song booklet shown in Figure 4-7.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Is this the film that Saraswati Devi refers to when she recalled Chandraprabha's loss of voice? Kinikar, "Lasting Lady, Khurshid-Saraswati," 70-72.

¹⁴⁶ Two versions of the song book exist in the files of NFAI. They differ in visual iconography as well as language. The English language version depicts a sailing boat on the sea; the Hindi version shows Devika Rani and Ashok Kumar.

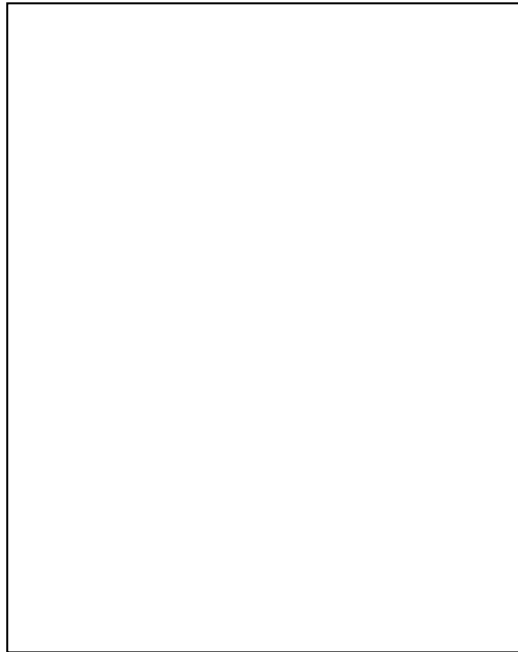


Figure 4-7 "Song booklet," *Jeevan Naiya*.

Some of the film's dialogues are telephemes, mediated through a device that served to conceal the microphone and enable steady sound recording. A ringing telephone signals the beginning of *Jeevan Naiya* with a conversation between Lata and Ranjit, establishing the relationship's centrality to the film's narrative, providing the opportunity for humour and recalling a similar scene in *Tankstelle*. When Ranjit's friends become privy to his side of the lovers' conversation, the telephone also provides the opportunity for eavesdropping, and the friends then use the same device to transmit their discussion with Ranjit so that Lata is placed in the position of eavesdropping, without Ranjit's knowledge.



Figure 4-8 "Ranjit speaks to Lata," *Jeevan Naiya*.

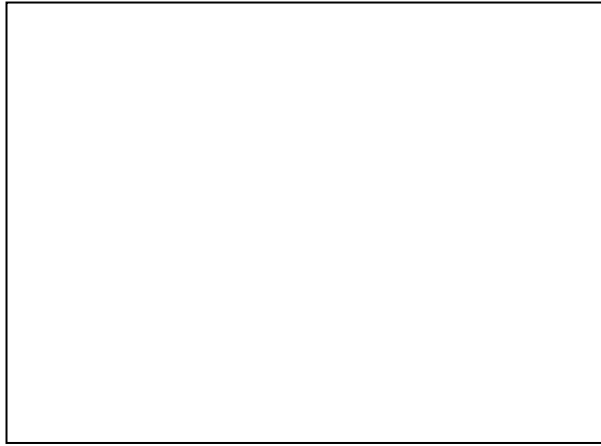


Figure 4-9 "Lata speaks to Ranjit," *Jeevan Naiya*.



Figure 4-10 "Ranjit's friends eavesdrop," *Jeevan Naiya*.

Thus sound is used both to reveal information and to open pathways to illicit knowledge. Telephemes also kept the actors within a narrow physical locus: movement that accompanies dialogue is controlled by keeping the performers within close range of one another, such as in the following two images when Ranjit's friends engage in horseplay:



Figure 4-11 "The joke is set up," *Jeevan Naiya*.

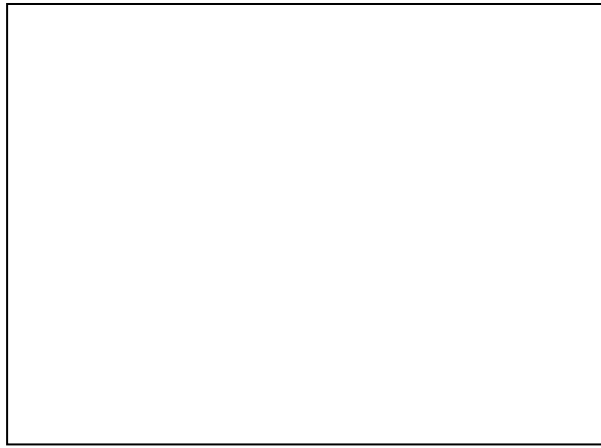


Figure 4-12 “Ranjit is unaware, but Lata hears everything,” *Jeevan Naiya*.

Elsewhere the narrow physical locus is only breached when movement is freed from dialogue; on these occasions it is accompanied by ambient sounds in the studio such as footfall, doors opening and closing; or it takes place during a musical item. A similar restriction of movement during dialogue recording can be observed in contemporary films such as Barua’s *Devdas* (1935) and Shantaram’s *Amar Jyoti* (1936).¹⁴⁷

In Figure 4-13, Sona and Chand are sitting together, with three musicians positioned in the foreground, continuing a practice discussed by Hughes, whereby musicians were placed near to the screen “following the stage tradition of company dramas ... [foregrounding] the place of music in relation to the images on the screen.”¹⁴⁸ Chand is singing to her in what appears to be playback mode, prompting her to get up and dance.¹⁴⁹ Sound is used here to conceal rather than convey information; while Sona dances, Ramlal enters the back of the set and confers with Chand (Figure 4-14), their exchange obscured by the music. With the assistance of visual clues, however, this auditory compartmentalisation suggests hidden or illicit knowledge.

¹⁴⁷ Both of these films are available at www.indiancine.ma

¹⁴⁸ Hughes, “Is there anyone out there,” 101.

¹⁴⁹ In Figure 4-13 the three musicians occupy the foreground, continuing a practice discussed by Hughes in his study of silent film exhibition, whereby musicians were placed near to the screen “following the stage tradition of company dramas” [and] “[foregrounding] the place of music in relation to the images on the screen.” “Is there anyone out there,” 101.

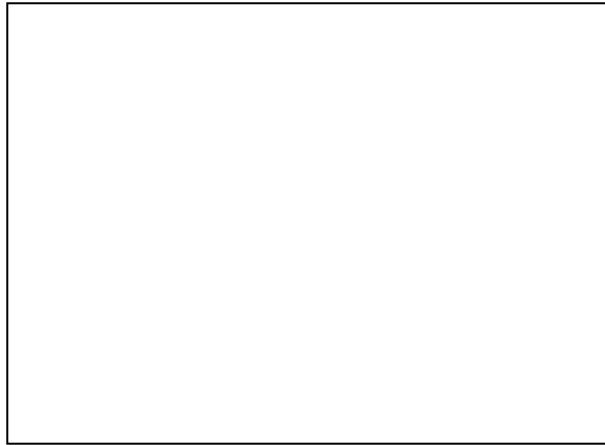


Figure 4-13 "Playback music accompanies Sona's dance," *Jeevan Naiya*.

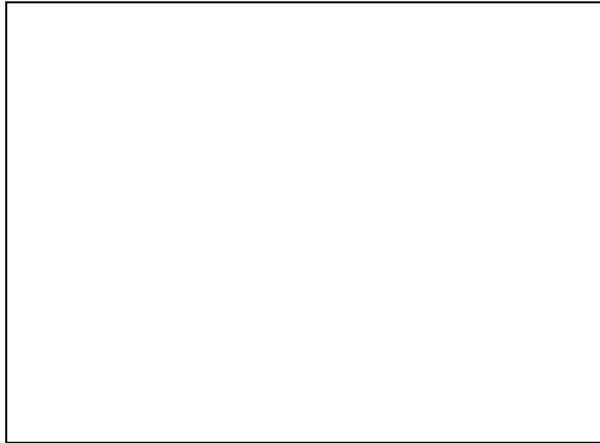


Figure 4-14 "Auditory compartmentalisation," *Jeevan Naiya*.

Chand disappears and, when Sona stops dancing, she notices his absence. Her ankle bells tinkling as she walks, rendering a leitmotiv of the feminine as familiar to contemporary viewers of the modern Hindi film as it was becoming in 1936. In spite of this sound announcing her arrival, Chand does not realise that he is being overheard, nor is he visible to the spectator, his disembodied voice an acousmaton emanating from the foreground enabling Sona to learn of his sinister plan.



Figure 4-15 "Sona hears Chand's voice as an acousmaton," *Jeevan Naiya*.

The cacophonous sounds attending Lata's kidnapping: claxons, the screeching of tyres, and the rattling of locks and chains, are further emphasised by the juxtaposition of her cries of anguish and the villains' callous laughter.

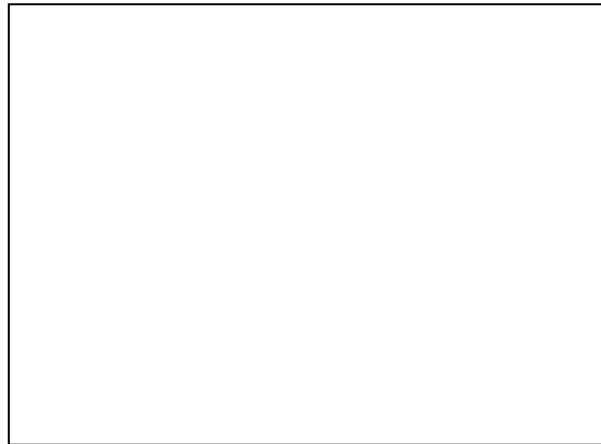


Figure 4-16 "Concern expressed through diegetic sounds," *Jeevan Naiya*.

Informed of the kidnap, meanwhile, Ranjit, his servant, Bhikhu (Pithawala) and a friend, are waiting for information, Wirsching's deep focus photography lending a modern aesthetic to the scene (Figure 4-16). There is barely any dialogue as Ranjit paces up and down: a match is struck, cups clink, and Ranjit's shoes squeak each time he turns, aural devices that increase the tension before his impetuous exit to rescue Lata.



Figure 4-17 "Ranjit rescues Lata from Ramlal," *Jeevan Naiya*.

In Figure 4-17, the visual and auditory effects of the scene when Ranjit subsequently enters the fray are surprisingly aggressive.¹⁵⁰ In a visual daisy chain,

¹⁵⁰ Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*, 10; Ghosh, *Ashok Kumar*, 46; Valicha *Dadamoni*, 21; all provide descriptions of what happened when Ashok Kumar sprang through the window, before

a series of nine vignettes follow to portray private conversations urging confidentiality about Lata's background, the right hand character becoming the left hand character as the message is transferred (Figure 4-18–Figure 4-20).

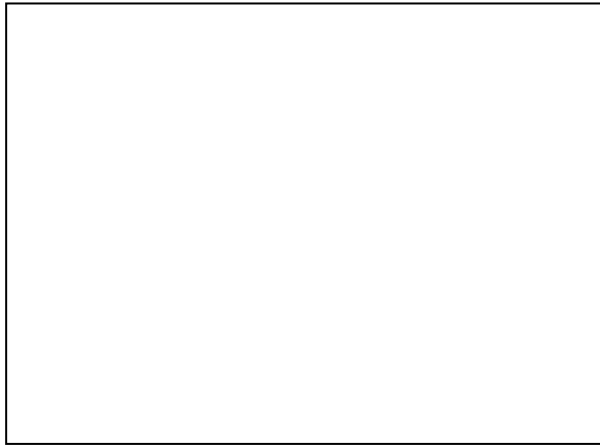


Figure 4-18 "Mathuradass requests silence," *Jeevan Naiya*.



Figure 4-19 "The message is passed to Sona," *Jeevan Naiya*.



Figure 4-20 "Sona passes the message to her maid," *Jeevan Naiya*.

Osten gave the signal. The ensuing debacle left Devika Rani with cuts and bruises and Ramlal (H. Masih) with a fractured leg.

The approach of the *barāt* (wedding procession) is signalled by the acousmatic sound of the *śahnāī* (phonofiddle typically used at weddings) and remains throughout the next scene between Bhikhu and his wife, Lakshmi, who share memories of their own nuptials (Figure 4-21).

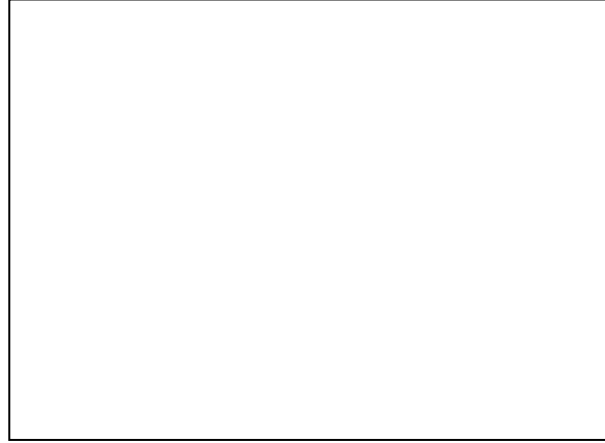


Figure 4-21 “Bhikhu and Lakshmi share memories,” *Jeevan Naiya*.

Specific sounds are identifiable in other Bombay Talkies’ films, and an examination of these reveals a development that moves from portraying action, to expressing psychological states. The hookah pipe provides one such example. As a visual image it represents a typically masculine ritual. In *Achhut Kanya*, the pipe is smoked by Kasturi’s father, Dhukhia (Kamta Prasad), as he explains to his daughter the impossibility of an intercaste relationship between her and Pratap. The pipe’s bubbling sound emphasises pauses between dialogic exchange and, combined with Wirsching’s chiaroscuro lighting, it lends solemnity to the discussion:



Figure 4-22 “Dukhia smokes his pipe,” *Achhut Kanya*, 1936.

In *Janma Bhoomi* the hookah acts as both visual and aural metaphor; the mistaken pipe encodes the absurdity of caste conventions, while its sound builds up to the social unrest that is to come. Figure 4-23 shows the Brahmin smoking as

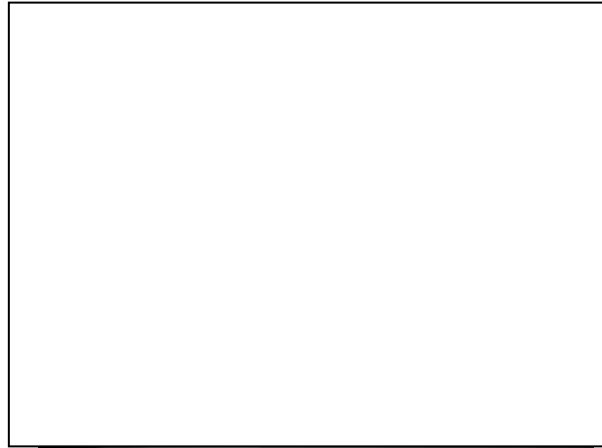


Figure 4-23 "Smoking, the Brahmin discuss the villagers," *Janma Bhoomi*, 1936.

they consider how to deal with the rebellious villagers. A gentle bubbling is the only sound heard for nearly fifteen seconds during which Sanatan (Pithawala) pulls himself upwards in growing shock until, crying out in alarm, he warns the priest, Bhavananda (Kamta Prasad), that he is smoking the wrong pipe. The latter's exclamation: "my religious integrity has been defiled!" and the shouts and cries that follow, act as a counterpoint to the previous calm, serving to underscore the insecurity of the Brahmins' treasured status.



Figure 4-24 "Bhavananda is smoking the wrong pipe," *Janma Bhoomi*.

In *Kangan*, the bubbling of the hookah has not only acquired the status of a leitmotiv denoting Kamal's father, it also represents his inner state as he graduates

from being determined to subdue his son's wishes, to grappling with his conscience after the devastating effect Radha's apparent suicide has had on his son.

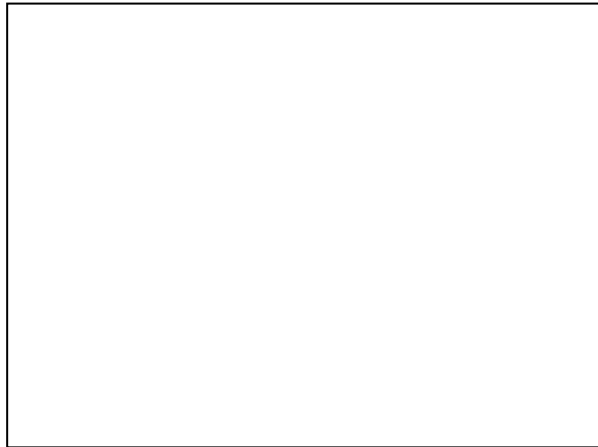


Figure 4-25 "Jainarayan and his ever present pipe," *Kangan*, 1939.

Kangan introduced a different aesthetic into the studio's films, the influence of which might be detected in subsequent Hindi films. In evoking the struggle between art and commerce, it also mirrors Bombay Talkies' own struggle to successfully embrace both. *Kangan* marked an ending when filming was interrupted by the arrest and internment of the Germans on 3 September 1939, leaving the Indians they had trained to successfully complete the film. It also marked a beginning by introducing Leela Chitnis, an actor who had already become an established star at Ranjit Movietone. And it presented a different approach to the studio's narratological format, signalling a stronger literary emphasis more typically exemplified by Bengali studios.¹⁵¹ This change appears to have come about following the Pal's departure and the arrival of the writer Saradindu Banerjee.¹⁵² *Kangan* was adapted by Banerjee and S. Mukerji, Bombay Talkies' sound engineer, from Gajendra Kumar Mitra's novel, *Rajanigandha*.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Parallels might be drawn between the early cinemas of Bengal and Germany which both favoured high-brow literary adaptations, the screenplay often adapted by the original author. For more information about the development of the cinema in Bengal; see Gooptu, *Bengali Cinema*.

¹⁵² Pal described his departure, soon after writing *Jeevan Prabhat*, as the culmination of tensions between himself and Rai, Pal, *Nirajan Pal*, 240.

¹⁵³ Mitra later received a Sahitya Akademi Award for his Bengali novel, *Kalkatar Kacchei*; Saradindu Banerjee was another respected author who had already worked with Bombay Talkies on *Bhabhi*, *Navjeevan* and *Durga*.

Kangan traces the path of love thwarted by social convention, filial obligation and jealous rivals, all elements that were emphasised in the advertising accompanying the film's release.¹⁵⁴ It is the love story of Kamal (Ashok Kumar), the son of Jainarayan (Mubarak) the local zamindar, and Radha (Leela Chitnis), the adopted daughter of Madhavdas Babajee (F. P. Pithawalla) the latter the head of a 200 year old ashram, the *Vaishnav Math*. Tensions are apparent between Jainarayan's commercial ambitions, embodied in the tragic-comic figure of his bookkeeper, Ramesh (V. H. Desai), and those of Kamal, who aspires to become a successful writer and earn enough to enable him to marry Radha. The eventual reconciliation between father and son which leads to the satisfactory rescue of the relationship between Radha and Kamal, foreshadows the trope of obedient children striving for parental acceptance.¹⁵⁵

In addition to the sophisticated use of the hookah as a leitmotiv expressing Jainarayan's internal psychology, other features of *Kangan*'s soundscape are worth exploring for their possible influence on later Hindi films. Rangoonwalla suggests that *Kangan* was one of the films that "changed the viewing pattern and outlook of audiences towards Hindi cinema, hitherto weighed down [...] by verbosity and solemnity."¹⁵⁶ A comparison with *Jeevan Naiya* shows that the laboured enunciation that had marked out the early Bombay Talkies' films is absent from *Kangan*, adopting a more natural and aesthetically pleasing sound to the dialogue; and illustrates a more playful embrace of language using rhythmic re-duplication (e.g. *lekin-vekin*) and dialogic exchange in the form of rhyming couplets.

Kangan's sound was recorded by Savak Vacha, and begins with the opening song, *Jal bharane chalo rī guiyām* (let us fetch water my friends). Sung by Leela Chitnis in playback, the song is interrupted by two short bursts of dialogue as she walks through the village, the successful juxtaposition of the elements of song and dialogue creating a natural auditory composition drawing the listener into the

¹⁵⁴ "The problem of thousands concentrated in the problem of two! For the Nation's Youth, a Rendezvous with Romance!" "Advertisement for *Kangan*," *Film India*, January 1940.

¹⁵⁵ See for example *Dilwale dulhania le jayenge*, directed by Aditya Chopra (Yash Raj Films, 1995).

¹⁵⁶ Rangoonwalla "The Emergence of Talkies," 47.

scene (Figure 4-26). Chitnis' vocal timbre with its melodic, undulating tones further enhances the soundscape.

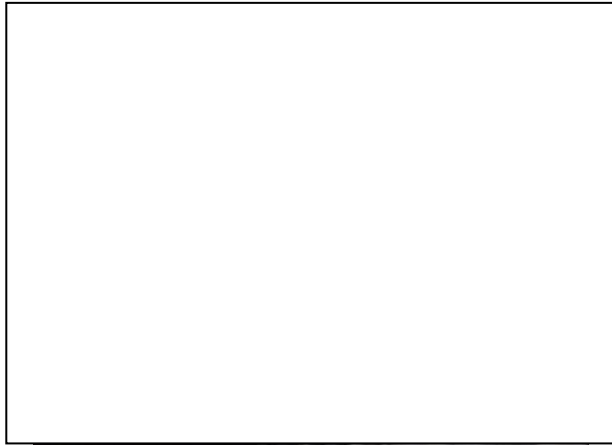


Figure 4-26 "Radha sings as she goes to collect water," *Kangan*.

Although a detailed discussion of the film's music lies outside the scope of this thesis, it suggests a fusion that includes both Western and Arabic influences, marking a new development in the studio's musical compositions.¹⁵⁷ The trope of the woman collecting water at the river bank, already present in *Achhut Kanya* and still frequently used to picturise a song, was already established in the grammar of the Hindi film. In *Kangan's* soundscape, Vacha allows Chitnis' initial song to be interrupted with the discordant sound of a harmonica played by Banwari, a sound underscored by his hollow laugh, emphasising the unpleasant characteristics of its owner. This is immediately counterpointed with the jaunty rendition played by Kamal who has picked up the discarded harmonica. When the first song finishes, ambient noises such as birdsong and running water are privileged on the soundscape, lending more realism to the scene.

Another of *Kangan's* auditory experiments is the scene introducing the *Math* where Radha lives with her father. While the camera scans the room, taking in the people, musicians casually tune their instruments, presenting what Chion would describe as a 'verbal chiaroscuro;' a relaxing ambience that distinguishes it from the motif of Naraiyan and his hookah. Kamal enters the scene and shyly tells

¹⁵⁷ The song booklet for *Kangan* names Ramchandra Pal as the *svarkār* (composer) and the website www.indiancine.ma indicates that this was his first film for Bombay Talkies.

Madhavdas that he wants to learn their sacred songs; in reality his intention is to be close to Radha. The next time Kamal appears in the doorway to the temple, is after his father has forbidden their relationship and threatened Radha's father that he will close the *Math* if he does not make his daughter see reason.

Other sounds are used to heighten emotions. The sound of a train on the tracks bringing passengers from the village to the city, moving Kamal further from Radha. The empathetic effect of melancholic music representing Jainarayan's sadness as he reads Kamal's poetry, his expression becoming ever more poignant. Ramesh, whose rhythmic invocation of accounting figures, provides a comic interlude, and parodies the contrast between the commercial world within which Jainarayan operates, and that of Kamal who recites poetry, not numbers.¹⁵⁸

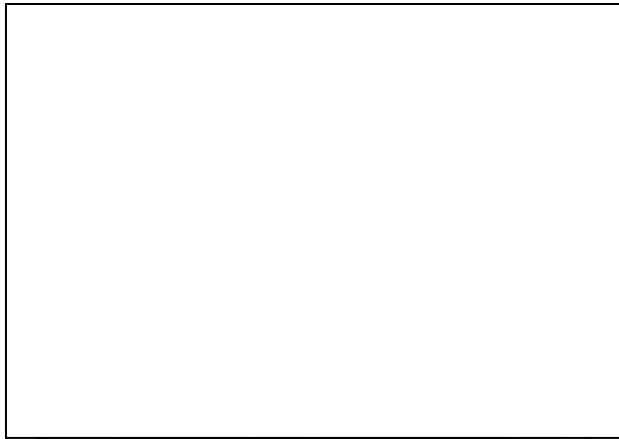


Figure 4-27 "Jainarayan reads Kamal's poetry," *Kangan*.



Figure 4-28 "Ramesh 'sings' the accounts to Kamal," *Kangan*.

¹⁵⁸ For comments about working with Desai, see Manto, *Stars from another sky*, 20-31.

Vacha included another auditory conceit into the soundscape: that of the phantom voice, audible to the cinema audience, but distinct from the acousmaton. When Radha is kidnapped by Banwari, the cry she utters is transmitted psychically across the miles, from the village to the city. Kamal, sitting at his desk hears her cry as if from the street outside. “*Bilkul Radha kissi avāz thī!*” he exclaims, that was Radha’s voice!

Whether any of this experimentation with the soundscape was the influence of Osten and his colleagues is impossible to assert; Osten’s apparent difficulties with the transition to sound are discussed in the following chapter. Len Hartley, who was presumably engaged by Rai because he had worked with Visatone, may have also added ideas. Rai’s own experience of the experimentation that took place in Pommer’s unit is likely to have been an influence; as well as lessons learned from the less than satisfactory sound production of *Karma*. Perhaps the Germans’ main contribution was limited to the introduction of playback technology, if indeed, this *was* their contribution? Finally, however, the influence of the sound technicians, Vacha and Mukerjee, who assumed responsibility for the role following Hartley’s return to Britain should also be considered as contributing to the way the soundscape evolved at Bombay Talkies.

4.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown how Bombay Talkies focused on the gentrification of the film industry in Bombay, thereby continuing a process that Rai had begun with *Light of Asia* to establish participation in film production as a respectable profession. It has argued for Rai to be considered the auteur for the films that the studio produced between 1935 and 1940. Although influences from other sources might be identified, the particular style of film that was produced by Bombay Talkies during this period was significantly shaped, though always successfully, by Rai’s decisions. From his insistence on the use of lower registers for Hindi, to the laboured enunciation of dialogue; to the control he exerted over all aspects of production, Rai’s influence on creating a particular genre of the Hindi social is evident.

In exploring how Bombay Talkies created aspects of the mise-en-scène in *Achhut Kanya*, the chapter has considered how and to what extent a German influence might be detected. In the case of von Spreti, the argument has been made that his contribution turned on professional expertise and disciplined working practices. Similarly, for the contribution of Willi Zolle, although in this case there is little more than supposition. Any German influence on the development of the increasingly sophisticated soundscape of the films, is more likely to have come from the experiences of Rai and Devika Rani at Pommer's sound unit in Babelsberg. Schünemann's contribution to an emerging cinematographic style has been explored in the previous chapter; the involvement of Osten and Wirsching is discussed in the two chapters that follow.

5 Franz Osten: Film Director

5.1 Introduction

The working partnership between Franz Osten and Himansu Rai inhabited a period of extraordinary flux. From a film history perspective, it framed the transition from silent to sound cinema, an evolution that demanded significant changes in modes of production, requiring new skills from all those involved, and altering the demographics and expectations of audiences. These developments occurred against a backdrop of political and social unrest that held particular resonance for this Indo-German collaboration. The triangular relationship between Colonial India, Germany and Britain inflected the activities and lives of the German and Indian filmmakers involved in this history; from the initial difficulties in securing permission for Emelka's film crew to enter India in 1925, to the moment the Second World War interrupted the production of *Kangan*. After 1939, Osten and his filmmaking career largely disappeared from public attention until 1983, at which stage the focus was predominantly on the three Indo-German productions made by Rai and Osten during the silent era.¹

Of the filmmakers examined here, Osten is, in some ways, the most enigmatic. Often described as a pioneering filmmaker, he displayed little of the innovative creativity of his more celebrated compatriots. He does not wear the mantle of an auteur and appears to have been most comfortable when he could work collaboratively within a stable studio environment; yet he was sufficiently adventurous to travel abroad and occasionally to risk more radical filmmaking projects. Osten's alleged dependence on the script may account for some of the polarised reviews he received; and his recognition as a director was frequently refracted through the type of review his film received. Comments from his colleagues at Bombay Talkies record Osten's willingness to function as a mentor to his protégés, perhaps also providing a foil to Rai's intensity. Osten was capable of

¹ See Koch, "Von der 'Münchener Lichtspielkunst' zu den 'Bombay Talkies': Franz Osten;" Koch, *Franz Osten's Indian silent films*.

cultural sensitivity, yet he made little effort to understand India, and his political affiliations appear at odds with the multicultural environment in which he worked at Bombay Talkies.

In order to evaluate how and where Osten fits into the history of transnational cinema, this chapter questions and expands upon the existing historiography in search of a deeper understanding of Osten as individual and as director. An examination of Osten's German films, and the technological and stylistic contexts within which they were produced, asks whether, and to what extent, this work might have influenced his style of direction and his contribution to Indian cinema. A comparison with the Jewish émigré, Willy Haas, provides scope to consider Osten's partnership with Rai, illustrating some of the characteristics that made him the ideal director for Rai's vision of Bombay Talkies. A closer examination of Osten's membership of the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) provides the opportunity to consider his position in the context of the socio-political circumstances prevailing not only in Germany, but in a region that was actively seeking self-determination. What emerges from this study is the shadow network of National Socialism that operated throughout British India during the period, and may have affected the lives of the individual German filmmakers at Bombay Talkies.

5.1.1 Biographical information

Franz [Ostermayr] Osten was born on 23 December 1876, five years after Bismarck had corralled Germany's separate states into one German empire, albeit with Osten's home state of Bavaria, invariably at odds with the mainly Prussian leadership in Berlin. Osten named Munich as his place of birth, although it may actually have been Mühldorf am Inn, a small village to the east of the city which is referred to as the birthplace of his brother, Peter.² In 1883 the Ostermayr family, which by now included at least one additional sibling, Ottmar, moved to Munich

² Mühldorf-am-Inn is given as the birthplace of Osten's younger brother, Peter Ostermayr. Accessed 13 November 2014. <http://www.literaturportal-bayern.de/institutionenlexikon?task=lpbinstitution.default&gkd=5344211-8>

where they set up a photographic studio, the Photo-Portrait-Atelier.³ It was this business that would initially provide Osten with the grounding for his career in the film industry and, as discussed below, its influence can sometimes be traced in his early films. Although he wanted to be an actor, and trained at the Hoftheater in Munich under its lead actor, Hofrat Sturj, Osten said that his parents insisted on photography as a contingency profession.⁴

In 1907 Franz and Peter founded the Original Physiograph Compagnie. This was a *Wanderkino* (travelling cinema) whose brief existence was curtailed when a fire destroyed their entire equipment and film stock. Abandoning this venture, the brothers began to make a series of short films of local interest.⁵ Osten later wrote that he was the first person in the south of Germany to take moving pictures and that these artistic landscape films were of sufficient quality to be bought by Pathé, who coloured them. He attributed this success to his professional training in photography.⁶ Osten also claimed to have sold films to Gaumont, Belair and Expres-Film, before moving to Freiburg to join this latter company which was producing newsreels under the rubric "*Der Tag im Film*."⁷ It was while he was working for Expres-Film in Freiburg that Osten presented a 1913 documentary film, *Mit der Kamera in der Schlachtfront* (Film pictures of the Balkan war), to an

³ Ibid.

⁴ Information Osten compiled for the *Reichsfilmkammer*, BAL RKJ0079, 300-304; Dablé mentions that Osten also claimed to have been trained in acting and direction between 1909 and 1911 during Max Reinhardt's *alljährlichen Gastinszenierungen* (annual guest productions), Dablé, "Der Filmpionier Franz Osten," 158; an article described the "artistic and clever management" of Reinhardt's season at Munich's Künstlertheater where he oversaw the production of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet* and *Comedy of Errors*; Osten's involvement in any specific production remains speculative. "Dramatic Gossip," *The Athenaeum*, 1 October 1910, 399.

⁵ Horak, "Munich's First Fiction Feature: Die Wahrheit," in *A second life*, ed. Elsaesser, 86-92.

⁶ Letter from Osten to Reichsfilmkammer, 7 October 1942. BAL PKJ0079, 300.

⁷ Pathé was a bulk producer of travelogue films that were popular with cinema audiences in the early 20th century. For more information see Maurizio Cinquegrani, "Travel cinematography and the Indian city: the imperial spectacle of geography at the end of the long nineteenth century," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: an Interdisciplinary Journal* 32, no. 1 (2010), 65-78; articles by the Pathé cameraman, Hans Theyer, "Erinnerungen eines Kameramannes," *Mein Film* (1929).

audience in Munich.⁸ Directed by Robert Schwobthaler and produced by Expres-Film, it is not clear from the report whether Osten himself was one of the cameramen present during this period of the Greek-Bulgarian conflict, or whether he was merely introducing the film on behalf of Expres-Film. Described as a template for war reporting, the advertisements for *Kamera* emphasised the innovative nature of the film and the extreme difficulties and dangers experienced by the cameramen:

Zum ersten Male seit Bestehen der Kinematographie wurde im Kugelregen und unter Cholerafaher ein ganze Feldzug mit dem Gipfelpunkt einer wirklichen Schlacht aufgenommen. (For the first time in the history of cinematography, under a hail of bullets and the threat of cholera, an entire military campaign culminating in a real battle was photographed.)⁹

Whether or not Osten had worked on this film, he would soon be experiencing conflict at first hand. From January-July 1915, he claimed to have served as a *Kriegsberichterstatte* (war reporter) in the Vosges; and from 1 September 1915 until 10 November 1918, he recorded that his activities as a director were subsequently interrupted by his military service in the Tirol, Galicia, Carpathia, Italy and France (Osten, "Lebenslauf," BAL PK J0079). Osten lost a brother-in-law and a cousin during the First World War; if he kept a record about his own experience as a photographer or soldier at the front, it has not surfaced. One might only speculate whether such experiences influenced the choice of films that he subsequently became involved with; unlike his younger colleague Wirsching, who worked on *Unsere Emden*, (Our Emden) in 1926; *Kreuzer Emden*, (Battleship Emden) in 1932; and *Stoßtrupp 1917*, (Assault troop 1917) in 1934, Osten's filmography does not suggest a focus on the heroism of war.

Although the Ostermayr brothers worked together on several occasions, it was Peter who would achieve greater prominence within the German film industry

⁸ "Mit der Kamera in der Schlachtfrent," *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*, 22 October 1913; this film was also exhibited in London, "Film Pictures Of The Balkan War," *Times* (London) 15 October 1913.

⁹ Original from *Der Kinematograph*, 1 October 1913. Cited in: Zimmermann, Peter, ed., *Geschichte des dokumentarischen Films in Deutschland: Band 1: Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), 375.

than either Franz and Ottmar, or his own son, Paul.¹⁰ Peter's dominant presence may have been a factor in persuading Franz to adopt the surname Osten as early as 1911 in order to differentiate himself from his younger sibling.¹¹ Although Osten's choice of name might have been prescient in symbolising his link with the East, the decision is more likely to have been because Osten provided a lexically easier name with fewer spelling variants i.e. Ostermaier, Ostermeier, Ostermayer; it was also a contemporary, albeit less common, German surname.¹²

The revival of the silent films seems to have acted as a catalyst for the initial analyses of Osten's work when all three films were included in retrospectives, exponents of the tiny percentage that had been salvaged from India's silent heritage, potentially distorting perceptions of the extent of the Indo-German contribution to its early development.¹³ As discussed in chapter 2, retrospectives have been repeated at regular intervals, including the Silent Film Festival curated by Suresh Chabria at Pordenone in October 1994 and, more recently, the 2013 commemorations for the centenary of Indian film included the three silent films at film festivals throughout the year. *Light of Asia* has also been recognised as a classic of Indian cinema.¹⁴ Yet Osten's involvement as a filmmaker might be traced back to the early days of German cinema, that is, from at least 1907, and definitively by 1911 when he directed *Erna Vale(w)ska*. By the time he accepted Rai's offer to become the lead director at Bombay Talkies in 1935, Osten's career spanned twenty-five years and had produced at least fifty-one films, making him the most experienced of the production team working at Bombay Talkies in the studio's early years. The Hindi language productions Osten made with Rai

¹⁰ For more information on Peter Ostermayr's film career, see von Moltke, *No place like home* and Thumser, *Ludwig Ganghofer*.

¹¹ In 1942, Paul Ostermayr would also change his name, taking the surname May.

¹² Sadat Manto ironically refers to Osten as Franz Weston, and refers to Wirsching as Darsching. Manto, *Stars from another sky*, 23; 187.

¹³ P. K. Nair referred to the anticipated arrival of copies of *Light of Asia*, *Shiraz* and *A Throw of Dice* from the National Film Archive, London. Possibly the first time they were shown in public in India was during the retrospective of Phalke's birth centenary. "Archive Films," *Times of India*, 26 June 1967.

¹⁴ Rachel Dwyer, "10 Classics of Indian Cinema Decade by Decade," *Guardian*, 25 July 2013.

amounted to a further sixteen feature films by the time the Second World War started; to these might be added an unknown quantity of newsreels and educational films produced between 1907 and 1939.¹⁵

5.1.2 Locating Franz Osten in the historiography

Osten is mentioned in *The German Cinema* as one of three “celebrated Ostermayr brothers” involved in early German cinema; although no further information is provided about any of them.¹⁶ He has an entry in Bock’s *The Concise Cinegraph*, but is otherwise unacknowledged by the majority of German film historians, unless it is in reference to the Indo-German productions.¹⁷ Elsewhere, the Indo-German film relationship was glossed over.¹⁸ Three monographs have been dedicated to Osten, of which two, by Koch and Gangar, were both produced in India for the Max Mueller Bhavan; the third is by Brandlmeier.¹⁹ Koch has also contributed a chapter about Osten to *Kino in Indien*.²⁰ Osten’s career has been the focus of three films for German television: *Ein Bayer in Bombay* (A Bavarian in Bombay, Franke, 1988); *Ein Sonderling im Orient* (A Misfit in the Orient, Koll, 2001); *Ein Bayer als Vater des Bollywood-Kinos* (A Bavarian Father of Bollywood, Lukas, 2008) and at least one recent radio programme *Wie der Regisseur Franz Osten den Grundstein für*

¹⁵ The precise total of Osten’s filmography, likely to have included many short documentary films, may never be known. Between 1907 and 1918 he produced short films and newsreels for several companies including Pathé, Gaumont and Expres-Film. During his time at Bombay Talkies, he would most likely have been involved in the newsreels, documentaries and educational films that the studio produced, although some of the directorial responsibilities might have been devolved to other filmmakers, Osten did work on the newsreel of the visit of Subhas Chandra Bose to Bombay in 1937 because he wrote about this five years later. Franz Osten, “Begegnung mit Chandra Bose,” *Film Kurier*, 11 April 1942, 3.

¹⁶ Manvell and Fraenkel, *The German Cinema*, 12.

¹⁷ Bock, Hans-Michael, ed. *The Concise Cinegraph: Encyclopaedia of German Cinema* (New York: Bergbahn Books, 2009).

¹⁸ For example, Walter Leifer’s summary of Indo-German connections jumps from production of *The Light of Asia* in 1925 (without mentioning Osten) eliding straight into the work of Paul Zils. Leifer, *India and the Germans*.

¹⁹ Koch, *Franz Osten’s Indian Silent Films*; Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*; Brandlmeier, “Franz Osten.” India is the only country where the Goethe Institut has adopted an alternative name in honour of the German Indologist, Friedrich Max Mueller.

²⁰ Koch, “Von der ‘Münchener Lichtspielkunst’ zu den ‘Bombay Talkies’: Franz Osten.”

Bollywood legte (How the director Franz Osten laid the founding stone of Bollywood, Metz/Seeßlein, 2014); titles that either stress his alterity, or seek to configure him as a forefather of the present film industry in Mumbai. The following articles and chapters also discuss Osten's work, principally in relation to *Light of Asia*: after Koch, Schönfeld is one of the first critics to re-examine Osten as an important filmmaker within German film history.²¹ Kapse describes Osten as a misfit and argues that his stylistic approach suited Rai's purpose.²² Ascárate assigns Osten the status of an auteur, viewing the *Light of Asia* as an exploration of Germany's relationship with modernity.²³ Fuechtner identifies Osten as a director whose involvement with Indian cinema, "subverts the notion of a monolithic German national film history."²⁴ Meanwhile Dablé examines him from the perspective of media history, attributing him the status of a film pioneer.²⁵

Osten is usually included in historiographies of Indian cinema. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy refer to him in their section on Bombay Talkies in *Indian Film*. A paragraph is dedicated to his work in Rajadhyaksha and Willemen's *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*; and he is discussed in Mulay's *Rajas and Yogis*.²⁶ Dwyer mentions Osten in *Filming the Gods*, whilst Bose's *Bollywood: A History*, provides an example of one of several derivative summaries drawn from earlier texts such as *Indian Film*.²⁷ Pal referred to Osten in his autobiography *Such is Life* as well as in several articles from the 1930s that have been reproduced in Bandyopadhyay's

²¹ Schönfeld, "Franz Osten's 'The Light of Asia.'"

²² Kapse, "The Moving Image : Melodrama and Early Indian Cinema, 1913-1939," 85.

²³ Ascárate, "Cinematic Enlightenment."

²⁴ Fuechtner, "The International Project of National(ist) Film."

²⁵ Dablé, "Der Filmpionier Franz Osten."

²⁶ Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*; Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*; Mulay, *From Rajahs and Yogis*.

²⁷ Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*; Bose, *Bollywood: a history*.

compilation volume of film criticism, *Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perceptions from the Thirties*. In these articles Pal focused mainly on their disagreements.²⁸

5.2 Politics and the shadow of National Socialism

Although it was not his first association with the National Socialist regime, in 1936 Osten became a member of the *Auslandsorganisation* of the NSDAP, the Overseas Branch of the German National Socialist Workers' Party that was led by Dr Oswald Urchs; a fact that is frequently cited without further context.²⁹ This inadvertently sets Osten apart from his compatriots at Bombay Talkies. Some historians record Osten's internment by the British in 1939 as a direct result of his party membership, yet all male German nationals over sixteen were initially interned. Osten's repatriation in March 1940 is attributed in turn to ill health, old age, or the intervention of British friends in Bombay; the first two were undoubtedly factors, and he was returned to Germany under the terms of the Geneva Convention. Ungern-Sternberg suggests that Willy Haas kept his distance from Osten and his colleagues because of their political orientation, yet this overlooks the fact that their time in Bombay overlapped by only a few weeks. Haas arrived as an émigré in Bombay at the end of June 1939, whereas Osten, Wirsching and Zolle were arrested on 3 September 1939.³⁰ Kaul describes Osten as an émigré and Manjapra argues that Osten chose exile from Germany.³¹ These interpretations are discussed below.

By examining the connections that linked the National Socialist regime in Germany with expatriate and diasporic Germans who were living in India during

²⁸ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*; Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Indian Cinema*.

²⁹ Bock, ed. *The Concise Cinegraph*, 176; Schönfeld, "Franz Osten's 'The Light of Asia';" Koch, *Franz Osten's Indian Silent Films*; Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*; Ungern-Sternberg, von, *Willy Haas, 1891-1973*; Kapse, "The Moving Image : Melodrama and Early Indian Cinema, 1913-1939," 86.

³⁰ *Willy Haas, 1891-1973*, 172; whether Haas and Osten knew each other is not clear, but Haas is credited as a scriptwriter on the 1929 silent film, *Napoleon auf St. Helena*, that was made for Peter Ostermayr Film-Produktion GmbH, and was produced by Ottmar Ostermayr and directed by Lupu Pick; Haas was not interned because he arrived as a Czech national.

³¹ Kaul, *Cinema and the Indian Freedom Struggle*, 61.; Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, 267.

the 1930s, this section explores the socio-political context after 1933 that modulated the lives of the filmmakers who were working at Bombay Talkies, asking how they might have been affected and whether this may have been a factor in their departure from Germany. It considers how National Socialist ideology was recalibrating the concepts of *Heimat* and *Deutschtum*, and how the regime monitored the activities of Germans abroad through a series of shadow organisations stretching across British India. Reading bureaucratic records in parallel with histories covering the period permits a more nuanced understanding of Osten's politics to emerge.³² The nature of Bombay's German Club, shows how the racially homogeneous space of this organisation existed in diametrical opposition to the cosmopolitan space of Bombay Talkies. Whether the political affiliations of any of the German filmmakers had any direct relevance or influence on their work at Bombay Talkies, is not evident from a study of the films.

When Osten applied to join the *Reichsfilmkammer* (RFK) in October 1933, one of several bodies set up under Goebbels to control Germany's cultural industries and now a prerequisite to allow him to continue to work in the German film industry, he claimed that he had been a member of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) since 3 July 1933. Whether Osten was active in Ernst Röhm's paramilitary organisation is not known, but is unlikely. Hitler's power had been consolidated after the vote in March 1933, giving the public a clearer indication of the kind of commitment that was now expected of German citizens. It is more likely that Osten was a *Märzveilchen*, a 'March violet' anxious to join affiliated organisations after the flood of people trying to join the NSDAP had been halted in May 1933.³³ Less than twelve months after Osten joined, Röhm and at least eighty-four members who were suspected of plotting against Hitler, were deposed and executed on 30 June 1934.³⁴ Over the summer of 1934, the SA began purging its members, and it is possible that Osten, whose age profile and physique are unlikely to have matched the SA's ideal,

³² Davidson, *The Perfect Nazi*; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

³³ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 22; *Märzveilchen* was a pejorative term used by long-established party members who doubted the ideological commitment of the latecomers, see Davidson.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31–41.

may have had his membership cancelled.³⁵ Osten's admission to the RFK was not a smooth process. For example, he was refused admission until he could provide sufficient evidence; in the meantime, he could not be included in the list of German Filmmakers for 1934/35.³⁶ It is Osten's involvement with Bombay's German Club between 1936 and 1939, however, that raises questions whether his political commitment was ideological or simply a pragmatic response to circumstances over which he had no control. The Germans working at Bombay Talkies had relatives and friends who were still in Germany and during the 1930s they probably anticipated returning to work in the German film industry at some point in the future.

The concepts of *Heimat* (home/homeland) and *Deutschtum* (Germanity/Germanness) were being recalibrated by the regime to encompass all those who were living in the Diaspora who were now designated as *Volksgenosse* (ethnically German compatriots), and were therefore within its sights for *Gleichschaltung*, the project to bring everyone into line with National Socialist ideology; this included those who had lived abroad for decades and had since taken other nationalities, as well as those who had been born outside Germany. The corollary of this was the exclusion of those Germans and other German-speaking people who, on the basis of ethnicity, political affiliations, sexual orientation and other 'non-Aryan' characteristics, were now regarded as *Gemeinschaftsfremde* (aliens) and were stripped of their nationality.³⁷ Osten fell into the first category as both *Volks-* and *Parteigenosse*; Haas, as a Jew, was now *Gemeinschaftsfremd*.

³⁵ For example, see Davidson, *The Perfect Nazi*, 124.

³⁶ Letter from RFK to Osten, 19 July 1934, BAL RKJ0096, 286.

³⁷ Germans were made stateless for reasons other than ethnicity, as the case of one Herbert Fischer illustrates. In 1937 Fischer was resident at Gandhi's ashram. After his passport was stolen, his request to Berlin for a replacement was rejected. Fischer had advised the authorities that he was a pacifist and a conscientious objector and the regime promptly retaliated by withdrawing his nationality and demanding the return of his *Heimatschein*, the citizen certificate for Germans living abroad. BL IOR/L/PJ/8/750, 249-255.

5.2.1 Bombay's German Club and the metaphysical contours of *Deutschtum*

Although a German Club had existed in Bombay since at least 1874, by 1892, the name was also used to describe a *chawl* on Bombay's Grant Road.³⁸ In 1912, the building of a German Gymkhana was announced, where "Germans resident in Bombay will be able to enjoy facilities for recreation in a place of their own."³⁹ It was this notion of providing a monocultural space that would later configure the Club as a sphere where Germans living outside Germany would be able to reinforce links within the German community as well as with the regime in the *Heimat*.⁴⁰

After a hiatus following the 1914 Status of Aliens Act that had prevented the free movement of German citizens throughout the British Empire, the Club had been re-established in 1930 by the German Consul, Karl Kapp, an Arabic-Persian scholar who worked to promote Anglo-German reconciliation in India.⁴¹ The Club frequently served as a site of confluence through which visiting German expeditions, whether mountaineers, scientists, or filmmakers (and sometimes a combination of all three), as well as other visitors, passed on their way to destinations within British India and beyond. The Club hosted talks by luminaries such as Professor Dyrenfurth, one of the leaders of an international expedition to Kanchenjunga in 1930 which included the British mountaineer, Frank Smythe; and it welcomed the Indian Olympic team in June 1936 before they left for Berlin.⁴² Although the Olympic team visited once more in September 1936, by this time,

³⁸ *Times of India* reported an incident that allegedly arose when the defendant, Mr. Morgan, responded angrily to having his sleep disrupted by "eighteen Germans singing in chorus" and threw bricks at the Club's windows. "Article 6," *The Times of India*, 24 September 1874; "A thief and a false accuser," *Times of India*, 21 June 1892.

³⁹ "The German Gymkhana," *Times of India*, 15 November 1912.

⁴⁰ For example, these included regular evenings when *Eintöpfe*, traditional German stews, lit. 'one-pot', would be served. "Eintopfessen, das Sinnbild deutsche Volksgemeinschaft," *Der Deutsche in Indien*, March 1938, 26.

⁴¹ "Popular German Consul: leaving Bombay," *Times of India*, 24 July 1936.

⁴² "Kinchinjunga too strong to be explored by human agency," *Times of India*, 26 July 1930.

Kapp had been replaced by a fervent National Socialist, Count von Donhoff.⁴³ In spite of Kapp's encouragement of Anglo-German rapprochement, an ambition that probably hastened his relocation to Ohio, the German Club was by now firmly located on the shadow axis of National Socialist organisations that were operating across British India; a position that was consolidated with Donhoff's arrival.

At the Club, the Bombay Talkies' Germans might have come into contact with the explorer Wilhelm Filchner and the filmmaker Richard Eichberg in 1937, the latter already known to them from the film industry in Munich.⁴⁴ They may also have met the zoologist, Ernst Schäfer, who held a talk at the Club in 1938, as well as the Austrian mountaineer, Heinrich Harrer, when he passed through Bombay as a member of Peter Aufschnaiter's Nanga Parbat team in 1939. Harrer later commented on the colonial lifestyle he observed in the Club:

Im Deutschen Klub erlebten wir staunend die Lebensart der Europäer in einem Kolonialland. Trotz der Hitze [...] spielte man Tennis, löschte den Durst mit Magnumflaschen Beck's Bier oder trank mehrere Gimlets. (In the German Club we were astonished to experience the life style of Europeans in a colonial setting. In spite of the heat ... people played tennis, quenched their thirst with a magnum of Beck's Beer or drank several cocktails.)⁴⁵

From 1936, Osten's presence at the Club is recorded in copies of *Der Deutsche in Indien (DDII)* and his name appears in this publication on at least nine occasions.⁴⁶ Osten was first referred to in a review of events from September 1936 when he gave a talk about his film work in Germany and India to the Club.⁴⁷ The editor of the *DDII*, Peter Frahm, commented favourably on this event, suggesting that Osten

⁴³ A British intelligence report into the activities of National Socialists in India suggested that Kapp was removed following a disagreement with Urchs. "An examination of the activities of the Auslandsorganisation of the National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei." BL L/PJ/12/505, 75.

⁴⁴ Richard Eichberg Film GmbH was associated with Emelka; Bock, ed., *The Concise Cinegraph*, 104.

⁴⁵ Heinrich Harrer, *Mein Leben*. (Munich: Ullstein, 2002), 45.

⁴⁶ A publication with similar aims to the *DDII* was published in Australia during this period; see Emily Turner-Graham, *"Never forget that you are a German": die Brücke, "Deutschtum" and National Socialism in Interwar Australia* (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2011).

⁴⁷ *DDII*, September 1936.

was a popular speaker. The December 1936 edition records Osten's donation of Rs 120/- to the *Winterhilfswerk* (winter relief fund), together with Wirsching who gave Rs 60/- and Zolle, who donated Rs 30/-; a financial hierarchy that may indicate their respective seniority and remuneration at Bombay Talkies.⁴⁸ Von Sprei's name did not appear and it is possible he had no connections with the Club. Osten was next mentioned by *DDII* when he introduced the 1937 Bombay Talkies' film *Izzat* (Honour) to the crew of the visiting German battleship, *Emden*, an occasion at which several members of Bombay Talkies, including Devika Rani and Ashok Kumar, were present.⁴⁹ In July 1937, Osten talked at the Club about film and politics; unfortunately the content of his speech was not recorded.⁵⁰ In March 1938, Osten was thanked for arranging a screening of the Bombay Talkies' newsreel about the visit of the Battleship *Emden*. This issue also refers to Osten as the president of the German Club, a title he only appears to have held briefly.⁵¹ How far any of these reports indicate overt political activism on Osten's part is moot, but it is in the final two entries for March and July 1939 that he appeared to articulate stronger support for National Socialism. In January 1939, Frahm reported that Osten had given a talk to the Club's members summarising Hitler's achievements and, in the final issue of July 1939, the editor recorded that Osten had attended the Club's celebration of Hitler's 50th birthday in April, where he recited a poem by Heinrich Anacker in praise of the Führer.⁵²

The metaphysical contours of Germanity that stretched from the heart of Berlin through the network of the *Auslandsorganisation*, served to monitor the activities of Germans in India; to persuade dissenters into the fold; and encourage compliance with the regime in Berlin. The network spoke out against negative media reports and complained about *Hetzfilme*, those films it claimed were inciting

⁴⁸ "Winterhilfswerk, 1936-1937," *Der Deutsche in Indien*, December 1936.

⁴⁹ *DDII*, April 1937, 11.

⁵⁰ *DDII*, July 1937, 19.

⁵¹ By August 1938, the role of president was held by Reiss, but no mention was made of Osten's resignation. *DDII*, March 1938, 22.

⁵² *Adolf Hitler als Mensch* (Adolf Hitler as a human being), *DDII*, July 1939, 51.

anti-German sentiment.⁵³ It also provided a source of anti-British propaganda that was directed at Indian nationalists and supported by individuals who were sympathetic to the regime in Berlin. Among these was Dr A. L. Sinha who was a frequent correspondent to the *Times of India* in defence of the German regime, and who was also suspected of writing under the pseudonym, Ernst Treu.⁵⁴ In India the networks operated through commercial organisations that employed German expatriates, such as AEG, Krupps and Siemens; through the consular authorities in Bombay, Calcutta and Karachi; via social clubs and other enterprises of the regime such as the *Bund Deutsche Mädchen* (BDM), the Hitler Jugend (HJ) and *Kraft durch Freude* (KdF) the Strength through Joy programme.⁵⁵ The fourth cornerstone of the network was provided by some of the missionary societies, most notably the Basler Mission, which was responsible for publishing *DDII*, that, by July 1938, was finally coming under closer scrutiny by the British authorities.⁵⁶

When war was declared on 3 September 1939, all male enemy aliens over the age of sixteen who were in India were arrested and interned. Initially the net was cast wide enough to include German Jewish males, the majority of whom were released after an initial assessment. Haas, a Czech citizen, was not interned. Osten, Wirsching and Zolle, were taken first to Deolali, later to be dispersed across the network of internment camps, or, in the case of Osten, to be repatriated. In addition to the Bombay Talkies' Germans, a handful of other German filmmakers

⁵³ This was a list that included *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The Reichstag had already brought in a law to ban foreign films in March 1931.

⁵⁴ "Mr. Sinha has a very good colleague in one 'Ernst Treu'. Nobody knows whether this is a man or woman, or Mr. Sinha himself." "Nazi propaganda in India", IOR/L/PJ/7/2286. Sinha met Hitler in Berlin on 6 December 1935 when he had the opportunity to ask him to clarify the race question, which he said was causing a lot of concern amongst Indians. Hitler replied that, providing no other race tried to enforce its customs onto the German race, there was no problem. BAL R/43/II/474a.

⁵⁵ It was an illusion of travel that the National Socialists later attempted to realise through the programme of *Kraft durch Freude* which was aimed at enabling ordinary Germans to experience the world beyond their borders; and by encouraging Germans abroad to capture photographic images of the world around them.

⁵⁶ William Paton, who admitted that his own knowledge of German was weak, suggested that *DDII* might be political, but was not a Nazi pamphlet. The Intelligence Bureau thought otherwise and suggested that Paton had been too easily convinced by the Mission's Dr. Karl Hartenstein. BL IOR/L/PJ/7/2048.

who were in India were also interned. These included Bodo Gutschwager, a special effects expert who had initially worked for Mohan Bhavnani on a 1935 animation film entitled *Lafanga Langoor* (The Merry Monkey), and who was arrested in Coimbatore on 3 May 1940.⁵⁷ Wilhelm Meyer-Bergelt, whose internment papers described him as a cameraman, had travelled to India as part of Richard Eichberg's film expedition to make sound versions of *The Indian Tomb* and the *Tiger of Eschnapur*. Meyer-Bergelt was arrested in Calcutta on 3 September 1939; why he had not returned with Eichberg and what his activities were in India during the intervening period might merit further research.⁵⁸ Paul Zils, who would become one of India's leading documentary filmmakers after 1945, was arrested on 10 May 1940 in Java where he had been making a film, and transported to India in January 1942.⁵⁹

Osten later claimed that he had been released in exchange for other internees held in Germany under an agreement between the two countries (i.e. the Geneva Convention), and documents in the India Office Files show that he was released from internment on 9 March 1940, travelling a week later to Germany on 17th March 1940 on the President Garfield.⁶⁰ In 1942, Osten reported that the British had confiscated all the belongings and savings he had held in India, requiring him to begin again once he returned to Germany.⁶¹ To compound his distress, the

⁵⁷ By this date, Gutschwager was working in the Tamil film industry with Ellis Dungan. BL IOR/L/PJ/8/31, 1; Gutschwager later wrote about his hunting escapades in India, *Jäger im Dschungel*, but omitted any reference to his filmmaking. Hughes suggests that Dungan was another keen hunter.

⁵⁸ BL IOR/L/PJ/8/31, 17; Eichberg himself emigrated to America in 1938 having come into conflict with the National Socialist regime; Kay Weniger, *Es Wird Im Leben Dir Mehr Genommen Als Gegeben ... Lexikon der aus Deutschland und Österreich Emigrierten Filmschaffenden 1933 Bis 1945 : Eine Gesamtübersicht* (Hamburg: ACABUS Verlag, 2011), 150.

⁵⁹ Public and Judicial Department, "Nominal rolls of internees and parolees in India", BL IOR/L/PJ/8/31, 183; see also Amrit Gangar, *Paul Zils and the Indian Documentary* (Bombay: Max Mueller Bhavan, 2003).

⁶⁰ Public and Judicial Department, "Enemy aliens interned in India; repatriations from India", BL IOR/L/PJ/8/69, 27,49.

⁶¹ The confiscation of property would have been carried out by the Custodian of Enemy Property. An auction was held on 23 July 1942 of all property held by the Custodian. "Sales by auction," *Times of India*, 20 July 1942.

possessions he had stored in Berlin before travelling to India were stolen on the journey from Berlin to Munich (Osten, “Lebenslauf,” RK J0079). In spite of his age, it was evident that Osten would still need to work for a living, but he claimed that his state of health was too poor to return to directing films. For a while, Bavaria-Filmkunst (Emelka’s successor) appointed him to manage and expand its entire film archives.⁶² Eventually he became the manager of a health resort, dying in Bad Aibling on 2 December 1956.

5.2.2 The expatriot and the émigré

When Rai invited Osten to work at Bombay Talkies, he ran into difficulties with Niranjan Pal who he had also invited to join the studio, but who was resolutely against the involvement of the Germans. Pal commented that Rai told him he “was not personally enamoured of [the Germans]” and reassured him that the arrangement was temporary to allow Indian filmmakers to be trained up; adding that their presence was necessary to “attract the business magnates of Bombay.”⁶³ Von Spreti recorded that he had been given a fixed term contract for three years; and this may have been true for the others.⁶⁴ Osten, Wirsching and Zolle were still in post by 1939, however, and it was Pal who had irrevocably severed his ties with Rai and Bombay Talkies in 1937 after writing *Jeevan Prabhat*.⁶⁵ Why had Rai chosen Osten, and what made the working relationship between them so durable?

In the first place, it is likely that Bombay Talkies’ rapid and ongoing success was a significant factor in Osten’s retention. Contemporary film reviews invariably

⁶² “Franz Osten bei der Bavaria,” *Luxemburger Wort*, 5 October 1940; Putz comments that Emelka failed to keep an archive during the period she researched (1919-1933), perhaps suggesting a subsequent change of opinion by the studio. See Putz, 12.

⁶³ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 234.

⁶⁴ Application to Reichskammer der bildenden Künste, 3 July 1938, BAL RKJ0096, 242.

⁶⁵ Pal indicated that the split with Rai came about following the Rai’s criticism of Pal’s articles in *Filmland*, but it is clear from his autobiography that there were regular disagreements. Pal was generally more critical when writing about Rai, whereas Rai was positive towards Pal, at least in available records. It should be borne in mind, however, that Pal may not have expected his memoir to remain anything other than private, the manuscript being only recently discovered. Rai, however, was writing for public consumption; Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 240.

praised the technical excellence of the films, citing Osten in particular.⁶⁶ In the second place, Osten was evidently respected by several of Bombay Talkies' employees. This is clear from comments by Ashok Kumar who told Gangar: "Franz Osten was like a father figure to everyone at Bombay Talkies."⁶⁷ Jairaj, who joined Bombay Talkies for the production of *Bhabhi*, commented that "Osten took a personal interest in me and treated me like a son, and when I showed interest in learning direction, he showed me old scripts from Ufa."⁶⁸

Although the terms émigré and exile generally imply a political motive for absence from a homeland, there is no evidence that this was Osten's position, and this thesis argues that his status, and those of his colleagues, was as expatriot Germans. Osten satisfied the German regime's criteria for ethnicity; and he declared that he had never been involved in left wing politics or human rights activities.⁶⁹ The films he made, although occasionally political, were unlikely to have caused the National Socialists undue alarm; they portrayed none of the cultural Bolshevism the Nazis so despised; and the homophonic resonance of *Judas*, with its theme of betrayal, might be interpreted as anti-Semitic. Reading Osten's life summary, however, it becomes clear that he was at pains to emphasise his commitment to Germany, rather than explicitly to National Socialism. He mentioned his military service in the First World War; he stressed that his role with Bombay Talkies had enabled him to install German products and equipment, and he pointed out that he had shown *Achhut Kanya* at the German Ministry of Propaganda in 1937.⁷⁰ Nowhere in this document does he refer to his activities at

⁶⁶ "under the experienced direction of that old veteran Franz Osten [the acting in *Savitri*] is well nigh perfect," "Bombay Talkies' *Savitri* offers glamorous Devika her greatest opportunity," *Times of India*, 25 June 1937.

⁶⁷ Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*, 9.

⁶⁸ "BT: The complete studio", *Screen*, 28 September 1984, 20.

⁶⁹ BAL RK J0079, 280, 282.

⁷⁰ "[Ich konnte] diesen Film 'Achuh Kauja' (sic) während meines Urlaubs 1937 in Deutschland im Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda Vorführung allgemeine Anerkennung gefunden." (During my holiday in 1937, I was able to show [Achhut Kanya] at the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Osten, "Lebenslauf," RKJ0079, 301-302.

the German Club in Bombay, however, and neither does he give any sense of being anti-Semitic.

It is by comparing Osten's approach to living and working in India with that of Haas, that another explanation for the success of the working relationship between Rai and Osten might be discerned. In Europe the careers of Osten and Haas had run along parallel tracks, rarely intersecting over the years. There was little overlap apart from their involvement in filmmaking; they originated from different social and political milieu, and they approached the task of Indian filmmaking from divergent perspectives.

Vilem/Willy Haas was a Czech-German Jew who arrived as an émigré in Bombay on 26 June 1939. A respected scriptwriter and film critic, Haas had twice been forced to flee, first from Berlin in 1933, and subsequently from Prague, following Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland in March 1939.⁷¹ Haas had secured a rare visa to come to India through the sponsorship and recommendation of a fellow Jewish émigré, the composer Walter Kaufmann, who had lived and worked in Bombay since 1934.⁷² Kaufmann had also secured work for Haas at Mohan Bhavnani's studio, Bhavnani Productions.⁷³ Although Haas had not been to India before 1939, he *had* studied Indian mythology as a student at King Charles University in Prague; consequently he approached the research for his first script for Bhavnani – a narrative derived from Ibsen's *Ghosts* – with scholarly attention. Ungern-Sternberg says of Haas "[he] wanted to make India his new home. He tried hard to get into the culture, the history and the myths of the country."⁷⁴ In spite of his deep commitment to engage with Indian cultural institutions, however, Haas

⁷¹ Ungern-Sternberg, von, *Willy Haas, 1891-1973*.

⁷² Ungern-Sternberg, von, "I Am Not Here to Teach, but to Learn ...", 43–45; for more information on Kaufmann, see Amrit Gangar, *The music that still rings at dawn, every dawn* (Max Mueller Bhavan, 2013).

⁷³ Bearing in mind that the Congress Party was reluctant to admit any European refugees, and that Gandhi's advice to Germany's Jewish population was to adopt *Satyagraha*, in peaceful resistance to Hitler's dictatorship, Haas, and the other twelve refugees who disembarked with him, were the fortunate ones.

⁷⁴ Ungern-Sternberg, von, "I Am Not Here to Teach, but to Learn ...", 44.

became disheartened with the way his efforts were ignored and scenes were filmed that bore no relation to his script.⁷⁵

Ungern-Sternberg suggests that Haas was reticent when it came to imposing his views on Bhavnani and he contrasts him with Osten, arguing that the latter was more strident in voicing his opinion, a suggestion that appears to have originated with Koch.⁷⁶ However, an account from Ashok Kumar suggests that Osten was not someone with a particularly imposing manner. Kumar remembered him as “a very kind man [who] respected everyone in the studio, despite his high position [...] he treated his actors with a sense of dignity.”⁷⁷

Although Osten appears to have wielded more power over the direction of *Light of Asia*, and Rai continued to seek his opinion before engaging actors at Bombay Talkies, it was nevertheless clear that Rai was in charge.⁷⁸ Osten had worked at Bombay Talkies for four years before Haas arrived in 1939 and he had also spent nearly two years working in India during the late 1920s. He was established as the principal director at Bombay Talkies and, by July 1939, was working on his sixteenth, and final film, *Kangan*.⁷⁹ During those years, however, he does not appear to have made any attempts either to learn Hindi or to attempt to understand Indian culture, a disengagement criticised by Shyam Benegal, who writes, “[*Achhut Kanya*] was directed by a German filmmaker, Franz Osten, whose

⁷⁵ Ungern-Sternberg, von, *Willy Haas, 1891-1973*, 181.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 172.; “[Osten] zur Durchsetzung seines Regiewillens bei der ‘photo- und kinofremden Bevölkerung’ schliesslich genötigt sah, die tausendköpfige Menge von der mit Schlagstöcken bewaffneten Polizei vor der Kameraobjektive treiben zu lassen.” Koch, “Von der ‘Münchener Lichtspielkunst’ zu den ‘Bombay Talkies’: Franz Osten,” 127. Koch claims this information came from one of several articles Osten wrote for German magazines after making *Light of Asia*. This particular reference has not been located. Was this an example of Osten brutalising film extras or is it more reflective of a local response towards unruly behaviour?

⁷⁷ Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*, 9.

⁷⁸ The choice of Ashok Kumar as the hero for *Jeevan Naiya* provides an example of Rai and Osten disagreeing, with Rai settling the matter to his satisfaction when he told Kumar: “Leave aside what the director thinks, he did not select you, I did.” This well known story is related by Valicha, *Dadamoni*, 14, and Ghosh, *Ashok Kumar*, 36.

⁷⁹ Osten and others report that he made 17 films for Bombay Talkies; it is possible that subsequent reports derived from Osten.

ignorance of Hindustani was matched only by his lack of knowledge of local customs.”⁸⁰

Osten’s failure to deepen his understanding of cultural matters is perhaps all the more surprising given comments he made in 1928, citing difficulties that had arisen because of cultural misunderstandings during filming in India. In these, he described misunderstandings that arose from his lack of knowledge of land and people.⁸¹ He explained the importance of having the assistance of a local “boy” to smooth his passage as he travelled around India, nevertheless declaring:

von dem indischen Knigge verstehe ich allerdings bis jetzt nicht viel und kann mich mit dessen Regeln noch nicht befreunden. (I still don’t understand much about Indian etiquette and cannot come to terms with its rules.)⁸²

Dealing with caste restrictions was one of the more delicate hurdles that Osten had to negotiate when directing actors and extras who wouldn’t wear the clothing of a lower caste character; or who were not prepared to stand alongside someone who was below them in caste hierarchy.⁸³ Nevertheless, Osten *was* capable of accepting that cultural traditions would sometimes restrict filming, seeking to draw on parallels with historical German customs that had reinforced social divisions:

“Wie vorsintflutlich,” hört man sagen, und doch gab es einmal so etwas Ähnliches in Deutschland. Durch das mittlere Brandenburgertor in Berlin durfte niemand fahren oder reiten – nur der Kaiser und in Ausnahmefällen – die Feuerwehr. (“How primitive” we hear them say, and yet we once had something similar in Germany. No one was allowed to drive or ride through the central of the Brandenburgertor – only the Kaiser and, exceptionally, the fire brigade.)⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Benegal, “Secularism and Popular Indian Cinema,” 229.

⁸¹ “Als Regisseur im Orient,” *Mein Film*, 11 May 1928.

⁸² “Seine Majestät der Boy,” *Brünner Tagesbote*, 28 December 1928.

⁸³ “Film in Indien,” *Mein Film*, 7 May 1937.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Clearly, the analogy Osten provided bore little comparison to the realities of caste discrimination, but it is arguably precisely because he remained ignorant of local customs and languages, that his working relationship with Rai was successful. Unlike Haas, whose precarious status as an émigré underpinned his determination to make a new life in India because he no longer had an alternative, Osten would remain forever an outsider, someone who was less likely to question or interfere with Rai's cultural vision for Indian cinema, and who would return home once his task at Bombay Talkies was finished. By comparison, Haas did everything he could to assimilate; he tended to avoid other Europeans, including émigrés, and he eschewed those clubs that excluded Indians.⁸⁵ Haas also forged friendships with Indians, including Bhavnani, Raja Rao and Sophie Wadia, occasionally contributing to the latter's theosophical journal, *The Aryan Path*.⁸⁶ He also worked briefly with Leela Chitnis to produce the screenplay for *Kanchan* in 1941.⁸⁷ When Bhavnani's studio became bankrupt, no longer able to make more than a rudimentary living from films, Haas initially worked as a civilian censor and subsequently joined the British army, spending most of the war years working at Dehra Dun, the internment camp where he was evidently well liked.⁸⁸

5.3 Osten's German films

By 1925, when Rai concluded arrangements with Emelka for the production of *Light of Asia*, Osten had more than thirty films credited to his name since 1910, and he had been producing short films and newsreels since 1907. He was counted among Germany's top ten directors, his films were being regularly reviewed by the press and he had been the principal director at Emelka since 1920. As the example

⁸⁵ Ungern-Sternberg, von, *Willy Haas, 1891-1973*, 158.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 194; unsurprisingly, given its title, *The Aryan Path* attracted some interest in Germany and was mentioned in correspondence between Frahm and Albert Hoffmann who was the head of the foreign press office in Munich (Leiter der Auslandspressestelle). BAL NS 42/12 26208.

⁸⁷ A *Times of India* article failed to mention the involvement of Haas in the film's narrative. "Leela Chitnis In Song And Dance Feast In 'Kanchan'," *Times of India*, 30 August 1941.

⁸⁸ Ungern-Sternberg, von, *Willy Haas, 1891-1973*, 231; Incidentally, this was also the camp that held Wilhelm Zolle, Heinrich Harrer and Oswald Urchs.

in Figure 5-1 shows, following the success of *Shiraz*, Ufa used Osten's name, along with those of Fritz Lang and Emil Jannings, as a successful draw for cinema audiences "who [have] brought you the biggest successes so far." Although he is known principally as a director, during his early years Osten also tried his hand at a variety of other film roles. In 1910, he may have acted in his brother's first feature film, *Die Wahrheit* (The Truth), although this could not be verified.⁸⁹ Osten wrote the script for *Träume sind Schäume oder "Zu Höherem geboren"* (Dreams are but Shadows or Born to a Better Life, 1916).⁹⁰ He operated the camera for *Der Jäger von Fall* (The hunter from Fall, 1918) and *Das Opfer der Isis/Iris* (The Sacrifice of Isis/Iris, 1919); the former film a rendition of a Ganghofer novel, the latter an orientalist drama.⁹¹ And he produced *Karl Valentin der Sonderling* (Karl Valentin the Misfit, 1929). A handful of Osten's German films survive, some only in fragments. This section considers whether those films can reveal anything about Osten's directorial style and whether traces can be identified in his later work at Bombay Talkies. And it considers how his films functioned as discursive spaces for socio-political concerns.

⁸⁹ Horak describes this as Munich's first fiction feature, he does not mention Osten's presence in the film and other sources list different names, Horak, "Munich's First Fiction Feature: Die Wahrheit."

⁹⁰ Described as a two act *Filmschwank* (film farce), this film was also exhibited in Austria and starred a popular Viennese stage actor, Pepi Glöckner.

⁹¹ Plot description for *Isis* from *Neue Kino Rundschau*, 24 January 1920, 12.

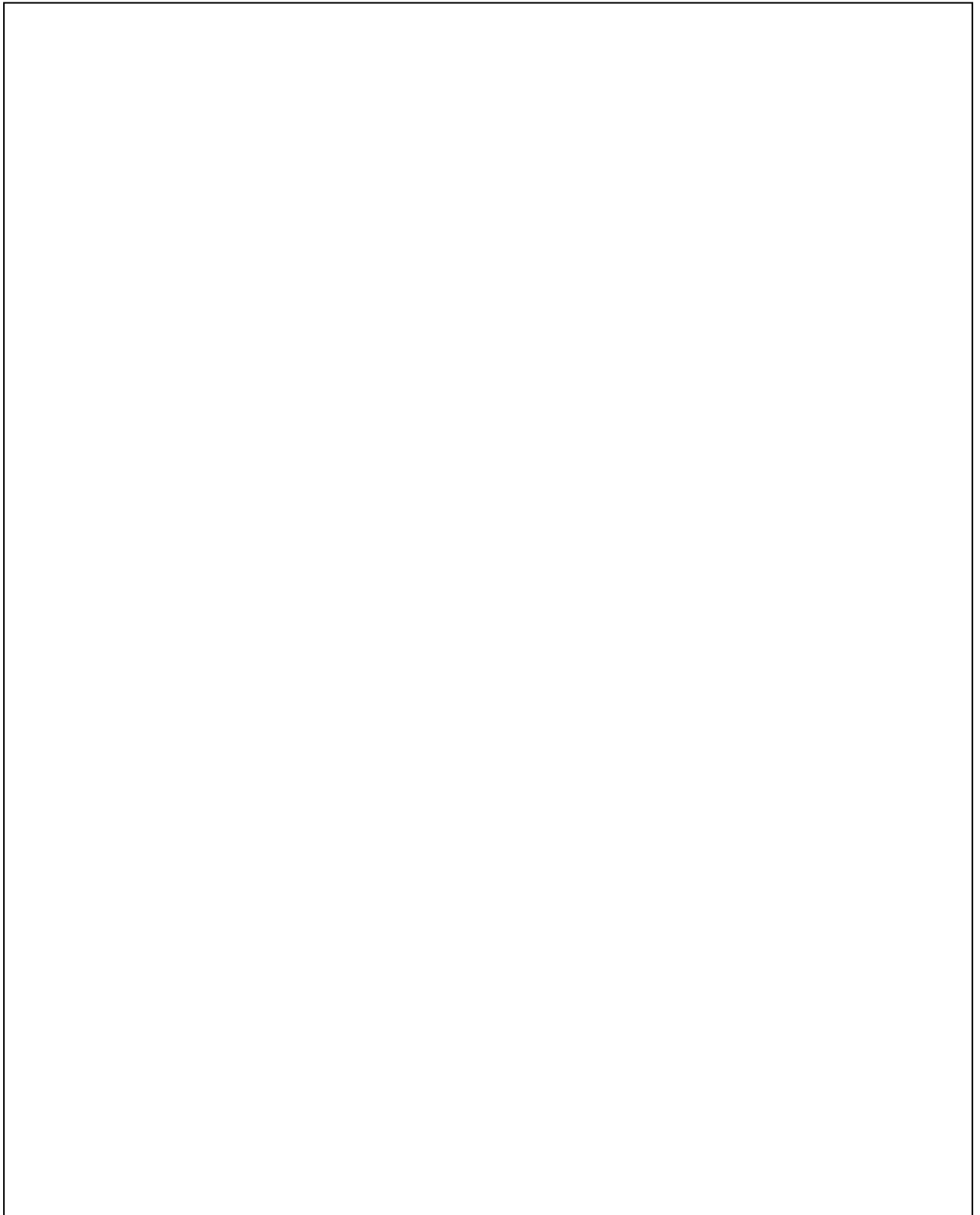


Figure 5-1 "Ufa advertisement," *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 1929.

5.3.1 The Münchener Lichtspielkunst (Emelka)

When Rai and Pal arrived in Germany to discuss the possibility of a joint venture to produce *Light of Asia*, probably towards the end of 1924, Osten was Emelka's principal director. Although some film histories suggest that Peter Ostermayr was involved with the *Light of Asia* negotiations, this is unlikely; Ostermayr's departure from Emelka in 1923 was evidently not congenial.⁹² Rai and Pal arrived during a brief period when Emelka was actively seeking international involvement, and Emelka's managing director, Wilhelm Kraus, agreed that the Germans would provide the technical expertise and equipment, and the Indians would provide the finance. As discussed in chapter 2, an Anglo-German agreement had been concluded with Michael Balcon and Emelka and W & F Film Services, shortly before the Indo-German agreement.⁹³

Emelka was established on 24 April 1918 in a merger with Peter Ostermayr's original company, the Münchener Kunstfilm P. Ostermayr, which had been in existence since 1909. This event was reported in the trade press and a four page advertisement announced that the new studio brought together, "the best in the arts and sciences, technology and literature that Munich has to offer."⁹⁴ Emelka had powerful social and political connections in Germany's south and, following its transition in January 1919 to an *Aktiengesellschaft*, a public limited company, it provided Bavaria with a film production company to temper the dominance of Ufa. In May 1920, Emelka was integrated with seven other local film producing

⁹² Ostermayr had left the company in 1923, later claiming that the role of artistic consultant was considered superfluous by the board of directors. Letter from Peter Ostermayr to the RFK, July 1941, BAL VBS 159/2600015019; the *Österreichische Film Zeitung* was less complimentary about the Ostermayr's achievements, later describing Emelka under its founding member as: "*bescheiden... klein ... und unscheinbar.*" (modest ... small ... and unremarkable), and attributing its new success to the close cooperation of the *Dreigestirn*, the triumvirate of Wilhelm Rosenthal, Wilhelm Kraus and Ludwig Scheer. "Emelka," *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 11 June 1927.

⁹³ Putz, 71; filmed at Geiseltasteig, *Irrgarten der Leidenschaft*/The pleasure garden, 1925 and *Der Bergadler*/The mountain eagle, 1926, were directed by Alfred Hitchcock and produced by Michael Balcon.

⁹⁴ This listed the names of seven luminaries from Bavarian life – architects, artists and sculptors who would act as cultural consultants to the studio, as well as the board of directors, which included Munich's president of police, Rudolph Beckh, Advertisement for Münchener Lichtspielkunst G.m.b.H., *Neue Kino Rundschau*, 29 June 1918.

companies, including that of Richard Eichberg, the director who would later remake *The Indian Tomb* and the *Tiger of Eschnapur* on location in India. By 1921 an American publication was reporting Emelka's prominence in the German film industry.⁹⁵ This comment confirmed Munich's position as Germany's second film city, although Putz argues that Berlin's status as Germany's leading film city was never realistically under threat.⁹⁶

Since 1919, Emelka had provided Osten with the infrastructure to develop as a director and he worked there until the end of 1926 when his contract was not renewed.⁹⁷ Putz attributes Osten's dismissal to the arrival of Ludwig Scheer and "the wind from Berlin that blew through Emelka as a result of Scheer's management."⁹⁸ Osten finally left Emelka on 31 December 1926 after making his last film for the studio, *Die kleine Inge und ihre drei Väter* (Little Inge and her three fathers) on which Josef Wirsching also worked as a cameramen. If there was any doubt that he had been dropped by Emelka, the omission of his name from an advertisement for *Inge* appeared to make it clear.⁹⁹ Writing in 1942, Osten did not claim that he had been forced out by Emelka, suggesting instead that he had left in order to move to Berlin to work as a director with a variety of Berlin and American companies.¹⁰⁰ For nearly ten years until he moved to Bombay in 1935, Osten would work independently for several film studios, including with Ufa for *Shiraz* and *A Throw of Dice*, as well as for Peter Ostermayr Produktions.

⁹⁵ "Heilbroner discusses German-American Films," *Variety*, 8 April 1921.

⁹⁶ Putz, 33.

⁹⁷ Was this a surprise for Osten? Early in 1926, and possibly before Scheer's arrival, Osten's name was still being used by Emelka, as can be seen from a notice appealing for actors in Spain for an unnamed film he was to direct. "¿Quereis ser "estrellas"? Se os ha presentado la ocasión," *El Imparcial*, 27 February 1926.

⁹⁸ Putz, 72;

⁹⁹ Where accompanying advertisements for other new Emelka productions carried the names of their respective directors: *Die Erinnerungen einer Nonne* (The memories of a nun) and *Faschingszauber* (Carnival magic) both made in 1927, Osten's name was absent from *Inge*. Only a few frames of this film have survived, described by the *Österreichische Film Zeitung* as an *entzückende Lustspiel*, a charming comedy. Advertisement for trade show of *Inge*, and comments on the film; *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 22 January 1927.

¹⁰⁰ Osten, "Lebenslauf," BAL PK J0079.

5.3.2 Contemporary critiques of Osten's work

Hake points out that early German-language film reviews rarely discussed the quality of a director's work, and the earliest critique that could be found was a 1919 review of *Der Tod von Phaleria* that described Osten's direction as "a good average without special merit."¹⁰¹ As mentioned above, Osten's films attracted variable reviews, at times reflecting cultural variations between Berlin and Munich; his Heimat films appear to have been particularly popular.¹⁰² The *Reichsfilmblatt* criticised Osten's direction of *Light of Asia*, complaining that it gave the impression of "expressionless reportage;" a similar comment being made by a Dutch newspaper.¹⁰³ Alfréd Keményi, writing in *Die Rote Fahne*, criticised Osten's presentation of both landscape and people in *Light of Asia*, complaining that they looked like they were taken from dusty oil paintings and dismissing him as "one of Germany's least talented directors."¹⁰⁴ Perhaps seeking to further diminish the director from Munich, Keményi compared Osten with the Russian directors, Pudowkin and Ozep:

Ein Pudowkin oder Ozep hätten der schönen und begabten Seeta Devi stark filmschauspielerische Wirkungen entlockt. Bei Osten liegen ihre Fähigkeiten brach. (Pudovkin or Ozep would not have failed to coax the beautiful and talented Seeta Devi to act like a film actress. Osten let her abilities lie fallow).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Hake, *Cinema's Third Machine*, 15; "Die Filmwoche," *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 26 October 1919; four years later, the same publication would praise Osten's influence at Emelka in his role as leading director, "Die Münchner Produktion," *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 3 June 1923.

¹⁰² "Alle Freunde des heimatlichen Films einen überdies auf den Film Fürst Seppl aufmerksam gemacht, der eine lustige Geschichte aus der bodenständigen Bevölkerung unserer Alpenwelt bringt." (We would like to make all friends of the home-grown film aware of Fürst Seppl, a film that presents an amusing story from the indigenous population of our Alpine world.) "Illustrierte Filmpost," *Illustrierte Wochenpost*, 16 September 1932, 15.

¹⁰³ *Reichsfilmblatt* 44 (1925), 41; "Duitschland. Een Engelsch-Indische Film," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 November 1925.

¹⁰⁴ Alfréd Keményi, *Die Rote Fahne*, 18 August 1929, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Indian Cinema*, 88; In a comment aimed not at Osten, but at the Indian film industry, Niranjan Pal also expressed praise for the work of Russian filmmakers as ideals his colleagues should strive for, emphasising in particular the work of Pudovkin and Eisenstein.

As discussed in chapter 2, Osten strove to achieve a style of realism, an aspiration that continued at Bombay Talkies when he advised Jairaj, “not [to] act, [but] be sincere in your characterisation.”¹⁰⁶ Osten was popular in Austria and Oscar Geller referred to him as “our dear old friend;” the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* meanwhile, described *A Throw of Dice* as Osten’s “best and most mature India film,” describing him as a “director with sensitivity;” while another Dutch review of *Dice* praised his “good eye for proportions and perspective.”¹⁰⁷ Leo Hirsch, writing in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, commended his cinematic realism saying that “under Osten’s direction the fairytale narrative takes on a touch of significance.”¹⁰⁸

Brandlmeier attributes the variable quality of Osten’s films to his precise adherence to the printed script.¹⁰⁹ Pal describing a dispute between himself and Osten during the making of *Light of Asia*, records Osten’s panic when the writer threatened to tear up his script, leaving the director allegedly begging “how can I make a film without a working script?”¹¹⁰ Marshall Braganza, a cameraman with Bombay Talkies, said “[Osten] would always hold the script in his hands while directing and follow it very minutely.”¹¹¹ Jairaj’s comment reinforced the image of the director and his close adherence to the script when he said “on the first day of the shooting [of *Bhabhi*] I noticed Mr Osten sitting on a high stool [...] script in hand [...] though he did not know the language he knew the rhythm from the English script.”¹¹² In the context of Rai’s absolute control over film production, discussed in

¹⁰⁶ “BT: The complete studio”, *Screen*, 28 September 1984, 20.

¹⁰⁷ *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 10 October 1931, 5; 4 June 1932, 5; 14 May 1932, 2; *Münchener Neueste Nachrichte*, 13 September 1929; “de regisseur Osten heeft een goed oog op verhoudingen en perspectief.” “De dobbelsteenen van het noodlot,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 2 February 1930.

¹⁰⁸ “unter [Osten’s] Regie gewinnen die sagenhaften Begebenheiten den Anflug von Bedeutung” Leo Hirsch, *Berliner Tageblatt*, 18 August 1929.

¹⁰⁹ Brandlmeier, “Franz Osten,” 30.

¹¹⁰ Pal, *Niranjan Pal*, 209.

¹¹¹ Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*, 15.

¹¹² Recounted by the Bombay Talkies’ actor, Jairaj. “BT: the complete studio,” *Screen*, 28 September 1984, 20.

the previous chapter, Osten's non-auteurial mode of direction was an attribute that worked to Rai's advantage.

Rai wanted to change the way India and Indians were seen by the West and it was Osten who would become responsible for assisting him in this endeavour. Nevertheless, Emelka and, to an extent Osten, had a history of producing populist orientalist dramas.¹¹³ Photographed by Peter Ostermayr in 1917, for example, *Die entschleierte Maja* (Maja unveiled), had a plot summarised by the Early German Cinema Database as "Indian woman ruins Olaf. Reawakened he makes up his mind;" and Osten directed *Der gelbe Gaukler* (The Yellow Swindler) in 1919, which is summarised as "Japanese kidnaps medium, her husband brings her back."¹¹⁴ In common with filmmakers in the West, the German film industry used its perception of the Orient to invoke exoticism rather than to foster realism; deploying make-up, costumes and studio sets to foster the cinematic imaginary. One filmmaker viewed this positively, commenting:

Es ist mit Wärme zu begrüßen, wenn die Sujets der Films immer häufiger auf das orientalische Milieu eingestellt werden, das so geeignet ist, dem Publikum Neues und Märchenhaftes zu bieten. (That films are ever more frequently focusing on an oriental setting, so appropriate for offering the public novelties and fairy tales, is to be warmly congratulated.)¹¹⁵

The film industries in Berlin, Hollywood and London contributed to the exoticisation of difference as much as Emelka in Munich. Writing about *Light of Asia*, Balázs compared this Indo-German film with what he referred to as the "Berlin-Staakener" films of Joe May, whose 'Indian' trilogy for Ufa, *Die Sendung des*

¹¹³ Brandlmeier cites a description of the 1919 production of *Der Brunnen des Wahnsinns* (The Well of Insanity), an orientalist drama directed by Ottmar Ostermayr, for which an entire oriental city was built in the grounds of the studio at Geiseltal. This was Emelka's fictional town of Melka, a metempsychotic space that was continuously remodelled to represent a number of exotic locations. Several of the films produced by Osten and his brothers suggests several narratives configuring the exotic Other as dangerous.

¹¹⁴ Plot summaries provided by The Early German Cinema Database, accessed 18 July 2014. <http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de/>

¹¹⁵ "Architekt und Film," *Die Filmwelt*, April 1921. Accessed 13 November 2014. <http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-plus?aid=fwt&datum=1921&page=4&size=45>

Yoghi (The Yogi's Message, 1921), *Das indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb, 1921), and *Der Tiger von Eschnapur* (The Tiger of Eschnapur, 1921), were shot in a converted aircraft hangar and featured the German actor, Conrad Veidt, who was made up to represent the [devious] Maharadscha Ayan of Eschnapur. This conceit was later parodied in an article in Germany's *Filmland* that also hinted at its author's own orientalism:

Die "Emelka" unter Mitwirkung hoher und höchster Persönlichkeiten Indiens sowie eines Verwandten des unsterblichen Rabbi Rabindranath Tagore einen biographisch-bioskopischen Film "Buddha" aufnimmt; die Expedition schwimmt schon auf hoher und höchster See. Jetzt wird bekannt, daß folgende Maharadschahs "ihre werktätige Unterstützung" zugesagt haben: die von Mysore, Kachmere, Benares, Udaypur und Barvda. - So, so, und warum macht der Maharadscha von Eschnapur nicht mit? ("Emelka", in cooperation with high and even higher Indian personalities, as well as a relative of the eternal Rabbi Rabindranath Tagore, is making a biographical-biopic film "Buddha"; the expedition is already swimming on high and higher seas. Now it has been made known that the following Maharajas have agreed to their "working support": the [Rajas] of Mysore, Benares, Udaypur and Barvda. - So, so, and why isn't the Maharaja of Eschnapur involved?)¹¹⁶

The exotic and orientalisising treatment of India continued with Richard Eichberg's 1938 remakes of Thea von Harbou's novels, *Das indische Grabmal* and *Der Tiger von Eschnapur*, as well as Zoltan Korda's film, *The Drum*, also made in 1938, all of which attracted the ire of *Film India*'s editor, Baburao Patel and K. A. Abbas. These led to official complaints, the discussion of which can be followed in correspondence at the India Office.¹¹⁷ Commenting on Eichberg's *Eschnapur*, Patel wrote:

the dancer's previous lover, of course a European, follows the girl to India and passing through a series of Indian "cruelties" takes

¹¹⁶ Cinemax, "Das endlose Celluloidband. Ein Film Kalendrium," *Filmland*, 7 March 1925.

¹¹⁷ Correspondence regarding Indian complaints about the making of *The Drum* (Korda, 1938) can be found at IOR/L/PS/12/3245. For an in depth analysis of *The Drum* and other controversial films in this period, see Chowdhry, *Colonial India*; Jaikumar, *Cinema at the end of empire*, and Mulay, *From rajahs and yogis*.

the girl back. The Maharaja pursues but ultimately loses. The European has vanquished the Indian, as usual.¹¹⁸

But Indian filmmakers also used exoticism to attract audiences, in particular themes from the Arabian Nights, leading Wilford Deming, an American sound engineer who worked for a while in India, to comment:

Scripts are very frequently prepared from 'Arabian Nights' tales, with a few original adaptations. Almost universally, the tragic ending is preferred with happy climax in heaven...and strange and various are the conceptions with double and triple exposures abounding.¹¹⁹

Fuechtner discusses Osten's attempts at ethnographic realism in *Light of Asia*, whilst Ascárate comments that:

by self-reflexively pointing to the wealth and leisure [of well-healed Europeans] required to enjoy (and to stage) such images, Osten undermines his original efforts at authenticity.¹²⁰

For example, *Die Villa im Tiergarten*, discussed in more detail below, employs oriental objects as markers to differentiate between the social classes: the Villa's aristocratic occupants possess oriental vases, porcelain elephants and Persian carpets; meanwhile Grete's room in the slums is decorated only with a cheap portrait of a naked woman, serving to reinforce her position as a fallen woman.¹²¹

Although he strove to achieve his own ideals of realism during the filming of *Light of Asia*, Osten also participated in the exotic and sometimes negative representations of otherness. In *Villa*, a Jewish peddler makes a cameo appearance dressed in the Chaplinesque style of a vagrant, speaking with exaggerated vowels

¹¹⁸ "The Foreigners insult the Indians!" *Film India*, 30 September 1938; K. A. Abbas, "'Gunga Din' another scandalously anti-Indian picture!" *Film India*, February 1939.

¹¹⁹ Wilford E. Deming, "Talking Pictures in India," *American Cinematographer*, March 1932; see also Rosie Thomas, "Thieves of the Orient: the Arabian Nights in early Indian cinema," in *Scheherazade's children: global encounters with the Arabian Nights*, ed. Ed. Philip F. Kennedy, and Marina Warner (New York: New York University Press, 2013.), 362-393.

¹²⁰ Fuechtner, "The International Project of National(ist) Film," 173; Ascárate, "Cinematic Enlightenment," 364.

¹²¹ *Die Villa im Tiergarten*, directed by Franz Osten, (Joe Stoeckel-Marcco-Film, 1926).

that set him apart from the non-Jewish community. Salomon's card declares his willingness to "negotiate, broker, buy and sell everything," thereby reinforcing stereotypes of the opportunistic usurer at a time when anti-Semitism was increasing in Europe. Wiping the dirt from his shoes onto the villa's luxurious carpet, Salomon sneers disdainfully when his offer of a huge guard dog is turned down. That he arrives at the scene of a crime with a dog to sell for security (the house has been burgled overnight) further implies access to unofficial modes of knowledge; he is quickly expelled, once again signalling to the audience that his place is outside society.

5.3.3 *Der Ochsenkrieg*, 1920

Ochsenkrieg was one of the first films to be made in the newly constructed glass studio at Geiseltasteig that had been funded when Emelka converted to an *Aktiengesellschaft*. Directed by Osten, and photographed by Franz Planer, *Ochsenkrieg*'s narrative is politically significant, although this does not necessarily indicate that it reflected the director's own position.¹²² Although the events take place in the 15th century, Ludwig Ganghofer's novel, first published in 1914, might be read as a parable of the senselessness of war. Its portrayal of social injustice, *droit-de-seigneur*, and violent oppression of the peasantry's grazing rights, may have struck a chord with audiences still bitter at the losses conceded by Germany in the post-war settlement of Versailles. Furthermore, *Ochsenkrieg* followed the deposal of the Kaiser and the beginning of the Weimar Republic, when bitter political disputes between left and right erupted into violence on the streets of Berlin and Munich during the winter of 1918-19.¹²³ Might the portrayal of the central character, *Richtmann* Runotter (Fritz Greiner), whose independence is a threat to the ruling class, also be seen as a metaphor for Bavarian desire for separation from the Prussian-dominated Weimar Republic, the democratic union

¹²² Franz Planer (1894-1963) was engaged by Emelka as its principal cameraman in 1919. He worked with all three of the Ostermayr brothers, as well as with Erich Pommer and F. W. Murnau. He also worked with fellow émigré Max Ophüls on *Liebelei* (1933) and later in Hollywood on *Exiled* (1947) and *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (1949). Planer, whose wife was Jewish, went into exile.

¹²³ Davidson, *The Perfect Nazi*, 47.

that many sought to undermine? Evans argues that the instability and extremism in Bavaria was eventually tempered by the Reich, and Putz suggests that after 1923, the normalisation of the relationship between Bavaria and the Reichstag gave Emelka the scope to expand again.¹²⁴

Ochsenkrieg is an early example of the *Heimatfilm*, a genre popularised by Peter Ostermayr who made extensive use of the exclusive rights that he had acquired from Ganghofer before the author's death in 1920.¹²⁵ Its dramatic mountain scenery also anticipates the *Bergfilm*, the mountain film genre that mirrored Germany's mountaineering ambitions in the same period, with a series of state sponsored German mountaineering expeditions between 1929 and 1938 to the Himalayas under the leadership of Paul Bauer and Willy Merkl.¹²⁶ The films of Berlin-based directors such as Arnold Fanck's film *Die weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü* (The White Hell of Piz Palü, 1929), Luis Trenker's *Berge in Flammen* (Mountains on Fire, 1931) and Leni Riefenstahl's *Das blaue Licht* (The Blue Light, 1932) depicted man in conflict with mountains he must conquer. Kracauer would later argue that these films:

captured the most grandiose aspects of nature at a time when the German screen [...] offered nothing but studio-made scenery.¹²⁷

On one level, Kracauer's supposition resonates with Rai's well-publicised determination to achieve a natural realism for *Light of Asia*. Where Kracauer saw "devotees performing the rites of a cult" in the mountain films of Fanck, however, his Berlin-centric discourse paid no attention to the work of either Osten or

¹²⁴ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 88; Putz, 11.

¹²⁵ Thumser, *Ludwig Ganghofer*; *Ochsenkrieg* was one of several titles that were remade by Ostermayr in two or three versions throughout his career; for further discussion of the *Heimat* genre, see Von Moltke, *No place like home*; Cooke, "The Heimat Film in the Twenty-First Century"; Ludewig, *Screening Nostalgia*.

¹²⁶ For a discourse on the *Bergfilm*, see Horak, *Berge, Licht Und Traum*.

¹²⁷ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 110.

Ostermayr.¹²⁸ By contrast, their films were blended with a distinctly *Heimat* theme that was characterised by Ganghofer's novels.¹²⁹ Osten's characters identify with the mountains in ways that reveal their familiarity with the rugged landscapes and it is this acquaintance with their *Heimat* that distinguishes them.¹³⁰

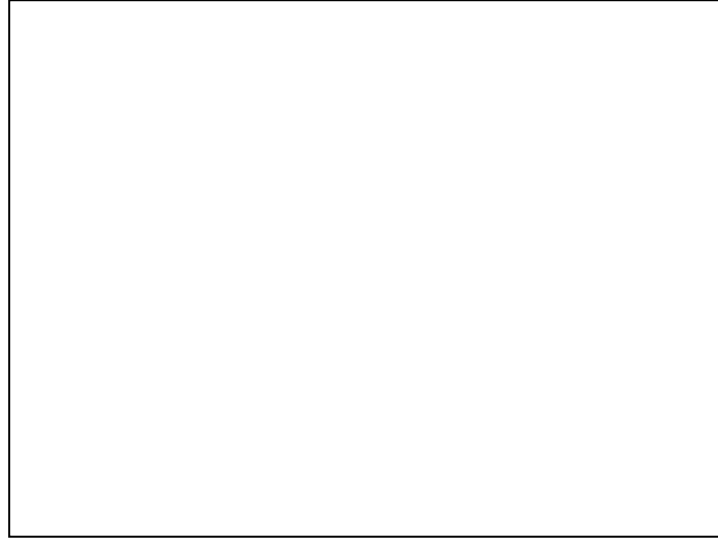


Figure 5-2 Opening frame of *Der Ochsenkrieg*, 1920.

Ochsenkrieg is arranged over five acts and this theatrical format is underscored with a sketch of a curtained stage to draw the audience's attention into the narrative (Figure 5-2). The composition and framing of images such as Figure 5-3 in the opening shots of *Ochsenkrieg*, also hint at the Ostermayrs' backgrounds as studio photographers.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 111; Filmmakers in Munich, and Peter Ostermayr in particular, were continuing to specialise in films that were set in what Moltke describes as the "therapeutic topographies" of the mountains where "Alpine elevation was synonymous with physical and spiritual well-being." Von Moltke, *No Place like Home*.

¹²⁹ Following the popularity of what were later described as *Autorenfilme*, in 1918 Peter Ostermayr had contracted for exclusive film rights with the writer, Ludwig Ganghofer. Ibid., 37.

¹³⁰ Osten directed at least three more films framed within these landscapes: *Im Banne der Berge* (Under the spell of the Mountains, 1931); *Der Judas von Tirol* (The Judas of Tirol, 1933); and *Zu Strassburg auf der Schanz* (On the ramparts of Strassburg, 1934) one year later; all of these were made as sound films.



Figure 5-3 Thea Steinbrecher in *Der Ochsenkrieg*, 1920.

Osten's direction of the principal male characters, reinforces the notion of an aesthetic that stretches back beyond the silent era to the portrait studio. Adopting slow and steady lateral head movements, facing towards the camera, they gradually reveal their emotions (Figure 5-4).

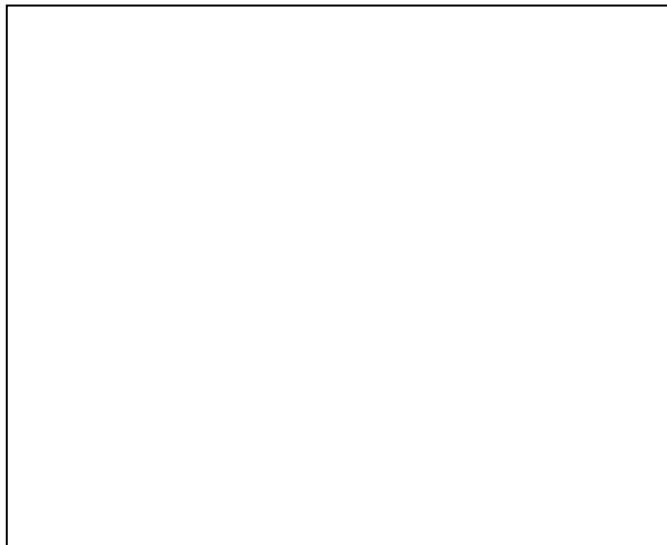


Figure 5-4 Fritz Greiner in *Der Ochsenkrieg*, 1920.

The regularity with which actors in Osten's films perform similar movements, suggests that it might have been one of his favoured styles. The depiction of Rai as Gautama in *Light of Asia*, provides another example (Figure 5-5).

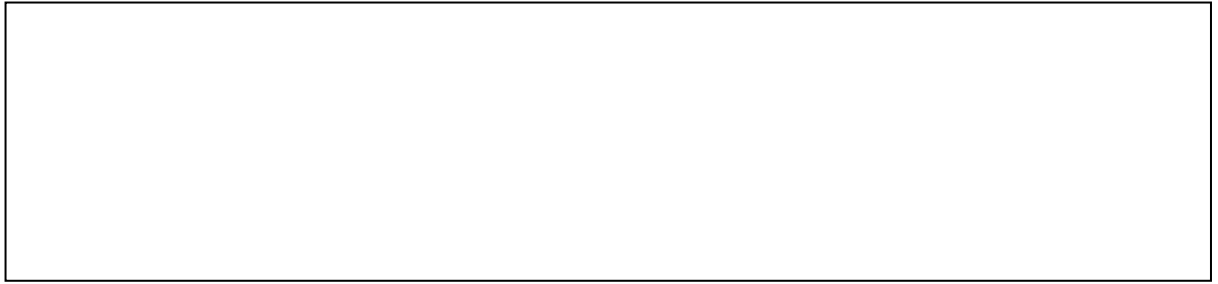


Figure 5-5 "Directing Rai," *The Light of Asia*, 1925.

This style of direction can be seen in the Bombay Talkies' sound films, suggesting a performance aesthetic that has been grafted onto a dialogue film by a director who has not fully transitioned to the new medium. On two occasions in *Achhut Kanya*, for example, eavesdropping villagers are shown making emphatic nods of the head towards the camera to indicate to the audience that they have overheard incriminating information. In a dialogue film any subtlety is lost.

5.3.4 *Um Liebe und Thron*, 1922

Osten worked on a further nine films before he directed *Thron* with the cameramen Franz Planer and Franz Koch.¹³¹ Elements of *Thron* might be interpreted as an homage to Robert Wiene's *Caligari*; however, given the disdain with which the experimental films made in Berlin were viewed by the more conservative film industry in Munich, they may also have been intended as parody. The first reference is the name of the circus, Cesario, where the lead protagonist Torello rides his horse; the second is in the visual resemblance of the circus owner's caravan to that of Caligari's where he keeps his somnambulist, Cesare. Unlike *Caligari*, however, Osten's film employs none of Wiene's anamorphic imagery.

Thron is a five act drama written by Hendrik Kerdon; a Ruritanian romance endorsing the rule of monarchy over anarchy and a metaphor for the political

¹³¹ Franz Koch (1898-1959) worked with Osten on several of his early Emelka films, and was also frequently paired with Josef Wirsching. Koch subsequently photographed several National Socialist propaganda films, including *SA Mann Brandt* (Stormtrooper Brand, Seitz, 1933) and *Heldentum und Toteskampf unserer Emden* (Heroism and fight to the death on our Emden, Ralph, 1934). Koch was also chosen by Leni Riefenstahl as one of 18 cameramen to work on *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will). Koch regularly worked with Peter Ostermayr and remained active in the German film industry until his death; *Um Liebe und Thron*, directed by Franz Osten (Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1922).

struggles that followed the establishment of the Weimar Republic. Although *Thron* does not reveal who has been assassinated at the film's outset, it may be a reference to the 1914 assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and his wife; but might also refer to the assassination by right wing extremists of the Jewish foreign minister, Walter Rathenau, in June 1922.¹³² Since 1919 Germany had suffered from political turbulence of violent street battles in Berlin and Munich as communists fought with a series of far right and separatist groups, such as the banned Bavarian League. A deep conservatism persisted towards social change and the democracy that was enshrined by the Weimar Republic, and many, particularly in Bavaria, harboured hopes for a return of monarchy and a reinstatement of authoritarian rule. Nevertheless, the topics of social inequality and occupational stigma also anticipate the themes of self-sacrifice and caste discrimination that feature in the films Osten made with Rai, such as *Light of Asia* and *Achhut Kanya*. *Thron* was also tinted, a technique that was added to *Light of Asia*.¹³³ The process of adding colour had been popular for some time and, as already mentioned by Osten himself, Pathé had added colour to some of his pre-war landscape footage.¹³⁴ The process of adding colour was beginning to fall out of fashion, however, partly because the chemicals involved, particularly in toning, could damage the film and therefore reduce the longevity of the print.

¹³² *Thron* was certified on 7 November 1922.

¹³³ *Moving Picture World* gave some guidance of the use of different colours: The regulation tints are blue for moonlight, yellow for lamplight and red for firelight. Green is sometimes used for exteriors and a blue green for night. For a gruesome effect green would be better than red. Red is better for scenes of violence, where colour is used, but green would show up a skeleton... There is something hard and repellent in a blue-green that gives this effect and a green medium is always used on the stage for ghost and similar scenes. "Colors," *Moving Picture World*, 14 August 1915.

¹³⁴ Osten later described these films as *koloriert*, but whether this meant they were toned or tinted is difficult to confirm ("Lebenslauf, BAL RK J0079). *Koloriert* translates as colourised, but does not make clear which process was involved. The same article from 1915 clarified the difference between the two processes, and complained that many people were confusing the two. Tinting involved immersing a film in a bath of dye, whereas toning involved a chemical reaction to change the tone or colour of the silver deposits. Tinting, it said, was simple; toning was complex and expensive. This might suggest that Osten's landscape prints were merely tinted.

5.3.5 *Die Villa im Tiergarten, 1927*

Die Villa im Tiergarten (The Villa in the Park) might be read as a social commentary on the fortunes of rich and poor in a post war Berlin that was still crippled by a struggling economy and widespread destitution. *Villa* contrasted with the existential despair that was evident in Georg Pabst's 1925 film, *Die freudlose Gasse* (Joyless Street). By taking a facile approach to social desperation, *Villa* employs elements of farce into its narrative, and idealises the rehabilitative virtues of poverty. Produced for Joe Stöckel-Marcco-Film (Berlin), *Villa* was completed and certified on 17 December 1926, before Osten's contract with Emelka had ended on 31 December. Released on 23 January 1927, *Villa* enjoyed "extraordinary success" in provincial German towns according to the *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, and had a premiere in Berlin.¹³⁵ In spite of this success, *Film Kurier* advised Osten, "pick up the scissors and remove some two hundred metres. The film will benefit substantially;" a criticism that recurs in some of the Bombay Talkies' films, discussed below.¹³⁶

After *Villa*, Osten made three more films before he left for India in January 1928. *Einbruch* (Burglary, 1927) was certificated in April that year and was followed soon after by *Was die Kinder den Eltern verschweigen* (What children hide from their parents, 1927), a Peter-Ostermayr-Film production that was reviewed by *Kinematograph* commenting that, "Osten [had] directed the film with a solid understanding of how to make an impact on the public."¹³⁷ Another Peter Ostermayr production followed with *Die raffinierteste Frau Berlins* (The craftiest woman in Berlin). Filmed on location in Paris and Copenhagen, it was described as a *Gaunengeschichte* (gangster story).¹³⁸ Revelling in the comedy of crooks double-crossing one another whilst the hapless private detective unsuccessfully disguised himself to entrap them, it was based on an eponymous novel by Garai-Arrayit. This

¹³⁵ "Der Film im Ausland," *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 8 January 1927.

¹³⁶ "Film Kritik. Die Villa im Tiergarten," *Film Kurier*, 26 January 1927, 2.

¹³⁷ "Was Kinder den Eltern verschweigen," *Kinematograph*. 23 October 1927, 20.

¹³⁸ *Die raffinierteste Frau Berlins*, directed by Franz Osten, (Peter Ostermayr Produktion, 1928).

film also retained a dramatic structure, its narrative divided into six acts, indicative of a conservative approach to filmmaking that was probably the influence of Peter Ostermayr. It starred Rudolf Klein-Rogge and Mary Johnson, the former made famous for his roles in Lang's 1921 *Dr Mabuse* trilogy and *Metropolis* (1926), as well as his earlier marriage to Thea von Harbou. Johnson, a Swedish actress, providing another example of transnational flow across film industries. A review applauded the acting, in particular praising Johnson; but failed to comment on the quality of Osten's direction.¹³⁹ Before the film was released, Osten had arrived back in Bombay to begin filming *Shiraz*.¹⁴⁰

5.3.6 *Sonja*, 1926

Although Osten's first sound film is listed as the 1931 production, *Im Banne der Berge*, in 1926 he participated in a pioneering venture that played with sound and experimented with form.¹⁴¹ According to a review in the *Berliner Börsenzeitung* this was *Sonja*, an Emelka production.¹⁴² Suggesting ongoing anxieties reminiscent of *Thron*, *Sonja* is a political film, its titular anti-heroine an anarchist who volunteers to lure the princely victim to his death.¹⁴³ The film has not survived, for reasons that become clear when it is described as an experiment of a dual theatrical/cinematic form, a *Bühnen-Film-Spiel*. The first and third acts are films, the middle act takes place on the stage. The two reviews that could be found offered diametrically opposed perspectives. *Börsenzeitung* expressed astonishment that Osten, "whose name was linked with the Buddha Film, could be involved in such an aberration." Arguably, the criticism by Rieß, describing the combination of film – a visual process – with theatre – an aural affair – revealed as much about the opinions of film critics towards the prospect of sound cinema, as it

¹³⁹ "Neue Filme," *Neue freie Presse*, 12 August 1928.

¹⁴⁰ "Passengers by 'Aquileia'," *Times of India*, 23 January 1928.

¹⁴¹ Brandlmeier describes *Im Banne der Berge*, a Peter Ostermayr production as *unsäglich* (unspeakable) Brandlmeier, "Franz Osten," 33; it was exhibited as *Der Wilderer von der Moosbacher-Alm* in Austria.

¹⁴² Richard Rieß, "Bühnen-Film-Spiel," *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 23 May 1926.

¹⁴³ "Verbindung von Film und Sprechbühne," *Linzer Tagespost*, 30 May 1926.

did about the relative merits of Osten's film.¹⁴⁴ Recording the audience's appreciation of the experiment, the *Linzer Tagespost* welcomed it and described how it functioned:

Sodann rollt plötzlich die Projektionsleinwand beiseite, und in hellem Rampenlicht steht vor uns im zweiten Teil eine wahrhaftige, plastische Bühne mit echten Dekorationen, die das Interieur des früher schon im Film gezeigten Raumes bilden, und worauf nun die Darsteller „in personam“ sprechen und mimen. (Suddenly the screen is rolled to one side and, in the full glare of the footlights, we see an authentic, vivid stage with real decorations, that recreates the interior of the room we have just seen in the film, and on which for the second act, the actors speak and mime in the flesh.)¹⁴⁵

The form taken by *Sonja* prevented wider distribution and it appears to have been screened only in Munich.

Man kann über diese kombinierte Art der Darstellung denken, wie man mag, jedenfalls bringt sie ein „Novum,“ einen interessanten Versuch, Abwechslung zu schaffen. (One can think what one likes about this combination of performance; at least it is a novelty, an interesting attempt to introduce change.)¹⁴⁶

Where films such as *Ochsenkrieg* and *Thron* embraced some theatrical formats, as described above. Osten's bold experiment with *Sonja* suggests that, possibly because of his early training in theatre, he persisted in thinking of cinema as a variation of the stage rather than a distinct art form. This apparent reluctance to disengage from the theatrical mode, would prove to be a disadvantage when he began making sound films and, at times, its effect can be traced in the early Bombay Talkies' films.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Rieß, "Bühnen-Film-Spiel," *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 23 May 1926.

¹⁴⁵ "Verbindung von Film und Sprechbühne," *Linzer Tagespost*, 30 May 1926.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

5.3.7 *Der Judas von Tirol*, 1933

Franz Osten hat mit dem Film ein sehr packendes, eindringliches Werk geschaffen. (Osten has managed to make a thrilling and haunting film.)¹⁴⁷

Based on the eponymous novel by Karl Schönherr that had first been produced in 1897 as a theatre play and again in Graz in 1928, Osten brought *Der Judas von Tirol* (The Judas of Tyrol) to the screen for Lothar Stark Film.¹⁴⁸ In accordance with new regulations, the film's censorship certificate dated 19 August 1933, listed the film's crew and cast, a step required since 28 June that year to verify the ethnicity of everyone who was involved in its production, before the film could qualify as *German*.¹⁴⁹ This factor alone would have prevented *Karma* from being exhibited in Germany, even had Rai ever tried to sell it there.

Judas took Osten back into the mountains and the film opens with snow-capped peaks. Much of the action was filmed in natural light, a mode of working with which Osten was comfortably familiar. Although *Judas* is described as a *Volkstück* (folk drama), its early nineteenth century politics are based on actual events involving the Tyrolean patriot, Andreas Hofer, who fought against the French imposition of Bavarian rule over the Tyrol in 1805 and was executed by them in 1810. The film's release on 26 August 1933 might be read on different levels, depending on whether the recipient perceived Hofer to be a hero.¹⁵⁰ *Judas* served as a reminder of the enduring German antagonism towards the French; nevertheless, that its title is homophonic with *Jude*, is unlikely to have been accidental, a supposition reinforced by the narrative. *Judas* centres on the manoeuvrings of one villager, Jakob Raffl (Fritz Rasp) who aspires to be the Christ

¹⁴⁷ "Neue Tonfilme," *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 16 September 1933.

¹⁴⁸ Dr. Alfred Möller, "Der Judas von Tirol," *Die Bühne*, 1 March 1928; *Der Judas von Tirol*, directed by Franz Osten, (Lothar Stark Film, 1933).

¹⁴⁹ Prüf.Nr. 34336. The certification document for *Judas* runs to 19 printed pages and includes the entire script.

¹⁵⁰ Hofer was an ambivalent hero; apparently a gambler, alcoholic and bankrupt, he appears to have polarised opinion along sectarian lines. Venerated by Catholics, he was also charged with anti-Semitism.

in the village's annual passion play but, due to his lower social status, is once again allocated the role of Judas, suggesting his exclusion from Christian society. In bitter retaliation, Raffl betrays Hofer's whereabouts to the French army. Immediately regretting his actions, he is unable to change the course of events his betrayal has set in motion. The pace of the film is slow and the acting tends towards melodrama, again illustrating that the transition from silent to sound cinema did not come naturally to Osten or, probably, the performers. Whether Osten was aware of the film's anti-Semitic undertones is debatable; equally possible is that, as a Bavarian Catholic, Osten might simply have viewed Hofer as a hero.

Judas was followed by a musical, *Zu Straßburg auf der Schanz* (On the Ramparts of Strassburg, 1934) described as an "entertaining romantic drama with Swiss peasantry as principals and beautiful Alpine scenery as background."¹⁵¹ Nothing more about the film was uncovered by the research and no copy appears to have survived; its title suggests that it may be related to a folk song of the same name dating back to 1790, although whether there is a connection remains speculative. There is some suggestion that it was banned by the Allies at the end of the Second World War, although this could not be verified.¹⁵² Two short films Osten directed have survived, both from 1934. *Die Reise ins Glück* (The journey to happiness) made by Märkische Film has a crudely drawn plot of attempted seduction using the artifice of the broken down car. Its claustrophobic mise-en-scène gives it the flavour of a *Kammerspielfilm*, whilst its positioning of the female character as a hapless victim, subject to the whims of the more powerful male from whom she needs to be 'saved' by yet another powerful male, is indicative of the regressive politics of National Socialism which sought to reframe the woman inside her traditionally ordained role as homemaker and child bearer in the *Kinder-Küche-Kirche* (Children-Kitchen-Church) model, whilst reasserting the authority of the male.¹⁵³ Approximately 20 minutes long, it probably served as a supporting film

¹⁵¹"Foreign," *The Film Daily*, 20 February 1936.

¹⁵² <http://www.hervedumont.ch/page.php?id=fr10&idv=3&idc=502>

¹⁵³ A Danish reporter, meeting with Hitler in August 1934, asked him about the position of women in the Third Reich. He replied to her "... unsere Frauen sollen richtige Frauen sein, und sie haben es

with a longer feature. Osten's name does not appear in the credits, but he is credited with its direction in the catalogue held by the Filmarchiv. The second, *Ein Heiratsantrag* (A marriage proposal) another short film, is described on its certificate as a *Filmscherz* (Film caper).¹⁵⁴ Osten is credited for the *Spielleitung*, a term favoured by the National Socialists in preference to the more French sounding *Regie*, signalling desire of the regime to control not only the creative media, but to excise foreign loanwords from the German language.¹⁵⁵ *Heiratsantrag* was another film that sought to (re)emphasise the woman as the homemaker.

The last film Osten ever made in Germany, also in 1934, was *Der zerstreute Walzer* (The scattered waltz) a short musical comedy made for Minerva Tonfilm presumably intended as a short film to run alongside a main feature.¹⁵⁶ *Walzer* imagined the composition and accidental dispersal of the Kaiser Waltz by Johann Strauss, playing on the idea of sound as music as both disruptive (while Strauß composes through the night, he interrupts the sleep of others) and unifying (the individual sheets on which the waltz has been written are scattered by the wind, but then gathered together, their notes expressed into music at the hands of an impromptu female orchestra that coalesces when individual performers arrive in the town).¹⁵⁷ In this short sound film, Osten showed that he could reach a level of sophistication with the medium of sound. *Walzer* was certified on 17 December

gut. Wir erziehen ihnen gesunde, tüchtige, sportgestaltete Männer, mehr kann man doch als Frau nicht verlangen, nicht wahr!" (...our women should be real women. They are fortunate. We are raising healthy, brave, sporty men for them, there is no more a woman can ask for, is that not so!). BAL R43II/474.

¹⁵⁴ *Ein Heiratsantrag*, directed by Franz Osten, (Lothar Stark Film, 1934); BAW Prüf-Nr. 38128.

¹⁵⁵ This trend was suggested in a discussion with Peter Berger, an engineer at the Bundesarchiv. It probably predated National Socialism, however, as indicated by the 1916 publication, *Verdeutschungsliste fremdsprachiger Geschäftsschilderaufschriften*, that specifically discouraged the use of words such as *Kinematograph* in favour of *Lichtspiele*. Last accessed 23 July 2014. Available at: http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN719393299&PHYSID=PHYS_0001

¹⁵⁶ *Der zerstreute Walzer*, directed by Franz Osten, (Minerva Tonfilm, 1934).

¹⁵⁷ Osten made another musical, *Zu Strassburg auf der Schanz* (On the Ramparts of Strassburg, 1934); no copy of the film could be located for research. A comment on a Swiss website suggests it had been banned by the Allies after 1945, although this cannot be confirmed. Accessed 24 June 2014. <http://www.hervedumont.ch/page.php?id=fr10&idv=3&idc=502>

1934 and approved for universal exhibition; if it was ever screened in Germany, this was possibly after Osten had already left for Bombay.

Since directing *Judas* in 1933, Osten had worked with five different film production companies in Berlin, producing one feature film and four short films in 18 months. Even as a veteran filmmaker, his situation was not exceptional: the German film industry had been going through a difficult period since the global economic depression, and the political changes undoubtedly compounded this. From June 1933, at least two of Osten's earlier films may have been affected by a new decree passed by Goebbels who, as Tegel points out, was making use of earlier quota regulations to limit imported films by amending the qualification for a film's German identity, and excluding any film that had been made with 'non-German' involvement.¹⁵⁸ With the regulation's clear intention being the exclusion of Jewish filmmakers and performers, *Die Villa im Tiergarten*, and *Die raffinierteste Frau Berlins* are two examples of Osten's films that would have been re-categorised retrospectively.¹⁵⁹

5.4 Directing at Bombay Talkies

Rai's offer of work would provide Osten with the opportunity to produce feature films on a regular basis, within a structured studio environment that bore similarities to the structure of studios like Ufa and Emelka. Osten would be the principal director with responsibility for organising the function at Bombay Talkies, and he would have responsibility for training future filmmakers for India, something that might have appealed to him after his earlier involvement with the Film School in Munich. Furthermore, he enjoyed working in India:

Daß ich gerade in Indien gern filme, hat natürlich seinen Grund darin, daß hier die Landschaft mit ihren seltsamen Bauten und

¹⁵⁸ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, 38.

¹⁵⁹ *Villa's* sets were designed by Max Heilbronner, who also designed *raffinierteste Frau*; this latter film included a script by Robert Liebmann, with Paul Morgan acting. As Emelka's film architect, Heilbronner had also worked with Osten on *Das rollende Schicksal*, 1923; *Der Schrecken des Meeres*, 1924; and *Der siebente Junge*, 1925. He went into exile in France and subsequently America; Liebmann and Morgan both perished in concentration camps; Liebe, *Verehrt, verfolgt, vergessen*.

Menschen einen allgemein reizvollen Hintergrund abgibt, den man niemals im Atelier so stimmungsvoll nachahmen kann. (The reason I enjoy making films in India is because the landscape, with its unusual buildings and people provides an appealing background which can never be achieved in a studio.)¹⁶⁰

Together with the other foreign employees, Osten and his wife, Ellen Lange, would be accommodated in the grounds of the studio.¹⁶¹ Most of all, perhaps, he could expect that his experience of filmmaking would attract greater recognition in a film industry that was less developed than in Germany, and he would be out of the shadow of the extensive influence that his brother Peter had over the industry in Germany's south.

From 1935 until the outbreak of war in September 1939, Osten directed sixteen feature films as well as a number of newsreels, promotional and educational films. Nothing suggests that he had any involvement in choosing the topics or influencing the socio-political content of the narratives of the films produced by the studio. The first Bombay Talkies production, *Jawani-ki-hawa* (The spirit of youth), opened at the Imperial Cinema on Lamington Road on 16 September 1935.¹⁶² The script had been written by Pal and translated into a Hindi version by J. S. Casshyap. It argued for a woman's right to marry for love, rather than be forced into an arranged marriage, a topic that would recur in later films from the studio.

The filming of *Jawani-ki-hawa* was a media event that aroused considerable curiosity, as might be seen from contemporary newspaper reports, particularly in the *Times of India*.¹⁶³ It was first certificated on 13 September 1935 and an advertisement promised Devika Rani "supported by a galaxy of new talent ...

¹⁶⁰ *Film im Bild*, 15 March 1928.

¹⁶¹ Osten had married an actress, Ellen Lange.

¹⁶² Although Devika Rani's name was displayed in large letters, the advertisement also gave prominence to Rai, Pal and Osten, a factor that would change within a year. *Bombay Chronicle*, 14 September 1935; Lamington Road, located to the north of Chowpatti Beach, is described by Bhaumik as a cosmopolitan area during the 1920s and 30s. "The Emergence of the Bombay Film Industry: 1913-1936," 82.

¹⁶³ For example, "Bombay Talkies Studios: Governor's Visit," *Times of India*, 17 May 1935; "Photo of Jawani-ki-hawa production," *Times of India*, 21 May 1935; "Filming Scenes In Railway Platform: Unusual Activities At Victoria Terminus," *Times of India*, 4 June 1935.

herald[ing] in a new era in Indian film production.”¹⁶⁴ Osten's name as director appeared on the advertisement alongside those of Rai and Pal. The initial reviews were not overly positive, however, “On the whole, [it was] a good picture which, with better direction and more judicious editing, could have been much better.”¹⁶⁵ The studio took heed and a certificate for a revised version was issued on 3 October after the film had “been lightened of its more cumbersome superstructure.”¹⁶⁶ If Osten had experienced any doubts about the wisdom of moving to work in India, the reviews attracted by *Jeevan Naiya* would probably have dispelled them: he was praised both for his handling of the psychological element of the narrative, and his management of the technical staff who:

have excelled their previous achievements in direction, recording, photography, settings and other branches of technique.¹⁶⁷

5.4.1 *Janma Bhoomi*, 1936

Quite apart from its histrionic merit and pictorial excellence [Janma Bhoomi] has a peculiar application to present day problems which invests it with powerful interest.¹⁶⁸

Janma Bhoomi was the sixth film that Osten directed for Bombay Talkies, an overtly political film from a studio that tended to be more conservative than, for example, Bhavnani Productions.¹⁶⁹ Rajadhyaksha comments that *Janma Bhoomi* was a “nationalist rural drama by Osten who had just joined the Nazi Party in

¹⁶⁴ *Times of India*, 14 September 1935.

¹⁶⁵ “Bombay Talkies’ first picture makes sensational debut,” *Times of India*, 20 September 1935.

¹⁶⁶ “Bombay Talkies’ Jawani-ki-Hawa,” *Times of India*, 18 October 1935.

¹⁶⁷ “Bombay Talkies’ Jeevan Naiya to be released shortly,” *Times of India*, 1 May 1936; *Janma Bhoomi*, directed by Franz Osten, (Bombay Talkies, 1936); “The way in which Mr Osten has handled the rich psychological interest of the picture indicates that he is one of the best, if not the very best, director in the Indian film industry today.” “Bombay Talkies’ Jeevan Naiya to be released shortly,” *Times of India*, 1 May 1936.

¹⁶⁸ “Janma Bhoomi still popular,” *Times of India*, 11 Dec 1936.

¹⁶⁹ For example, Mohan Bhavnani’s film *Mazdoor* (The Mill, 1934) had been banned by the censor for its “inflammatory influence on workers”. Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 259.

India.”¹⁷⁰ Caution is advised in not conflating these two events, however; Osten’s politics have been examined in more detail above but, whilst he *may* have sympathised with the film’s nationalist intent, there is no evidence that he influenced the politics of *Janma Bhoomi*. As with all of the early Bombay Talkies’ productions, the script was written by Pal and it is his political voice that is imprinted upon the film’s narrative. Nevertheless, in several ways *Janma Bhoomi* resonates with *Ochsenkrieg*, something that Osten should have been aware of when he was directing it. At the simplest level, a visual analogy is present with the *bail gārī*, the oxen cart that brings Protima to the village where Ajoy has renounced his comfortable middle class existence; however, a stronger analogy might be traced between the concepts of *Heimat* and *janmābhūmi* (land of birth). In *Ochsenkrieg*, *Heimat* signifies the relationship of the peasants to the mountainous landscape in which they were born, a relationship to the land that remains insecure because their rights are continually being contested by the landowning nobility and must be constantly fought for by the peasants. Similarly, *Janma Bhoomi* presents a conflict between the zamindar, the landowning class, and the low caste peasants who till the land and whose efforts support the Brahmins’ lifestyle, once again recalling Pal’s discourse in *The Goddess*. In both *Ochsenkrieg* and *Janma Bhoomi* it is brutality against the principal female character that brings the narrative to the point of eruption: in *Ochsenkrieg*, violence is held in check by Runotter’s agency, in *Janma Bhoomi* it erupts in hand-to-hand fighting.

Janma Bhoomi’s Gandhian narrative develops themes of social reform and sacrifice that were already present in the 1922 theatre production of *The Goddess*, and which had more recently found expression in *Achhut Kanya*. This was now extended to include a strongly nationalist message. *Janma Bhoomi* charts the conversion of a medical doctor, Ajoy (Ashok Kumar) who, following the death of his friend Premananda (Khosla), is persuaded to adopt *khadi* and devote his life to improving the lives of the rural subaltern. Inevitably this has consequences for other people, not least of all his fiancée Protima (Devika Rani), whose love he is prepared to sacrifice rather than expect her to surrender her comfortable middle

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 268.

class life style to follow him into relative poverty; once more recalling the sacrifices made by Gautama and Yasôdhara in *Light of Asia*. Ajoy's presence in the village, his encouragement of greater self advocacy in respect of health and family matters, is problematic for the ruling Brahmin; because it threatens the social hierarchies that have prevailed for centuries.

In *Janma Bhoomi*, the struggle is mediated through a young and highly educated middle class embodied by characters such as Premananda, Ajoy and Protima, who have sacrificed their comforts to work with the villagers and educate them about their basic rights. This desire to improve conditions for the peasantry is ironically configured as a form of madness, evoked in the name of Pagli (Chandraprabha), whose purpose is to convert Ajoy and Protima to the cause whilst constantly reminding them of its inherent insanity: "*acchā, to tu bhī pāglī hogī?*" (so, you too are becoming mad?), she asks Protima when she commits to join them. Superficially, *Janma Bhoomi* depicts a local dispute between zamindar and peasant; subliminally, it gives voice to a Gandhian message of peaceful resistance, ahimsa, against British occupation, epitomised by Ajoy when he refuses to retaliate aggressively against the Brahmins' violence; and it is further referenced through the metonymic image of the charka repeated in Protima's saris and Pagli's cloak; and the khadi adopted by Ajoy in preference to his Western suits.¹⁷¹

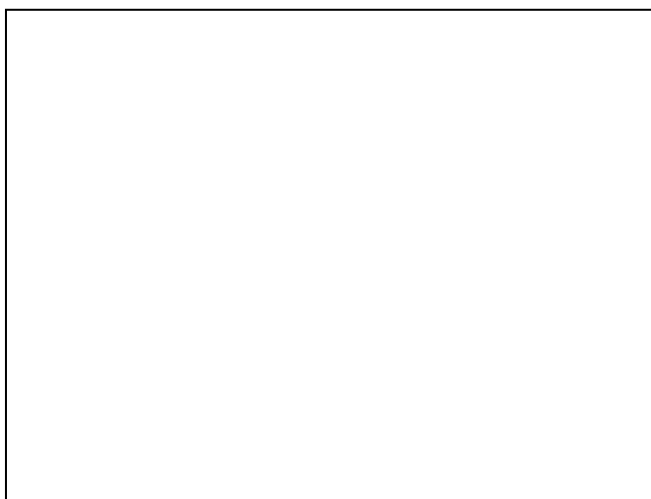


Figure 5-6 "Charka design on Protima's sari," *Janma Bhoomi*.

¹⁷¹ See Rebecca M. Brown, "Spinning without touching the wheel: anticolonialism, Indian nationalism, and the deployment of symbol," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no. 2 (2009): 230-245.

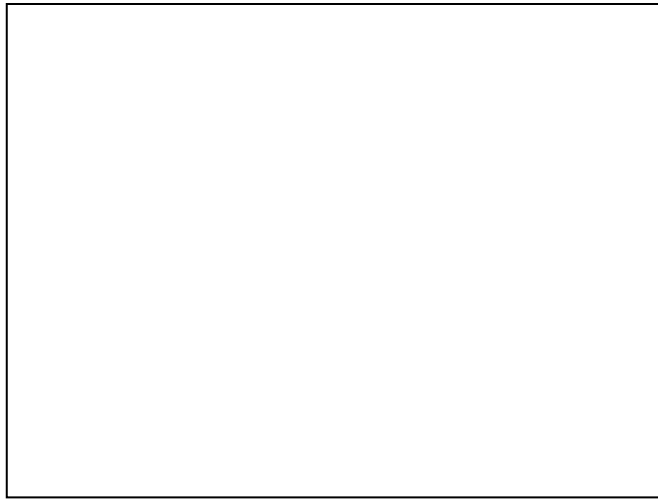


Figure 5-7 "Charka design on Pagli's shawl," *Janma Bhoomi*.

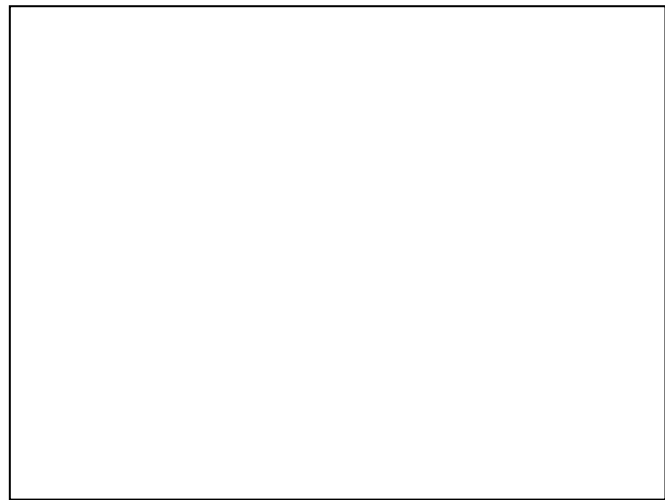


Figure 5-8 "Ajoy wearing *khadi*," *Janma Bhoomi*.

Did these nationalist undercurrents escape the attention of the censor entirely? One review cited comments by F. L. Brayne, the Commissioner of Rural Reconstruction, who praised it for "provid[ing] excellent propaganda for the village uplift movement."¹⁷² The Governor of Bombay also praised the film for its "splendid technique and educational value."¹⁷³ An initial certificate (16883) was issued for the film on 28 October 1936 that gave it "unqualified approval."¹⁷⁴ But a revised version was certificated on 10 November 1936 (16925), three days *after* its premiere at the Royal Opera House. Presumably changes were made to the film

¹⁷² "Bombay Talkies' 'Janma Bhoomi'," *Times of India*, 25 Dec 1936.

¹⁷³ "Governor admires Janma Bhoomi," *Times of India*, 8 January 1937.

¹⁷⁴ "Bombay Talkies' 'Janma Bhoomi'," *Times of India*, 20 October 1936.

in the interim, but what these were is not known. A similar pattern of rejection and approval had occurred with *Jawani-ki-Hawa* and *Miya Biwi*, however, with revised versions being resubmitted after the premiere when the studio had made its own changes in response to reviews from critics; and this might have been the case for *Janma Bhoomi*.¹⁷⁵ If the censor *had* overlooked the nationalist references, however, was this because Bombay Talkies was located within an elite social nexus that served to deflect attention? The studio's patrons included Sarojini Naidu; and the contemporaneous Governor, Lord Brabourne, had visited the studio as well as some of the film sets on location. Together with Sir Richard Temple, Rai and Devika Rani were regularly invited to social luncheons.¹⁷⁶

The concept of *janmābhūmi* appears to have been used by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and others in nineteenth century Bengal to denote the relationship of individuals to the motherland, the need for unity to save the motherland.¹⁷⁷ According to Gupta, the term could "signify one's local village, one's province and, in a wider sense, one's country."¹⁷⁸ However, Gupta also points out that its meaning was sometimes ambivalent with regard to *which* communities were intended to be included in this unity.¹⁷⁹ A Bengali *bhadralok* influence is transparent – from its writer, Pal, to its producer, Rai, as well as its two leading actors, Ashok Kumar and Devika Rani, who both portray enlightened Brahmins. In *Janma Bhoomi*, any vestigial communal ambivalence is excised. When Protima teaches the children about unity, she tells them that they are all children of Mother India and teaches them to sing: *Hindū, Mūslim, Sikh, Īsāī. Āpas men hain bhāī bhāī* (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, all are brothers together). Commenting on the reception of *Janma Bhoomi*, one reviewer wrote:

¹⁷⁵ "Jawani-ki-hawa improves with re-editing," *Times of India*, 4 October 1935.

¹⁷⁶ "Social & Personal," *Times of India*, 9 February 1934.

¹⁷⁷ Swarupa Gupta, *Notions of nationhood in Bengal: perspectives on Samaj, c. 1867-1905*. Philosophy of History and Culture, vol. 29. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

as the cheers resounded in the dimly lit hall one felt a thrill of optimism even though one can hardly forget the blood bath the city has so recently had in the name of communalism.¹⁸⁰

Janma Bhoomi had opened on 7 November 1936; barely three weeks earlier the city had been beset by riots that began on 15 October that year.¹⁸¹ Whether these were genuinely communal in origin, as many disputed, remained the subject of intense debate.¹⁸² Sporadic outbreaks of violence continued and the curfew imposed at the outset was only properly lifted more than two months later.¹⁸³ Resulting in fatalities, looting and damage, the riots affected much of public life, including cinema attendance, and several film studios delayed their releases. Nevertheless, *Janma Bhoomi* appears to have had good audiences from the beginning:

An index of the city returning to a normal and peaceful condition is provided by the crowds at the cinemas. The place of entertainment had been the worst sufferers during the riot days and ever since they had very poor audiences. But *Janma Bhoomi* ... has attracted excellent houses from the time of its release.¹⁸⁴

Whether the riots affected Osten in any direct way is not known; however, it may have brought back memories of the violence on the streets of Munich in the wake of the First World War.

5.5 Concluding remarks

Continuing the argument that, once he was in control of Bombay Talkies, it was Rai who emerged as the auteur, this chapter has illustrated how the working

¹⁸⁰ "Janma Bhoomi: Spectators cheer when children sing the song of unity," *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 November 1936.

¹⁸¹ "Bombay Riots," *Times of India*, 16 October 1936.

¹⁸² Some sources claimed that the riots had been caused by building works on a temple that was adjacent to a mosque. "Through Nationalist Eyes: the Bombay Disturbances," *Times of India*, 21 October 1936.

¹⁸³ "Bombay Curfew Order Ends: Extra Police Guards withdrawn," *Times of India*, 23 December 1936.

¹⁸⁴ "Janma Bhoomi. At the Opera," *Bombay Chronicle*, 16 Dec 1936.

relationship between Osten and Rai was one of mutual compatibility. For the reasons explained throughout the chapter, Osten should be considered, not as an auteur, but as a competent film director whose theatre training and many years of directing silent films, meant that at times he struggled with the transition to sound cinema. Nevertheless, Osten appears to have worked well within a studio environment, and comments made by some of the people who worked with him at Bombay Talkies, depict a director who encouraged his actors and strove to embed what he considered to be a realistic style in performance.

Reflecting on Osten's political affiliations, the chapter has argued that an understanding of the socio-political context is essential, if a more nuanced portrayal of situation within which Osten and his German colleagues operated is to be achieved. Although depictions of Osten as an émigré appear to be without substance, this does not indicate that he was satisfied with the dangerous developments that were taking place in Germany. Given Osten's admitted lack of cultural sensitivity, however, the possibility that he was generally oblivious to many of the political undercurrents of the films he directed in India, should not be ignored. There is no evidence, however, that Osten's political affiliations influenced the films he made at Bombay Talkies. If Pal was aware of Osten's politics, however, this may have been a further reason for him to leave Bombay Talkies in 1937 after writing *Jeevan Prabhat*, with the result that future screenplays would take a different form.

As discussed above, attempts have been made to depict Osten as a major figure in the development of the film industry in Mumbai. Whilst this notion is interesting, there is little to suggest that Osten's contribution was so extensive. In the case of Josef Wirsching, however, stronger claims might be made for his significance to the cinema, at least in Bombay/Mumbai; it is to his work that the final chapter now turns.

Technically Bombay Talkies was always way ahead of the others. When other studios did not attach much importance to photography, lighting, settings, we had Wirsching, a brilliant cameraman.

Ashok Kumar.¹

6 Josef Wirsching: Cinematographer

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the evaluation of the Indo-German beginnings of Bombay Talkies with an examination of the contribution made by Josef Wirsching to Indian cinema. Although these were punctuated by two periods of absence, Wirsching's contribution in India began with his work on *Light of Asia* and ended with his death in 1967, during the production of Kamal Amrohi's *Pakeezah*.² Ashok Kumar was not alone in recognising Wirsching's importance for Bombay Talkies, and from the early days of the studio, his stature as a cinematographer grew. He was the only one of Rai's German colleagues who remained in India after the war, returning to the film industry in Bombay and contributing to the production of both feature films and documentaries.

The person behind the camera has long been a casualty of historiographical neglect and, in spite of the extent of Wirsching's work, he is largely absent from historiographies of the film. This chapter engages with Wirsching's omission, asking whether this can be attributed to the narrow definition constraining nation-based historiography, a form that continues to overlook cinema that is produced in a transnational context. Nevertheless, it acknowledges that Wirsching's absence must also be considered in the context of other German and Indian

¹ Siddharth Kak, interview with Ashok Kumar, "The Bombay Talkies School," *Cinema Vision* 1, no. 2, 79.

² *Pakeezah*, directed by Kamal Amrohi, (Mahal Pictures, 1972)

cinematographers from the period who are also missing.³ Already recognised for the quality of his work during the early period he spent in Bombay from 1935 to 1939, Wirsching's post-war contribution to Indian cinema, maturing in the production of Kamal Amrohi's *Mahal*, suggests a level of expertise that arguably establishes him as a cinematographer of significance.⁴

The questions in this chapter are partly guided by Robinson's framework, used to consider the contributions of émigré filmmakers working in Britain.⁵ This considers Wirsching's legacy from four perspectives: whether he had any influence on how Bombay Talkies was organised; whether he introduced any new technology; which Indian cameramen he trained; and whether he has had any influence on Indian film aesthetics. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part introduces Wirsching, discusses his background; and considers his work in the German film industry, as well as some of those whose work might have influenced him during this period. The cinematic history of the Battleship *Emden*, in which both Wirsching and Bombay Talkies played a part, functions here as a metaphor for the triangular relationship between Britain, Germany and India; and it provides context for Wirsching's decision to move to India. The second part of the chapter identifies some of the visual idioms that characterise Wirsching's work. Through a comparison of *Achhut Kanya*, made in 1936, and *Mahal*, produced in 1949, the chapter explores how Wirsching developed his photographic style at Bombay Talkies, graduating from cameraman to cinematographer; asking whether any of these might be traced forward to today's industry in Mumbai.

³ For example, the majority of cameramen who Wirsching worked with in Germany, have not entered the historiography.

⁴ *Mahal*, directed by Kamal Amrohi, (Bombay Talkies, 1949)

⁵ Robinson, "British International Pictures."

6.1.1 Biographical information

Josef Wirsching was born in Munich on 22 March 1903.⁶ His father, also Josef, was later described by his son as a *Geschäftsführer*, and one article reported that he ran a fancy-dress factory.⁷ By 1938 Wirsching senior referred to himself as simply a *Sachbearbeiter*, a term approximately translating as a specialist administrator. Whether this change in professional status indicated economic hardship or political disfavour is speculative. Wirsching recorded that he was educated up to *Mittelschule* level, and his family indicate that he trained at the Städtische Gewerbeschule in Munich.⁸ He appears to have begun his career in filmmaking in either 1917 or 1918 when he was apprenticed as a photographer to a Munich company called Weiss-Blau-Film.⁹ By the time he travelled to India for the production of *Light of Asia*, Wirsching had been working at Emelka since 1923, and his filmography indicates that he remained there until the 1932 production of *Kreuzer Emden*.¹⁰ Whether he had any choice in joining the *Light of Asia* project or not, the journey to India afforded an opportunity beyond the scope of the majority of Germans, and would become a pivotal moment in his life.

⁶ Some sources use the name Otto Josef Wirsching and Otto Wirsching, and Ashok Kumar refers to him as Carl Josef Wirsching. Ghosh, *Ashok Kumar*, 29. A cinematographer by the name of Otto Wirsching is recorded on the encyclopaedic websites of IMDB and Filmportal.de and is credited as working on Ophüls' 1932 film *Die verkaufte Braut* and on *Die Zwei vom Südexpress* (Wohlmuth, 1932). He is referred to as Otto Josef Wirsching by Robert S. Birchard in an article about the developers of the Arriflex camera; Robert S. Birchard, "90 Years of Precision: Arri celebrates nine decades of service to the entertainment industry." *American cinematographer* 89, no. 6 (June 2008): 68. In none of the official documentation seen, does Wirsching use this name, and it may be one that simply fell out of use. Since Wirsching himself lists the films by Ophüls and Wohlmuth on his 1933 application to the RFK, it is reasonable to assume that Josef Wirsching and Otto Wirsching are the same person. Kumar's reference to Carl Josef Wirsching may be a lapse of memory.

⁷ "Ace cinematographer who would not be photographed!" *Hollywood Weekly*, 22 January 1937.

⁸ Accessed 16 January 2015. <http://wirschingarchive.com/synopsis/>

⁹ "The men behind the screen: Directors and Technicians who have made Indian Film History." *Times of India*, 5 May 1939, A14. Weiss-Blau Film is mentioned by Horak, "Munich's First Fiction Feature: Die Wahrheit," 92; "Kino Sommer im Spreethen," *Kinema*, 29 July 1918, 2; *The Film Year Book: The 1922-23 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, 419, records Weiss-Blau-Film at Nyphemburg, Kugmuellerstrasse 9, Munich.

¹⁰ *Kreuzer Emden*, directed by Louis Ralph (Emelka, 1932)

Wirsching married Charlotte Mühlberger in 1929. He joined the National Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP) in August 1932 and, in July 1933, the NSBO, the organisation that replaced all trade unions. In common with his peers, in October 1933 he joined the Reichsfilmkammer (RFK), now a mandatory hurdle to permit him to continue participating in the German film industry. There is limited archival material relating to Wirsching to be found in the Bundesarchiv files. The surviving documentation that does mention him, is the correspondence of Karl von Spreti and Wirsching senior and later, the bureaucracy of the internment camps held at the British Library. As with Osten and Zolle, it is likely that Wirsching attended Bombay's German Club, discussed in the previous chapter. *Der Deutsche in Indien* refers to Wirsching as a *Parteigenosse* (party member), and records his contribution to the *Winterhilfswerk* (WHW), the Winter Aid Programme.¹¹ Although notionally a voluntary contribution, as Evans points out, this was not the case: contributions were publicised and failure to comply could have consequences.¹²

Correspondence dated November 1938 indicates that the German authorities were chasing Wirsching for contributions to the WHW at his father's home in Munich. Was this a bureaucratic oversight? Did the authorities believe that he had remained in Germany after his visit earlier that year?¹³ Was this reminder, mediated through his family, intended to warn him of his obligations to National Socialism?¹⁴ This correspondence indicates that his father was still living at the family home in Munich in 1938, and there may have been other relatives still in

¹¹ *DDII*, September 1936.

¹² Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 485.

¹³ Wirsching and Osten had travelled to Germany shortly after the release of *Jeevan Prabhat* on 2 November 1937, returning to India in early February 1938; *DDII*, December 1937; " 'Nirmala,' Bombay Talkies' New Picture," *Times of India*, 4 February 1938; this may have been Wirsching's final trip to Germany.

¹⁴ Wirsching's father informed the authorities that his son was still in Bombay and, as a local member of the NSDAP there, had paid his WHW contribution. His father also stated that he did not know how long his son's contract in Bombay would continue. Letter to RKF from Josef Wirsching snr., 14 November 1938. BAL PKK0121, 950.

Germany.¹⁵ According to his grandson, Georg, the home at Müllerstraße 48 was bombed during the war and all of Wirsching's papers and photographs were lost.¹⁶ On 3 September 1939, Wirsching was interned by the British, together with Osten (briefly) and Zolle, leaving their Indian colleagues to complete the production of *Kangan*. The Germans were initially interned at Ahmednagar, Deolali and Dehra Dun, but Wirsching was eventually moved to the open camp at Satara, where he was finally able to live with his wife and son.¹⁷ Several accounts, from individuals and officials, provide insights into the experiences of internees in India during the Second World War.¹⁸ Harrer described the camp at Deolali as catastrophic, and said that it was only after a hunger strike was initiated by Oswald Urchs, that internees were eventually moved to a specially designed camp at Dehra Dun.¹⁹ Whether Wirsching kept a record of his own experiences of internment is not known.

6.1.2 Locating Wirsching in the historiography

As already mentioned, the person behind the camera has tended to be ignored, a state already bemoaned by Curt Courant in the 1930s.²⁰ Williams attributes these omissions to the dearth of methodological material regarding the role of the cinematographer and the "historical approach in the industry that had positioned

¹⁵ BAL PKJ0121, 950.

¹⁶ <http://wirschingarchive.com/synopsis/>, accessed 15 February 2016.

¹⁷ Wirsching was categorised by the British authorities with the designation 'XXX' i.e. "former Nazis now becoming more moderate as the war progresses." The other designations were XXXX (Committed and unrepentant Nazis), XX (Nazi sympathisers, in varying degrees, generally very moderate) and X (Anti-Nazis). BL IOR/L/PJ/8/31, Doc 76.

¹⁸ Harrer, *Mein Leben*; Harrer, *Sieben Jahre in Tibet : mein Leben am Hofe des Dalai Lama* (Munich: Ullstein, 1984); "General notebook for Dehra Dun," BL MSS EUR F255/15

¹⁹ Harrer, *Mein Leben*, 59.

²⁰ "I wonder how much the cinema public realises what is contributed to its enjoyment by the work of the cameraman. They probably do not even notice his name when it flashes on the screen at the beginning of the film; they do not, as a rule, talk about him, as they do the other stars of the picture; certainly they know little about his work." Curt Courant. "Camera Work," 447.; The encyclopaedia's editor (Winchester) introduced Courant's article with the comment: "The best photography is admitted to come from Germany." Courant was a German Jewish émigré filmmaker who moved to Britain.

the cinematographer as a technician, rather than an artist.”²¹ Several scholars have examined the German speaking cinematographers who subsequently became émigrés in Britain, France, America and elsewhere, but the focus is on those who were forced to flee on political grounds.²² As was the case with Osten, however, there is nothing to suggest that, when Wirsching first moved to India, he was under any political duress to leave Germany.

Ashok Kumar’s words illustrate the respect that Wirsching attracted from many within the Indian film industry. Contemporary reviews in Indian media readily acknowledged Wirsching’s skills and frequently praised his work, evident from this comment about *Savitri*:

The rural setting of the story undoubtedly helped the camera a great deal, but the sheer artistry with which the lens was wielded by Josef Wirsching has produced what may rightly be described as an artist’s dream.²³

Although Wirsching is mentioned in Indian film histories such as Rajadhyaksha and Willemen’s comprehensive *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, and Gulazāra et al’s *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*, and in the short monographs on Osten by Koch and Gangar, he is missing from other film histories such as Barnouw and Krishnaswamy’s 1980 *Indian Film* and Bose’s *Bollywood: a History*.²⁴ More recently, anniversaries such as *Mahal*’s diamond jubilee in 2009 and Indian Cinema’s centenary in 2013 have provided opportunities for retrospection, and in these, Wirsching has been specifically recognised for his work on *Mahal*.²⁵

²¹ Williams, “Tricks of the Light,” 340.

²² See for example: Hilchenbach, *Kino Im Exil*; Hochscherf, *The Continental Connection*; Robinson, “British International Pictures.”; Bergfelder and Cargnelli, *Destination London*; Williams, “Tricks of the Light: A Study of the Cinematographic Style of the Émigré Cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan.”.

²³ *Savitri*, directed by Franz Osten, (Bombay Talkies, 1937); “Devika Rani scores hit in Bombay Talkies’ ‘Savitri’,” *Times of India*, 20 August 1937, 5.

²⁴ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*; Gulazāra, Nihalani, and Chatterjee, *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*; Koch, *Franz Osten’s Indian Silent Films*; Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*; Bose, *Bollywood: A History*.

²⁵ Dwyer and Pinto, ed., *Beyond the Boundaries of Bollywood*; Nasreen Munni Kabir, Palace of Delusion, OutlookIndia.com, 4 June 2012, accessed 25 October 2013.
<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?281005>

In terms of the historiography of German cinema, however, Wirsching is lost to obscurity. He receives only a name check in the paragraph on Osten in Bock's *Encyclopaedia of German Cinema*; and he does not appear at all in either Bucher's *Germany* or Elsaesser's *Weimar Cinema and after*.²⁶ Schönfeld, Ascárate and Fuechtner refer to him, but only in the context of him accompanying Osten to India.²⁷ In her critique of German films portraying the First World War, Kester discusses some of the heroism films that Wirsching worked on: *Unsere Emden* (Our Emden, 1926) *Kreuzer Emden* (Battleship Emden, 1932); *Stoßtrupp 1917* (Shock Troop 1917, 1934), but he is merely a shadow in the discourse, granted nominal inclusion in the book's filmography.²⁸ The Battleship *Emden* films are discussed in more detail below, for their relevance to the socio-political context within which Wirsching, and Bombay Talkies, operated.

The most obvious reason for Wirsching's absence from German film histories is that the majority of his films were photographed in India. His German filmography suggests that he operated principally as a team cameraman, having not made the transition to cinematographer at that stage.²⁹ Although, as Guerin points out, greater freedom was given to cameramen in Germany who were encouraged to experiment, it may be that Wirsching's focus at this time was on the technological, rather than the aesthetic quality of film production, a matter that is discussed below with regard to his research work on the Arriflex camera.³⁰

²⁶ Bock, ed., *The Concise Cinegraph*; Felix Bucher, *Germany* (London: Zwemmer, 1970); Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and after*.

²⁷ Schönfeld, "Franz Osten's 'The Light of Asia.'"; Ascárate, "Cinematic Enlightenment."; Fuechtner, "The International Project of National(ist) Film."

²⁸ Kester, *Film Front Weimar*.

²⁹ Oswald Morris, a British cinematographer who began working in the industry in 1932 on Grune's first British film, *Abdul the Damned*, described a typical team hierarchy as comprising of a cinematographer, camera operators and camera assistants. Interviewed 8 December 2012; As one article title illustrates, it was the highly visible roles carrying the economic value of a film that continued to take precedence, "Money Making Stars and Pictures of 1928," *The Motion Picture Almanac 1929* (New York: Quigley Publishing Co., 1929), 144–145.

³⁰ Guerin, *A Culture of Light*, 14; Germany's reputation in the advancement of cinematographic techniques is borne out by the number of German guides and manuals listed under the heading 'camera work and studio technique' in the *Motion Picture Almanac*. For example, in a bibliography of 12 manuals under the rubric, six are German texts, mostly from the late 1920s. "Camera work

6.2 Wirsching's German career, 1918-1934

Wirsching's first employer, Weiß-Blau-Film, produced a handful of films between 1918-1920, the production of which Wirsching was probably able to observe.³¹ The film producing community of Munich was close-knit, and names of individuals and companies frequently cross over. Productions by Weiß-Blau were mostly directed by Franz Seitz and photographed by Franz B. Seyr; although none of the films appear to have survived, they were all certificated with *Jugendverbot* and, judging by the short plot summaries, they were mostly melodramas.³²

On his return to Germany after working on *Light of Asia*, Wirsching was once again paired with Franz Koch. This was on the Osten-directed production of *Die kleine Inge und ihre drei Väter* (Little Inge and her three fathers, 1926); an "entzückende Lustspiel" (charming comedy) according to the *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, an Austrian publication that generally admired Osten's films.³³ After an assignment as one of five cameramen on *Unsere Emden* (The Raider Emden, 1926), discussed below, Wirsching photographed the outdoor scenes for *Mein Heidelberg, ich kann dich nicht vergessen* (I can't forget you, my Heidelberg, 1927), and Koch photographed the studio sets.³⁴ *Heidelberg*, directed by James Bauer, was released on 8 July 1927; by August, Wirsching was abroad once again. This time he was participating on a 6,000 kilometer journey, travelling overland from Lebanon to Burma.

and studio technic," *International Motion Picture Almanac 1937-38*, 1304; For an extended discussion on the work of Schüfftan see Williams, "Tricks of the Light".

³¹ The name Weiss-Blau, with its reference to the colours of the Bavarian ensign, anchors this particular studio in the film industry in Munich.

³² *Die Knallzigarre*, directed by Franz Seitz, (Weiß-Blau-Film, 1918); *Der Herrgott am Wege*, directed by Franz Seitz, (Weiß-Blau-Film, 1918); *Kaëna*, directed by Nadler (Weiß-Blau-Film, 1918); *Verlorenes Spiel*, directed by Franz Seitz, (Weiß-Blau-Film, 1919). The Early German Cinema Database. <http://www.earlycinema.uni-koeln.de/>; Seyr might be of peripheral interest as a possible influence on Wirsching because they worked together on *Stosstrupp 1917* under the leadership of Karl Hasselmann.

³³ "Advertisement," *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 22 January 1927; BAL PKJ0121, 964, 966; only a few feet of *Inge* survive. Wirsching also worked on *Spuren im Schnee* (Tracks in the snow, Reiber, 1929)

³⁴ *Heidelberg* was described in one review as a "Schmachtfetzen der deutschen Filmküche" (a tearjerker from the German film canteen). "Filme der Woche," *Arbeiter Zeitung*, 22 April 1928.

Still photographs in the possession of the Wirsching family show a small convoy of three vehicles travelling under the banner *Asienfahrt*, possibly under the direction of an Austrian ethnologist, Robert von Heine-Geldern.³⁵ The result from this journey was a popular *Kulturfilm*, the reviews for which either attribute it to Wirsching or Heine-Geldern:

„Die Wunder Asiens“ [...] führt die Emelka durch den ausgezeichneten Photographen Josef Wirsching den Beschauer quer durch den grössten Erdteil vom Lebanon bis nach Birma. [...] So wird dieser Film zu einer Geschichte von 1001 Nacht. (Through the images by the outstanding photographer, Josef Wirsching, Emelka's film *The Wonders of Asia*, leads the spectator across the Earth's largest continent from Lebanon to Burma. [...] Making this film a story of Arabian Nights.)³⁶

The *Linzer Tagespost* review attributes production of *Die Wunder Asiens* to Urania-Film, prompting speculation that this may have been a joint production with Emelka Kulturfilm (Eku).³⁷ Curiously, however, Wirsching makes no mention of it in his own filmography.³⁸ His grandson refers to two travelogue films that were produced from this journey between 1927 and 1928, but no official records could be located for these in the German archives.³⁹

Wirsching's assignments following his return to Germany, saw him working with two celebrated directors who would shortly become émigrés: Karl Grune and Max Ophüls. Grune's 1929 film, *Waterloo*, was Emelka's *Jubiläums-Millionenfilm*, a

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/wirschingarchive/photos>; some reviews mention Heine-Geldern, some mention Wirsching, none mention both. Compare for example, "Kunst und Wissen," *Arbeiter Zeitung*, 13 December 1928, 8 and *Triestingtaler u. Piestingtaler Wochen-Blatt*, 9 February 1929, 5.

³⁶ "Linzer Urania," *Linzer Tagespost*, 2 February 1929, 12.

³⁷ The Urania film is not to be confused with another film of the same name that was researched and produced by Dr Hürlimann in conjunction with Ufa, and appeared in cinemas one year after the Wirsching/Heine-Geldern film; to add to the uncertainty surrounding the identity of these two films, however, a review of the Hürlimann film criticised Hürlimann for failing to inform who had worked on his film when he gave a talk introducing it: "Leider hat Herr Dr. Hurlimann vergessen zu erwähnen, von wem [das Bildwerk aufgenommen wurde.]" "Die Wunder Asiens," *Berliner Volkszeitung*, 5 February 1930.

³⁸ BAL PKJ0121, 966.

³⁹ "Munich to Benares," and "Calcutta to Rangoon," <http://wirschingarchive.com/synopsis/>

celebration of the studio's first decade.⁴⁰ Wirsching was one of two camera assistants (the other named as Hugo von Kaweczynski) who worked under Fritz Arno Wagner; Wagner's own portfolio included several classics of German cinema and Manvell and Fraenkel describe him as one of Germany's leading cinematographers during the 1920s.⁴¹ *Waterloo's* arrival coincided with the screening of *The Singing Fool*, marking the beginning of the end for silent cinema; consequently the studio suffered serious financial losses from which it never properly recovered.⁴² Kracauer later dismissed *Waterloo* as a "patriotic cut-to-pattern film;" and Rotha criticised it as being "badly staged at great expense, foolishly theatrical and lacking conviction."⁴³ Notwithstanding this earlier critique, *Waterloo* was introduced to new audiences at a screening at London's Royal Festival Hall in April 2010 with a musical score composed by Carl Davies. Incidentally, Davies' score replaced the original composed by Hansheinrich Dransmann who had composed one of the two original scores for *Light of Asia* discussed in chapter 2.

Wirsching's next significant film was *Die verkaufte Braut* (The bartered Bride, 1932), an exemplar of innovative cinematography, and one of the last films made in Germany by Max Ophüls.⁴⁴ Wirsching worked as one of four cameramen on *Braut* (although only Reimar Kuntze and Franz Koch appear on the film's title

⁴⁰ "Der ganz gross aufgezogene Film, der von der deutschen Presse einmütig als die beste Leistung der Emelka bezeichnet wird, wurde in beiden Städten mit großem Beifall aufgenommen." *Österreichische Film Zeitung*, 12 January 1929, 12.

⁴¹ Wagner had photographed films by Murnau (*Nosferatu*, 1921), Lubitsch (*Sumurun*, 1920; *Madame Dubarry*, 1919) and Lang (*Der müde Tod*, 1921). Soon after photographing *Waterloo*, Wagner worked for Georg Pabst on *Die 3-Groschen Oper* (1930) and *Westfront 1918* (1930) as well as Fritz Lang's *M* (1931).

⁴² For more information on Emelka's difficulties, see Putz, *Waterloo*.

⁴³ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 156; Paul Rotha, *The film till now: a survey of world cinema* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 284.

⁴⁴ Josef Wirsching appears in the credits as Otto Wirsching, for example White, *The Cinema of Max Ophüls*, 366; *Die verkaufte Braut* was filmed at Geiselgasteig, the production company was Reichsliga-Film GmbH (München), this had been set up by Ludwig Scheer and was owned by Karl Ritter. *Deutsche Biographische Enzyklopädie (DBE)*, 448; Ophüls made two more films for Ufa in 1932: *Die lachenden Erben* (Laughing Heirs) and *Liebelei/Une histoire d'amour*, the latter a multiple language film.

credits).⁴⁵ Ophüls' adaptation of the eponymous opera by Smetana, anticipates the mobile and circular camera movements that later defined his style on *La Ronde* (1950). This stylistic genealogy encourages the assumption that for the production of *Braut*, Ophüls was the auteur, with the team of cameramen adhering to his vision in shaping the film's style. Nevertheless, the film should be considered as a significant work for Wirsching to have been involved in photographing, and traces of Ophüls' influence might arguably be discerned in Wirsching's use of the camera for the picturisation of the song 'Dil Diya Hai' in *Sangram*, made in 1950.⁴⁶ Might also the setting designed for this song, depicting misshapen architecture reminiscent of *Caligari*, indicate a further German influence (Figure 6-1)?⁴⁷



Figure 6-1 "Dil Diya Hai," *Sangram*, 1950.

Writing in October 1933, Wirsching recorded that he had worked on nine films after *Light of Asia*; and he listed four film production companies that he had worked for.⁴⁸ Three later films might be added to this list. Firstly he worked as one of seven cameramen on *Stoßtrupp 1917* (Zöberlein/Schmid-Wildy, 1934); for this film he received only nominal accreditation, and is identified merely as 'Wirsching'

⁴⁵ According to Bucher, Kuntze "shot some of the most important German films at the end of the Twenties and the beginning of the Thirties;" Bucher, *Germany*, 104. For more information on Kuntze, see Kamm, "German Film, World Travel."

⁴⁶ *Sangram*, directed by Gyan Mukherjee (Bombay Talkies, 1950).

⁴⁷ The art director was named as D. N. Jadhav; whether he had also trained in Germany is not known.

⁴⁸ Apart from Emelka, Wirsching listed: München Cine-Ton, Amsterdam, Bavaria-Film (Emelka's successor) and Ondra-Lamac Film, Berlin-München. BAL PK J0121, 964, 966.

in the film's titles.⁴⁹ Kracauer suggested that *Stoßtrupp* bore a stylistic resemblance to Pabst's 1930 film, *Westfront 1918*.⁵⁰ Where Pabst's film sought to show the horrors of war, however, and was subsequently banned by the Nazis, *Stoßtrupp*'s style of realism portrayed the horrors of the trenches but, according to Kracauer, it eschewed any promotion of pacifism that might have been intended with the earlier film. A review in *Film Kurier* praised the realism of the camerawork on *Stoßtrupp* saying that it "gave the impression of reportage in the scenes covering the Battle of the Aisne."⁵¹ This was intended as a patriotic film promoting German soldiers as heroic and ultimately compassionate, exemplified in their treatment of the mortally wounded British soldier. Whether Wirsching had any agency in designing the cinematographic style of *Stoßtrupp* is debatable; given his subordinate listing, however, it is unlikely to have been significant. Nevertheless, aspects of this film's style might have come to influence Wirsching's later films in Bombay, particularly in terms of low camera angles and expansive skies, and examples are discussed here.

Wirsching also worked on *Das verliebte Hotel* (The Hotel of Love, Lamac, 1933), a popular romantic comedy starring Anny Ondra.⁵² This film had its premiere on 19 December 1933, marking the end of a tumultuous year that had seen a large number of filmmakers in the German industry prevented from working. Lamac's film was popular in Germany and was also sold abroad, reaching audiences in Sweden and Austria during early 1934.⁵³ Members of the National Socialist

⁴⁹ The credits on the print of *Stoßtrupp 1917* name the following cameramen: Karl Hasselmann, Ludwig Zahn, Bartl Seyr, Wirsching u.a. [and others]. Why these other cameramen are not named can only be speculated upon; but they may have simply been apprentices. Considering the titles of films that were credited to Zahn and Seyr such as *Hitler Jugend in den Bergen* or *Der Nürnberger Parteitag der NSDAP 1929*, this might suggest sympathies towards National Socialist ideology, although without further information this remains speculative.

⁵⁰ Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 234.

⁵¹ "Film-Kritik *Stoßtrupp 1917*," *Film Kurier*, 21 February 1934, 3.

⁵² Ondra had established Ondra-Lamac-Film GmbH with her fellow Czech, Carl Lamac; Ondra also appeared in two Hitchcock films produced for British International Pictures: *Blackmail* (1929) and *The Manxman* (1929); Wirsching refers to a film he calls Hotel Atlantic, but this is *Das verliebte Hotel*. BAL PK J0121, 964,966.

⁵³ Advertisement, *Mein Film*, March 1934; released as *Kärlekshotelet* in Sweden, 5 January 1934.

leadership had been putting the film industry under pressure to produce films with an ideological narrative, such as Franz Seitz' *SA Mann Brand* (1933), however, this move was being resisted by Goebbels, who argued that imposing films infused with Nazi propaganda would be counterproductive unless they could be seen as genuinely entertaining.⁵⁴

On *Hotel*, Wirsching was credited in third place after Otto Heller and Ernst Zahn. Whether he made any decisions about the technical or artistic aspects on *Hotel*, is in some ways less relevant than an exploration of the visual style they created as a team. Two aspects in particular are worth mentioning here because these may have influenced Wirsching's later work at Bombay Talkies. The first is the focus on the star, a practice that would become equally important for Bombay Talkies. In contrast to the heroism films Wirsching had worked on, *Hotel* was designed around the romantic heroine played by Ondra. At the time, Ondra was one of Germany's leading stars, a status that required special lighting and photography to portray her most photogenic aspects.⁵⁵ In *Hotel*, Ondra is photographed with a diffuser to create a soft edge to the image; she is often backlit to bring her into the foreground; when her back is to the camera, her hair is lit like a halo. It was a task in which they evidently succeeded.⁵⁶ The second aspect is the use of the contra-jour technique, shooting directly into the sun to produce strong contrasts and silhouettes, and often used to create the illusion of day-for-night. Many images in *Hotel* were created using this method and it is a technique that appeared frequently in Wirsching's work all the way through to *Pakeezah*.

⁵⁴ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 127.; *SA Mann Brand* was an early example of an overtly propagandistic film that led to Goebbels' comment cited in Tegel that the SA should be marching on the streets, not the screen. For a detailed account of the film's reception, see Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, 53–57.

⁵⁵ For an entertaining perspective from a cinematographer on the challenges of photographing film stars, see Morris, *Huston, we have a problem*. Oswald Morris began his career in the British industry in 1932.

⁵⁶ "Film Kritik. Das verliebte Hotel," *Film Kurier*, 20 December 1933, 2.

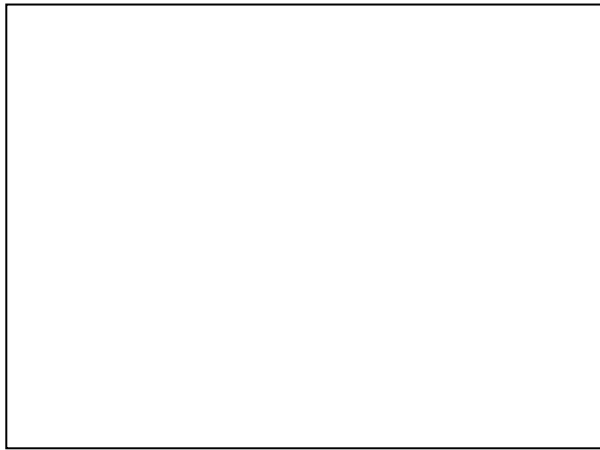


Figure 6-2 "Contra-jour lighting," *Das verliebte Hotel*, 1933.

By the time he left for India in 1935, Wirsching's career in the German film industry appeared to have slowed considerably. Some of his peers from Emelka/Bavaria clearly did find work: the filmography for Koch, with whom he had worked so often, is one such example.⁵⁷ Another example is Seitz, whose filmography up to 1942 indicates that he was also highly productive. In spite of having worked on films directed by Grune and Ophüls, Wirsching made only two films in 1934, for one of which he received only limited credit. After April 1934 he is not credited on any further films in Germany, although he may have continued working within the industry, a possibility that is discussed below.

There is some confusion regarding the title of the last film Wirsching made in Germany. Filmportal lists it as *Im Lande des silbernen Löwen*, on which he worked as director. This short film was made by Bavaria-Film AG, Emelka's successor.⁵⁸ The film's content is not known and a copy does not appear to have survived, leaving only the information provided by the censor from which to draw tentative conclusions. *Löwen* was a sound film with a narrator, Dr. W. Klette, and music composed by Rudolf Kaiser. The certificate lists no actors, however, which might suggest that it was a documentary.⁵⁹ *Löwen* was certified for exhibition on 6 April 1934, and approved as *volksbildend* (educational), a rating that entitled it to a small

⁵⁷ For example, over the three year period 1933-35, Koch is credited with twenty-three films, including Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens*.

⁵⁸ According to its certificate, *Löwen* was only 510 metres. BAW Prüf-Nr 36114.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

tax reduction, valid until 31 December 1937.⁶⁰ One year later, however, without the film appearing to have ever been exhibited, the original certification was withdrawn by the *Filmoberprüfstelle*, the head office in Berlin that dealt with censorship appeals across Germany. The reason(s) for this withdrawal are unclear because the film's original approval was dated *after* the law on censorship had been revised in February 1934. The authority's decision, dated 15 April 1935, withdrew the rights for the film to be shown in Germany, on the basis that it had not been re-submitted within the time frame of fourteen days stipulated on 26 March 1935.

Several questions are prompted by this exposition. Had Bavaria Film started an appeal process it chose not to complete? Why was Bavaria Film required to resubmit this film? What had happened with *Löwen* to result in it losing approval for universal exhibition? Had Wirsching somehow failed to comply with the restrictions that were gradually forcing ideological compliance onto the German film industry? The *Reichslichtspielgesetz* of 16 February 1934 had already introduced the *Vorzensur*, the pre-censor requirement for all scripts/scenarios had to be approved before filming began. If *Löwen* had been filmed on location outside Germany, perhaps there was not enough time to comply with this between the date when the law was revised and the date of the first certificate? Perhaps the film's crew included people who were now no longer eligible to work in the German film industry? Tegel points out that by 1935 the *Reichslichtspielgesetz* allowed the minister to override any decision by the censor.⁶¹ Without further information, however, the reason for the film's fate remain speculative.

What, though, was Wirsching's film about? Might it have been a remake of the similarly named 1927 film, *Im Lande der silbernen Löwen*? This silent film, based on a script by the German writer, Bernhard Kellermann, was made by Phoebus Film in

⁶⁰ Having been approved by the Censor on 6 April 1934 (Prüf. Nr 36114) *Löwen* was withdrawn a year later (15 April 1935, 07661). Accessed 24 June 2014.
<http://www.filmportal.de/node/69645/material/1236697>

⁶¹ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, 42.

Berlin.⁶² Manjapra attributes a travel documentary about Thailand, *Unter Palmen und Pagoden* (Under palms and pagodas) to Wirsching; and he also refers to another film that was produced by Bavaria Film at Geiseltal in 1934, entitled *An den Grenzen Tibets* (At the borders of Tibet).⁶³ Filmportal indicates that *Tibets* was approved on 6 April 1934, under document number B36117; the same date that *Löwen* received its initial approval with the slightly earlier sequence number, B36114. Whatever the circumstances that led to Wirsching's film being withdrawn, by this point he had already left for Bombay, and the film's fortune is unlikely to have been a significant factor in his decision to accept Rai's offer at Bombay Talkies.

The racially-motivated purging of the German film industry from 1933 onwards, resulted in many filmmakers being forced into exile; including several people with whom Wirsching had worked at Emelka.⁶⁴ Rogowski cites Asper's estimate of 2,000 émigrés out of an industry workforce of approximately 10,000; a 20% reduction in the workforce is likely to have had a dramatic effect on the industry's ability to function.⁶⁵ Might not this vacuum have created opportunities for those cinematographers who were allowed to remain working in Germany? Tegel suggests that it did, and that salaries rose accordingly for those who could provide evidence of German, i.e. 'Aryan' ethnicity.⁶⁶ Yet Wirsching's filmography amounts to a fraction of the films that Koch and Seitz were producing.

⁶² Subtitled as "the journey of a caravan through the Persian desert," it has survived in a good print and is held at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin. It runs to 58 minutes, and although described as a documentary, it has a narrative plot in the form of a *Bildungsroman*, following a young man from a Persian family who matures in the face of tragedy, to take on his family responsibilities. Kellermann was an author and traveller who often wrote about the East, particularly Persia and India.

⁶³ Manjapra, *Age of entanglement*, 268.

⁶⁴ Analysis of the filmography of Emelka/Bavaria Film over a 10 year period from 1925, provides the names of more than 20 cameramen during this period, at least four whom (Werner Brandes, Otto Kanturek, Günther Krampf and Eugen Schüfftan) have more recently become the subjects of academic focus on the basis of their status as émigrés to the British film industry. Other émigrés who worked at Emelka included the set designer Ernö Metzner, and the directors E. A. Dupont and Geza von Bolvary.

⁶⁵ Rogowski, *The many faces of Weimar cinema*, 6.

⁶⁶ Tegel, *Nazis and the Cinema*, 40.

Ethnicity alone was not sufficient, however, and applicants were also required to prove ideological allegiance to National Socialism.⁶⁷ Notionally, Wirsching passed all these hurdles and was admitted as a member to the RFK on 1 June 1934; superficially at least, there appeared to be no reasons why he should not be one of the filmmakers to fill the vacuum created by departing émigrés. In common with Osten and von Spreti, Wirsching was neither an émigré nor an exiled filmmaker and there is no evidence to suggest that he was under any compulsion to leave Germany in 1935. Whatever the circumstances of Wirsching's decision to travel to India, however, in common with other Germans living and working outside the physical boundaries of the *Heimat*, he would not be beyond the reach of the Party. That Wirsching subsequently made his home in India, rather than returning to Germany after the end of the war, may indicate that he felt no motivation to return to a country that had been devastated by war.⁶⁸

6.2.1 Research and development: the Arriflex camera

August Arnold and Robert Richter were the original founders of the present day multi-national company, ARRI. According to information provided by the company, the two friends developed an interest in cinematography, building their own camera out of spare parts, and setting up ARRI in Munich in 1917.⁶⁹ Through their connections with Peter Ostermayr and Martin Kopp (who worked as a photographer on Meßter newsreels), Arnold and Richter extended their technical innovations to include studio lighting.⁷⁰ These links brought them into contact with Weiß-Blau-Film in 1918 and it was here that they probably encountered Wirsching. Is it possible that Wirsching is not credited on any films between *Spuren im Schnee* in 1929 and *Kreuzer Emden* in 1932 because he was doing

⁶⁷ For example, all applicants were obliged to declare whether they had ever been a member of any anti-war, communist or human rights groups, namely Reichsbanners; Frontkämpferbundes; eisernen Front; Kampfbundes gegen den Faschismus; or the Liga der Menschenrechte.

⁶⁸ As discussed in chapter 4, Karl von Spreti also considered returning to India in 1948.

⁶⁹ *A Pictorial History of Arri*. Accessed 21 November 2014.
http://www.musitelli.com/site/downloads/ARRI_Picture_Chronicle_2012.pdf

⁷⁰ Birchard, "90 Years of Precision," 69–70.

research and development work with Arnold and Richter? Birchard claims that Wirsching supported ARRI on the development of a new camera that was commissioned by the German government for the Berlin Olympics in 1936:

In collaboration with camera designer Erich Kaestner and cinematographer Otto Josef Wirsching, Arnold ... worked on the new camera [the Arriflex] for four years.⁷¹

ARRI's project to produce a new type of camera in time for the 1936 Olympics was delayed until 1937, when the Arriflex 35 was presented at the Leipzig Trade Fair. This suggests either that Wirsching's role with Arnold and Richter might have involved working on prototypes between 1929 and 1932, or that his involvement with the Arriflex camera was not a full time occupation, but might have involved testing the designs. It might also indicate that he worked with ARRI sporadically from 1933 until he left for India, however, and Georg Wirsching reports that his grandfather was also involved with other research during this period, including experimenting with 3D and colour film.⁷² Georg also suggests that Josef planned to work independently.⁷³ Perhaps this desire may have also been instrumental in determining how much work he was involved in?

As it did for Osten, Rai's offer to work at the newly established Bombay Talkies is likely to have been attractive to Wirsching: subject to the studio's success, it promised a regular income, a programme of film production and a place to live at Malad (the Germans were all accommodated in the grounds).⁷⁴ He would be working with German colleagues who were already familiar to him and in a milieu that included other German speakers, such as Rai and Devika Rani. Furthermore, Wirsching would act as lead cinematographer for Bombay Talkies, with responsibility to train Indian cameramen, and the opportunity to establish his own

⁷¹ Ibid., 72; a cross check of the archives confirms that Otto Josef Wirsching is Josef Wirsching.

⁷² <http://wirschingarchive.com/synopsis/>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "There was an old bungalow in the 21-acre land required for the studio ... On the first floor well furnished rooms were kept for the foreign technicians and Sir Richard Temple." M. S. M. Desai. "The Rise and Fall of Bombay Talkies," *Screen*, 12 October 1984, 4.

cinematographic style. Whether this responsibility included making decisions about the technology the studio would use, and where this would come from, could not be confirmed. At the very least, however, it is likely that Rai would have consulted with his German specialists before making major decisions on purchasing equipment. As mentioned in chapter 4, photographs show Wirsching using a French camera, indicating that Bombay Talkies probably used a variety of sources for their equipment.

6.3 Josef Wirsching and the epic of the Battleship *Emden*

In 1937, Bombay's harbour became a site of convergence in the history of one of the twentieth century's most frequently reincarnated battleships. The *Emden* has also been the subject of cinematic treatment on at least eleven occasions, most recently in 2012 with *Die Männer der Emden* (Pfahl). As a metaphor for the triangular politics between India, Germany and Britain, *Kreuzer Emden* also carried particular symbolism for both Josef Wirsching and Bombay Talkies. For Germany the serial incarnations of this battleship embodied the hopes of a nation that it would compete with the naval power of its island neighbour – at least as far as the political rhetoric was concerned; and, in its film form, it sought to celebrate the heroism of German masculinity in the wake of defeat and the Treaty of Versailles. During the Weimar era, the trope of heroism was heavily promoted through cinematic representation, with no fewer than seven naval films appearing.⁷⁵ For Britain, meanwhile, the *Emden* represented a threat to its maritime power and was therefore one that had to be constantly routed out and destroyed each time it was resurrected, adding to Britain's own rhetoric of heroism.⁷⁶ For India meanwhile, following an incident during which the *Emden* fired several shells at oil tanks in the harbour of Madras on the evening of 22

⁷⁵ Kester, *Film Front Weimar*, 161.

⁷⁶ Although the version of the *Emden* that was the subject of Emelka's film, was actually sunk by the Australian navy's ship, the *Sydney*, on 9 November 1914. This event was also recorded in a cinematic narrative in the Australian film *How we beat the Emden* (Rolfe, 1915). A short compilation is accessible here <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/for-the-honour-of-australia/clip3/?nojs> Accessed 25 October 2013.

September 1914, it came to be commemorated in Tamil ballads.⁷⁷ This attack started a fire that the *Times of India* described in cinematic terms, “the oil in the tanks immediately blazed up, rendering the sea face of the town as brilliant as day.”⁷⁸ Twenty-three years later, the trauma of the bombardment was perhaps partly redressed when, during a visit in 1937 by a subsequent incarnation of the *Emden*, its crew rescued thirty civilians after their boat had capsized in Bombay’s harbour; an event for which they were awarded a medal for bravery from the Safety First Association of India.⁷⁹

6.3.1 *Unsere Emden*, 1926

Die “Taten der Emden” haben Deutschland und die Welt in ihren historischen 80 Tagen tief bewegt. Letzter Sendbote der Romantik, kämpfte jenes Schiff auf fernem Ozean als etwas Einzigartiges, Märchenhaftes, Pfantastisches - nicht verbunden mit dem Kriegschaos Europas. Der “Emden” Krieg bewies: auf dem Meere, da ist der Mann noch was wert. (Germany and the world was deeply moved by the “escapades of the Emden” during its historic 80 days. A final emissary from the Romantic age, this ship, battled on distant oceans as something unique, like a fairy-tale, fantastical – not connected with the chaos of war in Europe. The Emden’s war meant: at sea, a man still has value.)⁸⁰

Wirsching was connected with four of the films that were made about the *Emden*. The first, *Unsere Emden* (1926), was filmed shortly after he returned from India and he is credited as one of four cameramen, including Werner Bohne, Arthur von Schwertführer and “Schmidt,” who all worked on the film under the

⁷⁷ The attack killed three people and injured a further sixteen, details that are missing from the majority of contemporary accounts; the British Library holds three Tamil texts of the ballad dating to 1914 and 1920. It also holds a book of photographs documenting the attack; it mentions the dead, but does not name them, only listing their occupations; K.T. Henderson, *The Bombardment of Madras on the 22nd September 1914, by the German Cruiser “Emden.” From photographs, etc* (Madras, 1914).

⁷⁸ “A passing bombardment” *Times of India*, 24 September 1914, 5.

⁷⁹ “Drowning Women & Children Rescued. ‘Emden’ crew’s help,” *Times of India*, 8 March 1937; “Bravery medal for Emden: women saved from drowning” *Times of India*. 10 March 1937.

⁸⁰ “Film Kritik” *Film Kurier*, 26 December 1926; it was also commemorated with poems, songs, books and photographs, according to the same article.

cinematographer, Ewald Daub.⁸¹ *Unsere Emden* was produced by Emelka and directed by Louis Ralph who would also be responsible for several of the subsequent versions. Striving for realism, and under the auspices of the German Admiralty, *Unsere Emden* took a quasi documentary approach, and followed the record preserved in the log of Captain Müller; its cast also included some of the original crew from the ship. The film has not survived, although Kester suggests that some of its footage was included in *Kreuzer Emden*; otherwise the quality of its photography might only be surmised from surviving stills and contemporary reviews.⁸² Considering that *Unsere Emden*'s premiere was delayed by a German government that was concerned the film might harm the entente cordiale, it was nevertheless popular outside Germany, appearing in Britain, Australia and the US as *The Raider Emden*, and in Sweden as *Emden - havens fribytare*.⁸³ Endorsed by the German Navy, the film was praised as an objective account of the events, with *Film Spectator* describing it as "admirably impartial."⁸⁴ A British film critic, Caroline Lejeune added that:

The *Emden* is the romance of gallantry; it belongs no more to Germany than to the whole world. It has no villains; it is the story of the clash of heroes, in which victor and victim share the honour, and no one can really say which has lost and which has won.⁸⁵

The photography is one of the aspects of the film that were not particularly praised, however, and *Film Kurier* criticised it as uninspiring and failing to bring to life an element as significant as the sea, saying "Der Regisseur Ralph hat nicht die Gabe, die Natur ins Bild zu ziehen" (The director, Ralph, does not have the talent to

⁸¹ Daub would later join Richard Eichberg's 1937 expedition to India to photograph *Das indische Grabmal* and *Der Tiger von Eschnapur*.

⁸² Kester, *Film Front Weimar*, 165.

⁸³ "Film und Aussenpolitik," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 22 December 1926, 3; Swedish record here: <http://sfi.se/en-GB/Swedish-film-database/Item/?type=MOVIE&itemid=32347> Accessed 10 January 2016.

⁸⁴ Ibid.; "As They Appeal to a Youth." *The Film Spectator*, 1 September 1928, 13.

⁸⁵ "A war film from Germany. The story of the Emden" *Manchester Guardian*, 27 May 1927.

draw nature into the picture).⁸⁶ Lejeune added that it was “not technically equal to [British] work, nor to the average work of German producers, but it certainly has the power to stir one’s emotions.”⁸⁷

6.3.2 *Kreuzer Emden*, 1932

The second *Emden* film that Wirsching photographed was *Kreuzer Emden*. Produced in 1932 this was also directed by Ralph who played the role of Captain Müller. This time Wirsching worked with Koch alone, however, suggesting that they may have had a greater influence on the film’s appearance than when they worked on the earlier film. Nevertheless, it is possible that Ralph, as director, exerted the greater influence on the aesthetics of this second film.

Wirsching and Koch worked on *Kreuzer Emden* in what was to be their penultimate film together. Although this remake included footage taken by Daub, Bohne and Schwertführer from the 1926 film, these three are not mentioned in the titles for this later film. Because the earlier film has not survived for comparison, however, a cautious approach is required before ascribing cinematographic influence to either Koch or Wirsching. In spite of this, there are specific scenes that are definitely only part of the later film, and these betray distinctive aesthetic features, allowing them to be attributed to either Wirsching or Koch. This argument is based on aspects of Wirsching’s later work in India and Koch’s continuing career in German cinema.

Like its predecessor, *Kreuzer Emden* retold the *Emden*’s activities in South East Asia during the first three months of the First World War. In contrast to the 1926 film, Kester explores the variations between the two films, both made by Emelka/Bavaria Film, with the 1932 film taking on aspects of caricature in its demonisation of the Russian officers.⁸⁸ Pitting two of the male heroes against one another, the 1932 film introduced a triangular love story whose narrative arc

⁸⁶ “Filmkritik. Unsere Emden” *Film Kurier*, 26 December 1926.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Kester, *Film Front Weimar*, 167.

reflected an overwhelmingly negative portrayal of women as unfaithful. The film's other female characters are prostitutes or vamps.⁸⁹ Combined with a fetishisation of the semi-naked male body that echoes some of Leni Riefenstahl's early work; the interaction of man and machine recalls Eisenstein and von Sternberg; and the focus on heroism in battle. The overriding masculine aesthetic of the film is inescapable and stands in sharp contrast to the films that Wirsching would later make at Bombay Talkies.

Three elements of the cinematography of *Kreuzer Emden* are examined here in order to explore whether Wirsching might have influenced the film's visual style and to attempt to distinguish these elements from the work of Koch. The first aspect considers the emphasis on machinery in motion, suggesting the influence of Eisenstein's 1925 film, *Battleship Potemkin* (without the rapid editing) and, to some extent, with Eisenstein's 1929 film, *The General Line*, with its focus on modernity and the machine.⁹⁰ Josef von Sternberg's 1928 film, *Docks of New York* is also invoked with the imagery of the internal workings of a ship, a comparison arguably showing that the stronger quality of photography and lighting was in the earlier American film (Figure 6-3). Was it the film's cameramen or its director, Ralph, who was influenced by an Eisenstein/Sternberg aesthetic?

⁸⁹ *Kreuzer Emden* was certificated for exhibition in Sweden as *Kryssaren Emden* where it first appeared on 6 August 1932.

⁹⁰ Russian films were shown in Germany at this time, although this led to complaints from right wing politicians. See, Letter from the Reichswehrminister to the Reichsminister des Innern, 7 April 1927, BAL R43-I/2499.17. In Britain, however, Russian films were largely banned until 1929: "Russian Films for England. Selected pictures to be exhibited," *Times*(London), 5 April 1929. *Battleship Potemkin*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, (Goskino, 1925), *The General Line*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, (Sovkino, 1929).

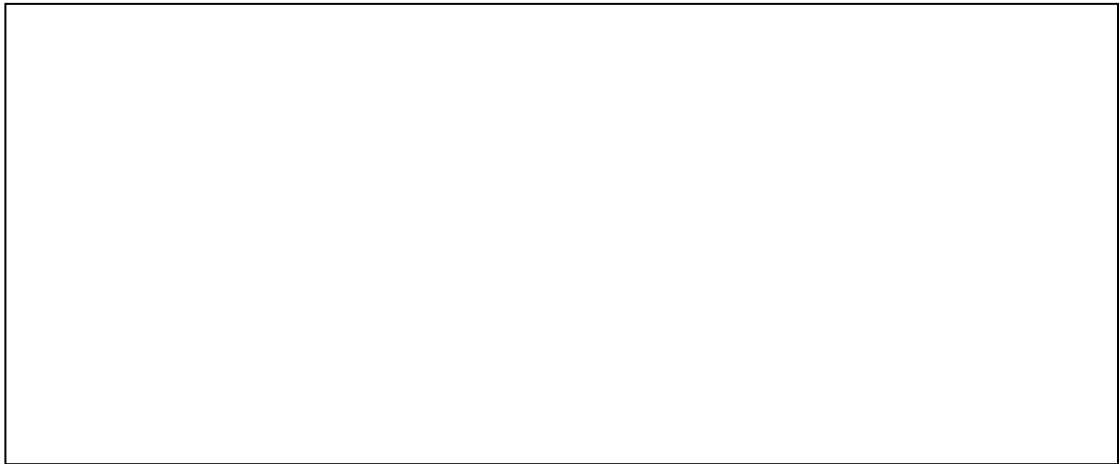


Figure 6-3 *Docks of New York* (left) *Kreuzer Emden* (right).

The second aspect is the portrayal of the semi-naked masculine body as a marker of strength and heroism; and one which identifies with the German movement of the early twentieth century celebrating physique and beauty, and exemplified in films such as *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (Ways to strength and beauty).⁹¹ This celebration of manhood and strength, an ideal in the aesthetics of National Socialism with its focus on the physical, and evident through the *Kraft durch Freude* movement, contrasts with von Sternberg's Hollywood aesthetic, where, even while working in the heat of the engine room, the protagonists keep their shirts on. Whether it was Wirsching or Koch who had the most influence on these aesthetics is difficult to assert.

The third aspect, is one that suggests Wirsching's aesthetic influence on the film. This is in the depictions of natural scenery: land, seascapes, sky and trees, and frequent use of the contra-jour method, which is redolent of Wirsching's camerawork at Bombay Talkies and which is discussed below.

⁹¹ *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, directed by Wilhelm Prager and Nicholas Kaufmann, (Ufa, 1925); also embodied in the mountain films of Riefenstahl and Fanck, discussed in the previous chapter.

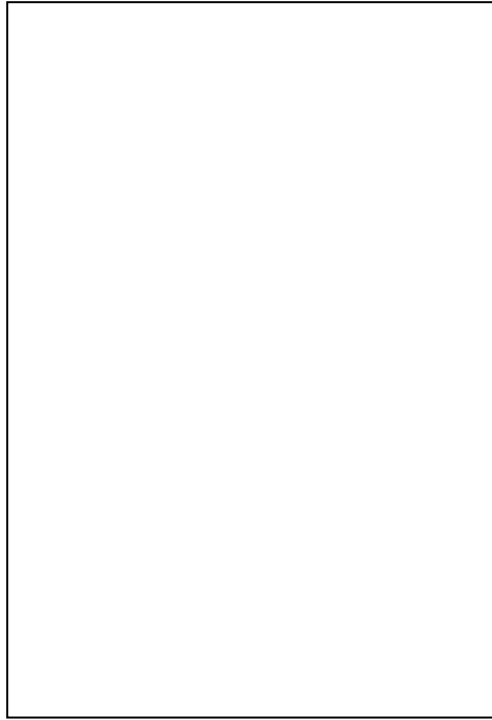


Figure 6-4 German poster for *Kreuzer Emden*, Deutsches Filminstitut.

6.3.3 *Emden* documentaries and newsreels

The third *Emden* film in this narrative, was made after Wirsching had left for India. This was a short documentary, *Mit Kreuzer Emden in die Welt* (Into the world with Battleship *Emden* 1937), produced by the *Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine*, the Naval High Command, and once again directed by Ralph.⁹² The *Emden* was visiting Bombay as one of the stops on its voyage around the world between 1936 and 1937, an exercise that might be interpreted as a show of strength in the prelude to war.⁹³ That a documentary film was being produced about this voyage, also reinforces the notion that the *Emden* was an object of propaganda for a home audience. It was this visit that led to what would have been Wirsching's fourth involvement with the *Emden*, when he filmed a newsreel for Bombay Talkies about

⁹² Ralph had also directed an intermediate *Emden* film: *Heldentum und Todeskampf unserer Emden* (Ralph, 1934) which was photographed by Koch alone.

⁹³ Although a copy of *Mit Kreuzer Emden in die Welt* exists in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin, unfortunately it is not complete. This is particularly regrettable because the censor certificate describes film footage of the visit, not only to Bombay, but also of the crew's visit to the Roxy to watch the Bombay Talkies film, *Izzat* (Honour, Osten, 1937) in the missing 67m of the film. (1. Bombay. 2. Arrival at the entrance to the harbour, the "Gateway of India." 3. Special presentation of the Indian film *Izzat* (honour) directed by a German. 4. The main actress Devika Rani and her partner Ashok Kumor [sic]). BAW Censor certificate 48984.

the ship's presence in Bombay; this newsreel was later shown at the Opera House, presumably as a precursor to the main feature.⁹⁴ The newsreel received its certificate from the Bombay Censor on 15 April 1937; if copies survive, they have yet to surface.⁹⁵ Osten screened a copy of the *Emden* newsreel at Bombay's German Club in March 1938, much to the satisfaction of the editor of *Der Deutsche in Indien*, Peter Frahm, who described the original *Emden* visit in strongly visual imagery:

Zwei mächtige Hakenkreuzbanner hoben sich ab gegen das nächtliche Dunkel des Gartens, flankiert von den Fahnen Britanniens und weiter deutschen Flaggen. Hunderte und aberhunderte Öllämpchen warfen ihre Lichter in die Nacht und verliehen dem Garten einen Märchenhaften Glanz. (Two huge swastikas, flanked by the flags of Britain and the other German flags, raised themselves against the night time black of the garden. Hundreds upon hundreds of oil lamps threw their light into the night giving the garden a fairytale aspect.)⁹⁷

The image of the *Emden*'s crew marching through the streets of Bombay under both British and German flags masks the growing political tension between the two European neighbours. Nevertheless, although German activity in India was being more closely scrutinised at this stage, Anglo-German relations remained cordial, at least on the surface. Captain Walter Lohmann and two of his officers were invited to lunch at Government House during their stay, an occasion at which the Rais may also have been present.

⁹⁴ The *Bombay Chronicle* reported on the newsreel that was produced by Bombay Talkies, suggesting, "It is likely that copies of this film may be sent abroad also, particularly to Germany where naturally it will arouse great interest." "'Emden' film to be shown. Bombay Talkies prepare interesting news short" *Bombay Chronicle*, 17 March 1937; Whether the *Emden* newsreel reached Germany is unknown, although it is possible that Osten and Wirsching might have taken a copy when they travelled to Germany later that year, as they did *Achhut Kanya*.

⁹⁵ *German Cruiser Emden Visits Bombay*. Certificate 17631.

⁹⁶ Heiber, cited in Hilchenbach *Kino Im Exil*, 23, points out that Goebbels' interest in cinema extended to *Besonderen ausländischen Streifen* (exceptional foreign films)

⁹⁷ "Besuch der Emden – Festtage in Bombay" *Der Deutsche in Indien* 12, no. 9 (April 1937).

6.4 Making films in India, 1935-1967

In 1935, Wirsching and his wife, Charlotte, travelled to Bombay. Colin Pal later told Amrit Gangar that his father, Niranjan Pal, believed Rai's first choice was actually Wilhelm Kiermeier but he couldn't get him.⁹⁸ If Kiermeier was Rai's first choice, however, his experience was barely more extensive than Wirsching's. Is it not also possible that Rai might have considered Emil Schünemann, given that the latter had extensive experience and had produced a high quality of photography on *Shiraz, Dice* and *Karma*?

The social films Wirsching would make for Bombay Talkies, with their focus on motherland, caste inequalities and the status of women, provided a distinct break with the masculine aesthetics and the rhetoric of *Vaterland* (fatherland) that had dominated many of the German films that he had worked on, such as *Stoßtrupp 1917* and the *Emden* films. From the first film produced by Bombay Talkies in 1935, *Jawani-ki-hawa*, to the production of *Kangan* that was interrupted by the declaration of war in 1939, Wirsching is credited for the photography of sixteen feature films, all directed by Osten and produced by Rai. He was also behind the camera for an unknown quantity of newsreels, sports programmes and educational films, although gradually this work might have been taken up by his main protégé, R. D. Parrenja. Wirsching's cinematography is often striking, revealing how his skills with lighting were developing as he gained experience. From his work on *Light of Asia*, his increasingly confident use of light and shadow, as well as his use of deep focus photography, is evident all the way through to *Kangan*, later finding accomplishment in *Mahal*.

This section examines the main influences on the development of Wirsching's cinematic style and, with the intention to direct the discourse away from the oft-cited influence of German Expressionism, it challenges the extent to which this amorphous term can actually be applied to Wirsching's cinematographic style. In conclusion, the section outlines the argument made at the beginning of the chapter,

⁹⁸ Gangar, *Franz Osten and the Bombay Talkies*, 15.

and explains why Josef Wirsching should be considered for his significance to the development of the Bombay Talkies' style and why he deserves greater recognition in the historiography of Indian and German film.

6.4.1 Thoughts on German Expressionism

The subject of German Expressionism was introduced in chapter 1. Here the discussion considers how it has been applied to Wirsching's work, and the extent to which this designation is appropriate.

Since the post-war theses of Kracauer and Eisner, the term 'expressionism' has become so closely identified with German cinema, that Elsaesser has described it as the "Moebius strip of German cinema and its double."⁹⁹ Of the many determinants ascribed to it, the most commonly cited include anamorphic imagery; supernatural elements and the sense of the uncanny; reaction against realism; psychological disturbance; and chiaroscuro lighting; yet, these are also features that might be traced in other cinematic traditions. Barry Salt distils the canon of German Expressionist films into a group of six, with *Caligari* as the prima facie example.¹⁰⁰ Guerin explores the use of light in early German cinema, describing expressionist films as "effectively static, two-dimensional images that mimic the Expressionist paintings of artists such as Erich Heckel or Lyonel Feininger."¹⁰¹

Scholars sometimes suggest that German Expressionism has been an influence on Wirsching, in particular with regard to *Mahal*.¹⁰² Given Guerin's description of static, two-dimensional images, it is hard to find such features in Wirsching's films. Furthermore, his background was in the film industry in Germany's south, a region that tended towards social conservatism and generally favoured a different

⁹⁹ Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and after*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 185.

¹⁰¹ Guerin, *A Culture of Light*, 17; furthermore, Guerin challenges the political periodisations, arguing that these introduce an artificial division into the study of the films.

¹⁰² See, for example: Nihalani, "Through the Viewfinder," in *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*, 249; Fuechtner, "The International Project of National(ist) Film," 173.

aesthetic, such as the naturalism depicted of the *Heimatfilm*, discussed in the previous chapter. Whilst this is not to expressly exclude *any* influence whatsoever arising through films that have been labelled as expressionist, an argument might be made that any influence is minimal, and the genealogy of Wirsching's cinematographic style might be attributed to a fusion of genres and influences. Of the traits that have been most commonly associated with expressionism, it is the use of chiaroscuro lighting and the inclusion of supernatural elements and the uncanny that appear more frequently in Wirsching's photography. This study has also considered whether the influence of Emil Schünemann and the style of the three films he photographed, introduced aspects of his photographic style to the Bombay Talkies' films made between 1935 and 1939. Before discussing Wirsching's development from *Achhut Kanya* to *Mahal*, the following section considers some examples of his early work at Bombay Talkies: lighting techniques, camera angles, and framing techniques.

6.4.2 Lighting techniques

Janma Bhoomi, introduced in the previous chapter, provides an opportunity to consider how Wirsching designed the lighting on a studio set. This study illustrates aspects of lighting that were successful, as well as those that appear less so. The scene discussed here comes near the beginning of the film. Ajoy (Ashok Kumar) is attending to his dying friend, Premananda. This is the pivotal moment when Ajoy decides he will take over Premananda's work and devote his life to supporting the poor against the brutality of the zamindar. The first image shown (Figure 6-5) is in medium close up, and shows Ajoy in the left of the frame with Premananda lying on a bed, their bodies forming a 45 degree angle; the key light comes from a midpoint to the right of the frame, creating a series of geometric patterns; the camera focused on the dying man, the chiaroscuro lighting emphasising the bleakness of the moment, and recalling Schünemann's work on *Karma*.

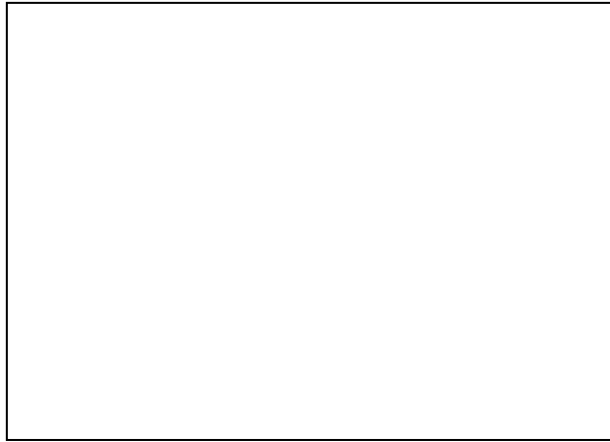


Figure 6-5 “Ajoy consoles Premananda,” *Janma Bhoomi*, 1936.

The next shot (Figure 6-6) shifts the perspective to place Premananda in the foreground, now slightly out of focus, with Ajoy occupying the right of the frame in sharp focus. Ajoy, in his smart Western suit, is unable to save Premananda; the hospital in the city is now his only chance of survival, but is one he rejects. This illustrates once more the theme of sacrifice that follows through many of the films Rai and Osten made together.



Figure 6-6 “Premananda and Ajoy,” *Janma Bhoomi*.

A series of shots follow, alternating between the left and the right side of the bed; between high angle and low angle camera positions; and between medium, medium close up and close up shots. Given what appears to be a small space, the mobility of Wirsching’s camera suggests the use of von Spreti’s set construction, discussed in chapter 4.

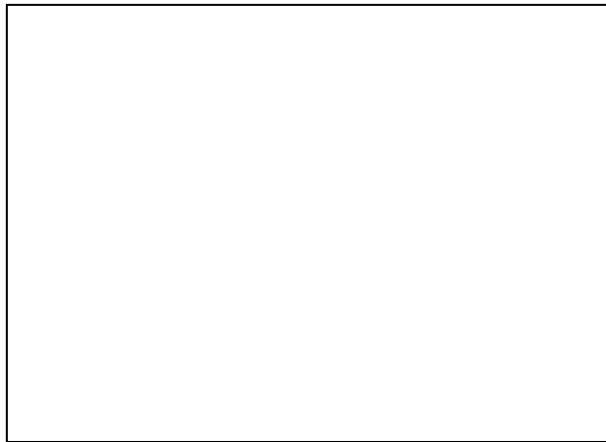


Figure 6-7 "Premananda waits," *Janma Bhoomi*.

The light is dying and Premananda's sight is failing. He is now alone whilst Ajoy has gone to bring Pagli, the mad/wise woman of the village. Wirsching's lighting arrangement echoes the reality of approaching death: the room is edged in darkness, and he frames Premananda in long shot, reducing him to a small point at the bottom left of the frame (Figure 6-7). In Figure 6-8, Chandraprabha and Ajoy enter the room from right to left towards Premananda's bed, blocking the light

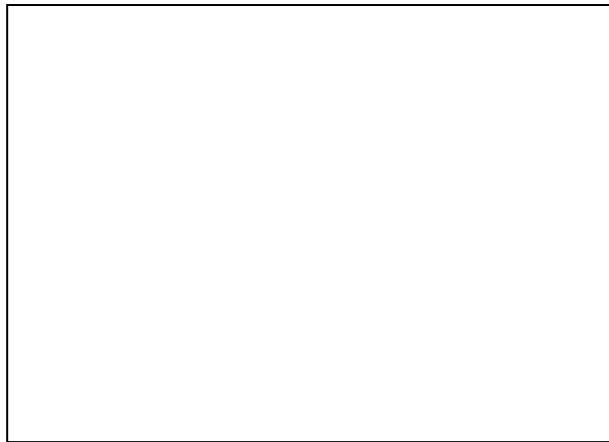


Figure 6-8 "Pagli and Ajoy return to Premananda," *Janma Bhoomi*.

source and throwing strong shadows on the wall above the bed. Was this intentional? Does Wirsching's lighting design indicate a deeper narrative purpose, their shadows intended to signify approaching death? Or was it simply that the lighting was affected by other factors such as Osten's direction, the lack of space in von Spreti's set design or Wirsching's own inexperience at controlling lighting on this occasion?

The following two images illustrate the change in Wirsching's lighting for portraiture; and they indicate that between 1936 and 1949, his level of skill transformed from that of a cameraman to a cinematographer. The first image of Devika Rani in *Janma Bhoomi*, is closer to the technique used to photograph Anny Ondra in *Hotel*. Competently lit and softly photographed, it is in sharp contrast to the second image of Vijayalaxmi in *Mahal*. Here, Wirsching's lighting and careful composition introduces an emotional and psychological depth that is not evident in the earlier film, a feature that distinguishes it from the early Bombay Talkies' films.



Figure 6-9 Devika Rani, *Janma Bhoomi*, 1936.



Figure 6-10 Vijayalaxmi, *Mahal*, 1949.

6.4.3 Camera angles

The extreme low angle used to photograph the marching villagers in Figure 6-11, may have been influenced from working on *Stoßtrupp 1917*, where the camera was filming from the low angle of a trench.

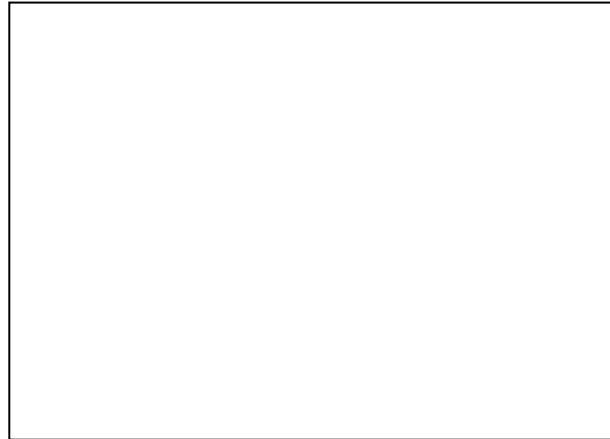


Figure 6-11 "Villagers," *Janma Bhoomi*.

Low angle composition became a regular feature of Wirsching's work; arguably influenced as much by the camera mobility of Ophül's *Braut* as *Stoßtrupp*. Taken from the level of the track, Figure 6-12 emphasises the hopelessness of Dukhia and Kasturi's position as untouchables, shunned by most of society, and it also evokes the style of Sergei Eisenstein's 1929 film, *The General Line*, in its foregrounding of the subaltern against an expansive sky (Figure 6-13).



Figure 6-12 "Dukhia and Kasturi," *Achhut Kanya*, 1936.

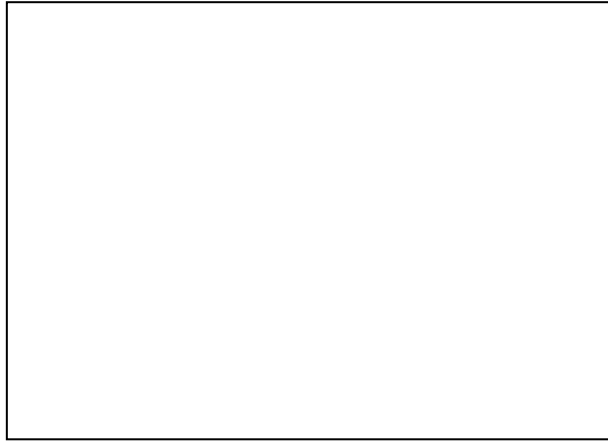


Figure 6-13 "Peasants ploughing," *The General Line*, 1929.

Trains, already a popular trope in Indian cinema, appear in many of the Bombay Talkies' films. The extreme low angle shots that Wirsching employs on *Achhut Kanya* (Figure 6-15), angled from below the level of the tracks, present a brooding perspective that configures the duality of the train as a harbinger of modernity bringing changes to India, and a mortal threat that will eventually take the life of Kasturi. A year later, when he photographed *Prem Kahani*, Wirsching employed chiaroscuro lighting to accompany the sound of the approaching train (Figure 6-14); an audio-visual technique later reiterated in *Kangan*.



Figure 6-14 "Train at night," *Prem Kahani*, 1937.

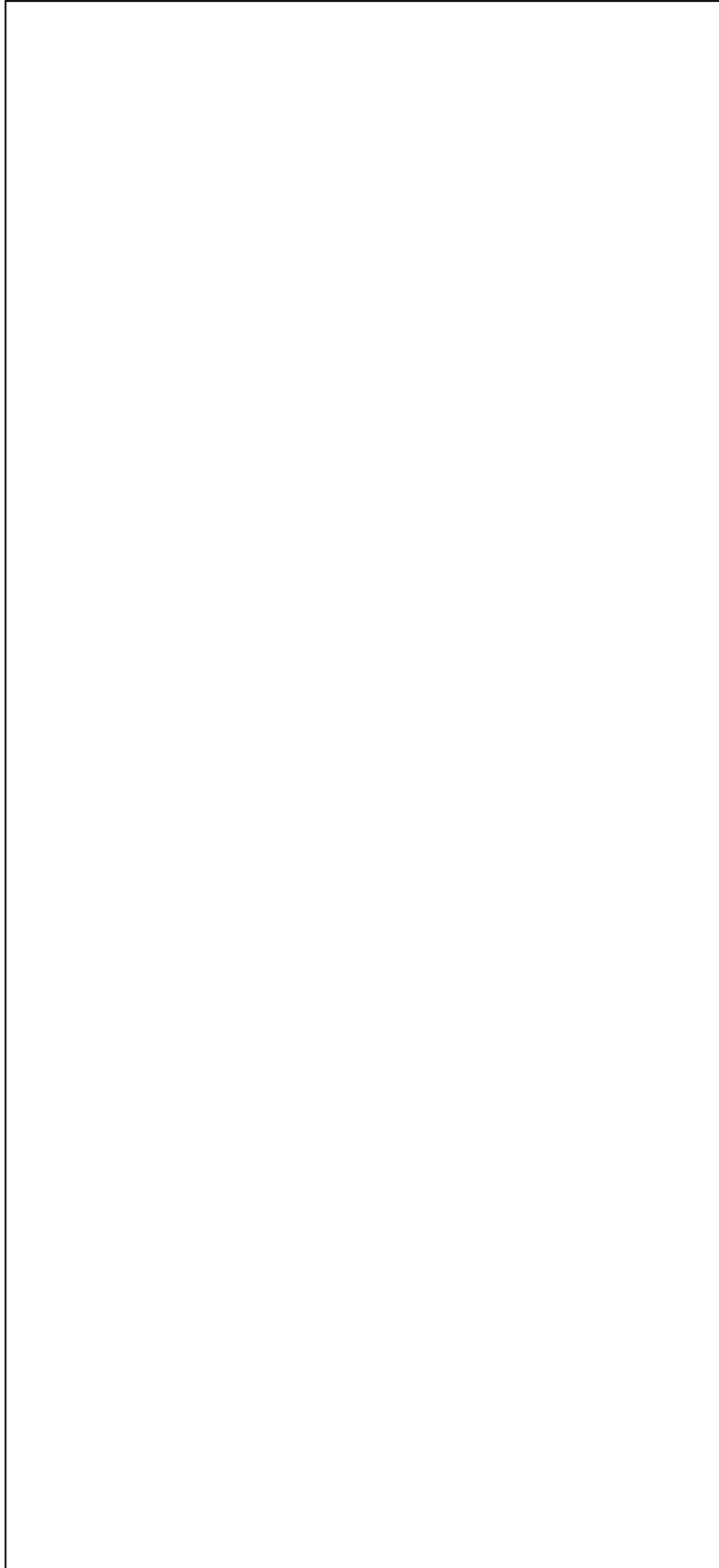


Figure 6-15 "Extreme low shots," *Achhut Kanya*.

6.4.4 Framing techniques

Wirsching's use of architectural and natural structures to frame an image was already evident by the time he photographed *Light of Asia* (although the first influence on this film might have originated with Kiermeier or Osten). The following image presents a beautiful tableau suggestive of the photographic studio rather than a moving image; the spectator observes it much as a painting, and is not invited to speculate further:



Figure 6-16 "Architectural framing," *Light of Asia*, 1925 (Osten).

Wirsching's framing technique on *Mahal*, however, combines narrative suspense with a sense of the uncanny as the figure of Shankar (Ashok Kumar), the film's tragic hero, moves through the series of doorways towards the camera; the multiple portals reinforcing the theme of reincarnation that is central to the narrative.



Figure 6-17 "Architectural framing," *Mahal*, 1949 (Amrohi).

A similar visual trope was also used by Hitchcock in his 1945 psychological thriller, *Spellbound*, suggesting a possible influence on *Mahal*.



Figure 6-18 “Architectural framing,” *Spellbound*, 1945 (Hitchcock).

Where Schünemann used soft fabric to frame faces (Figure 3-9 and Figure 3-10) Wirsching sometimes used doorways. In *Achhut Kanya*, he uses it to depict Devika Rani/Kasturi in a mischievous mood as she plays a prank on Pratap. Her face is evenly lit, giving the impression of emotional openness.

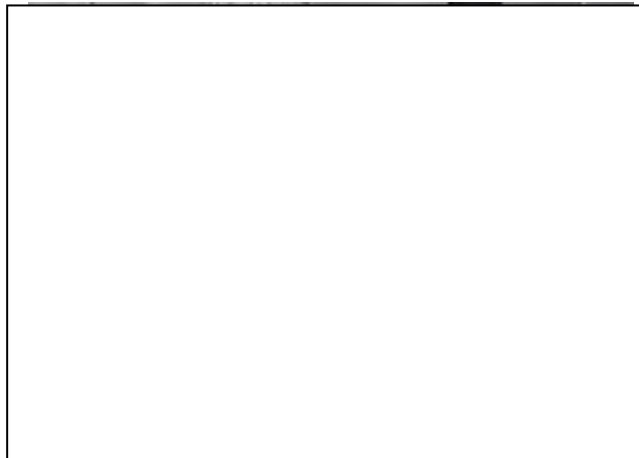


Figure 6-19 Devika Rani, *Achhut Kanya*, 1936.

In *Prem Kahani*, photographed in 1937, the framing of Maya Devi’s face hints at a more guarded psychological state as she eavesdrops on a conversation that she believes is about her future marriage. Her face partly obscured by shadows, her eyes totally in darkness, the image conveys concern, rather than happiness:

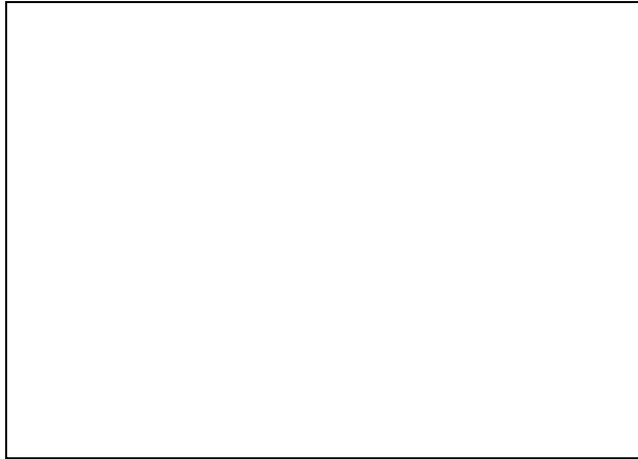


Figure 6-20 Maya Devi, *Prem Kahani*, 1937.

By the time he photographed *Mahal*, however, Wirsching's door-framing technique, combined with intense chiaroscuro lighting and sharp focus, now denotes a deeper and more desperate psychological state as Hari Shankar descends into obsessive madness. Here Kumar's face is more obscured than Maya Devi's, however, the visible features are sharp, holding the eye at the centre of the image:



Figure 6-21 Ashok Kumar, *Mahal*, 1949.

Wirsching also used the natural environment in a way that distinguishes his photography, examples of which are provided in the following four images.

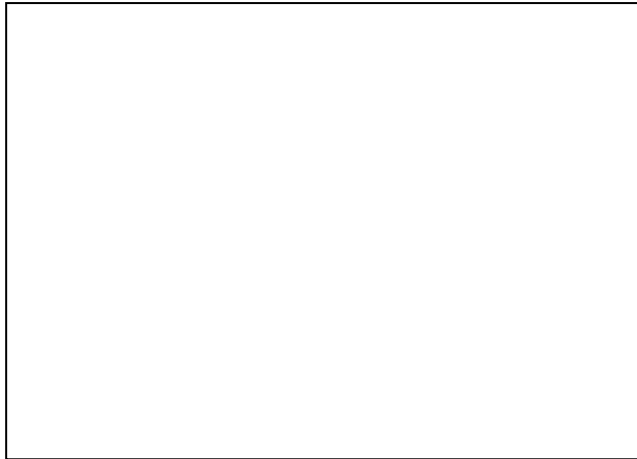


Figure 6-22 *Light of Asia*, 1925.

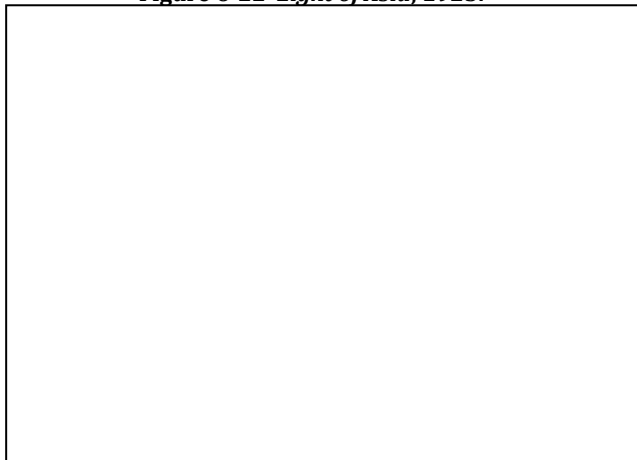


Figure 6-23 *Kreuzer Emden*, 1932.



Figure 6-24 *Das verliebte Hotel*, 1933.

In *Janma Bhoomi*, he used window bars to achieve a similar effect:

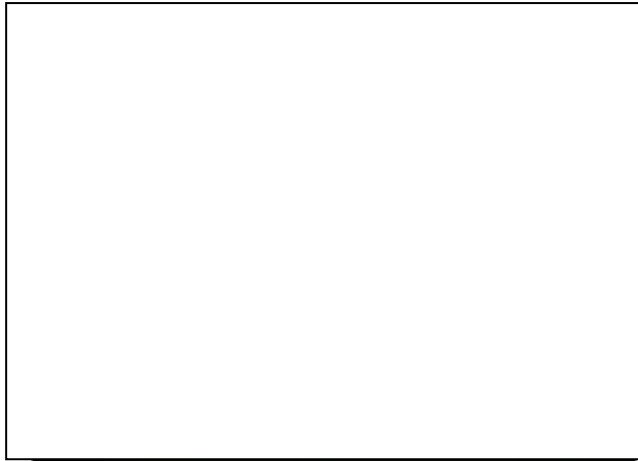


Figure 6-25 *Janma Bhoomi*, 1936.

The *Bombay Chronicle* praised Wirsching's skills on *Achhut Kanya*, claiming "Seldom has the Indian landscape, the contrasting foliage and sky, the lone cart rattle and the music from the lips of the rustic maid been so effectively captured on the screen."¹⁰³ Where palm trees framed the landscape in *Light of Asia* (Figure 6-22) and *Kreuzer Emden* (Figure 6-23), in the films he photographed at Bombay Talkies, Wirsching's camera lingered on the beauty of nature, sharing the effect of flickering light on trembling leaves. A similar observation of nature might be observed in Schünemann's work on *Karma*, as a boat conveying Devika Rani to her meeting with Rai is photographed from the river bank, seen through a shifting canopy of trees.

6.4.5 The transition from *Achhut Kanya* to *Mahal*

When Wirsching was released from internment, Ashok Kumar and Savak Vacha engaged him to photograph *Ziddi*, the film that introduced Dev Anand to cinema audiences. The reviews were positive, singling out Wirsching's cinematography for praise and, in one case commenting:

Distinguished by some of the finest photography we have seen for years on the Indian screen - the camera in fact steals the picture - and at least two excellent portrayals of highly sympathetic and satisfying roles, Bombay Talkies' first production after almost a year, *Ziddi* is good wholesome entertainment, clean as a whistle and filled with popular appeal. Enhancing the appeal are the old

¹⁰³ "Towards distinct film individuality: Achhut Kanya at the Roxy," *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 July 1936..

marks of the Malad Studio: settings of great beauty, brilliantly photographed by that old veteran of Himansu Rai days, Wirsching, whose cunning time has ripened in rare art.¹⁰⁴

A number of films followed with Bombay Talkies, before the studio finally ceased production in 1954.¹⁰⁵ Wirsching photographed *Mahal* in 1949. He worked with Gyan Mukherjee on *Sangram* in 1950 and *Samsheer* in 1953.¹⁰⁶ And he photographed Bimal Roy's *Maa* in 1952.¹⁰⁷ From 1954 to 1959 Wirsching worked for AMA Limited, where he was credited on twenty-five documentary films during this period.¹⁰⁸ He was then invited by Amrohi to join Mahal films for whom he made his final two films: *Dil apna aur preet parai* and *Pakeezah*.¹⁰⁹ Wirsching died in June 1967, during the filming of *Pakeezah*, a production beset with problems that delayed its completion until 1972.¹¹⁰

The style and quality of Wirsching's photography developed significantly over the years from 1935. He managed his own department at Bombay Talkies, training Indian cameramen, some of whom subsequently became renowned cinematographers and directors in their own right. To illustrate Wirsching's development, this section examines two of Bombay Talkies' most important films, photographed thirteen years apart: *Achhut Kanya* in 1936, and *Mahal* in 1949; the former was directed by Osten, the latter by Kamal Amrohi.

¹⁰⁴ "Wirsching's Camera Real Star Of Bombay Talkies' 'Ziddi'," *Times of India*, 2 April 1949.

¹⁰⁵ Records of Wirsching's filmography vary. The website set up by his family includes films such as *Baad-Baan* and *Maa*, but these do not appear to credit Wirsching. Therefore, the filmography at the back of this thesis only includes those films for which reasonable proof was available that Wirsching had actually worked on them.

¹⁰⁶ "photography by veteran ace, Josef Wirsching," "'Shole', 'Samsheer' & 'Navdurga' Open On Friday," *Times of India*, 1 March 1953.

¹⁰⁷ "photography by JW is patchy. It is good in fits and starts, and leaves an overall effect of dullness." "Leela Chitnis Lives Her Role In 'Maa': Our Review," *Times of India*, 13 June 1952.

¹⁰⁸ Wirsching Foundation. <http://wirschingfoundation.blogspot.co.uk/>

¹⁰⁹ *Dil apna aur preet parai*, directed by Kishore Sahu, (Kamal Studios, 1960).

¹¹⁰ Charlotte Wirsching died on 28 May 1967; Josef Wirsching died on 11 June 1967. "Deaths," *Times of India*, 29 May 1967, 2. "In Memoriam," *Times of India*, 11 June 1968, 2.

Achhut Kanya places the Bombay studio at the head of India's picture-making units; and all connected with it, producer, director, stars, cast, technicians and the story-writer may congratulate themselves on having turned out a masterpiece of screen art that is at once a credit and a tribute to the Indian film industry.¹¹¹

As already discussed in chapter 4, *Achhut Kanya* retains its position as Bombay Talkies' best known film from the Rai/Osten era. Celebrated for the quality of its photography, the film's "distinct film individuality" referred to by the *Bombay Chronicle*, owes much to Wirsching.¹¹² By framing *Achhut Kanya* in a contemporary setting, Bombay Talkies pitted the modern, in the form of trains, guns and automobiles, in tandem with the progressive, embodied in the person of the Brahmin, Mohan, against the traditional, configured in the rural Indian village, and the regressive, evident in the Sanatanist tendencies of the villagers. *Achhut Kanya* continued the Bombay Talkies' tradition of provoking discourse about social mores through the medium of cinema, a reputation that was becoming firmly established, not least through its close connections with, and endorsements from, Sarojini Naidu and Jawaharlal Nehru.¹¹³

Apart from Wirsching's cinematography, the most obvious feature uniting *Achhut Kanya* and *Mahal*, is the notion of the uncanny and the cinematic spectral vision. Wirsching was already familiar with photographing the ethereal. Using double exposure, a common technique that can be seen in several films from the period, including the fragments of Osten's *Was Kinder den Eltern verschweigen*, *Light of Asia* used the spectral vision to illustrate King Sudhodhana's dream (Figure 6-26) and Gautama's temptations.

¹¹¹ "Achhut Kanya, triumph of screen art," *Times of India*, 24 July 1936.

¹¹² "Towards distinct film individuality: Achhut Kanya at the Roxy," *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 July 1936.

¹¹³ *Pandit Jawaharlal sees Achhut Kanya*. Certificated on 29 September 1936, No. 16796.

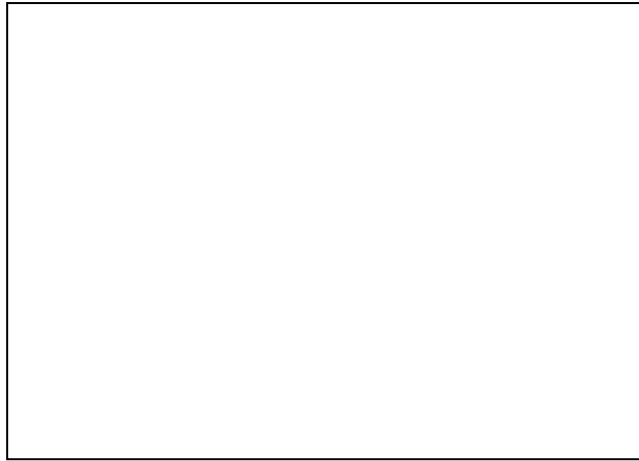


Figure 6-26 "King Sudhodhana's dream," *The Light of Asia*.

In *Achhut Kanya*, the intervention of the ghostly sage prevents uxoricide, its didactic message framing the central narrative of Kasturi and Pratap's love story that is presented in flashback. Apart from its gradual fade in, and in spite of the crossing keeper's fear of the *bhoot*, there is nothing sinister about this 'genuine' apparition:



Figure 6-27 "The sage metamorphoses," *Achhut Kanya*.

In *Mahal*, however, the notion of the metaphysical is a conceit, a flesh and blood doppelgänger of the gardener's daughter, Asha (Madhubala), whose purpose is to beguile Hari Shankar (Kumar) by impersonating Kamini, the long-dead lover of the previous owner. The girl on the swing, first seen by Shankar, has apparently melted into nothing when he approaches (Figure 6-28); as Asha/Kamini continues to pursue him, the psychological drama of the film builds with increasing claustrophobia that owes much to Wirsching's cinematography.

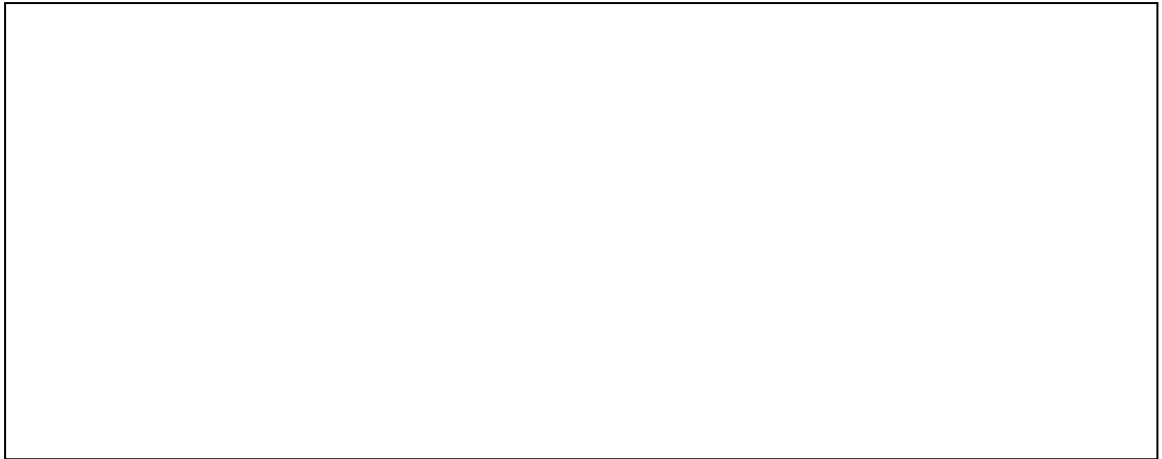


Figure 6-28 “Kamini's ‘ghost’ appears – and disappears,” *Mahal*.

Mr Amrohi was lucky in having a camera artist of the experience and consummate ability of Mr Wirsching.¹¹⁴

The richness of themes and imagery in *Mahal* could serve as a topic of doctoral research in its own right. For Dwyer, the film occupies a unique position in the canon of Indian cinema, a genre-defying film, and her essay provides a comprehensive examination of the fusion of film styles that shaped *Mahal*.¹¹⁵ Dwyer's comment that *Mahal* does not “take up the great theme of the new nation” is worth considering further.¹¹⁶ Whilst she identifies the narrative of the nation in the films of Guru Dutt and Raj Kapoor, Dwyer suggests that *Mahal* also presents a subtle entreaty for communal reconciliation. At the diegetic level, *Mahal* is suffused with culturally specific references that an Indian audience would recognise; in terms of visual imagery, it also draws on sources outside India, referencing the contemporary work of Hitchcock and Welles.¹¹⁷ *Mahal* was released in the wake of Partition, communal tensions that the studio itself was struggling with in 1948.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ “Kamal Amrohi's ‘Mahal’ breaks new ground,” *Times of India*, 21 October 1950.

¹¹⁵ Dwyer, “Bombay Gothic,” in *Beyond the boundaries of Bollywood*, ed. Dwyer and Pinto, 131.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹⁷ During 1925-1926, Hitchcock was working at Geiseltasteig with an Italian cinematographer, Gaetano di Ventimiglia on two co-productions with Emelka, *Irrgarten der Leidenschaft* and *Bergadler*; Wirsching may have come into contact with either of them.

¹¹⁸ Manto, *Stars from Another Sky*, 17–18.

Dwyer points out that Sangam Bhavan translates as a “confluence of rivers at Allahabad,” a factor that might be interpreted as signalling a confluence for India’s communities. In this context, the positioning of the *mahal* as both Islamicate in style, yet with a name (Sangam Bhavan) that discounts this, is further layered by the embedded knowledge of the audience who know that Madhubala, a Muslim, is playing the dual role of Kamini/Asha, identifiable as a Hindu, who appears as a ghost, yet is actually alive, and whose singing voice is that of another, Lata Mangeshkar. The use of *mahal* rather than *bhavan* for the film’s title, is further emphasised by foregrounding Hindi, Urdu and English as parallel modes of communication through the official body of the court and in the letters that are portrayed to progress the narrative and reveal the characters’ inner thoughts.

With its fusion of cultures and film styles, *Mahal* arguably fulfils the process that began when Rai first travelled to Munich in 1924. Wirsching’s cinematography in *Mahal* achieves an amalgamation of styles that includes his early German films, even offering glimpses of what might be termed expressionism in the two dimensional and abstract form of Figure 6-29, depicting the removal of the gallows when Shankar is reprieved.



Figure 6-29 “Gallows,” *Mahal*.

Mahal betrays influences from contemporary productions such as Orson Welles’ *Lady from Shanghai* and the noir films of Alfred Hitchcock; but it also hints at

having itself influenced later films.¹¹⁹ *Spellbound* was playing in Bombay in December 1946; *Lady from Shanghai* in December 1947; and *Rebecca* was shown in Bombay during March 1947.¹²⁰ The night-time scenes of the silhouetted mansion in *Rebecca* bear a striking similarity to the opening scene of *Mahal*, when Shankar arrives at the mansion his father has bought unseen. The presence of the uncanny that is indicated in *Rebecca* with the appearance of the dog, anticipates the black cat that darts in and out of scenes in *Mahal*. When Shrinath (Kanu Roy) shoots towards Kamini, he only destroys a mirror (Figure 6-31), a scene that resonates strongly with Orson Welles' thriller, *Lady from Shanghai* (Figure 6-30). Welles' film in turn recalls an early German film, *Der Student von Prag*, when Balduin (Paul Wegener) shoots at his mirror image, killing himself.¹²¹



Figure 6-30 "Bannister shoots at Elsa," *The Lady from Shanghai*, 1947 (Welles).



Figure 6-31 "Shrinath shoots at Kamini," *Mahal*, 1949 (Amrohi).

¹¹⁹ *The Lady from Shanghai*, directed by Orson Welles (Colombia Pictures Corporation, 1947).

¹²⁰ *Spellbound*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Selznick International Pictures, 1945); *Rebecca*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Selznick International Pictures, 1940).

¹²¹ *Der Student von Prag*, directed by Stellan Rye, (Deutsche Bioskop GmbH, 1913).

Apart from emphasising the notion of reincarnation, the temporal metaphors that infuse *Mahal*, also find resonance with the emphasis on time in Guru Dutt's 1962 film, *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam*.¹²² Equally, *Mahal*'s use of animals (bats, snakes and owls) as objects of terror, anticipates Hitchcock's 1963 film, *The Birds*. The mobility of the cinematic medium and its producers, enables the exchange of aesthetic styles across cultural, national and temporal borders. If Wirsching had been influenced by Hitchcock during the British director's sojourn in Munich in 1925, it is tempting to speculate that *Mahal*'s influence may have extended back towards Hitchcock.

In the case of Bombay Talkies, it should be considered that, in addition to practices of film production, these aesthetic influences flowed, not only from the Germans, but through the experiences Rai and Devika Rani took from Germany. Furthermore, there is evidence that certain practices and aesthetics from Bombay Talkies contributed to a legacy that persists in present day productions from Mumbai. For example, Devika Rani's frequent costume changes, occurring as early as *Jeevan Naiya* and *Janma Bhoomi*, share a practice that continues to influence the fashion industry. Domestic interior design in middle class homes, was a feature already present in *Prem Kahani* and *Nirmala*, later gaining significance with parallel cinema and the films of Hrishikesh Mukherjee. The trope of the heroine gathering water, irrespective of social class, can still be observed in the 2002 version of *Devdas*. Whether this holds true for the Bombay Talkies' template of the Indian village, discussed in chapter 4, is another matter.

This chapter concludes by offering two visual motifs from *Kangan*, that occur in relatively recent productions. In *Kangan*, Kamal's declaration of love for Radha is hampered by caste difference; in *Veer-Zaara*, Veer's love for Zaara is prevented by religious difference.¹²³ Their entry into the respective places of worship is both dramatic and unexpected. Kamal arrives at the *Math* to declare his love for Radha in defiance of his father's orders that he sever all contact with her. Veer arrives at

¹²² *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam*, directed by Abra Alvi (Guru Dutt Pictures, 1962).

¹²³ *Veer-Zaara*, directed by Yash Chopra (Yash Raj Films, 2004).

the mosque on the eve of Zaara's wedding, that has been arranged by her father with a business associate.

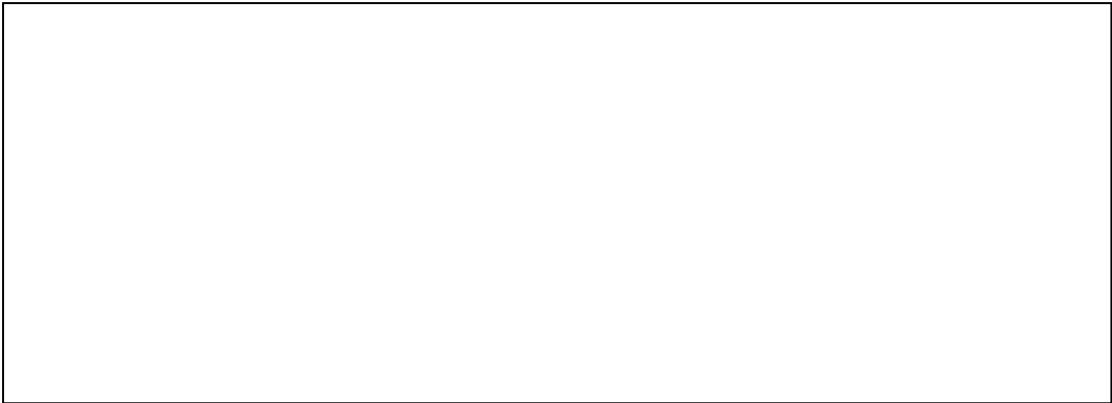


Figure 6-32 "The arrival of the lover." *Kangan*, 1939; *Veer-Zaara*, 2004.

The second motif depicts the performance of *aarti*, as welcome and celebration. In *Kangan*, Radha is shocked by Kamal's sudden appearance, and anguished when this causes her to drop the tray. In *Devdas*, Parvati's mother makes an overture to the mother of Devdas for a union between their children, but is forcibly rejected, causing the tray to crash to the ground.¹²⁴

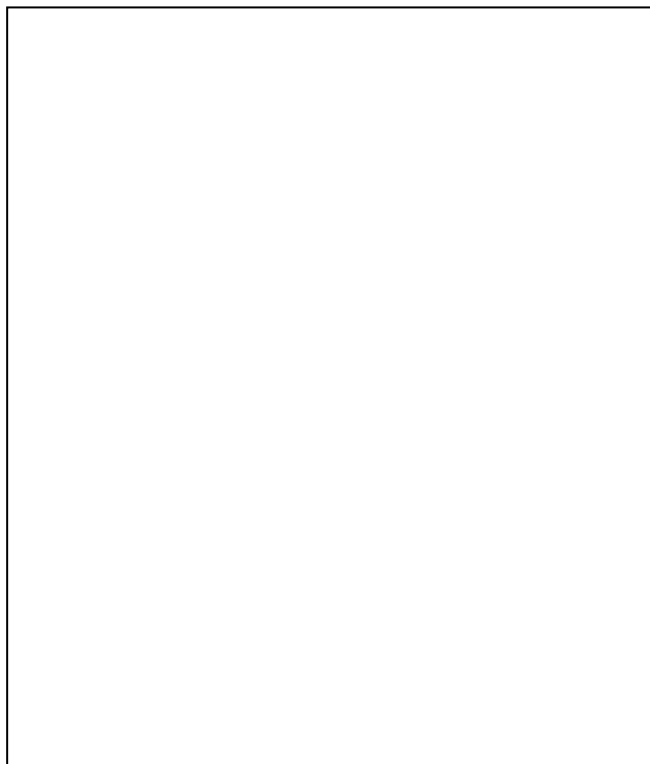


Figure 6-33 "Shame and the fallen tray," *Kangan*, 1939; *Devdas*, 2002.

¹²⁴ *Devdas*, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali (Mega Bollywood, 2002).

6.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter has examined the contribution that Josef Wirsching made to Bombay Talkies, a legacy that continued after the end of the Second World War and led to his participation on some of Hindi cinema's most significant films. Comparing *Achhut Kanya* with *Mahal*, the chapter has explored how Wirsching developed from a cameraman to a cinematographer, a progression that enabled him to create mood and enhance the psychological aspects of a narrative. It has considered some of the many sources that may have influenced his work, arguing that these originate from a broader palette than might be imagined, ranging from Hitchcock and Eisenstein to the work of Emil Schünemann.

By considering Wirsching's general absence from German historiography, one might reflect that this is largely because his career was predominantly in Indian cinema. The extent of Wirsching's involvement in organising Bombay Talkies may have initially been limited to his own area of expertise. Whether Wirsching succeeded in introducing new technology is likely, given his own involvement in research and development; however, this could not be specifically demonstrated by the current research. Of all Rai's German colleagues, it is arguably Wirsching who left the most enduring traces on the studio's photographic style, both through his own work, and through the work of those he trained. From 1935-1939, he worked with R. D. Pareenja on every feature film that was produced by Bombay Talkies. Pareenja subsequently photographed Bombay Talkies' major production of *Kismet* in 1943, later becoming a director and cinematographer for Filmistan. He also trained R. D. Mathur who was first credited on *Savitri* in 1937, and who completed *Kangan* after Wirsching was interned. Mathur later photographed *Mughal-e-Azam* for Kamal Amrohi in 1960.

In a re-examination of *Mahal*, Nasreen Munni Kabir has described Wirsching as "an unsung hero of Indian cinema."¹²⁵ Whether or not the influences that can be traced between the films made by Bombay Talkies and more recent productions

¹²⁵ Nasreen Munni Kabir, "Palace of Delusion." Accessed 10 January 2016.
<http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/palace-of-delusion/281005>

from Mumbai are the direct contribution of Josef Wirsching, his influence on the studio's aesthetics undoubtedly played a part.

Epilogue

As if in continuation of the debates that coursed through the interviews held by the Indian Cinematograph Committee in the late 1920s, Willemen, in his 1994 preface to the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, discusses the difficulties the editors encountered in determining what classifies as *Indian* cinema, ultimately agreeing to consider India “not as a fixed entity, but as a socio-cultural process.”¹²⁶ More recently, Pernau has examined the multiplicity of new historiographical approaches that transcend what might, for the relevance of this particular study, be referred to here as national borders.¹²⁷ Given the socio-political context of this project, and the shifts that have occurred across the two regions denoted by the title, those borders have shifted and divided. Although the changes have been more significant in the region of South Asia, within Osten’s lifetime (1876-1956), Germany saw its recently unified principalities expanded into a greater Germany, contracted and then divided; only to expand once more after reunification in 1989.

Germany stands witness to the tragedy of what happens when a country seeks to essentialise who, and what, is to be recognised under its framing of nationhood. Furthermore, when writing history and reflecting on the socio-political circumstances inhabited by the individuals discussed in this thesis, it is impossible to undo the knowledge inherent in a retrospective panorama. To paraphrase Evans, the historian’s knowledge of how events unfolded over the period from 1925-1939 and beyond, cannot be taken as an unequivocal guide to understanding the responses and reactions of the people for whom those events still lay in the future.¹²⁸ In speculating why the Germans participated in Indian film production, the potential responses that are suggested by this research are multiple. They may have left Germany because they did not like the political direction their country was taking; or they might have desired to embrace the quasi-colonial lifestyle that was observed by Heinrich Harrer. They may even have considered this

¹²⁶ Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, 9.

¹²⁷ Pernau, *Transnationale Geschichte*.

¹²⁸ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, xix.

undertaking as a patriotic endeavour to promote Germany's expertise and standing by actively contributing to the development of Indian cinema. Whatever their political engagement, however, their politics do not appear to have had any influence on Bombay Talkies' productions; as argued in this thesis, the political voice behind the early scripts is undoubtedly that of Pal. Nevertheless, the involvement of Osten (and arguably Wirsching and Zolle) within the sequestered space of Bombay's German Club, signals a dichotomy with their participation in a film studio that was so evidently cosmopolitan. Whether this was a contributing factor to Pal's irrevocable separation from Rai is moot; arguably the relationship between Rai and Pal fractured, not at the interface of the Indo-German partnership, but in what appear to be their contradictory expectations for cinema.

The use of the cinematic medium as a discursive space for matters of socio-political concern, identifies the silent Rai/Osten films as Indian. Thus the rhetoric of sacrifice that accompanied the production of *Light of Asia*, signals a patriotic commitment to India that runs through some of the early films produced at Bombay Talkies, in particular, *Janma Bhoomi*. Pernau's argument that identity is forged at the confrontation with alterity offers another perspective on the identity of the studio.¹²⁹ In this context, Bombay Talkies might be described as a fusion of ideas and characteristics emerging out of the diversity of individuals who worked under its auspices. In addition to the Germans, this fusion included other Europeans as well as people from across South Asia, with strong representation from Bengal. Equally, its membership cut across India's communal divide, including Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians among its participants, a promise Rai had made with the share proposal:

Films [produced by Bombay Talkies] should [...] correctly represent the traditions as well as the everyday modern life with its problem, hopes, aspirations, present and future of the peoples of Indian avoiding that which is narrow, parochial and communal.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Pernau, *Transnationale Geschichte*, 86.

¹³⁰ "The Bombay Talkies Limited," *Times of India*, 9 August 1934.

Rai was first and foremost an entrepreneur, a commercially focused pragmatist who had his own distinct vision for the studio and the type of films he wanted it to produce. Endorsement by people such as Sarojini Naidu was significant, and illustrates the socio-political nexus within which Rai, and ultimately Bombay Talkies, operated. It is evident from this study that Rai exercised full control over the studio and individual modes of production. Whether this entitles him to the retrospective status of auteur depends on the interpretation of that term. Because of his insistence on slow enunciation of dialogue and a stripped-down version of Hindi for all scripts, he undoubtedly had an influence on the aesthetic development of the films made by the studio during the 1930s. At times, however, this control appears to have impeded onscreen performance, sometimes resulting in stilted presentation, a critique that has finally disappeared with the production of *Kangan*.

Kangan heralded a new aesthetic for Bombay Talkies and hinted at the direction cinema in Bombay might take in the future. The arrival of Leela Chitnis, who was already established as a star with Ranjit Movietone, led to a change in the performance of Ashok Kumar. The film's narrative focus differs from the more didactic socio-political mode that was outlined in the share proposal and identified with the scripts produced by Pal. The emphasis on the relevance of art and culture in the face of commercial interests, might even be seen as a critique of Rai's business outlook. The musical arrangement composed by Saraswati Devi with Ramchandra Pal signalled a new mood. Finally though, *Kangan* marked the end of the Indo-German partnership between Rai and Osten, leaving the unanswered question whether this also had an impact on the film's new aesthetics.

On one level the German filmmakers provided what Rai wanted and needed to fulfil his ambition: expertise, efficiency and conformity. Not for Rai a filmmaker like Haas, whose cultural literacy might have provoked him to offer advice that went beyond writing scripts. Rai's preference was for a director like Osten, whose competence and compliance he could rely upon; he knew from experience that Osten would take his instructions, laid out in the script, and carry them out, with, presumably, minimal dissent. Nevertheless, one might challenge Rai's insistence that the Germans functioned only as technicians. In the absence of further information, perhaps Zolle's contribution amounted only to the efficient running of

the laboratory, the technical expertise he brought with him and the people he trained. Von Spreti was instrumental in designing the mechanisms that enabled sets to be shifted to accommodate actors and equipment, and for training those who followed him. Although the extent of his creative input is difficult to measure, not least because he left minimal information about his work in Bombay, it is difficult to imagine that his architectural vision and professional training at Emelka, left no trace on the on-screen aesthetics. As the director, Osten's contribution might be identified in some of the early films produced at Bombay Talkies, which betray a performance mode suggestive of the silent era. Nevertheless, comments from Jairaj and Kumar describe a colleague who directed without the ego of an auteur and who appears to have promoted a sense of equality with the actors. In this respect, Osten's behaviour might have functioned as a foil to Rai's dominance. Schünemann, although never an employee of Bombay Talkies, nevertheless contributed to the aesthetics of the studio through his cinematographic work on *Shiraz*, *Dice* and *Karma*. Given Rai's emphasis on the studio as a place of learning, one might speculate that these three films formed part of the education of those who were apprenticed to learn the art of film production. Wirsching remained in India after the war and his family has become Indian. After the war, he continued to contribute to the Indian film industry, photographing feature films and documentaries, his productions often achieving critical acclaim. The evolution of Wirsching's photographic and lighting skills that saw him progress from a cameraman to a cinematographer, deserves greater recognition in the historiography than he has been accorded so far.

More research in the area of Indo-German/transnational historiography remains to be done. As material continues to emerge from archives, albeit in decreasing quantities, it may be possible to present a deeper understanding of Bombay Talkies' working practices, commercial arrangements and use of technology. The involvement and training of Indian filmmakers in Germany during the period under discussion deserves greater attention; whether they were training or actively contributing to film production at Ufa or elsewhere, their stories are missing. So too with other German filmmakers who were involved with film production in India during this period.

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Filmography

Franz Osten – Josef Wirsching – Karl von Spreti

Titles in bold have been viewed at the locations indicated: BAL – Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde; NFAI – National Film Archive India. DKB – Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin. Some films are available online as indicated.

***Achhut Kanya*. Directed by Franz Osten. Bombay Talkies, 1936.**

www.indiancine.ma

Am Weibe zerschellt. Directed by **Franz Osten**. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1919.

Aus der Jugendzeit klingt ein Lied. **Directed by Franz Osten**. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1924.

Aus Liebe gesündigt. Directed by **Franz Osten**. Möve-Film GmbH, 1919.

Bedaure besetzt. Directed by **Franz Osten**. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1921.

Bhabhi. **Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching**. Bombay Talkies, 1938.

Brand im Variete Mascott, Der. **Directed by Franz Osten**. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1921.

Dame in Schwarz, Die. **Directed by Franz Osten**. Peter Ostermayr Produktion, 1929.

Dil apna aur preet parai. Directed by Kishore Sahu. **Camera: Josef Wirsching**. Kamal Studios, 1960.

***Durga*. Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1939.**

***Ein Heiratsantrag*. Directed by Franz Osten. 1934. Film. (Archive: BAL).**

Ein Mann mit Herz. Directed by Géza von Bolváry. **Settings Assistant: Karl von Spreti**. Super-Film GmbH, 1932.

Einbruch. **Directed by Franz Osten**. Ama Film GmbH, 1927.

Eine Fliege ist ins Glas gefallen. **Settings: Karl von Spreti**. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1932.

Eine Frau wie Du. Directed by Carl Boese. **Settings assistant: Karl von Spreti.** Atalanta-Film GmbH, 1933.

Erna Valeska. **Directed by Franz Osten.** ?, 1911.

Fürst Seppl. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Leo Film, 1932.

Gelbe Gaukler, Der. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1920.

Herrgotts-Grenadiere, Die. Directed by Anton Kutter. **Settings assistant: Karl von Spreti.**

Im Banne der Berge. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Peter Ostermayr Produktion, 1931.

Im Lande des silbernen Löwen. **Directed by Josef Wirsching.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bavaria Film AG, 1934.

Izzat. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti. Bombay Talkies, 1937.

Jäger von Fall, Der. Directed by Ludwig Beck. **Franz Osten on camera.** Münchener Kunstfilm Peter Ostermayr, 1918.

Janma Bhoomi. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti. Bombay Talkies, 1936. (Archive: NFAI); www.indiancine.ma

Jawani-ki-Hawa. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti. Bombay Talkies, 1935.

Jeevan Naiya. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti. Bombay Talkies, 1936.

Jeevan Prabhat. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti. Bombay Talkies, 1937.

Judas von Tirol, Der. **Directed by Franz Osten.** 1933. Film. (Archive: BAL).

Kangan. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1939.

Karl Valentin der Sonderling. Directed by Walter Jerven. **Produced by Franz Osten.** Union Film Company, 1929.

Karma. **Directed by J. L. Freer-Hunt.** Produced by Himansu Rai. Himansurai Indo-International Talkies, 1933. (Archive: NFAI)

Kette der Schuld, Die. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1921.

Kleine Inge und ihre drei Väter, Die. **Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst. 1926.

Kopf des Gonzales, Der. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1920.

Kreuzer Emden. **Directed by Louis Ralph. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1932. VHS. (Archive: BAL).**

Liebe und ... Koffer. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1920.

Lieserls Traum . **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1921.

Maa. **Directed by Bimal Roy. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1952.**

Mahal. **Directed by Kamal Amrohi. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1949. www.indiancine.ma**

Mamta. **Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti.** Bombay Talkies, 1935.

Mein Heidelberg, ich kann dich nicht vergessen. **Directed by James Bauer. Camera: Josef Wirsching.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1927.

Mit 300 PS. Zum Standesamt. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Kunstfilm Peter Ostermayr, 1920.

Miya Biwi/Always tell your wife. **Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti.** Bombay Talkies, 1935.

Nacht der Entscheidung, Die. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Kunstfilm Peter Ostermayr, 1920.

Naujeevan. **Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1939.**

Nicht sterben dürfen, Die. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1919.

Nirmala. **Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1938. www.indiancine.ma**

Ochsenkrieg, Der. Directed by Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1920. www.Filmportal.de

Opfer der Iris, Das. Directed by Ludwig Beck. Camera: Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1919.

Pakeezah. Directed by Kamal Amrohi. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Kamal Amrohi Studios, 1972. DVD.

Prem Kahani. Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti. Bombay Talkies, 1937. www.indiancine.ma

Raffinierteste Frau Berlins. Directed by Franz Osten. Peter Ostermayr Produktion, 1927. DVD. (Archive: BAL).

Reise ins Glück, Die. Directed by Franz Osten. Curt Prickler, 1934. Film. (Archive: BAL).

Reisebilder aus Indien: 1925/1926. Directed by Franz Osten?

Rollende Schicksal, Das. Directed by Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1923.

Ruhm und Frauengunst. Directed by Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1919.

Samsheer. Directed by Gyan Mukherjee. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1953.

Sangram. Directed by Gyan Mukherjee. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1950.

Sankt Elisabeth in unseren Tagen. Directed by Franz Osten. Leo Film, 1932.

Savitri. Directed by Franz Osten. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Settings: Karl von Spreti. Bombay Talkies, 1937.

Schattenkinder des Glücks. Directed by Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1922.

Schrecken des Meeres, Das. Directed by Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1924.

Schützenkönig, Der. Directed by Franz Seitz. Settings Assistant: Karl von Spreti. Tonfilm-Produktion Franz Seitz, 1932.

Schwarze Gesicht, Das. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1922.

Shiraz. **Directed by Franz Osten.** 1928. DVD. (Archive: NFAI); www.indiancine.ma

Siebente Junge, Der. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1926.

Sonja. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1926.

Spuren im Schnee. Directed by Willy Reiber. **Camera: Josef Wirsching.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1929.

Stoßtrupp 1917. **Directed by Heinz Zöberlein.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Arya Film, 1934. VHS. (Archive: BAL).

Sündige Hof, Der. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Leo Film, 1932.

The Light of Asia. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, Great Eastern Corporation, 1925. www.indiancine.ma

Throw of Dice, A. **Directed by Franz Osten.** British Instructional Films, Ufa, 1929. DVD; www.indiancine.ma

Tod von Phaleria, Der. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1919.

Tragödie einer Liebesnacht, Die. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1924.

Träume sind Schäume oder zu Höherem geboren. Director not known. **Script by Franz Osten.** (Münchener Kunstfilm Peter Ostermayr, 1916)

Um Liebe und Thron. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1922. Film. (Archive: BAL).

Unsere Emden. Directed by Louis Ralph. **Camera: Josef Wirsching.** (Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1926).

Vachan. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1938.

Verfluchte, Der. **Directed by Franz Osten.** Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1921.

Verkaufte Braut, Die. Directed by Max Ophüls. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Reichsliga-Film GmbH, 1932. www.youtube.com

Verliebte Hotel, Das. Directed by Carl Lamac. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Ondra-Lamac Film. VHS. (Archive: BAL).

Vetter Fürst. Directed by Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1919.

Villa im Tiergarten, Die. Directed by Franz Osten. Joe Stoeckel-Marcco-Film, 1927. Film. (Archive: BAL, DKB).

Vollendete Schicksal, Das. Directed by Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1919.

Was die Kinder ihren Eltern verschweigen. Directed by Franz Osten. Peter Ostermayr Produktion. Film (fragments). (Archive: DKB).

Waterloo. Directed by Karl Grune. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1929.

Welt Liebe und Leid, Der. Directed by Franz Osten. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1921.

Wissen Sie was im Moos los ist? Settings: Karl von Spreti. Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1932.

Zerstreute Walzer, Der. Directed by Franz Osten. Minerva Tonfilm, 1934. Film. (Archive: BAL).

Ziddi. Directed by Shahid Lateef. Camera: Josef Wirsching. Bombay Talkies, 1948.

Zu Strassburg auf der Schanz. Directed by Franz Osten. Ideal-Film GmbH, 1934.

Zwischen zwei Meeren. Directed by ? Camera: Josef Wirsching, Münchener Lichtspielkunst, 1928.