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Introduction

Despite the presence of hybridity in what are theoretically considered by orientalists to be homogeneous sets, the binary opposition colonial self/colonised Other is encoded in colonialist discourse[1] as a dichotomy necessary to domination. Hence the contrasting images of the racially superior white, masculinised British imperialist and its Other, the racially inferior, dark, subjugated, emasculated Indian found expression in its various disciplines, institutions and cultural practices.[2] This image emanated within disciplinary formations through the publications of histories and gazetteers, for example, and from institutions such as the colonial armed forces. Its most potent visual manifestation in the cultural domain came through the so-called 'empire cinema'. Empire cinema is a term now accepted for both the British as well as Hollywood cinema made mainly during the 1930s and 1940s, which projected a certain vision of the empire in relation to its subjects. Britain and Hollywood shared a common viewpoint and the acceptance of certain ideological concerns and images in keeping with this imperial vision. The latter emphasised the unique imperial status, cultural and racial superiority and patriotic pride not only of the British but of the entire white western world. Such a vision typified imperial perceptions not only in the nineteenth century (as argued by John Mackenzie and others),[3] for such core assumptions about British empire were common to the entire colonial period.

A great deal of work has already been done on what went into the making of this vision and how it was aggressively propagated in England from 1880 onwards through exhibitions, parades, music hall entertainment, advertising, postcards, popular litera-

ture and school books, as well as the cinema.[4] Out of all these popular cultural manifestations, it was cinema which emerged by the 1930s as the most influential propaganda vehicle. The ideological and political forces and the cultural roots of this vision in Britain have been well researched. It has been suggested that the empire cinema was successful, first, in encouraging British audiences, especially the working class and the unemployed, to identify with the empire and feel patriotic pride in its achievements, and, second, in diverting their attention from the class contradictions of their own society in order to validate the repressive machinery of law and order which was maintaining the status quo in Britain and its colonies.

A series of such empire films were made in the 1930s with India as their central theme. These films reached the height of their popularity during the decade 1929–39. Those rated among the fifteen top grossing films during the year of their release included *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), *The Drum* (1938), and *Gunga Din* (1939). With the exception of *The Drum*, which was made in England, these films were Hollywood productions. They shared certain common features: the defence of India as the pivot on which the plot revolved; the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) as location; the late nineteenth century (again, with the exception of *The Drum*) as the historical period of reference and, as the motivation behind military confrontation, the unbridled ambition of some tribal chief instigated, trained and supplied with modern fighting weapons by outsiders like the Afghans, Russians or Germans. These films paid a rousing tribute to the British Indian army and their message was that the British were in the colonies for the protection of the native inhabitants.

The present study is an empirico-historical inquiry into the empire cinema. I approach this problem as a social historian and attempt to equate the on-screen narrative with wider social and historical forces. This establishes the crucial interconnection of colonial politics and popular culture, not only as it shaped mass opinion in the imperial centre, but also in its quite different impact on the popular consciousness of the colonised.

Awareness of the historical importance of the vast moving picture material has been rapidly growing in the west since the 1960s. Historians now realise that cinema provides a very impor-

tant addition to the range of sources available for the study of the twentieth century. In India, a few recent works have utilised Indian cinema as an important source of history.[5] However, no work has so far utilised the British and American films set in India in the colonial period in a similar way. Although empire cinema has been subjected to academic scrutiny by scholars outside India, such studies have located the films almost wholly within the colonising country rather than exploring their reception among the colonised. By shifting the emphasis to the historical reception of imperial popular culture among the colonised, this work seeks to fill out a certain terrain between the current Indian writing on national cinema and non-Indian writing on empire cinema.

Films, as popular culture, need to be considered as one of the repositories of twentieth-century consciousness in that they reflect and articulate, as well as shape, much of the awareness of the men and women who form that consciousness. Films are both part of and reflect their historical contexts. Cinema therefore needs to be recognised as a valid historical archive for the writing of political, social and cultural history, in addition to being a primary object of study in its own right.

By focusing on empire films as a site for understanding the social history of colonial India, I do not confine my analysis simply to the cinema itself, but use it to get at the variegated nuclei of colonial power in India. I also suggest a different way of envisioning colonial enterprise and gaining fresh insight into the voiced and unvoiced apprehensions of the British regarding India during the turbulent 1930s and 1940s. This work points to a way both of reading history on the screen as well as reading screen projections in their historical context. The study also seeks to offer fresh insights in the field of cultural and film studies from a different and multi-focal perspective. It endeavours to understand how the empire films constructed the colonial world, their reasons for doing so, and what that construction meant to the colonised people. As such, the focus of my study is at the level of the production of culture as well as its consumption.

Such an analysis goes beyond the text to suggest new insights into the socio-political pressures that underlay cinematic production specially during the interwar period, which coincided not only with greatly heightened nationalist activity in India – when the British prestige and legitimacy had reached its lowest ebb and

they were forced to make substantial political concessions – but also with the aftermath of the depression, the build-up to the next world war, the rise of fascism and the outbreak of World War II. It attempts to explore the diverse processes of manipulation and control that went into the cinema acquiring and transmuting certain images and ideologies, in relation to its vast and varied consumers, both white/western and coloured/colonised. It also analyses the historical context in which these films were consumed and meanings produced.

This work argues that, as constructs within and appropriating a dominant colonial discourse, empire films were imaginatively reconstructing political practice, colonial knowledge and subjectivities.[6] Colonial discourse had itself gone through a series of shifts accommodating itself to different stages in imperialist expansion and administration. First, there was the period of individual exploitation of a mercantile agency under the East India Company and an aggressive expansive phase; second, a phase of governing institution in the late eighteenth century; third, a period of pax-Britannia consolidation; and, finally, the nationalist phase, itself divided into a series of multilayered phases, indicating a shift in power equations between the colonisers and the colonised. Such shifts offered the colonised a space in which to operate in opposition to the imperialist-capitalist interests. The construction of colonial knowledge consequently went through different historical phases and was shaped as much by the rapidly transforming colonial realities as by political and intellectual discourse, or, indeed, by historical events in Europe. In their prolonged and severely contested rule, the British devised a system of knowledge about India and themselves intended to justify and legitimise their rule over India. And yet, as Thomas R. Metcalf points out, 'at no time was the British vision of India ever informed by a single coherent set of ideas. To the contrary, the ideals sustaining the imperial enterprise in India were always shot through with contradiction and inconsistency.'[7]

The empire films emerge as a mediation on this complex socio-ideological formation, comprising multifarious and multivalent elements. Like other literary and cultural texts, the empire films reveal the contradictions of the social formation in which they were located and produced. Governed by several inhibiting factors, these films also accommodate sentiments important to

the audience in colonial India, which did not necessarily subscribe to the dominant ideology of imperialism. Such a contradiction highlights what Tytti Soila, in her study of Swedish cinema, has described as the need for the dominant ideology to argue against other competing ideologies in order to legitimise itself.[8]

The nature of representation in the empire films highlights the contradiction between colonial ideology and cinematic practice, articulating as it does a conflict between the ideological effects of cinema and the economic pressure exercised by the market. As an ideological apparatus cinema, especially as compared to other forms of cultural production, has to realise its position as a large-scale commercial enterprise within a capitalistic system where market forces are paramount. Because of its prohibitive costs, film production and its ideological thrust need to negotiate with the economics and ideologies of the market. Clearly, in relation to the empire cinema, the needs of imperialism and capitalism did not necessarily collide, but they did not necessarily work harmoniously either. This work argues that the market reception, even under a colonial set-up with its well-defined structures of domination and subordination, created the possibility of accommodating a subversive even oppositional point of view as well as the ability to reshape the dominant ideological thrust of the visual production.

Colonial India and the making of empire cinema investigates the colonial market's reaction against certain ideological formations and its impact on production processes as well as British policy formation in relation to empire films. Such an investigation highlights the shifts within empire ideology as it responded to the needs of the empire at different historical periods.[9]

It is now accepted that the high-adventure genre films of empire demonstrated the moral, social and physical domination of the colonised by the colonisers. In the opinion of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, 'The imperial thrust of many of these films, requires no subtle deciphering.'[10] The present work argues that such films, produced in the period between the wars, went beyond merely reiterating Rudyard Kipling's 'white man's burden', which was composed of concepts of duty, destiny and self-sacrifice. The ingenuous portrayal of the 'Great Game' in empire films can be seen to encompass a complex weave of ideologies. The coherence of the explicit message of colonialism,

imperialism and racism in these films is buttressed by their depiction of ideological structures of communalism, casteism and gender. Their aim is to demolish the nationalist rhetoric of one India and unity in diversity, to emphasise instead its heterogeneity and disparity. They also strive to indicate potential social and political disruptions in India, which can be controlled only by the British presence.

However, it was the representation of precisely these latter tensions in the empire films that proved contestable, evoking protest and agitation. Significantly, these protests themselves point to a crisis of the values and ideologies that provide the context for the cinematic texts. The implications of such projections screened in the India of the 1930s, with its highly active nationalist consciousness, were not lost on the Indian audience. In fact, their readings surpassed the overt and covert intent of the films enough to provoke a political reaction, questioning the very ethics of imperialism, and challenging its justification. The moral and ideological opposition of such a varied audience – composed of diverse class, caste and community identities – to these projections assumed the form of direct political intervention, with telling effects upon the politics and cultural policy of both nationalists and colonial masters.

In this context, I take up for detailed discussion three significant films which were released in India in the successive years 1938, 1939 and 1940. Their release coincided with a special historical moment: the implementation of far-reaching political and administrative changes under the government of India act of 1935. The act created for the first time a legally accepted public space for democratic participation and protest. As the political climate altered so did the reaction of the audience. Consequently, the impact of the empire cinema, which was not noticed earlier, could now be sharply registered. The realisation that something vital was at stake consequently demanded and elicited equally sharp responses from both nationalists and the British government with far-reaching consequences. Thus, an analysis of the films released during these crucial years has special significance. It brings emerging oppositions to the fore: between imperialism and the nationalist agenda; within imperialism; and within nationalism. Centring around issues of culture, identity and self-representation the reaction to the empire cinema became fraught

with the social and political tensions of the immediate historical moment of reception.

The first film, *The Drum* (1938), proved catalytic in the Indian colonial situation in more than one way. Confronted with prolonged agitation, screening of the film had to be banned. The popular reaction to this film was to influence the reception of the other films as well. *Gunga Din*, which followed in 1939, was banned before it could be screened. Made to a formula which had produced blockbusters, these two films were not particularly different from other films which had preceded them. Yet, none of the earlier films had provoked such strong reactions. The present work links the reception of *The Drum* and *Gunga Din* to specific aspects of their intended message, to their delineation of characters and recall of historical events, and to the parallels they drew with the contemporary situation.

The cognition of messages conveyed by the medium of film does not depend on the reception of any single film alone, but on the cumulative effect of regular exposure to certain stereotypes and viewpoints. This analysis demonstrates how a different set of meanings was ignited by the changing colonial situation – a significant point that has not merited attention so far. My attempt to historicise and contextualise the empire films in relation to colonised Indians helps reconceive the process of meaning production by underscoring the impact historical context has not only on production but on reception as well.

The third empire film, *The Rains Came* (1940), which attempted to reconcile some of these contradictory political and cultural pressures and contradictions, involved complex ideological negotiations. This resulted in a reframing of the colonial discourse to introduce images that were both recognisably familiar and yet innovative. Emphasising 'native' collusion rather than resistance, this film sought to mediate to a subject population firmly committed to achieving national independence an alternative imperial vision and conception of the colonial world based on modern western developmental ideals. This film sought to project princely India as a counterfoil to the rising demands for democracy in a bid to consolidate conservative opinion. At the heart of this politico-cultural negotiation lay a representation of gender, which seemingly undermined fixed categories of identity and highlighted the ambivalence that both coloniser and colonised felt

towards themselves and each other. Questioning the earlier representations of difference as 'fixed', the popular stereotypical images of both now underwent a dynamic reinvention as well as renewal.

The Rains Came dramatically altered certain stereotypes while retaining and reinforcing others to suit the colonists' changed purpose. The empire films' contradictory mode of address could now be seen on the screen articulated as an ambivalently positioned colonial presence, which emerged as a site of competing voices and contradiction. For the colonisers, 'the strength of white representation', unlike that of black, already lay, as Richard Dyer suggests, 'in the apparent absence altogether of the typical, the sense that being white is coterminous with the endless plenitude of human diversity.'[11] This potential diversity was now expressly useful in reframing the hitherto projected white image. For example, the substitution of the white female in place of the white male as the imperial protagonist had a range of ideological consequences, such as adding to the essence of 'whiteness'. The emphasis on the non-threatening white woman and therefore feminine nature of imperialism opened up possibilities for negotiating a different agenda within the colonial setting.

My detailed analysis of these three films highlights the nuances of the contemporary context as they affected the production of these films. Questions of contemporaneity verge on those of realism and authenticity and become relevant especially in cases where there are real life prototypes for characters (as in *Gunga Din*) and situations (as in *The Drum*), and where the film implicitly makes and is received as making historical-realist claims. Film adaptations of popular novels and poems by authors well-reputed for their knowledge of India, heightened the feeling that these representations were 'reliable'.

Moreover, these cinematic representations brought forth real life assumptions not only about space and time but also about social and political relationships. Historical incidents and personalities took shape and contour through the medium of what was being thought and felt at the time and were interpreted on such grounds. Admittedly questions of such interpretation are complex. Yet, as Janet Staiger points out, it is not the 'correct reading' of films that is important, but the range of possible readings and reading processes at historical moments and their

relation, or lack of relation, to groups of historical spectators that is important.[12] Such questions arise out of the crucial connection forged by Indian audiences between these films and their socio-political location and experience. A self-identified, self-conscious community now recovered possible subversive readings already embedded in these films, or constructed alternative readings afresh.

This emphasis on questions of the contemporaneity of reception and its impact upon subsequent productions has so far not been investigated by film and social historians. This in-depth analysis uncovers in the empire films, set in the late Victorian period, their contemporary relevance in the eyes of both imperial and Indian audiences of the 1930s and 1940s.

The study highlights the difference between cultural space, which legitimised the projection of these films in Britain and the western world, and the cultural space of India and its empire market, where the films met with resistance that invalidated their message. Because this vast cinema market was not merely white but also a coloured one, the empire films were now caught in the basic contradictions and limitations of exploiting two heterogeneous and opposed markets for a single product. The colonial market with its vast audiences who played a crucial role in relation to the cinema, empire as well as indigenous, has not merited any critical attention so far. All work on the empire films to date has operated without significant reference to these aspects and the film text with its prioritised status has remained abstracted from the colonial context of its consumption. This work establishes the live, volatile relationship between Indian audiences (with varied identities, as active consumers and receivers of the cinematic enterprise) and empire films – through an exploration of the ways in which cinematic and other discourses were being negotiated for meaning.

Situating audiences in colonial India

The historical and national location of the audiences – white/western and coloured/colonised – is significant in understanding the construction of widely differing meanings for these films. Both social science[13] and cultural studies[14] have amply demonstrated the ability of readers and spectators to bring their different

histories and subjectivities to construct varied realisations of cultural texts. In fact, it has been proved that the visual media (both television and cinema) need not necessarily be consumed hegemonically; they can be consumed oppositionally as well.

In analysing how the empire films evoked Indian colonial reactions I have found the encoding/decoding model developed by Stuart Hall useful.[15] Out of the three political responses to a media message suggested by this model – dominant, negotiated or oppositional – it is the last stance which explains Indian audiences' drastic reaction to the empire films in the 1930s. An oppositional response to a cultural product is one in which the recipient of the text (film) understands that the system that produced it is one with which she or he is fundamentally at odds.[16] The oppositional stance of Indian audiences allowed them to receive messages other than those the film-makers intended. This alternative reading, dependent upon the viewer's privileging of certain images, scenes and messages, becomes crucial in explaining how the empire films ended up mobilising Indian audiences to interrogate the political and cultural identities ascribed to them.

The Indian spectators therefore inhabited a realm of ramifying differences and contradictions. The popularity in India of empire cinema, especially the adventure genre, suggests a variety of spectatorial responses stretching from acceptance to resistance. In a direct parallel to this differentiated consumption of the empire films and their dominant imperialist ideological thrust, recent research indicates how US western genre films have been constructed by Australian aboriginal children, Native Americans and American blacks in a way that enabled them to find in the genre some articulation of their own subordination to white imperialism, and presumably to identify with instances of resistance to it. Such a reading position affected the sense these readers ascribed to the inevitability of the final narrative defeat of the Native Americans or non-whites. It was their ability to impose a non-white meaning on and find non-white pleasures in a genre of white imperialism that made it popular with them.[17]

For a variety of Indian spectators the dynamics of their situation as the recipients/consumers of the empire cinema as well as the objects of its portrayal, provided a fertile context that gave these films special meaning. The interconnection made for what

Manthia Diawara has called 'resisting spectatorship'.[18] Writing about African-American spectators in relation to the representation of blacks in Hollywood films, Diawara suggests that black spectators circumvent identification and resist the persuasive elements of Hollywood narrative and spectacle because of the components of 'difference' among the cinematic tropes of race, gender and sexuality which give rise to different readings of the same material.

In India, this work argues, the audience similarly occupied an active spectatorial position and emerged as 'meaning producers' who derived their own socially pertinent meanings from the films. In fact, the empire films emerged as serving the contradictory interests of both the producers-cum-western audience, on the one hand, and the Indian audience, on the other, by stimulating their feelings for and identification with the 'nation'. In a very crucial way the ideological thrust of imperialism demanded by the former was reversed by the latter to produce oppositional meaning. As perception itself is embedded in history, the same cinematic images and voices provoked different resonances for western and Indian audiences. The projected image clashed directly with the changing perceptions, aspirations and self-image of Indians resulting in the latter's severe criticism and rejection of western paradigms of knowledge of themselves, their race, character, history, tradition and society. They challenged the British appropriation of India's cultural space and demanded a change by exercising pressure on distributors and exhibitors, ultimately affecting subsequent productions.

The varied Indian audiences, as this work investigates, drew upon their own highly developed cultural codes and practices. Despite the colonial government's restrictions on these, in the form of censorship of print and entertainment media[19] and strict limitations on the expression of nationalist and anti-British sentiments, political messages were conveyed through covert strategies. The incipient Indian cinema, both of the silent era (1913–31) and the talkies (from 1931 onwards), was similarly articulating the growing national aspirations in a variety of ways. At a time when other national cinemas succumbed to the domination of the Hollywood film, the Indian cinema, through formal and cinematic features, constituted something like a 'nation space' against the dominant norms of Hollywood.[20] Dhundiraj

Govind Phalke (Dadasaheb Phalke), considered the pioneer of Indian cinema, conceived of film-making as a nationalist enterprise in line with the call of *swadeshi* (indigenous enterprise).[21] His initiation of the mythological genre in popular cinema was quickly followed by the emergence of several new genres. These included the costume film or the 'historical', the spectacular stunt-action dominated films, the 'devotional' film about the relationship between deity and devotee, and finally the 'social' film with its accent on social problems. By the late 1930s, Indian films had emerged as big business. Significant finance began to be invested in films and a well-consolidated, lucrative film studio system emerged, producing and marketing films on a regular basis.

This brings the Indian audience centre stage as active recipients of cinema, both the empire as well as their own; a process which has not so far received due attention from film and social historians.[22] Recent works have argued for the need to investigate the historical reception of films, in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of this phenomenon and its impact.[23] The present work engages with the historical spectatorship of empire films in the late 1930s. This analysis, however, cannot be based on empirical evidence comparable to the rich ethnographic material used by Jackie Stacey, who draws upon letters and questionnaires from over 300 zealous cinema-goers, for constructing the British female spectators of Hollywood films in the 1940s and 1950s.[24] Such source material is difficult to locate for colonial India. There is also no statistical data about cinema attendance during this period, as available for Britain, where cinema-going was recognised as a major form of leisure activity and came to be fully documented.[25]

Methodologically, I have taken recourse to archival material, where possible, making use of police commissioners' reports, Legislative Assembly and House of Commons debates and official confidential records, including observations of private and public individuals, both imperial and colonial, on the one hand, and the secret assessments and manipulations, both official and non-official, extending from British administrators in India to the highest policy-makers at the level of secretary of state for India and the viceroy, on the other. I have also used accounts of a large number of national inquiries, congresses and commissions, held

on empire cinema; the major resolutions of the Motion Picture Association and the reactions of certain leading Indians to the cinematographic debates going on in this period; articles, news items, film reviews, critics' reactions, national daily newspapers of both Britain and colonial India, trade magazines and journals, popular articulations through letters to film journals, film propaganda and posters. This vast and varied material has been culled to analyse and understand the empire films and to reconstruct the multilayered responses of historically situated Indian spectators, whose class and community composition had a crucial bearing on those responses.

As a necessary prelude to the three chapters that follow, I seek to identify here the nature and level of participation of the Indian audiences with the empire cinema. The reconstruction of audience involvement, as well as the manifestation of their response, will be analysed through their regional, class and community identities in relation to the film *The Drum*, which evoked the most sustained and inflammable reaction.

The Indian audience for cinema was a rapidly growing one. The changing exhibition patterns and marketing strategies of the film exhibitors had resulted in extending cinema beyond its initial establishment as a European form of entertainment, to catering to different segments of Indian society from the first decades of this century onwards.[26] In 1931, the introduction of sound to Indian films revolutionised the audiences' reactions to the western as well as Indian films. Indeed, sound would have a detrimental impact on the popularity of western films among Indian audiences; although no figures are available of the respective popularity of western and Indian films among this audience, a possible indicator is the fact that western films were shown in fewer theatres, located in upper-class areas. For example, out of forty theatres in Bombay, only two were screening western films on a regular basis. This meant that despite the growing Indian audience for cinema, there was a much smaller audience for western films, which was primarily elite and urban.

This limited viewership did not apply, however, to western adventure films where language was hardly a deterrent, since these films depended more on spectacular action than on dialogue. This special emphasis enabled an almost unlimited viewership for this genre.[27] Films like *The Adventures of Robin*

Hood, *Tarzan*, *Tarzan and his Mate*, *King Kong*, *Ape Man*, among others of this kind, were thus enormously successful. These were films which were thematically defined by Hollywood film-makers as 'world audience films'. The Indian Cinematograph Committee noted in 1927–28 that:

> There is no prejudice against western films, which are much enjoyed and appreciated. There are certain types of western films which appeal to all classes and communities. The spectacular super-films [*sic*] and the films featuring Douglas Fairbanks, Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin, have a universal appeal. A film in which any of these world-famous figures of the screen appears can be sure of an enthusiastic reception in any cinema in India. The most popular film ever shown in India was the *Thief of Baghdad*, with Douglas Fairbanks in an Oriental setting.
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> The taste of the westernised Indian or the Indian who has some knowledge of English and acquaintance with western ideas is akin to that of the Europeans and generally the same film whether social dramas, comedies or whatever they may be, which are popular in the west are appreciated by this section of the community. The bulk of the population however, which is insufficiently acquainted with the English language and with western ideas, enjoys films with plenty of action, especially comic and adventure films, but finds no attraction in the social dramas. This is natural enough; being unable to read the captions, which are almost always in English, they derive their entertainment from watching the 'stunts', comic or adventurous. If there is plenty of action they can follow the sequences of events, and they are very quick at grasping the significance of the scenes and picking up the story. The heavy applause which is heard from the cheap seats when the hero administers summary justice to the villain or rescues the heroine in the nick of time shows a proper appreciation of the events and is seldom at fault.[28]

Films featuring Indian characters, like *The Jungle Book*, were immensely popular, and others, such as *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *The Drum* and *Gunga Din*, which gave prominence to Indian actors (like Sabu for instance),[29] were expected to arouse a large degree of interest in the Indian market. These films were all high-adventure films with Indian locales and characters and were calculated to create spontaneous audience association with

the characters and situations portrayed. They *did* attract a vast Indian audience. Performing as well at the box office as the films produced in India, they also aroused a great deal of resentment in the Indian film industry.[30]

More than half of the total feature films screened in India in 1935 were foreign films. According to an estimate of the Indian film industry the annual remittances of foreign distributors to the UK and USA were Rs 55 lakh.[31] The detailed figures available for some of the films indicate the money collections of foreign distributors from India, after deducting the exhibitors' share: Rs 2 lakh for the film *Trader Horn* in its five years of screening; Rs 2 lakh for *King Kong* in its four years of screening; Rs 1 lakh for *Robin Hood* within a year; Rs 2 lakh for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* within a year; Rs 1 lakh for *Victoria* within a year and a half. Significantly these were not even the most popular films.[32]

Such films were also taken to small suburban theatres, even to those that usually exclusively showed Indian films. As the demand for films was greater than their supply and the exhibitors could not always obtain Indian films, which commanded a relatively higher price, they had to settle for foreign films. This resulted in overlapping audiences of different classes for the two categories of films, western and Indian.[33] This was recognised by *The Hindu*, which, in 1941, aptly observed: 'talkies audience knows no language barriers'.[34]

The Indian audience for cinema, especially in the 1930s, was extending over more and more classes of people.[35] By 1939, there were 1265 permanent cinemas in India and 500 touring ones.[36] Apart from these there were numerous 'seasonal' cinema houses, mostly in hill stations, which were open only for a part of the year, privately owned regimental cinemas and numerous halls, which were occasionally used for film screenings. It is difficult to estimate how many of these have been excluded from the official figures of cinema houses. The travelling cinemas went into the interior of the rural areas as film exhibitors moved from village to village for one night stands.[37] As the supply of Indian films was not equal to the demand and those available charged exorbitant rates, the travelling cinemas tended to exhibit old, second-hand western films which could be purchased very cheaply. So much so that the effects of the European and US films in the villages of India was of great concern to the British colonial authorities who

not infrequently refused to issue licences to the travelling cinema, unless they undertook to show only 'Indian religious dramas'.[38] The fact that the mythological and the devotional genre lent itself easily to nationalist reading was lost on British officials. Despite restrictions the alleged 'nuisance' of the western films continued to spread fast. Even broken down touring talkies with an impoverished screen in a tent made up of 'two dirty bed sheets sewn together' were giving open air shows in places like Panipat, which attracted the nearby rural youth due to their extremely low rates of admission.[39]

The oral and written evidence from different provinces also emphasises that the 'poor classes' occupied the lower cheap seats.[40] These included not only urban workers but also 'rustic villagers' of different hues, when and where they had access. Such imported films were periodically shown to the native labourers in the Assam plantations. One plantation owner testified to the great demand for western films among his labourers in his tea garden.[41] For the urban lower classes it was observed: 'For want of amusement elsewhere, the labourers frequent cinema expending a portion of their income. A labourer may not have cooked rice to eat after his return from the cinema, but his love for films has been found to be always on the increase.'[42]

Another large and important segment of the cinema audience for western high-adventure, spectacular-action films was provided by serving Indian armymen. John Masters, who was with the British Indian army from 1934 until the transfer of power, and joined the Gurkha regiment as a subaltern posted in the NWFP, spoke of a cinema theatre within a mile of the British regiments patronised by the soldiers.[43] Indeed, the cantonment areas provided popular location bases for the cinema houses. For the armed forces, with few avenues of entertainment, cinema had proved a boon and had come to be well-patronised, especially as the soldiers were offered discount rates. This was vouched for by M. D. Puri, the proprietor of the Gaiety theatre in Lahore, who had pioneered cinema exhibition in Punjab and the NWFP and had cinemas in cantonment areas.[44]

The viewership of cinema among army personnel grew and the cinema emerged as the major form of entertainment for troops during World War II. This also meant that the large number of rural Punjabi men who contributed so substantially to the war

recruitment, also formed part of the audience for the cinema throughout.[45] Khan Bahadur Nawab Muzzafar Khan, director of the information bureau in Punjab, also observed that he had noticed the villagers of Lahore suburbs visiting the cinema.[46] Similarly, the oral evidence of H. W. Hogg, secretary of the boy scouts association in Punjab, dated 25 November 1927, also told of how the 'rustic villagers' who came to Lahore to 'have a good time', generally spent their evening hours in the 'cheap cinema theatres'.[47]

Lahore under the British had emerged as the centre of educational, cultural, social and political activity, and as the country's best cantonment. Tucked away in the interior of the north-west, it was indeed the gateway to that region. During winter, a large number of Pathans, Kashmiris and others flocked to the city to escape the rigours of weather in their own homes.[48] Relatives from villages trooped in and stayed for days at a stretch. Since the city had a large number of cinema houses, they provided the major form of entertainment. Indeed, Punjab was considered 'the biggest market for films'.[49] Consequently, the audience for western films, especially for the high-adventure genre, was clearly not limited to the educated middle class but drew its viewership from different segments of Indian society.

British perceptions: conflicting viewpoints

Historically, this multilayered audience emerges as racially stratified. The colonial officialdom was markedly ambivalent in its perception of and attitude towards the Indian audience. The reception of film meaning comprised an important part of British self-perception and the ideology of racism and imperialism. Cognition and comprehension of this media was therefore assumed to be the prerogative of the enlightened British audience alone. By and large, the Indian audience was thought of as an undifferentiated whole, and popularly projected by British officials as 'child like', 'deficient of character', 'occupying a position of ignorance' and 'moral corruptability' similar to the Indian characters in the empire cinema.[50] Paternalistic notions inherent in imperial discourse reinforced this dominant perception of the 'Indian cinema audience' as projected in 1923:

> The racial difference between the European and the Asiatic is fundamental and irreconcilable. The Asiatic matures easily and the development of his mentality does not keep pace with his physical growth. This is particularly true of the illiterate native, who forms nine-tenths of the population. At maturity he is still a child, and child like he remains. He never appears 'grown up'. The native of India is astonishingly credulous, and the plays (native dramas) and stories (folk-tales) he delights in would bore to death an English child of tender years by their simplicity.[51]

This perception was adopted as a general policy by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) in the years 1927–28, which eschewed 'undue sensitiveness to communal, racial, political and even colour considerations'.[52] The policy in its essence maintained:

> We can hardly believe that a historical film which may picture incidents, say, of the French Revolution, will incite any ordinary member of an audience to attempt to overthrow the government by law established in India. Neither the commercial producer nor the exhibitor has the least desire to upset the existing order of society. Objectionable scenes may be excised, but we deprecate the idea that a film should be banned merely on the general ground that the subject matter may by over-subtle analogy be interpreted as having a possible reference to current questions. Similarly, we consider that the censor and the administrative officers should not encourage or be too sympathetic to individuals who in their private or representative capacities object to film plots or incidents. Breaches of peace must of course be guarded against, but over much tenderness to frivolous objections is more likely to encourage dissension.[53]

Clearly, the British tended to stress the childishness of the Indian mind and its inability to pierce through the outer layer of the plot. British officials were not suggesting that the cinema or its images and signs did not contain any 'damaging meanings'. What they were suggesting was that Indians would fail to perceive any subversive meaning because they lacked the mental capacity to view an image, receive its message and relate it to their concrete reality. Interestingly, this has also been the conventional viewpoint of Indian film historians and critics who

have described the 'lower-class audience' or the 'plebeian spectators' as immature, infantile, the unlettered mass, lacking the critical ability to distinguish between image and reality. It has been held that this mass audience would not be aware of the veracity of the image.[54]

Despite the official perception, however, a greater sensitivity to Indian reactions was also surfacing in many quarters due to political reasons. The government of India while deprecating 'over sensitiveness in the political sphere', was aware of the political fall-out of these films.[55] From time to time they were 'very severely perturbed' about the widespread criticism that such films were evoking in India and the inability of the authorities in Britain to recognise it.[56]

In fact, throughout the period under consideration, there was a difference of perception among British officials about the reception of such films in the colonial market. The available evidence shows the conflicting currents of opinion circulating among British officials in India and in Britain, regarding what may or may not have been suitable for exhibition in India. Censorship in India had been established under the Cinematograph act of 1918. Under this, censor boards were set up in the four seaport towns of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Rangoon. Lahore came to have a censor board in 1927 because of its increased importance as a centre for the production of Indian films and as a market. These boards were empowered to grant certification valid for the whole of India, but any provincial government could decertify a film that it deemed unsuitable for public exhibition in its province. Although the composition differed, each board of censors was headed by the commissioner of police, invariably British, who was assisted by other members. Half the total members of a board were there in their ex-officio capacity and the other half were nominated from among the different communities of a province. The Bombay board, the most important of the five boards, had one prominent representative from each community – a Hindu, a Muslim and a Parsi – nominated as its functionaries. The final decision regarding censorship was however always taken by the chairman. In general, the boards were required to keep moral, racial, religious and political considerations in view for censorship purposes, lest the British position in India be compromised.[57] These boards had been severely criticised by British officials in

India and in Britain for being 'largely nominal', as well as 'weak and inexperienced'.[58]

The BBFC, as the 'mother of censors', kept in very close touch with the representatives of the empire censors through weekly and monthly correspondence, frequent meetings and 'favourable interchange of opinions', whenever they visited London. Regarding this close relationship and identity of views, Lord Tyrrell, president of the BBFC, remarked in June 1937: 'It is remarkable how closely our opinions coincide'.[59] This may have been true of the censor boards in India but so far as British officials in India were concerned, the evidence suggests the contrary and shows a wide discrepancy between the understanding of the British officials located in India and the BBFC.

The views of government of India officials were rooted in the changing political realities on the ground, although they also appeared to share the paranoia of the white viewing public stationed in India who considered the Indian audience a potentially violent one. The opinion of British civilians in India was considered important enough to be brought to the attention of the secretary of state for India. The first letter, written by 'a lady residing in India' to the editor of the London *Times*, was referred to him by H. Rowen Walker, general secretary of the British National Film League on 4 September 1923. It stated:

> I have myself seen a film in which a perfectly impossible man – supposed to be an Englishman – offends an Indian [Native American] by making love to his squaw, and the Indian finally gets him and ties him to a post, where he starves to death. This was greeted by applause by the Indians [natives of India] present. I saw another film where a drunken guest at a wedding knocks down a Negro – the Negro afterwards murders him. Again great applause from the natives. These are the cheapest, commonest films and are all we get to see in India ... The Indians go more and more to the cinema and must be thinking the British a nation to despise.[60]

The second letter was from the Manchester Diocesan Association for Preventive and Rescue Work. It was referred to the government of India by the secretary of state for India on 9 December 1924. The letter written 'after consultation with certain of the missionary societies and lay men and women returned from countries in which there is a coloured population', stated:

> The film *The White Man's Grave*, was shown on the Gold Coast to a mixed audience. In the film the white man knocks out a native. As a result a riot broke out amongst the natives in the audience and there was great difficulty in preventing serious disturbances.
>
> In Assam a screening of a film is often the annual treat given by tea-planters to their native labourers. Often the planter and his household are the only white people on the plantation of thousands of acres. The films are imported from America and from European firms. We have proof that the attitude of the natives to the white population in these plantations is rapidly degenerating after these annual displays of films purporting to show civilised English life ... It is not only a political or colour question, but one of moral welfare. It is useless to expect the coloured people to respect the white races when they see these false representations of so-called 'civilised life'.[61]

Others among them similarly tended to make an entirely simplistic correlation between western films and the behaviour of Indian audiences. For example, the kidnapping of Mollie Ellis by Afridis in 1915 was put down to the influence of western films.[62] Such connections expunged the passivity of the Indian audience and endowed them with agency, which could well prove politically dangerous.

Discerning officials in the India Office understood the potentially dangerous association of these films with contemporary events, and also recognised that censoring for the native population demanded 'different standards' than those adopted for western home audiences.[63] Yet, these officials were operating within a complex political situation, and considered it circumspect to leave the fate of these films in the hands of censor authorities in different provinces of India.[64] Part of the reason for taking this line was the fact that, allowing for the varied pulls of different interests involved in film-making, it was prudent to soft-pedal the issue because of wider political and commercial considerations. It was suggested that since certain films, like *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, had not evoked any protests among Indian audiences in the USA, Canada or England, bureaucrats consequently did not expect 'any trouble' from their Indian counterparts in Asia. Such an assessment was not entirely accurate, as I will illustrate presently, yet it was a convenient stand to

assume. More importantly, however, the banning of films produced caustic comments in the foreign and Indian press.[65] The London-based officials were uneasy about the 'unfavourable publicity' that such a move could attract as 'the press etc. would get on to cases where something objectionable to Indian sentiments had been shown in a film and produce a lot of talk about it which would be equally objectionable.'[66]

Consequently, the dominant attitude of British officials in London generally remained at odds with official opinion in India. The repeated advice of the officials of the government of India – that 'Indian psychology' needed to be kept in mind while viewing these films – was essentially ignored.[67] When pressurised by the latter to keep 'Indian susceptibilities' in view, British officials retaliated by suggesting that 'a sympathetic article' about empire films might be published as an adequate answer to the 'anti-Indian charge'.[68] This was presumably to highlight those aspects in the film that were 'favourable' to Indians.

Despite these differences British officials (both in London and India) were united in their analysis of Indian society and in their belief that the British were civilising agents acting for the benefit of the colonised. There was no doubt regarding the basic thrust of the empire films, which portrayed the colonial rule as moral, positive and civilising. Any fundamental criticism of the films would have meant a critique of the very nature of colonialism itself. The discordant and cautionary voices of officials were in favour of stricter censorship, but remained within the ambit of imperial politics rather than in opposition to it.

Clearly, some British officials based in India did not necessarily read the message of the empire films within the cultural codes of their producers, as many of the London-based officials opted to do. Their decoding of the films related to the colonial situation and the possible readings (positions) of the Indian audience. Such a decoding suggests the potentiality of different reading positions, due to a variety of reasons, among the white 'master' audience. Because of their own location in India, a segment of the British official class was aware that messages encoded in one way could also be read in a different way. The question of film consumption/reception by Indian audiences had obviously emerged, to use a popular media studies' phrase, as a 'site of cultural struggle', with members of a single social class

of British officials drawing their codes of understanding from differing politico-cultural contexts.

The dissident voices were ignored, however, until the reaction of the lower-class Indian audience to the film *The Drum* forced the hands of the British authorities. The reception of this film by lower-class Indian spectators showed a heightened cognitive and political disposition, indicating a more political understanding of colonial cultural representation and its ideological thrust than British officials had been willing to concede to date.

Heretofore, British officials had continued to disagree among themselves about the empire films and their impact upon an Indian audience. This incongruity of approach may be illustrated in the case of the film, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*. In Britain the film was passed with the following comment: 'The story is quite harmless. It has no political significance and no discredit is brought on the service.'[69] Yet, the film evoked strong protests in Lahore.[70] The Muslim community in Britain similarly protested vociferously.[71] There were questions in the Central Legislative Assembly in India and subsequently in the House of Commons.[72] Those parts of the film which evoked strong protests showed the hero, Captain Macgregor, cutting a piece of pork and throwing pig's blood on an Afridi captive to make him talk by threatening: '*Sarkar tumhe phansi dega aur tumhara badan soowar ki khal me rakha jayega, bolo badmash bolo*'. In the film it was translated as: 'talk you rascal, or you'll be hanged and your dead body will be sewn in a pig's skin.' The pig motif was repeatedly used in the film by British officers to insult the Muslim rebels in front of the Indian armymen. The abuse, 'swine', was used by them for Indian armymen and rebels alike.

Scenes such as these merited censorship in the eyes of the government of India officials who feared a 'political fall-out'. This anxiety was not merely due to the fear of hurting the 'religious sensibilities of the Muslims' in general, or those in the army in particular, but also on account of the class and racial connotations which emerged from such scenes. The under-secretary of state for foreign affairs considered these anxieties to be baseless. His opinion sums up the general viewpoint of the authorities located in Britain, who failed to understand the reactions of colonial and Indian audiences. While hailing *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, as the 'Jubilee year's greatest film', he maintained:

> There is indeed nothing in it which an impartial observer would take to be at all derogatory to the people of India. On the contrary, the film depicts scenes in which troops of the Indian army fight with great gallantry against equally brave Afghan opponents and in which the Indian's loyalty and devotion to his officers, be they British or Indian, are portrayed with full justice. Neither is there anything in the film which might offend the religious susceptibilities of Indians. A possible criticism which might be levelled at the film is that it showed British officers engaging in what might be termed third degree methods of intimidation in order to break down the resistance of their Afghan captors into giving information. The threat was however not put into execution and the subsequent treatment of the captives was generous.[73]

Subsequently, even very pointed questions posed to the secretary of state for India in the House of Commons elicited a similar reply. On 29 April 1935 Lt.-Col. Arnold Wilson wondered if *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, with its mistreatment of captives by British officers, 'was in the interest of good-will between India and other countries', to which the secretary of state replied, 'It is not likely to affect the good-will between India and Great Britain.'[74]

Yet, British army officials were extremely anxious about the effects of portraying the British Indian army in the manner of these films. Well aware of the nationalist propaganda among armymen, they strongly disapproved of their own misrepresentation on the screen. Similarly, old-India hands may well have been offended by the cinematic inaccuracies of these films, signifying a sharp division of opinion among the imperialists themselves.

Such differing perceptions are seen in the controversy about the advisability of showing the film, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* to Indian audiences. The government of India took a strong stand against several scenes in this film and, in fact, to the very theme itself, which revolved around an incident from the Mutiny.[75] On military grounds alone this film had been judged as 'undesirable' by the military secretary,[76] yet R.T. Peel, secretary to the public and judicial department noted: 'I really think the Government of India are a little sensitive on the question of films.'[77]

It is undeniable that, by the late 1930s, there was greater

consensus among British officials about the inadvisability of projecting imperialist images to Indian audiences. Realising that the reading of the films could provoke a sharp negative reaction from the Indian audiences, they advised caution and change. This was confirmed by the India Office, which, in 1937, appeared to be in doubt about positive reactions from an Indian audience to British imperial symbols of royalty. W. Thompson, information officer at the India Office, wrote to Peel on 15 June 1937 maintaining that 'Inclusion of the Indian coronation contingent during the parade at Buckingham Palace for the presentation of medals, and its use in the trailer for propaganda purposes is of doubtful suitability throughout India.'[78] The Political ADC's note to Thompson, dated 23 July 1937, endorsed this stand: 'for the trailer to use the King's photograph in coronation robes with the crown on his head would not be really more effective as propaganda with the audience we are *now* considering' (emphasis in original). This correspondence was followed by a letter from the information officer to Peel, dated 2 March 1938: 'It is open to considerable doubt whether Indian cinemas especially in the Congress Provinces would be prepared to show such a trailer even if it were supplied free of charge.'

Exhibitors of films in India, suffering under the dual burden of entertainment tax and paying exorbitant rental charges for cinema houses, were naturally anxious to exhibit films which would give them profits.[79] Marketability of a film was therefore a prime concern. Especially in relation to western films, the exhibitor was in a position to choose which films to screen. Owing to the time gap which elapsed between the release of a film abroad and its arrival, he could know in advance the potential marketability of any film that he ordered or that he was due to receive, as many exhibitors had access to trade journals and other trade literature. Press comments, articles and reviews, both abroad and in India, which generated controversy had the advantage of attracting the cinema-going crowd – unless the reactions got out of hand leading to the banning of the film as in the cases of *The Drum* and *Gunga Din*. Generally speaking, 'ruthless censorship' of a film even though it might be 'a travesty of Indian life and customs', was disliked by the exhibitors, as they had to pay a heavy price for the film and knew the 'very strong attraction' the film or those scenes would have for the

public.[80] Only the British owners of the Grand Opera House in Calcutta were known to 'ruthlessly censor' a film despite the risk of financial losses because of its alleged 'harmful and misleading' effects.[81]

The reaction of the audience to a film or any other screen projection was therefore of paramount interest; if they were rejecting certain images or messages, the exhibitors would be wary of exhibiting them. In actual fact, Indian audiences were known to avoid being in the cinema hall during the playing of the British national anthem at the end of foreign films.[82] The sudden rush to leave the theatre by the Indian audience suggests that they considered this to be 'blatant propaganda of the British way of life, which the natives were expected to follow', as even British officials acknowledged.[83]

Clearly, in certain quarters British officials were showing a greater sensitivity to Indian reactions for political reasons. For instance, the *Evening Standard* received a sharp rebuke for their caption – 'A native receives his award from Lady Linlithgow' – which they published on 2 June 1939 beneath a photograph of a prize-giving ceremony at the Simla horse show. The bureau of public information wrote a confidential letter dated 16 June 1939 commenting, 'To call an Indian "a native" in 1939, suggests that in matters imperial, Fleet Street is still living in the nineteenth century. The word "native" arouses the strongest resentment out here.'[84] The letter went on to suggest that 'hints' in this respect were to be 'dropped to all concerned'. Significantly, the word 'native' was commonly used in the empire films.

Awareness of Indian feelings led to voices being raised in England, advising a change in the way of looking at the exported films. Voicing such a concern was Edward Thompson, professor of Indian history at Oxford University, who in his letter to Ralph Glyn, dated 6 December 1937, summed up the situation as follows:

> Indian self-respect is touched to the extreme as was shown by the nation-wide furore over *Mother India*. There is need to conciliate India's self-respect and to take steps now when peace still obtains. The films we have had, do not do this. *Elephant Boy* shows Indians in a menial capacity and as picturesque and pleasantly interesting which Indians resent as much as Scots resent being shown as

> 'pawky' and the Irish as being shown as chiefly remarkable for 'bulls'. The practice of a nation which delights foreigners usually infuriates the nation itself. As for the *Bengal Lancer*, the less said about it the better ... the Indian self-respect with the outside world is not won by films which broadcast the 'sahib and native' relationship or show the world that Moslem assassins are hanged in Peshawar bound up in pig-skin.[85]

The growing sensitivity to the colonised point of view can also be witnessed in an edition of *Cinema* published on 23 August 1939: 'One can imagine the feeling of an English audience if the Chinese were represented as heroes, while roles of murderers, smugglers or dope peddlers were reserved for the English.'[86] It went on to recommend that heroic roles or those of the villains should not be reserved only for one race.

Quite clearly, the British were slowly moving towards granting greater recognition to the colonised point of view *vis-à-vis* production of such films. In 1936, the foreign office in London had been asked by the public and judicial department to tell their British representatives abroad to keep a look out for films 'offensive to Indian sentiments'.[87] But nothing really was done until the British hand was forced in the wake of the agitation over *The Drum* in 1938. Prior to this, the officially catalogued report, comprising the 'objections' of India, was hardly acted upon.

This work demonstrates how the concern with the portrayal of India on screen was directly related to difficulties the British were experiencing in the late 1930s. This period coincided with the aggravated tension of an extremely uncertain internal position, and, combined with a rapidly accelerating antagonistic international situation directly preceding World War II, resulted in increased sensitivity. The situation for the British in India was so precarious that the India Office preferred not to risk having films made which might, when distributed throughout the world (not merely in India), 'stir up more trouble and cause further uprising or protest'.[88]

Yet, when the government of India put its foot down about screening films like *India Speaks*, J. Brook-Wilkinson, secretary of the BBFC, was horrified that the colonial government was 'yielding to pressure', and was taking action against the producers of 'so important a concern as RKO of New York'.[89] On the

other hand, a section of London-based British officials were apprehensive that such films actually served Indian interests. In their perception, the Indians desired these films to be shown in their country to arouse anti-British feelings. A letter from the India Office to M. Seton of the government of India, had noted as early as September 1923: 'I presume that the boards in India are mostly composed of Indians, who may not necessarily regard it as part of their duty to exclude films that bring the white man into contempt.'[90]

A more forthright reiteration of this came in the confidential letter of R. T. Peel to General Wilson, dated 4 February 1937. Written in justification of stopping the production of the film, *The Relief of Lucknow*, Peel maintained: 'Assuming that the film could be shown, Indian opinion would not object to its exhibition in England or any other foreign country. Indeed, it is quite possible that Congress leaders would welcome its exhibition in India as being likely to arouse a revolutionary mentality and a desire to experiment with another "war of independence."'[91] It was clear that the British were apprehensive of Indian audiences making 'popular cultural capital' out of empire cinema.[92]

The pre-emptive banning of *The Relief of Lucknow* was to formalise this changing perspective of British officials regarding empire films. This film was used as an occasion to lay down new policy guidelines which were noticeable in the film, *The Rains Came*, released in India in 1940.

Renegotiating ideological norms: the case of *The Relief of Lucknow*

The change in the nature of the propaganda thrust was not exclusive to Britain's Indian colony. It was a part of the wider official change made by Britain in the late 1930s, as the colonial image during the interwar period was particularly vulnerable.[93] The change in the official policy in India, following the revaluation of the imperial propaganda in cinema, was effected through the controversial film, *The Relief of Lucknow*. Its theme, the 1857 uprising, popularly referred to by the British as the Mutiny, had ample potential for cinematic exploitation. The Mutiny had become a potent symbol of conflict between British and Indian points of view and perceptions of history. For

the former, the brutal acts of 'mutineers' inspired nothing but retaliatory moves, and, for the latter, it was a nationalist uprising against the British rule. British sensitivity about this period was well known, especially as the causes of the Mutiny were actually constitutive of British imperialism itself. Moreover, the 1857 revolt had become the most inflammatory memory in the nationalist agenda.

Although references to the Mutiny had not been censored or objected to, where it provided the theme or the central event around which the entire film revolved, the British felt apprehensive about likely reactions. A case in point was the film, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, in which the crucial Mutiny incident had to be heavily camouflaged following the British censors' objections.[94] Based on Tennyson's poem of the same name, the subject of which was the Crimean War (1853–56), the entire film is located in India except for the climax in Crimea, where 600 Lancers are sent to their death. The film begins with Surat Khan, ruler of Suristan, a Frontier state, allying himself with the Russians and thus becoming a danger to the security of British India. In league with Russia, Surat Khan, on the eve of Crimean War, leads the border tribes against a British outpost, killing men, women and children. The twenty-seven Bengal Lancers avenge this massacre. This film presented the Mutiny and its colonial repression as a response to Indian subversion. It used the retaliatory Kanpur massacre of the British garrison, women and children in July 1857 for delivering a lesson: 'that no Indian can take liberties with a British regiment's women and children'. Despite being underplayed it was still considered by British officials in India a 'painful reminder of Indian history which had better be left unrecalled at the present time at least'.[95] Consequently, when another film on the Mutiny revealingly entitled *The Relief of Lucknow* was put into pre-production, it attracted the severest condemnation. Such a film by T. A. Addison and Company had already been made in 1912, but in the 1930s the British wanted no repetition of it.

In 1912, *The Siege of Lucknow* had been blatantly advertised as 'The Indian Mutiny 1857 – an actual page from the actual history of the past', and as 'historically correct – closely adhering to recorded facts'.[96] The reviews of those days had also emphasised that the film was a 'faithful reconstruction of the events'.[97]

It was claimed that the film was not fictitious but showed 'just what occurred on the night of 12 May 1857, at Lucknow'.[98]

However, there was a vast change in the Indian situation between 1912 and the late 1930s when similar claims, if made, could well prove inflammatory. Clearly, cinematic interpretations are not static but form part of a constantly changing dialectical process in which meanings are reproduced and transformed. Consequently, when the proposal for reviewing *The Relief of Lucknow* came up in 1936, BBFC stopped its production.[99] Commenting upon it, the secretary of state for India noted, 'One should be in favour of everything possible being done to stop it ... It would be a great pity to revive memories of the Mutiny and particularly inopportune just now with the Abyssinian war in progress. If the film starts with Lucknow they would be likely enough to go to other things which would be much worse.'[100]

In 1938, the proposal was again revised. By this time *The Drum* had provoked a large-scale popular agitation in Bombay followed by a ban imposed in provincial assemblies by popular ministries, along with a stringent censorship policy regarding all foreign films that featured India in any form. The British considered it politically prudent to pay attention to the vociferous objections of 'nationalist India', which at the time was considered 'peculiarly sensitive' to stories designed to emphasise the valour of British troops in a clash between them and the Indians of Mutiny days.[101]

The danger that Indian film-makers might represent the anti-colonialist movement as a response to the coloniser's violence, exploitation and repression – to express a political point of view – was heightened in the current political climate. Banning of such themes therefore forestalled the possibility of a denunciatory counter-narrative from the perspective of the colonised. This point is elaborated in a confidential letter from Lothian, additional secretary to the government of India, to Zetland, the secretary of state for India, dated 5 December 1938:

> May I say how extraordinarily dangerous, I think any such films would be in India today. In the first place young nationalist India is extraordinarily sensitive about the whole Mutiny episode. To them it was the first wave of the national movement for independence and was largely due to resentment at the suppression of the

> independent state of Oudh. The Rani of Jhansi is already a popular figure on the stage. It is almost impossible for the British company, advised by British soldiers to do a film which will not cause resentment in India. To us the Mutiny was a glorious episode in our history in India in which British soldiers and civilians showed extraordinary heroism in resisting a singularly brutal collection of rebels. To the Indians – it was a heroic if unsuccessful attempt to strike for freedom.
>
> But the effect of the film itself would be the last of the evils. It would most certainly provoke a crop of films from Indian companies setting forth the Indian version of the Mutiny and it would be extraordinarily difficult for the Government of India to censor or suppress them if it had allowed a British film of the Mutiny to appear. Further Hollywood has long been itching to use the Mutiny as a theme, as the North West Frontier Province becomes exhausted and if we are to allow a British film to appear, there will be no means of stopping Hollywood from pouring out versions of its own which would probably infuriate both Britain and India but nonetheless set fire to the stubble. India, as you know better than I do, is in a difficult state at the moment and even the Congress ministries are finding great difficulty with extremist youth. I cannot think of anything more likely to make difficulties during the next year or two when you are trying to get the constitution into operation than the kind of controversy which would almost certainly be engendered by any kind of film about the Mutiny, however carefully prepared. *It is not the film, it is the theme which is dangerous.* Use your influence to prevent any such film being manufactured.[102] (emphasis in original)

To this letter was attached a note from A. Dibdin of the public and judicial department, which revealed that in the Central Legislative Assembly of India, the commander-in-chief had come under heavy attack for unveiling a Mutiny memorial in a village near the capital, Delhi; particular objection was taken by Indians to the use of the word 'Mutineers' on the memorial.[103]

The proposal for *The Relief of Lucknow* also provoked vehement reactions in the Indian media. Picking up on these protests, the *Edinburgh Evening News* of 9 December 1938 observed, 'The majority of Indians regard the Mutiny as the first war of independence lost through treachery.' It went on to quote the *Pioneer*

of Lucknow: 'The Indians like the Irish have long memories and have lived on them too long. Rightly or wrongly they would resent a film on the Mutiny and for that reason consider it would be bad policy and what is worse, bad manners to make it.'

Confirming the dangers of allowing such a film, Edward Thompson wrote in his letter to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* on 19 December 1938:

> I am certain that it would be impossible to make any film on any episode of the Indian Mutiny which would not send a wave of fury throughout India, stirring Hindus and Moslems equally, to which the anger caused by Miss Mayo's 'Mother India' would be nothing. Indians have their own traditions and opinions of the Mutiny, which are not ours. There are interests in Hollywood, already living off the North West Frontier as a film region, which would like nothing better than to move on to the Mutiny. Our people know nothing of the Mutiny as it is seen from the Indian side or of what it still means. The film would have caused suffering to 400 million of our fellow citizens who sent its soldiers to fight the great war.

Similar sentiments, echoed in other papers, advised caution in touching upon the 'mutual savageries' of British as well as Indians, the memories of which were considered to be alive among 'very old people still living in India' as well as among 'the generation which followed'.[104]

The controversy surrounding *The Relief of Lucknow* having spilled over in to the public domain, also found a great deal of passionate support in England. A large number of British members of parliament, the press and publicity agents vehemently protested against 'political censorship'.[105] Those lobbying for the film criticised its ban on the grounds of the large amount of money having already been spent on the film and ensuing problems of unemployment caused by throwing people out of work. Despite mounting pressure, private and public, production of the film was banned in early 1939.

More importantly this occasion was used to lay down a policy regarding films which depicted India. This change virtually brought almost all empire feature film productions relating to India to a halt, as we shall see presently. The official statement of Tyrell regarding *The Relief of Lucknow* stated, 'The British Board

of Film Censors has been advised by all the authorities responsible for the Government of India, both civil and military, that in their considered opinion such a film would revive memories of the days of conflict in India, which has been the earnest endeavour of both countries to obliterate, with a view to promoting harmonious co-operation between the two people.'[106]

In the parliamentary debates which took place regarding the banning of *The Relief of Lucknow*, S. Hoare, quoting the secretary of state reiterated that 'to produce a film depicting scenes of the Indian Mutiny would be undesirable at this time, when we are just embarking upon a new chapter in the constitutional development of India and when we want to get rid of differences which there have been between us in the past. I think everyone wants to see the new constitution in India a success.'[107] These were publicly touted reasons and were greatly publicised in India as well. Yet these do not adequately explain the considerations behind this shift in policy regarding the empire films, which I shall deal with later. However, an immediate issue dealing with the British Indian army may be recounted here briefly. During the year 1938, an expert committee under Lord Chatfield had been appointed to look into its deficiencies. Published in early September 1938, this committee report was sent to India in October 1938 and was accepted by the cabinet in June 1939. It came at a time when the provincial autonomy scheme was under trial in the wake of the 1935 act. The Chatfield Report feared that the Congress party might control the future federation of India and thus gain 'virtual control whether by direct or indirect means over defence policy'.[108] They were anxious to insist that the British government alone, through the governor general and the secretary of state for India, should remain responsible for the defence of India regardless of the constitutional reforms in progress. Thus the recommendations of the Chatfield Report ran almost completely contrary to the constitutional principles introduced in an India ostensibly on its road to self-government and were bound to alienate public opinion.

The British were justifiably nervous about this contradiction which made their commitment to constitutional reform and self-government suspect. Given their own vulnerability at this time, they could not afford to allow public attention to be directed at the British Indian army, which the empire film package tended to

do. This was explicitly stated in a minute paper of the public and judicial department dated 9 December 1938:

> Apart from the regrettable effect a Mutiny film would have upon nationalist feelings in India, we might emphasise its probable reaction upon the Indian army. However glorious the episodes may be to the British army and to some Indian units, the reverse of the picture must be the implication of disloyalty and treachery in the Indian army of that period ... The point I would like to make is that I believe the British public, including many of those connected with the film industry are more likely to sympathise with the desire not to offend the susceptibilities of the loyal Indian army than to feel any great solicitude for the reaction upon political India, the vocal elements of which, outside the Punjab, have not exhibited a marked degree of loyalty recently.[109]

With the army's position as a highly contentious issue the British government came down with a heavy hand on the making of *The Relief of Lucknow*. This action, however, did not deter the producers from making an appeal directly to the parliamentary private secretary, Lord Beauchamp. The correspondence which followed, illuminates the finer nuances of British policy towards empire cinema, its propaganda and impact in the given socio-political situation of the late 1930s.

On 20 April 1939, John Weiner on behalf of the US Columbia studio made a second representation to Beauchamp seeking permission to make a film, *The Siege of Lucknow*, as an earlier representation had been turned down. The letter sought to reassure the British that the '*reasons* of the Mutiny will not be gone into' (emphasis in original), and 'the actual rebellion of the sepoys would be glossed over if shown at all'.[110] In an obvious attempt to assuage British apprehensions, the letter promised:

> The enemy would be shown in this picture as nothing more or less than a type of Indian bandit. Nana Sahib might be their leader, the causes could with ease be shown as the personal ambitions of this man coupled with the old business of the greased cartridges and others of a similar nature. The real question of the Indian company and their policy would be left out. The film would also show that a great number of sepoys at the siege of Lucknow *remained loyal* as well as the *majority* of the natives who lived in these parts ...

> After all, the film *Gunga Din* was a great success here and in England. I am sure that one of the most important reasons for this was that 'the enemy' were bandits nothing more nothing less. This proposed film as far as 'the enemy' is concerned could be handled in a similar manner. (emphasis in original)

Beauchamp sought the advice of Zetland on this letter and later communicated parts of Zetland's advice, without naming him, to the US producer. By now the film, *Gunga Din*, released in April 1939, had also been banned by the provincial governments in India. The time had come to officially and publicly accept the stand taken by the Indian provincial governments. Zetland's letter to Beauchamp, dated 18 May 1939, put down for official and public consumption the British attitude not only towards *The Relief of Lucknow* but also other films about India in general and is therefore cited in full:

> Mr. Weiner entirely misunderstands our reasons for objecting to certain films. He is at pains to explain that the proposed film would not show up British policy in India in a bad light, but it is not for that reason that any recent film about India has caused us trouble but because they portray Indians in a manner offensive to Indian sentiments. It is unfortunately a frequent characteristic of films about India produced in England or America that Indians are shown as being a subject race and as likely as not engaged in rebellion against the British which is invariably frustrated by the heroism of the latter to the discomfiture of the Indians. Mr. Weiner's suggestion, therefore, that the Mutineers should be shown as bandits actuated merely by personal ambition does not meet the main point, since it is exactly this method of presentation which offends Indians, many of whom look upon the Mutiny as the 'first Indian war of Independence', and upon the Mutineers as comparable to the followers of George Washington, only differing from them in that they were unsuccessful. It is, in fact, precisely because the Indians are posed as 'bandits' and so on that such films are so distasteful to Indian sentiments and if the Indian characters could be made more agreeable, which does not mean to say that they need be shown as excessively loyal to the British, films about India would be much more satisfactory from our point of view. Mr. Weiner mentions the film *Gunga Din*. This may have been a success in England, but it was banned in India and the Government

> of India was asked in the Indian Legislature whether they could take steps through the British Embassy in Washington to prevent its production and release.
>
> Besides these general objections to so many films about India, special objections are attached to any about the Indian Mutiny. Not only does a film about the Mutiny raise unfortunate associations, no matter in what way the episodes are presented, but (it also could not fail to show part of the Indian army in the regrettable role of Mutineers) the substitution of bandits for Mutineers could not of course disguise the historical basis of the film, the production of which consequently revives memories of events which are painful and humiliating to the Indian Army with its great tradition of loyalty, as well as to the Indian public. We have on two occasions in the past been instrumental in preventing a film about the Mutiny being made in this country. In the second case production was already fairly far advanced when we came to hear of the film. But despite the inevitable inconvenience caused to the producers and the fact that some public and Parliamentary interest was shown in the case, the project had to be abandoned as a result of the Board of Film Censors informing the company that they would not be able to pass the film. It may be assumed therefore, that the Board would not for a moment think of passing a film on this subject produced on India. Since we may expect a spate of Hollywood films about India, and though I am afraid they will inevitably be of the *Gunga Din* type, I am anxious that Hollywood should at any rate be aware of our attitude.[111]

Thus wider political ramifications had brought about a near unanimity of opinion between home and colonial officialdom regarding the portrayal and effect of empire films in India.

This correspondence 'to influence the trade to the right direction sought' was sent out by Dibdin of the public and judicial department to F. H. Puckle, secretary to the government of India's home department, with strict instructions that the correspondence be kept 'highly confidential'. At the insistence of the government of India, the producers not merely of Hollywood but also the 'enlightened producers of UK' were warned that the provincial governments under Indian control were most likely to refuse certification not only to all such films but also to any company responsible for producing work 'offensive to Indian

public opinion'.[112] The consequent risk of losing 'a considerable market' was also underlined.

This was followed by the circulation of detailed instructions giving specific directions regarding films, which went far beyond the four major considerations laid down in 1928 regarding assessment of imperial projects.[113] These instructions laid down certain criteria for judging whether empire films about India might be considered 'offensive' to Indians. Films that might not be sanctioned included:

1 Those which are based on episodes in British Indian history or stories in the Kipling tradition.
2 Those which show quarrelling or fighting between Europeans and Indians or between Hindus and Muslims.
3 Those in which Indian religion or social customs are brought into ridicule or contempt, for example, films tending to overemphasise the backwardness of certain classes of people or giving undue importance to social abuses or primitive customs, which are not fairly representative of India as a whole.
4 Those in which an Indian is portrayed as the villain and a European as the hero.
5 Those which generally depict Indians as an inferior race, with a 'slave mentality', cringing and dominated by a superior white race.[114]

These instructions were sent to producers of films in the USA and Britain with a final warning: 'that a film will not be exhibited in India, is not in Indian opinion the end of the matter. What Indian sentiment particularly objects to is the lowering of Indians in the eyes of the world and the exhibition in other countries of films which would not be tolerated in India arouses for that reason no less resentment'.[115]

Film India in a shrewd comment on this changed attitude and policy of the colonial masters, observed that it was 'more as a need for imperial unity in these dangerous times than a real change of heart'.[116] *Hindu* went on to question why 'Indian feelings' could be accommodated in respect to a film on the Mutiny and not in respect to other films?[117]

This repeated private and public emphasis on 'Indian feelings' regarding films portraying India in a derogatory light served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it supported the Indian objections

by portraying them sympathetically as just and fair, and, on the other hand, it supplied the British with an opportunity to set their colonial record straight (which was being roundly assailed at this time) by implying that the colony itself rejected the allegation of its backwardness under colonial domination. These new guidelines coincided with the banning of *The Drum* and *Gunga Din*.

Oriental-cum-imperialist discourse: the Hollywood stakes

The volatile controversy regarding the empire films forced the British to note with growing alarm 'America's preoccupation' with an image of India focusing on the 'exotic', 'oriental' or 'awkward' side of India. This image based itself on 'imperial glory'. The fact that the themes or backgrounds of a large proportion of Hollywood's films were made on war, conquest and political trouble, recent or historical, only served to emphasise this image.[118]

The portrayal of Eurocentric-imperialist ideology and colonialist representations on the Hollywood screen has been comprehensively investigated by writers like Robert Stam, Louise Spence and Ella Shohat in their recent works. According to them these representations and ideologies did not begin with the cinema but are rooted in a vast colonial intertext and a widely disseminated set of discursive practices which lay in philosophy, literature and history.[119] Portraying the orient or the Other on the screen tapped into the 'cultural baggage' that was deeply embedded in the discourse of the empire and which the white audience – British or American – carried with them. In fact, the birth of cinema coincided with the height of European imperialism between the late nineteenth century and World War I. Consequently, most western films about the colonies adopted the 'explorer's perspective' in which the European civilising mission is projected as 'interweaving opposing yet linked narratives of western penetration into inviting virginal landscape and resisting libidinal nature'.[120] The popularity of adventure genre films in the west, with their emphasis on masculinity, aggression and penetration in relation to the colonial world, lay in the fact that the films lent themselves perfectly to the 'gendered western gaze' described by Shohat.[121]

Historically, the USA had been a colony that had fought a

determined and successful war against imperialist Britain. It had also served as a colonising hegemonic power in relation to Native American and African peoples. This historical contradiction within the USA created an ambivalence that came to be reflected in the films. The USA came to identify with Britain in relation to its colony in India on racial grounds, but showed itself uncertain in relation to the political situation. Politically, the anti-British and anti-imperialist forces in the USA sympathised with the Indian national movement. This critique became embedded in the Hollywood films, which offered a space for alternative perceptions even while they echoed dominant imperialist messages.

Racially, however, Hollywood cinema subscribed fully to the cultural outlook that located heroes and villains in racial stereotypes. The affinity is further emphasised by the resonance between the military, racist and imperial ethics of these films and similar trends in US society. Jeffrey Richards explains this historically in terms of a deeply pervasive and strident racist society in the USA of the 1930s in which all coloured people occupied an inferior position.[122] This aspect, which, according to him, is 'the key to the link between the British empire and often unspoken and unarticulated ethos of American imperialism', found its way on to the screen not merely in empire films but in other genres as well.

The western genre, for example, came close to the imperial adventure films in conveying a similar ideological premise in its imperial-style adventure on the American frontier. It gave a specialised national form to a more widespread historical process – the general thrust of European expansion into Asia, Africa and the Americas.[123] A popular theme of the late 1930s, as seen in the classical period of the western genre, was the slow march of white settlers across the continent escorted by regiments of US cavalry to disperse the native population. The Hollywood western made the Native American appear as intruders in their own land and thus provided a paradigmatic perspective through which to view the whole of the non-white world. The domestication of their wild land is encoded in notions of civilisation, progress and manifest destiny in a striking similarity with the empire films. US identification with colonialism and imperialism was quite clear, despite certain reservations and its stand as an anti-colonial power in relation to Europe at this time.

Moreover, the imperial ideology, as Shohat and Stam suggest, was really transnational. White audiences were encouraged to identify not only with single European nations but also with the racial solidarity implied by the imperial project as a whole. Thus a British audience could identify with the heroes of French Foreign Legion films, a Euro-American audience with the heroes of the British Raj and so on. In Shohat and Stam's words:

> For the European spectator, the cinematic experience mobilised a rewarding sense of national and imperial belonging, on the backs, as it were, of otherized peoples ... The cinema's ability to 'fly' spectators around the globe gave them a subject position as film's audio-visual masters. The 'spatially mobilised visuality' of the I/eye of empire spiralled outward around the globe, creating a visceral, kinetic sense of power while turning the colonies into spectacle for the metropole's voyeuristic gaze.[124]

Each imperial country therefore emerged with its own imperial genre set in different colonies. Hollywood was thus making films not only on British imperialism but also on the French. In fact it made more films about the French Foreign Legion than the French themselves.[125] In films relating to British imperialism, Hollywood scored by using a combination of US and British actors with the former playing a central heroic role, which ensured the sympathetic identification by a Euro-American public. Yet, it is undeniable that in these carefully designed commercial productions, the US public's admiration for the British empire ideals of loyalty, courage and hard work, as pointed out by Margaret Farrand Thorp in 1939, also played its part.[126]

In projecting British imperialism, the two most popular locations for Hollywood's empire films were Africa and India. India emerged in Hollywood films in 1902 in Thomas Edison's *Hindu Fakir*, the first motion picture with an Indian theme of which there is any record.[127] It concentrated on 'mystic India' and projected an oriental land and people, full of mysterious, frightening, strange things, repulsively fascinating to a western audience due to their 'uncivilised' and 'barbaric' nature. Such films merely reproduced the orientalist discourse so attractive to the white races, a vision which the USA shared with the rest of the western white world. This film, regarded as the ancestor of a whole series of motion pictures, provided the backdrop to the

cinematic adventures of the British Indian army.

Hollywood films about British troops stationed in India presented tales of racially superior white men finding adventure in a foreign land where primitive people, wild animals, poisonous snakes and a treacherous country called upon them to be brave and fearless soldiers. What emerged, therefore, was the cinematic projection of orientalist-cum-imperialist discourse by Hollywood. The first film on this theme, Twentieth-Century Fox's *The Black Watch*, was made in 1929. It was based on a story by Talbot Mundy and directed by John Ford. This enshrined the basic plot which was followed in subsequent productions.[128]

Such films had melodramatic plots revolving around primitive tribesmen (usually pictured as living just beyond the Indian North-West Frontier), who rose up against the British in India with the idea of overcoming and destroying the British army and taking over the whole country. This plot against India was defeated by the British Indian army led by gallant British officers. In defeating the wild tribesmen, the British were invariably presented as serving the cause of justice, law and order, and acting for the good of India by saving the country from being overrun by savage tribes. The 'good' elements of the Indian population were shown to work with them, the 'bad' elements against them. This theme recurred with remarkable consistency for over a quarter of a century, the dramatic element being reinforced by the contrast of white and black as convenient symbols of good and evil.

However, in this commercial peddling of British imperialism, Hollywood was aware of the pressures exercised by the British government as well as the British viewing public. During the 1930s, there was a conflict of commercial interests between Britain and the USA in the struggle for world trade. In film-making especially, the Americans had left the British way behind. In 1926, for example, eighty per cent of the films shown in India were from the USA and only ten per cent were British. The British film industry had been steadily declining and was severely handicapped due to shortage of material and staff.[129] The Americans' forging ahead of the British was a source of much heart-burning in British film and official circles. In view of this resentment and the possibility of the British government introducing fresh policies or further tightening the existing protectionist policy with its quota rules, it was important for US producers to make films that

were acceptable to the British in terms of projecting politically and ideologically correct messages and images. It also made them very careful about not offending 'British susceptibilities'.[130]

Along with the British government, the susceptibilities of the British public had also to be kept in mind because success at the box office could be obtained only by producing films arousing popular interest. The British public, with forty per cent of the population regularly attending the cinema, accounted for a weekly sale of twenty million tickets, providing Hollywood with its largest overseas market.[131] A still larger market awaited Hollywood in Britain's world-wide empire. The importance of the British empire was testified to by film director Frank Capra, who recalled in his autobiography that only two of his major films failed to make money and this was because they were banned in the British empire.[132] The desire to capture this lucrative film market made US film-makers situate their films in various territories of the empire, for it was a well-known fact that if a film was located in a specific colony it had a far greater chance of being a commercial success there.

The British, on the other hand, encouraged the making of such films for their own reasons, particularly as the British official attempts in non-feature film propaganda about India had not been very effective. This failure was not merely due to lack of resources and a reluctance to use state intervention in private enterprise, as argued by Philip Woods,[133] but also to the commercial non-viability of such an enterprise. Propaganda films focusing on developmental aspects such as irrigation, agricultural improvements, education and industrial progress in India had no audience. Whereas feature films easily attracted enthusiastic distributors and exhibitors, not to mention a popular viewership.

Moreover, there was considerable pressure both inside and outside the government for the production of feature films promoting the imperial agenda.[134] Although the British government remained reluctant to become directly involved in feature film production until World War II, private producers were certainly encouraged to adopt the British empire as a fruitful field for cinematography. From about 1932 onwards the BBFC moved from post-censorship to pre-censorship. It encouraged producers first to submit to the board for general advice on draft scripts. This was followed by the submission of suitably amended scripts,

which received detailed comments and amendments prior to the commencement of actual production.[135] This exercise obviated the need for drastic censorship if not outright bans later on. Such close association between the state and the cinema also had its effect on production and its thrust. As scripts were officially vetted and both Hollywood and its counterpart in Britain made these films with the active co-operation of the colonial authorities and the British Indian army, the images-cum-ideological content of the films had the stamp of approval of the authorities. A spate of films thus came to be produced in which the focus on the British Indian army projected a combination of militarist, patriotic, imperialist and masculinist values.

With time, the films made by Hollywood became increasingly important to Britain, especially in view of the rising Indian objections; objections which could be disregarded in the case of Hollywood films but not British ones. It was pointed out that due to the pressure brought about by the Indian government on the India Office and, consequently, on the BBFC, more films about India could not be produced in England.[136] Hollywood films were considered comparatively safe from this pressure.

Zetland, acknowledging England's need for the production of such films, explained to the chairman of the BBFC why and how Hollywood (and not the British) could continue the production of such films, arguing that 'we in this country could not be held responsible for what was done in the States and could not be attacked by Indians on account of it.'[137] Moreover, if the film for some reason had to be banned or withdrawn, it was felt that it would be politically 'easier to exclude an American film from India, than an English one'.[138] The Americans on their side continued to glorify 'British feats of arms', show 'soldiers in a eulogistic manner' and 'endorse the imperial ideology'.[139] However, this orientalist-cum-imperialist ideological thrust in the empire films produced its own contradictions for, ultimately, the empire films were not successful in endorsing either imperialism or colonial policy. They backfired.

A shift of policy: shelving of films

The imperatives for change in orientalist-cum-imperialist representations came from the changing historical requirements of

colonial rule. This change was not exclusive to Britain's Indian colony and was part of a wider official policy adopted in the late 1930s. The changed policy regarding India was fully evident in the British guided and controlled film, *The Rains Came*, which departed from the hitherto adopted adventure genre and its stock characters. This film proved to be the sole exception. The pressures of a changed policy combined with material and political interests to force Hollywood into either abandoning or shelving thirty-seven such films relating to India, which were announced in the 1939–40 schedules.

Consequently, a remake of *The King of the Khyber Rifles*, previously filmed in 1929 as *The Khyber Rifles*, was shelved,[140] and proposed film adaptations of two of Kipling's imperialist works, *Kim* and *Soldiers Three*, were also banned and made only after India's independence. *The Bengal Border* and *Storm over India* similarly had to be put into cold storage, and a reissue of *Gunga Din* was banned. Even Alexander Korda was reported to have dropped, in September 1939, the idea of acquiring film rights to a historical novel about India.

Hollywood's feature films of the adventure genre dealing with India as their theme re-emerged only after independence. In view of the drastically changed socio-political context of the triumph of colonial nationalisms and decolonisation, and their ideological requirements, there was continuity as well as change in cinematic representations and ideological formations (of both western and Indian cinema) in the post-colonial period.

Throughout World War II, a plea for a change of policy and image in relation to the colonies was stressed. The need for such a change for the British public was emphasised. For example, Alexander Shaw, a British film producer, who spent a year in India during the war wrote:

> But please remember, India belongs to you and me and the next Englishman. It is no good you sitting back and being funny about *Pukka* Sahibs and the cabinet's attitude to India. Indians don't laugh about you any more, they take you very seriously. If you who are reading this article were to go to India you would be held personally responsible for every unpleasant thing that has happened in the country since Clive; it was you who put down the so called Mutiny, who killed the Rani of Jhansi, as she led her

> troops in to battle, it was you who imprisoned Nehru because he objected to his country being brought in to the war without being asked.[141]

In view of these observations Alexander Shaw made certain recommendations to the British government reiterating what had already been officially accepted and implemented.[142] He emphasised that 'care should be taken that these films (catalogued as peoples of India, primitive tribes, cults, villages, religions), are brought up to date and that subjects are not presented from a "dead past point of view."'[143]

Endorsing these recommendations and summing up the new perspective, a sub-committee on films officially announced on 27 March 1942 a shift of emphasis 'from the British Indian army to portraying Indian armed forces to indicate India's war efforts'.[144] The shift in cinematic emphasis towards 'recent developments in India in industrial, educational, military fields etc.', which was to have 'immediate value in connection with war' and also 'would be of permanent interest', had already started.[145]

British policy was compelled to change in response to new social and political pressures, both colonial and international. This dramatic shift in theme and ideology highlighted the tussle between the contrary perceptions of colonisers and colonised. The empire cinema had emerged in the 1930s as an arena for debate and discussion on matters of imperialist concern and thus as a new site for the formation of public opinion. In this, the media, both Indian and western, played a significant role. A subversion of symbols and meanings effected an expose which successfully transformed the pro-British propaganda of the empire films and made them counter-productive.

Colonial India and the making of empire cinema investigates this important cultural shift in British policy regarding British and colonial images and ideology. It unravels neglected aspects of the unofficial and official attempts to manipulate and control a vastly influential and popular communication mass medium like the cinema. In doing so it also locates the cinema in relation to other significant media such as print and broadcasting. The scale of interest the cinema generated in the colonising and colonised country indicates its historical importance. This work foregrounds certain hidden facts and nuances of the interaction

between colonial society and the cinema at a very crucial stage of its historical development.

Notes

1 By 'discourse' is meant an 'organised and regulated as well as regulating and constituting' domain of language use, a 'truth-producing system in which propositions, concepts and representations generally assign value and meaning to the objects of the various disciplines that treat them'. The concept of 'discourse' would suggest 'linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, control of populations and the ... State as these intersect in the functioning of systems of thought'. See Paul A. Bove, 'Discourse', in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds), *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1990), pp. 50–65.

2 For the classic account of the Other under the impact of colonialism and the role of the creation of knowledge in this colonial enterprise, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). For an essay that relates Said's general insights to British scholarship on India, see Ronald Inden, 'Orientalist construction of India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20 (1986), pp. 401–46. See also Inden's *Imagining India* (Massachusetts, Basil Blackwell, 1990).

3 See, for example, John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1986).

4 John M. Mackenzie gives a comprehensive compilation of the most important research work in this connection. See *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, and *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984).

5 S. Theodore Baskaran, *The Message Bearers: The Nationalist Politics and the Entertainment Media in South India, 1880–1945* (Madras, Cre-A: 268 Roypettah High Road, 1981); M. S. S. Pandian, *The Image Trap: M. G. Ramachandran in Films and Politics* (New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1992); Pandian, '*Parasakthi*: life and times of a DMK film', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26: 11–12 (Mar. 1991), pp. 759–70; Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947–1987* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996); and M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998). The other scholars currently engaged in the study of Indian films offering fresh insights in this field are Geeta Kapur, 'Mythic material in Indian cinema', *The Journal of Arts and Ideas*,

3 (Jul.–Dec. 1987), pp. 79–109; Ravi S. Vasudevan, whose articles have been very useful in understanding Indian cinema of early 1940s and 1950s; Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke era: conflict of traditional form and modern technology', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 14–15 (Jul.–Dec. 1987), pp. 44–77; and Rosie Thomas, 'Sanctity and scandal: the mythologization of *Mother India*', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 2:3 (1989), pp. 11–30.

6 'Subjectivities' is used here in a strictly limited sense: the meanings ascribed to being an individual with a given identity by a cinematic text.

7 Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. x.

8 Tytti Soila, 'Valborgsmassoafton: melodrama and gender politics in Swedish cinema', in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema* (London & New York, Routledge, 1992), pp. 232–44.

9 The ideologies of empire are varied and complex with different motivations and justifications all at odds with one another or working simultaneously. They are rejected by the subordinate all over the world. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the British ruled over a colossal empire. This extended over a large part of Africa, the whole of the Indian subcontinent and Australasia, territories in south-east Asia and the Pacific and even, for a time, much of the Middle East. The empire's diverse character, with particularities of different types of people, culture and civilisation and rapidly changing equations with imperial power in the wake of the rise of nationalist forces ensured that imperialism meant different things to different people at different times, making definition of the empire ideology difficult and contradictory.

10 Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentricism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London & New York, Routledge, 1994), p. 110.

11 Richard Dyer, 'White', *Screen*, 29:4 (Autumn 1988), pp. 44–64.

12 Janet Staiger, 'The handmaiden of villainy: methods and problems in studying historical reception of films', *Wide Angle*, 8:1 (1986), pp. 19–28.

13 It is now widely accepted that audiences recreate their own meaning from reading or seeing text or images. Ginsburg shows how 'a man of the people' uses his own experience to read or draw out the meaning of a text entirely in a differently context to the one intended. Chartier similarly maintains the possibility of a narrative, written or oral, permitting a plurality of meaning. He explains this in terms of the logic of cultural consumption in which recipients or people as

cultural consumers are not passive but construct their own reading and interpretations. See Carlo Ginsburg, *The Cheese and the Worm* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Roger Chartier, 'Intellectual history or sociocultural history: the French trajectories', in his collection of essays, *Cultural History: Between Practice and Representations* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988), pp. 19–52.

14 For different theories and a comprehensive debate on audience studies see, Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth (eds), *Remote Control: Television, Audience and Cultural Power* (London & New York, Routledge, 1989); and Paul Marris and Sue Thornham (eds), *Media Studies: A Reader* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1996).

15 This model was developed by the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies under the direction of Stuart Hall. See David Morley, 'Changing paradigms in audience studies', in Seiter *et al.*, *Remote Control*, pp. 16–43.

16 Lawrence Grossberg, 'Strategies of Marxist cultural interpretation', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 1:4 (1984), pp. 392–421.

17 The example cited by John Fiske is drawn from Robert Hodge and David Tripp, *Children and Television* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1986). John Fiske explains that the popularity of Westerns is due to the aboriginals' ability to be the producers of their own culture and makers of their own meaning and pleasures. See Fiske, 'Movements of television: neither the text nor the audience', in Seiter *et al.*, *Remote Control*, pp. 56–78.

18 Manthia Diawara, 'Black spectatorship: problems of identification and resistance', *Screen*, 29:4 (Autumn 1988), pp. 66–76.

19 The colonial government legislation which imposed restrictions and censorship on the print and entertainment media with severe consequences for any activity deemed seditious, incorporated the *Registration Act* (1867), the *Dramatic Performance Control Act* (1878), the *Vernacular Press Act* (1878), and the *Press Act* (1910).

20 See Ravi S. Vasudevan's pioneering work on the cinema of 1940s and 1950s, which is also relevant for this period. Among his other articles, see especially 'Shifting codes, dissolving identities: the Hindi social film of the 1950s as popular culture', Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Research-in-Progress Papers, second series, no. 74; and 'Addressing the spectator of a "third world" national cinema: the Bombay "social" film of the 1940s and 1950s', *Screen*, 35:4 (Winter 1995), pp. 305–24.

21 Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke era', pp. 44–77

22 The recent work of Stephen P. Hughes, dealing with the growth of film audiences in the city of Madras during the first decade of this

century is an exception to this. See his 'The pre-Phalke era in south India: reflections on the formation of film audiences in Madras', *South Indian Studies*, 2 (Jul.–Dec. 1996), pp. 161–204. The few other works on audience studies that exist deal with the contemporary period and with highly specialised cinema audiences. For example, the work of Pfleiderer and Lutze is based upon participation observation of a rural audience at a special screening: see Beatrix Pfleiderer and Lothar Lutze, *The Hindi Film: Agent and Reagent of Cultural Change* (New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 1985). Sara Dickey's work, *Cinema and Urban Poor in South India* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), deals with fan clubs among the poorer sections of society in South India and is essentially a sociological study. Pandian's article '*Parasakthi*' deals with agitational politics around this film in 1952. However, the identification and actual participation of the audience/agitators remain elusive, subsumed under the politics which they represented. The major emphasis of the work remains on the ideological trends represented in the film in the given logic of electoral politics of Tamil Nadu.

23 Robert C. Allen, 'From exhibition to reception: reflections on the audience in film history', *Screen*, 31:4 (Winter 1990), pp. 347–56; and Barbara Klinger, 'Film history terminable and interminable: recovering the past in reception studies', *Screen*, 38:2 (Summer 1997), pp. 107–28.

24 Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London & New York, Routledge, 1994).

25 A unique project was started in Britain in 1930 called 'mass observation' to assess different aspects of everyday life of British citizens. The cinema proved to be an important aspect of everyday life in Britain at that time and the *Mass Observation Archives* in Sussex has more files on cinema than on any other single topic. This vast collection has several reports on audiences' behaviour, preference, family life, cinema impact and so forth.

26 Hughes, 'The pre-Phalke era in south India', pp. 161–204.

27 *Hindu* (10 Dec. 1937), p. 5.

28 *Indian Cinematograph Committee Report*, 1927–28 (Madras, Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1928), pp. 21–2.

29 The advertisement for *The Drum* in India, for example, mentioned Sabu as the 'star' of the film; other actors were dismissed as 'many others'. See *Bombay Chronicle* (10 Sep. 1938), p. 14.

30 There was a great deal of resentment in the Indian film industry because they felt that US and British films were being 'dumped' in the Indian market, when they had already earned their cost at home.

31 *Film India* (May 1939), p. 39.

32 Culled from *Bombay Chronicle* (26 Feb. 1939), p. 8; *Hindu* (7 Sep. 1934), p. 5; *Hindu* (11 Aug. 1933), p. 12; and *Film India* (May 1939), p. 39.
33 Panna Shah, *The Indian Film* (Bombay, Motion Picture Society of India, 1950), p. 45.
34 *Hindu* (14 Nov. 1941), p. 3.
35 *Film India* (Jan. 1939), p. 29, and *Film India* (May 1939), p. 39.
36 Shah, *The Indian Film*, p. 68.
37 *Indian Cinematograph Committee, Evidence, 1927–28*, vol. II (Calcutta, Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1928), p. 212.
38 Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai, Home Poll, F. no. 75 (1928), p. 3.
39 *Film India* (Jan. 1939), p. 29.
40 ICC Evidence, vol. I, p. 50.
41 ICC Report, p. 23.
42 ICC Evidence, vol. IV, p. 235.
43 John Masters, *Bugles and a Tiger* (New York, Viking Press, 1956), p. 115. Interestingly, one of the empire films located in the Frontier was being screened at the time of Masters' visit to the cinema in the cantonment area of the NWFP where he was posted.
44 ICC Evidence, vol. IV, pp. 78–9. Also see oral evidence of Badri Prasad Mathur, professor of English, Radha Swami Educational Institution, Agra (13 Feb. 1928), pp. 894–95.
45 ICC Evidence, vol. II. See oral evidence of Lala Lajpat Rai, member of the Central Legislative Council (28 Nov. 1927), p. 205.
46 ICC Evidence, vol. I, pp. 14–15.
47 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 72.
48 For a fascinating recapitulation of the past see V. S. Mahajan 'Down memory lane', *Tribune* (6 Dec. 1992), p. 5.
49 *Film India* (Jan. 1939), p. 29
50 From 1927–28 onwards, there is a vast literature on the Indian audience in the form of letters, observations by different strata of British society in India and articles, all of which underline the 'unsuitability' and 'gullibility' of Indian audiences. See India Office Records, London, L/P&J/6/1747, pp. 452–622. Part of this vehement condemnation of the Indian audience was geared towards a demand for more stringent censorship to discourage the exhibition of US films in India. For the British opinion of the Indian audience see also Aruna Vasudev, *Liberty and Licence in the Indian Cinema* (Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1978), pp. 20–2.
51 IOR, L/P&J/6/1747, 1922–1930. See 'Films in the east', *The Times* (23 Aug. 1923), p. 582.

52 IOR, L/P&J/6/1995, 1930–1938, p. 621.
53 *Ibid.* The film in question was *The Triumph of the Scarlet Pimpernel.* This film was certified after excision of scenes dealing with violence and 'ruthlessness of mob rule'.
54 For the conventional viewpoints addressing the nature of spectators of the commercial films in India and its critique see Vasudevan, Addressing the spectator', pp. 305–24, and 'Shifting codes, dissolving identities'.
55 IOR, L/P&J/7/831, 1935, Punjab government to the home secretary, 10 Jan. 1944.
56 IOR, L/P&J/8/127, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. VII, Feb. 1936–Jul. 1938, government of India to the home secretary, public and judicial department letter no. 5/2/3/36-Poll., 10 Mar. 1936.
57 Vasudev, *Liberty and Licence*, pp. 17–18.
58 ICC Report, pp. 2–9.
59 British Film Institute, London. See paper read by Tyrrell at the summer conference of the cinematograph exhibitors association of Great Britain and Ireland on 23 Jun. 1937.
60 IOR, L/P&J/6/1747, 1922–1930.
61 *Ibid.*
62 *Ibid.* See Constance Bromley, 'Censorship and propaganda: influence of foreign films', *The Times Cinema Supplement* (21 Feb. 1922).
63 IOR, L/P&J/6/1747, 1922–1930.
64 *Ibid.*, R. T. Peel to the under-secretary of state for India, 7–12 Mar. 1937.
65 MSA, Home-Poll, F. no. 274, 1933–1934, p. 31.
66 IOR, L/P&J/8/126, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. I, Oct. 1935–Aug. 1940. See handwritten remark on letter no. P. 1850/128/150, foreign office to P&J department, dated 12 Jun. 1936.
67 *Ibid.* See handwritten comment on a note to the secretary of state, dated 19 Aug. 1939.
68 *Ibid.* See minute paper of the P&J department, dated 16 Aug. 1939.
69 IOR, L/P&J/7/831, 1935. See P&J department to G. E. Shepherd, 22 May 1935.
70 *Ibid.*, R.T. Peel to J. Brooke-Wilkinson, secretary of the BBFC, 6 Jun. 1935. See also telegram from government of India to secretary of state for India, dated 1 Jun. 1935.
71 *Ibid.*, Aftab-ud-Din, Imam, the Shah Jahan mosque, Surrey, England, 7 May 1935.
72 *Ibid.* See extracts from the Central Legislative Assembly debates of Sep. 1935 and the House of Commons debates of 29 Apr. 1935.

73 *Ibid.* John Simon, under-secretary of state for foreign affairs to under-secretary of state for India , 25 Apr. 1935.
74 IOR, L/P&J/8/127, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. VIII, Apr. 1937. See note dated 9 Mar. 1937.
75 *Ibid.* See government of India home department to R. T. Peel, secretary of the P&J department, confidential DO no. 1, 2/3/63-poll, 18 Feb. 1937.
76 *Ibid.* See confidential paper of the military secretary, dated 17 Feb. 1936.
77 *Ibid.* See note dated 9 Mar. 1937.
78 IOR, L/P&J/8/129, Coll. no. 105-B, Feb. 1936–Jul. 1939.
79 ICC Report, p. 24.
80 IOR, L/P&J/6/1747, 1922–1930. See Bromley, 'Censorship and propaganda', *The Times Cinema Supplement* (21 Feb. 1922).
81 IOR, L/P&J/6/1747, 1922–1930.
82 Personal interview conducted in May 1992 with N. V. K. Murthy, former director of the Film and Television Institute of India at Pune. Murthy remembers several such occasions in the film theatres. A counter demand was being made at this time that the Indian nationalist song '*Vande Mataram*' should be played at the end of Indian talkies. See *Hindu* (10 Dec. 1937), p. 5.
83 Murthy interview. See also IOR, L/P&J/8/129, Coll. no. 105-B, Feb. 1936–Jul. 1939.
84 IOR, L/P&J/8/131, Coll. no. 105-D. See letter no. F.49/8/39, bureau of information, home department, Simla, to A. M. Joyce, India Office, London, 16 Jun. 1939.
85 IOR, L/P&J/8/130, Coll. no. 105-B, Oct. 1937–Jul. 1938.
86 IOR, L/P&J/8/126, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. I, Oct. 1935–May 1940.
87 *Ibid.*, J. W. Chidell to R. W. A. Leeper, foreign office, London, 16 Aug. 1939.
88 *Ibid.*
89 *Ibid.* See minute paper of P&J department, dated 16 Mar. 1936.
90 IOR, L/P&J/6/1747, 1922–1930. See letter dated 11 Sep. 1923.
91 IOR, L/P&J/8/128, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. XIII, Apr. 1936–1939.
92 John Fiske has adopted the term 'cultural capital', borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu's work, and added to it the notion of cultural power in the hands of cultural categories other than the dominant bourgeoisie. In the colonial context, these other 'cultural categories' may be defined as the colonised. See his 'Moments of television', pp. 56–78.
93 For details see Rosaleen Smyth, 'Britain's African colonies and British propaganda during the Second World War', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14:1 (Oct. 1985), pp. 65–82.

94 IOR, L/P&J/8/127, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. VII, Feb. 1936–Jul. 1938.
95 *Ibid.*
96 See *Bioscope* (15 Aug. 1912), p. 461, *Bioscope* (29 Aug. 1912), pp. 664–65, and *Kinetogram* (2 Sep. 1912), p. 8.
97 *Bioscope* (29 Aug. 1912), pp. 664–65.
98 *Kinetogram* (2 Sep. 1912), p. 8.
99 Other proposals on making Mutiny films were also rejected at the scenario-vetting stage in 1936. One such scenario was that of *The Prime of Empire* proposed by Paramount Film Service Ltd.
100 IOR, L/P&J/8/127, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. VII, 1939. See letter from P&J department to the secretary of state for India, 7 Apr. 1936, and a handwritten note of the secretary of state, dated 6 Apr. 1936, which stated: 'It may start with Lucknow, Cawnpore will follow. We ought to do all we can to stop it'.
101 *Ibid.* Private letter from Zetland to Linlithgow, dated 6 Dec. 1938.
102 IOR, L/P&J/8/128, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. XIII, Apr. 1936–1939, 1939, Lothian to Zetland, 5 Dec. 1938.
103 *Ibid.* See note by A. Dibdin dated 5 Dec. 1938.
104 *Ibid.* See *West Africa* (10 Dec. 1938).
105 *Ibid.* For details of objections from different segments of British society and the critical comments of the press see P&J department papers dated Dec. 1938; *Daily Herald* (2 Dec. 1938); *Daily Telegraph* and *Morning Post* (3, 6 & 19 Dec. 1938); *New Chronicle* (6 Dec. 1938); *Daily Despatch* (7 Dec. 1938); *Daily Film Reuter* (7 Dec. 1938); *Edinburgh Evening News* (9 Dec. 1938); and *Bystander* (14 Dec. 1938).
106 Cited in *The Cine-Technician*, 4:19 (1939), p. 144.
107 IOR, L/P&J/8/126, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. I, Oct. 1935–May 1940. See also *House of Commons Debates*, 342:22 (7 Dec. 1938).
108 For details of the Chatfield Report see Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War* (London, German Historical Institute, 1981), pp. 126–28.
109 IOR, L/P&J/8/128, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. XIII, Apr. 1936–1939.
110 IOR, L/P&J/8/126, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. I, Oct. 1935–May 1940. See letter of John Weiner dated 20 Apr. 1939.
111 *Ibid.* Zetland to Beauchamp, 18 May 1939. The words in the parenthesis existed in the first draft but were subsequently dropped in the final draft perhaps because they were too revealing of the official intent.
112 *Ibid.*, government of India, home department, to P&J department India Office, London, no. 20/40/39-Poll, 2 Jun. 1939.
113 The 1928 guidelines maintained that films should not adversely

reflect on the British army or the white race as that might imperil the British prestige, which was vital to the maintenance of British rule; films should not offend foreign contenders; film-makers should consider the political expediency of the film and whether it was likely to inflame the indigenous population; and, finally, films should not deal with miscegenation. In subjects dealing with India, it was further laid down that films should not portray British officers in an odious light, neither should they suggest disloyalty of native states or in any way undermine British prestige in the empire. Scenes of 'white men in a state of degradation amidst native surroundings', or 'equivocal situations between white girls and men of other races', or British possessions represented as 'lawless sinks of iniquity', or 'conflict between armed forces of a state and the populace', were especially mentioned in the instructions as projections which were to be avoided. See BBFC, annual report, 1928, p. 5.

114 IOR, L/P&J/8/126, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. I, Oct. 1935–May 1940. See foreign office circular memorandum dated 31 Jul. 1936. Significantly, these instructions had been prepared in Jul. 1936 itself on the basis of government of India recommendations but had neither been implemented nor heeded seriously.

115 *Ibid.* J. W. P. Chidwell, P&J department, to R. W. A. Leeper, foreign office, London, 10 May 1939.

116 *Film India* (Aug. 1939), p. 5.

117 *Hindu* (8 Sep. 1939), p. 3.

118 IOR, L/I/1/691, 1940–1942, information department, F. no. 462/14E, 1942. See note of Burton Leach, empire division, to Hodson, 5 Sep. 1940.

119 Robert Stam and Louise Spence, 'Colonialism, racism and representation: an introduction', in Bill Nicholas (ed.), *Movies and Methods*, vol. II (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1985), pp. 632–49; Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentricism*, pp. 45–83; Ella Shohat, 'Gender and culture of empire: towards a feminist ethnography of the cinema', in Hamid Naficy and Teshome H. Gabriel (eds), *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged* (Langhorn, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), pp. 45–84.

120 Shohat, 'Gender and culture of empire', p. 46.

121 *Ibid.*

122 For details see Jeffrey Richards, 'Boys own empire: feature films and imperialism in the 1930s', in Mackenzie (ed.) *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, pp. 140–64.

123 Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentricism*, pp. 114–21

124 *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4.

125 *Ibid.*, p. 151.
126 See reprint of her article in *Daily Telegraph* (8 Apr. 1987), p. 10.
127 For details of early films centring around India, see Dorothy B. Jones, 'The portrayal of China and India on the American screen, 1896–1955' (Massachusetts, Center for International Studies dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1955), pp. 52–5.
128 This film concerned a 'holy war' planned by tribesmen living in the Afghanistan frontier under the leadership of a woman called Yasmini, who was regarded by them as a goddess. Her plan was to overcome the British while Britain was preoccupied on the continent during World War I, and with her tribesmen to sweep over and conquer all India. The hero aided by 'loyal Indian subjects' uncovers the plot and prevents the uprising.
129 Clive Coultass, 'British feature films and the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19:1 (Jan. 1984), pp. 7–22. See also the introduction to Nicholas Pronay and D. W. Spring (eds), *Propaganda, Politics and Films, 1918–45* (London, Macmillan, 1982).
130 IOR, L/P&J/8/127, Coll. no. 105-A, pt. IV, Aug. 1935–Apr. 1936. See memorandum from the British consulate, Los Angeles, California, 22 Nov. 1935.
131 Peter Stead, 'The people and the picture: the British working class and film in the 1930s', in Pronay and Spring (eds), *Propaganda, Politics and Films*, p. 77.
132 These were *The Miracle Woman* (1931), which was considered to offend religious susceptibilities of certain viewers, and *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), which dealt with miscegenation. Films that dealt with the British empire therefore must have seemed a safe box-office gamble. Frank Capra cited in Jeffrey Richards, 'Imperial images: the British empire and monarchy on films', *Cultures*, 2:1 (1974), pp. 79–114.
133 Philip Woods, 'Film propaganda in India, 1914–1923', *Historical Journal of Films, Radio and Television*, 15:4 (1995), pp. 543–53.
134 In 1930, the Imperial Conference had accepted the need for offering positive propaganda, especially through feature films, for the projection of the British empire. See Richards, *Dream Palace*, pp. 134–52. Also see Jeffery Richards and Anthony Aldgate, *Best of British Cinema and Society, 1930–1970* (London, Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 22–3.
135 See Nicholas Pronay and Jeremy Croft, 'British film censorship and propaganda policy during the Second World War', in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1983), pp. 144–64.

136 IOR, L/P&J/8/128, Coll. no. 105-A. pt. XIII, Apr. 1936–1939. See J. D. Coleridge to the secretary of state for India, 15 Apr. 1936.
137 *Ibid.* See minute paper of A. Dibdin dated 5 Dec. 1938.
138 *Ibid.*, J. D. Coleridge to the secretary of state for India, 15 Apr. 1936.
139 *Picture Goer* (6 Feb. 1936).
140 *Film India* (Jul. 1939), p. 32, and *Hindu* (8 Sep. 1939), p. 3.
141 IOR, L/I/1/691, 1940–1942, F. no. 462/14E, 1942. See Alexander Shaw, 'India', *The Cine-Technician* (Feb.–Mar. 1942), pp. 19–21.
142 At the outbreak of World War II, the ministry of information was formally established to pursue this line of propaganda regarding the colonies in the print, broadcasting and visual media.
143 IOR, L/I/1/691, 1940–1942, F. no. 462/14E. See recommendations dated 27 Sep. 1942.
144 *Ibid.* See report of the film sub-committee, consisting of H. R. Gough and A. Walgough, dated 27 Mar. 1942.
145 *Ibid.*, Burton Leach, empire division, to Hodson, information department, 5 Sep. 1940.