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# THE MODERN GIRL IN INDIA IN THE INTERWAR YEARS: INTERRACIAL INTIMACIES, INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION, AND HISTORICAL ECLIPSING

PRITI RAMAMURTHY

Cheeky, cosmopolitan, and seductive, the Indian Modern Girl made her flamboyant and very public appearance as the “worldly and wicked” *sitara*, or starlet, of Indian silent cinema; as an icon of commodity culture; and as the “English-educated” college girl (*kallege ladki*) in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>1</sup> The Indian Modern Girl, as a social identity and a wildly popular icon in multiple media, spurred intense political and economic debate. Nationalist leaders, among them Gandhi, decried her, and American and British companies found themselves in competition with each other and, increasingly, with Indian companies, for her huge cinema audiences and for the growing market to meet women’s modern consumer desires through commodities such as soaps and “snows” (face-whitening creams), lipsticks, and see-through saris. Yet there is, to my knowledge, no scholarly study of the Modern Girl in India. In this essay, with a spotlight on the *sitara*, or cinema star, I argue that the Indian Modern Girl has been eclipsed because she is not easily recoverable as an anticolonial project. If feminist scholars do not pay attention to the Indian Modern Girl, especially to her interracial origins, her fluid minority religious affiliations, and the international economic contestations she indexed, we too risk reifying nationalist history and historiography and forgetting the ways in which gendered modernity has long been a transnational project that has linked the intimate and the global in ways that are contradictory and compelling.

This essay has two purposes: it is an effort at historical recovery that asks when the Indian Modern Girl appeared, who she was, how she was coded and coded herself, and when and why she was displaced. In answering these questions, my focus is on why the Indian Modern Girl is a particularly appropriate site to think about interracial intimacy in the

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Indian context, a “charged space” where not just colonial but also international and nationalist categories of inclusion and exclusion were articulated and fortified but also contested and disordered.<sup>2</sup> My second purpose is historiographical. The Modern Girl cinema star was recoded and faded after the 1930s in the face of a more strident anticolonial cultural nationalism and the contradictory imperatives of economic competition, as I will demonstrate, but contemporary popular histories of Indian film continue to construct her dislodgment as a “natural” consequence of her mixed-raciality. In so doing, contemporary film historiography eclipses the complex identity of the Modern Girl and skews it toward a nationalist and linear rendering of history. In the conclusion, I suggest why Indian feminist historiography, which has all but ignored her, is politically enriched by engaging with the Modern Girl of the 1920s and 1930s.

#### A NOTE ON THE ARCHIVE

The first cinema show was held in Bombay in 1896, a few months after its debut in Paris, to packed houses, including special sections for “ladies in purdah.” Shortly thereafter Indian businessmen imported films and set up cinema “tents” in the major cities and sent “touring cinemas” in small towns and villages. The film industry in India started in 1912 and grew rapidly in the 1920s. More than thirteen hundred silent films were produced from 1912 to 1931, when the first talkie was released. During the 1930s, many of the most popular silent movies were remade as talkies. Since the expense of converting cinema houses to sound projection was very high, silent movies were shown alongside talkies throughout the 1930s. Of these early films, unfortunately, only a handful survive. The bulk of them were “photographed and printed on highly combustible nitrate-based stock and has [*sic*] either gone up in flames in warehouse fires or crumbled to dust in rusty old cans in forgotten lofts” (*Looking Back*, 26). Notwithstanding their physical loss, it is the lack of cultural memory that is my concern.

The Indian Modern Girl sitara was star of the silent movies and early talkies in the 1920s and 1930s. She was hugely popular (“*lokpriya*”) in terms of being preferred viewing by large numbers of people and popular in terms of her wide class appeal. My research on *sitaras* is on actresses who worked for the major film studios located in Bombay, Poona, and Calcutta in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>4</sup> (After the introduction of sound, these studios made films in Hindustani, a syncretic mixture of

Hindi and Urdu, the language that the largest numbers of people understood, which became the lingua franca of “national” Indian film, in a country with sixteen major languages.)<sup>4</sup> The research is based on photographs and secondary materials from the National Film Archive of India, Pune, and from *sitara* biographies and movie story lines pieced together by film historians (Bhaumik 2001; *ICC Report*; *Looking Back*; Bandopadhyay 1993; Manto 1998; Garga 1996; *Flashback*; Raheja and Kothari 2003; Mohan 1996; Tamrakar 1990; Majumdar 2001; Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1994). I also collected journalistic accounts and social commentaries of the time.

For this essay, I have relied on primary materials from two of the most widely circulated English newspapers, the *Statesman* and the *Times of India*, and, in particular, a magazine, the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, for the period 1920–42.<sup>5</sup> Although these papers and magazines were mainly read by British and Indian English-educated elites they contain a number of largely visual commodity and film advertisements and photographs. They were probably viewed by those who were not fluent in English, and they were certainly read aloud to non-English speakers.<sup>6</sup> The *Illustrated Weekly* regularly printed commentaries by and on Indian cinema stars, as well as snippets on Hollywood, European, and other foreign stars. It also featured columns that offered fashion, sports, and beauty tips and ran cinema, beauty, and photography contests. In fact, the *Illustrated Weekly* was praised for supporting “the cause of the Indian film industry” when “very few other journals of standing [had] given any such support” (“Indian Film Work”).

### SITARA: THE INDIAN CINEMA MODERN GIRL

Long before Bollywood, there was a vibrant culture of going to the cinema in India. British and Hollywood films were shown alongside Indian films, though there was a marked preference for Indian films by Indian audiences. The Indian Cinematographic Committee (ICC) report of 1928, based on a survey and hundreds of interviews with film directors, distributors, audiences, actors and actresses, and bureaucrats, confirms, “As regards the relative popularity of Indian and Western films, there is no doubt that the great majority of the Indian audiences prefer Indian films” (*ICC Report*, 22). Working classes in the metropolises and Indian and European elites all viewed films in the cinema halls that proliferated from colonial city centers to the suburbs and to the neighborhoods where

industrial workers lived. Indian middle-class women, formally in domestic seclusion, filled the *zenana*, or women-only sections, of the growing number of movie halls. Films were also shown by traveling cinemas that toured provincial towns and regularly set up shop in village fairs. Cinema halls were thus spaces that were regularly shared across class, race, gender, and religious divides. How movies were experienced and received may, of course, have been quite different for those “above” and those “below.” Anxieties about this open-endedness of cinema consumption was expressed by arguing for censorship, as we will see. By the mid-1920s, in response to the newly created identity of “cinema fan,” film stars were photographed, films were advertised and discussed in newspapers and in special film magazines, contests were held to judge the most popular film star, and signed studio photos and postcards circulated. The stars themselves were widely gossiped about. They responded in signed and “anonymous” articles and letters to magazines and newspapers.<sup>7</sup>

Called *sitara* (starlet), *swapno ki rani* (dream girl/queen), and *romance ki rani* (romance queen) Modern Girl screen personalities were the first *bax affice* (box office) hits (Tamrakar 1990, 11, 19). Of them, and there were



Fig. 1. Sulochana. Credit: Manmohan Chaddha, *Hindi Sinema ka Itihaas*, 1913–1988, New Delhi: Sachin Prakashan.

many, Sulochana (Fig. 1), was representative of a quintessential Modern Girl: she was sexy and provocative; long limbed, or made to look so; she wore Western-style clothing and hats; she sported bobbed hair, lipstick, plucked eyebrows, mascara, and painted nails; and she was racially ambiguous and religiously hybrid.

Commenting on Sulochana, who was adulated as the Queen of the Screen and the Star of the Stars, film historian B. D. Garga writes, “Her position and popularity were unrivalled by any other actress of her time. She was showered with gifts and souvenirs and besieged with frantic pleas

ranging from autographs to matrimony. Her name shone in the brightest of theater lights on theater fronts and the boldest types in newspaper advertisements” (Garga 1996, 42). According to the film magazines of the time, Sulochana earned five thousand rupees a month, more than the British colonial governor of Bombay, and at least three times the salary of her male screen partner, Dinshaw Billimoria (*Filmiland*, various issues in 1931 qtd. in Bandopadyay 1993, 9). Adoring fans lined the streets for hours to get a glimpse of her as she whizzed by in her white Bentley (and later a 1935 Chevrolet). Her life story was made into a script, and one of the movies she acted in was the eponymous *Sulochana*. She was the Indian screen’s first “sex symbol . . . the girl all men would want to love” (Garga 1996, 42). A contemporary claims that if he “were to ask a dozen men what Sulochana suggests to them they would all answer ‘a woman.’” He goes on to extol her as the “Ideal of Womanhood . . . Beauty combined with youth and flavored with Intelligence,” comparable to the Venus de Milo, “a universal Ideal of womanhood . . . recognizable by every member of a European, American, or Indian nation” (Fernandes 1931, 10–11).

Sulochana’s meteoric rise to stardom (one of her other monikers was “Sulochana the Supreme” [*Looking Back*]) was quite remarkable for a woman who barely six years before was an unknown. Sulochana was the nom de plume of Ruby Meyers (1907–83). She is identified in some contemporary film histories as “Anglo-Indian” or “Eurasian,” of mixed-race Indian and European (usually, of British descent), and in others as Jewish.<sup>8</sup> The story goes that she was working as a “convent-educated” (that is, English-speaking) telephone operator when a director spotted her and asked her to act in his film. Film acting was not a “respectable” profession at the time, especially for women from “well-to-do,” “good” families, so Sulochana turned him down several times. After he pursued her relentlessly, she gave in, and her first movie, *Birbal* (1925), was a hit. *Birbal* was a “historical,” a popular silent film genre, which, like the “mythological,” another popular genre, reworked the past to create a historical self-consciousness that was distinctively “Indian.” Sulochana acted in several films within the historical and mythological genres, but her most memorable “super hits” were movies with “worldly and wicked themes,” movies I propose to identify as Modern Girl movies (Garga 1996, 46). Describing the difference from mythologicals a commentator in the *Times of India* newspaper wrote, “So ancient heroes and serene

goddesses are for the future to be replaced by vamps and bucket-shop men, and instead of battle and sudden death there will be beauty and badinage. It is a thoroughly reasonable experiment since battles are tedious things, and if Bombay demands vamps and golden haired home-breakers as a relaxation, it may as well have some homegrown ones" (February 8, 1926).

In what I am calling Modern Girl movies, a subsection of the genre that Indian film historians have called "socials," the complexities of modernity facing middle-class households were explored, and women were the protagonists.<sup>10</sup> They were cast in new urban professions, those of cinema star, telephone operator, typist, teacher, and doctor, and one even is the president of a textile mill! They questioned and transgressed gender boundaries. Many featured rebellious, even libidinous, wives, who explored new relationships with in-laws and husbands, demanding that they share in housework, for example. Women exercised individual autonomy and the freedom to choose partners, thereby rejecting the authority of older brothers, uncles, and fathers. In the process, they reinvented what it meant to be sister, daughter, wife, and daughter-in-law. "Love" marriages, romance, and overt female sexuality were all celebrated, and so was "indiscriminate" kissing. Testifying before the Indian Cinematographic Committee, in 1928, on the need for censorship, Pheroza Shah S. Marban, editor of the Gujarati newspaper *Jam-e-Jamshed*, opined:

Q: With regard to kissing, do Indians not kiss?

A: Not in public anyway.

Q: Most of the scenes shown on the screen are scenes from private lives. If you are going to debar that and love scenes from Indian pictures, are you not taking away the pith of the picture?

A: I do not say take away the love scenes. . . . Kissing may be here and there, but not indiscriminate kissing. You have got the long kiss, the prolonged kiss, the hot kiss, the soft kiss, all sorts of kisses. (*ICC Report*, qtd. in *Looking Back*, 41)

This is worth mentioning because for the fifty years following Modern Girl movies, from the 1940s till the late 1990s, kissing was banned from Indian cinema.

Not only was kissing commonplace, some Modern Girl films feature vamps and prostitutes who were not characterizable as antiheroines. In

others, the fluidity of gender was explored, with women masquerading in multiple roles, some of which were traditionally male.<sup>11</sup> Women took advantage of modern liberal institutions—educational, juridical, and administrative—to explore the world outside their homes and to demand social justice. College girls (*kallege ladki*), were at the center of several movies, usually enmeshed in complicated love triangles.<sup>12</sup> Several were about women who are movie stars, telephone operators, and beauty queens.<sup>13</sup> In short, these screen personalities were convincingly modern: they lived in a metropolitan world; were members of a cosmopolitan set; and partook in the institutions of modern life, whether college, city, or cinema. So much so that often the radical disruption of women breaking gender codes and transgressing conventional social norms was contained, within the narrative of the films, by Modern Girl heroines’ meeting a violent end or being otherwise chagrined.<sup>14</sup>

As an icon and a social persona, the Modern Girl of Indian cinema was noticeably different from the “traditional” Indian woman, the sign of a procreative middle-class femininity within the terms of heterosexual



Fig. 2. Women Picketing Foreign Cloth Shops. Credit: *Illustrated Weekly of India*, May 11, 1930, 31.



Fig. 3. Seeta Devi with Pola Negri in Paris. Credit: "Stars from East and West" *Illustrated Weekly of India*, July 20, 1930, 33.

marriage.<sup>15</sup> Modern Girls were never photographed with children, for example. The Modern Girl was also distinguishable, with her flagrant eroticism and sensuality, from the archetypal New Woman of the anticolonial movement, who was iconized as the spiritual, self-sacrificing bearer of a higher capacity to withstand pain, especially that of British violence. As agent, not trope of woman-as-nation, the New Woman of nationalist feminism expressed her agency on the streets, protesting foreign consumption, especially of cloth and foreign fashion, not embracing it (Fig. 2).<sup>16</sup>

As a global modern, the body of the Modern Girl of Indian cinema was a dense node of transcultural exchange (See Modern Girl Around the World



Fig. 4. Patience Cooper Lounging. Credit: National Film Archive of India.

Research Group 2005, 245–94). It was through her body—especially its narrative construction and visual display—that she trafficked and moved within networks of global cultural consumption. Her predication in English through general terms such as *romance ki rani* and *Kallege ladki* spoke to this trafficking. So did the affixing of English prefixes to convey the differential preciousness of a “Glorious” Gohar, a “Sultry” Sultana, a “Loveable” Shahzadi, and a “Talkie Queen” Zubeida. Many of the photographs of Modern Girl cinema stars in the *Illustrated Weekly* were of them posing in London and Paris, and other cosmopolitan cities in Europe, as well as in the United States, China, and Japan (Fig. 3). In a news report that covered Seeta Devi’s trip to Europe in 1929, for example, she was identified as “the brightest star in the Indian cinema world” with “millions” of followers in England, Germany, Poland, and Austria (“Indian Film Work As a Career,” 1929). Patience Cooper, another well-known star, even won a beauty contest in England (“Some Stars in Their Eastern Courses”).

Visually, the Indian Modern Girl displayed the familiar and global body aesthetics of Modern Girls the world over. In one image, Patience Cooper was represented with bobbed hair, kiss curl, plucked eyebrows, bold lipstick, huge false eyelashes, and a slouchy, languid body posture (Fig. 4). If she was not slouching on a couch, she was posed “preening” with her hand raised in the angular Z reminiscent of depilatory cream ads (Fig. 5).<sup>17</sup> Or she stared unabashedly at the viewer with a sexy come-hither look. Often, the Modern Girl was depicted romancing in intimate heterosexual love scenes (Fig. 6), with arms locked in a tight embrace, gazing deeply into the hero’s eyes, her lips close to his. In other images,



Fig. 5. Patience Cooper in Depilatory Cream Z-pose. Credit: Looking Back, 1896–1960, New Delhi: Directorate of Film Festivals, 1981, 21.

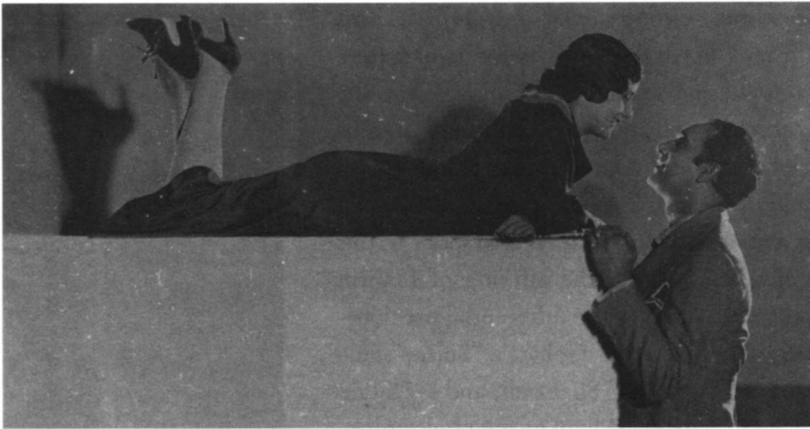


Fig. 6. Sulochana Romancing with Dinshaw Billimoria in *Bambai ki Billie* (Wildcat of Bombay) (1936). Credit: National Film Archive of India.

she displayed an androgynous look, as in a photograph of Sulochana in a masculine suit, set in front of that international symbol of modernity, a motor car (Fig.7).

Popular contemporary Indian film histories read these narrative and visual presentations as Modern Girl cinema stars mimicking Hollywood “in mannerisms and appearance” (*Looking Back*, 21). According to *Looking Back*, “The early actresses . . . modelled themselves after the ruling

Hollywood dieties of the day” (62).

B. D. Garga concurs: “The imitation of Hollywood permeated most aspects of Indian film production the star myth included. If in Hollywood, ‘America’s sweetheart,’ Mary Pickford[,] initiated the star era, in India, it began with the beautiful Sulochana, a Jewess of European extraction whose real name was Ruby Myers. With her mercurial charm she could slip under any skin at will, be it that of Theda Bara, Lillian Gish or Pola Negri” (1996, 55).



Fig. 7. Sulochana in *Indira MA* (1934) Credit: *Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perceptions from the Thirties*, Jamshedpur: Celluloid Chapter, 1993, ii.

However, the “Hollywood look” the Indian Modern Girl was ostensibly imitating was itself borrowing from all over the globe as aesthetic styles, designers, and commodities crisscrossed the world appropriating and reconfiguring elements from all over.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in the Indian context, this “Westernized” look existed side-by-side with representations that were unequivocally hybrid. In one studio shot of Sulochana (Fig. 8), the plucked eyebrows, painted lips and nails, and dangling earrings remained, but now she wore a *bindi* (the dot on the forehead that signifies women as Hindu) and pearl bangles, and her hair was long, braided, and arranged around her head. Or, in a studio shot of “Glorious” Gohar (Fig. 9), her hair, large eyes, and mascara-laden eyelashes referenced Clara Bow, the famous American movie star widely acknowledged as the “It” girl, but the *bindi*, sari, and pearls were from an aesthetically Indian cultural palette. Similarly, in a studio shot of Jahanara Kajjan (Fig. 10), whose “spectacular beauty was her wealth,” Kajjan wore makeup and mascara, sported finely shaped lips, and her hair was bobbed; but even though she wore no *bindi* (her name reveals she was Muslim), her nose ring and sari signified her aesthetic and intimate hybridity (Tamrakar 1990, 16). Not easily characterizable as “pure” Hollywood or “pure” Indian, she inhabited the interstices and thereby brings into relief the very fragility of those boundaries.

The Indian Modern Girl was particularly innovative, and transgressive, in the creativity she brought to sari and sari blouse wear. At a time when



Fig. 8. Sulochana Studio Shot. Credit: National Archive of India.



Fig. 9. Gohar Studio Shot. Credit: National Film Archive of India.



Fig. 10. Jahanara Kajjan Studio Shot. Credit: National Film Archive of India.

most “traditional” middle-class urban women wore saris that reflected regional specificity, the Modern Girl was capacious; in fashioning herself she absorbed, mingled, and transformed several styles—modern and “traditional,” Western, East Asian, and Indian, and cut across religious signifiers as well. Saris were draped, often Parsee style (over the right shoulder, not the left) and clipped into place with fancy jeweled brooches. Sari blouses were sleeveless, “cut-outs,” or, on occasion, had frills and flounces—sometimes (as worn in *The President* by the actress playing the role of the young, unmarried, tough cotton mill owner) they even had shirt collars! The material of the saris was also trendy and imported—see-through georgette, crepe de chine, silk voile, and chiffon, worn with sari blouses trimmed in lace, with sequins or embroidery. Often, the embroidery was reminiscent of chinoiserie. Thus, the Indian Modern Girl coded herself as a global modern through her intimate and hybrid body fashioning, her body language and sartorial zest.

By the late 1930s, however, the Modern Girl icon and film story lines were transformed. Such Modern Girl cinema stars as Patience Cooper, Seeta Devi, and even Sulochana faded from popular cinema culture. Patience Cooper acted in sixty-six films between 1920 and 1937 but just two more after that; Seeta Devi made just fifteen films, all between 1922 and 1932; Sulochana acted in fifty-two films between 1925 and 1937, but just seventeen more in the following nearly forty years (based on filmographies in Rajyadhyaksha and Willemen 1994). It is possible that they were less in demand as they aged; however, they were replaced not by look-alikes but by the new Nationalist Woman.

While what I am characterizing as Modern Girl stories formed a subset of early movie story lines in the 1920s and 1930s, from the mid-1930s on there was less room for such experimentation with gender roles. The actress Pramila recounts: “The story of *Mother India* was part of an effort to create a true Indian woman as against a modern westernized one. [In it I] played the role of the bold, westernized, Indian girl educated abroad who finally realises the greatness of being a *Bharat nari* [Indian respectable woman]” (Shahani 1998, 10).<sup>19</sup>

Increasingly story lines were more didactic and “Indianized,” with Indianness signified by woman as a good wife, now in the modern role of companion within the confines of heterosexual, middle-class marriage. Typically, a heroine’s desire for modernity was contained by the need to serve her modern husband better, not to assert individual choice or

autonomy. The antiheroine was more narrowly defined as Westernized and “bad” typically, the vamp. As Reena Mohan points out, this “gradually institutionalised the hierarchies between mother, wife and vamp” (Mohan 1996, 22). Predictably, Western dress, in particular, was symbolically loaded as alien and colonial. The borrowing from global cultural circuits in how women’s bodies were narrated and visualized decreased (though in terms of music and dance this continued).

In popular Indian film histories, three reasons are usually put forth to explain this transition. The first is that technology played a role in the displacement of the early silent film stars: fairer skin was no longer important with the introduction of superior lighting, which replaced the earlier eye-level lighting, which reflected off whiter skin more effectively, and better cameras.<sup>20</sup> A second explanation is that with the coming of sound, being able to talk in a native language and to sing became critical, so those silent era actresses, who couldn’t talk Hindustani, or sing, didn’t transition. And the third reason proffered is that “superior” actresses (Raheja and Kothari 2003, 20), “educated,” Hindu girls from “respectable families” such as Devika Rani, Durga Khote, and Shantha Hublikar, all “Brahmin [the highest caste], no less,” entered the profession (*Looking Back*, 62).

All three narratives are predicated on the assumption that many early actresses were Anglo-Indian.<sup>21</sup> As one film history puts it, “[M]ost of the stars of the Silent Era had been ‘Anglo-Indians’ or ‘Eurasians’ as Europe called them. The community had sent an endless stream of pretty girls into the industry. The introduction of sound literally changed the complexion of Indian screen personalities.”<sup>23</sup> These “natural” explanations—that it was the Anglo-Indian *sitara*’s lighter skin losing advantage with technological change, that they did not speak the native tongue, and that they were less trained and less “respectable” than later film stars—index a politics of interracial intimacy, one that had a longer history. In what follows, I argue that racial difference was both the condition for Anglo-Indian women to enter a “disreputable profession” and their embodied liminality the condition for reworking it. I then trace the contradictory articulation of British colonial economic interests, Hollywood commercial strategies and cultural influences, and emergent elite Indian nationalist concerns with markets and morality, all of which traded in ideas of race, gender, and sexuality in the late 1920s. And last, I suggest that by 1940, as the imagination of something “Indian” as nation

was achieved, in part, by marking and solidifying the border of who could now represent it, the Anglo-Indian Modern Girl became a code for the expression of un-Indianness.

### INTERRACIAL INTIMACIES

Modern Girls in reel life and real, Sulochana (Ruby Myers), Seeta Devi (Renee Smith), Sabita Devi (Iris Gasper), Madhuri (Beryl Cleason), Patience Cooper, Pramila (Esther Victoria Abraham), Ermeline, Lina Valentina, Dorothy Kingdom, Bibbo, Gulab, Jilloo, Miss Rose, Miss Moti, Miss Stewart, Miss Chanda, Miss Kaiser, Miss Wood, and Miss Joyce were some of the “homegrown” *sitaras* whose names are mentioned in the literature on early Indian cinema. They were, or are thought to be, “Eurasian” or “Anglo-Indian,” terms that refer to their racially mixed European and Indian descent.

*Anglo-Indian* was a “moving category” of mixedness in colonial regimes of governance (Stoler 1995, par. 17). Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century it was used to designate all British persons in India. The term *Eurasian*, however, was used to designate those born of male British or Armenian, Dutch, French, Flemish, Portuguese, Prussian, Spanish, or Italian and female Indian unions or descended from them.<sup>22</sup> It was only in the 1911 census of India that the term *Anglo-Indian* was used to designate “a domiciled community of mixed descent, who were formerly known as Eurasian, country-born or half-caste” (Blunt 2005, 1). The 1935 Government of India Act defined an Anglo-Indian as a person whose “father or any other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent” and had been born in India.<sup>23</sup> As Alison Blunt observes, “Although written out of this definition, the maternal line of descent for Anglo-Indians usually included an Indian woman, often as far back as the eighteenth century” (3).

In the early years of the East India Company, from the mid-seventeenth century on, British men, like their Dutch and Portuguese counterparts, were encouraged to marry Indian women. According to one estimate, 90 percent of British men were married to Indian or Anglo-Indian women in the mid-eighteenth century. After the Haitian revolution of 1791, however, British rulers, fearing a similar uprising in India, forbade intermarriage. By the mid-nineteenth century, according to some historians, with the rescinding of prohibitions on the travel of British women to India, “intermarriage had virtually ceased” (9). Henceforth, most

Anglo-Indians tended to marry within the community.

Socially acceptable mixed-race unions, in all likelihood, “virtually ceased,” but according to other historians, throughout the nineteenth century and up until World War I, the sexual needs of British Tommies, lower-class foot soldiers (or ordinary enlisted men), were provided for by the colonial government in specially designated *lal bazars* (or red-light areas) (Ballhatchet 1980; Hawes 1996). Indian women who took up relations with them were low-caste or impoverished (or both) young widows, destitutes, rural migrants escaping famine, and women from hereditary prostitute communities. They were examined and medicated by the colonial government to prevent the spread of venereal diseases. Children were probably born of these sexual unions, which were highly transgressive of elite colonial and local societal norms of the period, and of class and caste hierarchies.

These divergent histories—one of a long history of mixed-race descent and marriage within the Anglo-Indian community and the other of more recent illegitimate cross-race unions—are reflected in the divisions within the community by class.<sup>24</sup> Anglo-Indian community leaders such as Frank Anthony and geographers such as Alison Blunt attempt to dispel the presumption of Anglo-Indian illegitimacy. Blunt does so by challenging the stereotype that Anglo-Indian women were beautiful, and therefore morally lax and licentious. While I am respectful of these concerns, they may also explain why there is no mention of Anglo-Indian silent cinema stars even in Anglo-Indian histories.<sup>25</sup> Instead of continuing that erasure, I suggest that Anglo-Indian *sitaras* deployed their beauty and sensuality as agents. In so doing, they were not only pioneer actresses of Indian cinema but also publicly and universally loved.

For Anglo-Indian actresses, mixed descent was both the condition for women to enter a profession like acting and the condition for reworking it. In the late 1890s and again in 1920, the British colonial government recommended that poor Anglo-Indian girls be educated to “qualify them as Nurses, Shop Assistants, Teachers, and Domestic Servants” (Qtd. in Blunt 2005, 34). As “convent-educated” girls, who knew English, many got service jobs as typists, stenographers, office receptionists, telephone operators, secretaries, nurses, harmaids, and department store clerks in the new commercial establishments, especially in Calcutta and Bombay. By 1920, at least five hostels for Anglo-Indian working girls were set up in Calcutta, to provide Anglo-Indian girls with a place to live, but also to police their

“moral welfare” (40). They also worked in the entertainment business in itinerant Western-style bands, musical comedy shows, dancing troupes and revues. These prior labor histories and transitional urban identities were important antecedents of Anglo-Indian Modern Girl cinema stars.

That Anglo-Indian women worked in paid employment is an important and valued element of Anglo-Indian self-identity. Blunt (65) suggests that Western dress, work, and the freedom to choose whom they wanted to marry were the self-identified markers of Anglo-Indian difference. This difference is the condition of possibility for Anglo-Indian women to enter acting, but they became popular icons through their malleability. Most took on Hindu names. So just as Ruby Myers was the famous Sulochana, Renee Smith was Seeta Devi, Iris Gasper was Sabita Devi, Beryl Clausen was Madhuri, Marcia Solomon was Vimla, and so on. Moreover, they did not just change their names, but, as demonstrated earlier, they also wore bindis and jewelry that signified they were Hindu and were often dressed as brides or married women (Fig. 11). Patience Cooper, an Anglo-Indian star, even posed for a Id greeting card in a Hindu bindi (Fig. 12)!



Fig. 11. Miss Madhuri Postcard. Credit: Reena Mohan, *Of Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: Women in Indian Silent Feature Films*, Mumbai: Majlis, 1996, 18.



Fig. 12. Id Postcard. Credit: Reena Mohan, *Of Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: Women in Indian Silent Feature Films*, Mumbai: Majlis, 1996, 5.

There is other evidence of the Modern Girls' fluidity between multiple identities as well. V.K. Dharamsey, a film historian, suggests that Seeta Devi was not one performer but two, acted by both Renee Smith and her sister Percy Smith (qtd. in Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1994, 84). Extolling "her" virtues in its report on Seeta Devi's European tour as "the brightest star in Indian cinema" in 1929, the *Illustrated Weekly*, opined that "rightly she is named Seeta Devi—for Seeta is the sweetest figure in the Indian [i.e., Hindu] Pantheon and has been enshrined with such notable charm and loveliness in the pages of Indian classical literature" ("Indian Film Work as a Career").

Critiquing the racism of foreign producers on her trip abroad, Seeta Devi wrote: "I have never used either grease paint or water paint in any of my pictures. . . . I quite agree that I appear much darker on the screen than I actually am. Unfortunately, there is a false notion lingering in the minds of the foreign producers that all Indians should and must be dark. But then people of North India are very fair—some of them are almost as fair as the Westerners themselves. Especially the Mogul princes who hailed from regions of Central Asia, and their women-folk are very fair indeed. I do believe, therefore, that foreign producers would be well-advised to use more discretion in the matter" (1929). Indian and Anglo-Indian she may be in India, for, like the other actresses, her *nom de plume* was never secret, but abroad she is unequivocally Indian. At home, this fluidity proved increasingly difficult to sustain.

### INTERRACIAL INTIMACY AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COMPETITION

By the end of World War I, more than 85 percent of the films imported into India were from the United States. Hollywood established its hegemony in moviemaking in part because during the war most European countries had to cut down on celluloid production, which was made from the same material as explosives.<sup>26</sup> The British colonial government, fearful of further competition from Hollywood, brought cinema directly under state control in 1918. After 1920, when the Indian central administration was financially delinked from London, import tariffs became a major source of raising revenue and an entertainment tax was instituted on cinema, the highest-grossing import industry in India, in 1923.

In 1927, the British colonial government set up the Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC), because it was concerned with Hollywood's depictions of lascivious white women and lurid sex, which in

inciting the lust of Indian men had the potential of disrupting the sexual boundaries that marked racial difference. This fear reverberates through the introduction to the ICC report. A well-known bishop “intimately acquainted with India” is quoted from a speech he gave in Britain in 1925: “The majority of films, which are chiefly from America are full of sensational and daring murders, crimes and divorces, and on the whole, degrade the white women in the eyes of Indians” (*ICC Report*, 3). The pages of the *Times of India* newspaper in the late 1920s and early 1930s are replete with criticism of the “sex, spectacle and sensationalism” of Hollywood films and how they lower the prestige of white women and, therefore, the white races in India. “Uneducated” Indians of the “laboring” classes, it was argued in many of these newspaper articles, editorials, and letters, were especially likely to “misinterpret” these overtly sexual images.<sup>27</sup> British imperial feminists, as members of the British Hygiene Delegation and the National Council of Women in Burma (Burma was part of India until 1937), who were called to testify before the ICC, were also vehement in their criticism, arguing that Hollywood was “lowering the standard of sex conduct and thereby increasing the dissemination of disease” (*ICC Report*, 116). In other words, there was a broad bloc that saw the need to assert strategies of imperial rule that preserved racial formation through the management of sexual desire.<sup>28</sup> Their demand was for stringent censorship of Hollywood films.

But T. Rangachariar, the Indian lawyer who was put in charge of the ICC by the British to appease nationalist demands for more Indian representation in government, did not comply with this request. Critiquing the Federation of British Industries, which had lobbied for the ICC, he approvingly quoted an editorial in the *Times of India*: “American films certainly should be fought by British competition but to try and suppress them by hypocritical pleas for Imperial welfare is merely ridiculous.” He also dismissed the British Social Hygiene Council as “ill-informed” and went against their scientific racism based on opposing testimony from Directors of Public Health and the Indian Federation of University Women (*ICC Report*, 16).

Instead of Hollywood censorship, Rangachariar suggested, Indian filmmakers and audiences were being undermined by “Western” films, under which he clubbed *both* British and Hollywood imports: “American civilization is as much Western civilization to them [Indian cinemagoers] as British civilization. Both are foreign. . . . If too much exhibition of

American films is a danger to national interest, too much exhibition of other films is as much a danger. . . . The British social drama is an enigma to the average Indian viewer as the American . . . if, in fact, the exhibition of Western films is doing some mischief in the country the best remedy would seem to be to encourage Indian films to take their place" (99).

A quintessential liberal, Rangachariar recognized film as a potent new medium of modernization. He was determined to develop the Indian film industry on economic grounds, arguing for infant industry protection, for an industry he saw as highly profitable: "India has got her own film industry which . . . requires to be protected, guided and encouraged. It is in its infancy and it is vital to the national interest that the indigenous industry should be encouraged in every way (100).

As important, Rangachariar wanted to realize the potential of film as a visual cultural form to educate "the lower classes." He writes: "This is art worthy of the attention of cultured men. Moreover, they will be doing national work by propagating Indian ideas and ideals and interpreting Indian literature, history and traditions. But it is not merely as producers that cultured people are required; educated men and women must be induced to act for the film. At present there is a sort of stigma attached to film-acting because the actresses (and to a less extent the actors) are not drawn from the respectable classes (47). The putative national "Indian" subject to be constructed through Indian film could not, in Rangachariar's view, be well served by current actresses: "The actresses are mainly recruited from the 'dancing girl' class. Indian women of the better class do not take up film-acting as a profession. . . . Owing to the difficulty of obtaining suitable Indian actresses some Anglo-Indian girls have adopted the profession and several of them play Indian parts with considerable success and are among the most popular 'stars'" (5).

Paradoxically, while Rangachariar rejected the view that Hollywood films led to interracial sex and the spread of disease, he fell back on stereotypical depictions of early actresses, especially "Anglo-Indian girls," which relied on an understanding of their mixed-raciality as that which renders them disreputable for the all-important job of nurturing cultural nationalism. Rangachariar's hope that "educated" actresses from the "respectable classes" replace Anglo-Indian actresses did not transpire till at least ten years after his ICC report was issued in 1928. Popular film historiographies praise Rangachariar as a hero of Indian cinema. As we

saw, they portray the displacement of Anglo-Indian actresses as a “natural” concomitant of improved technology and the coming of sound in 1931, but their ideological project mirrors what Rangachariar outlined in his report and was put into practice only in the late 1930s.

### ORCHESTRATING NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL FORGETFULNESS

Contemporary film histories that posit the displacement of Anglo-Indian *sitaras* (and those represented as such) as simply explainable by the decreasing value of their light skin and poor native-language skills ignore the fact that some Anglo-Indian *sitaras* transitioned well from silent movies to talkies. Their claim that these *sitaras* only knew what one calls “Kaisa hai” Hindustani (Raheja and Kothari 2003, 25) and another “atpati-chatpati” Hindi (Tamrakar 1990, 19), that is, pidginized Hindi, ignores the fact that some Anglo-Indian stars, like Sulochana, took time off to learn or relearn the language. Sulochana made seventeen more movies in Hindustani after 1938, till her last one in 1978 (Rajadhyaksha and Willemsen 1994, 207). Others, like Madhuri and Sabita Devi, also made a number of very popular talkies, also in Hindustani (Raheja and Kothari 2003, 30; Tamrakar 1990, 11, 13). Pramila proudly remembers a casting session when she “surprised them all by learning her dialogues perfectly” (Rohsani 1998, 9). She knew Bengali, Hindi, and many other languages and went on to make twenty-three films from 1939 to 1961 (in addition to the twelve previously). The story is also complicated by the fact that some Muslim stars, who knew Hindustani and could dance, did not transition well. Zubeida, who had created a sensation by acting in the film *Zarina*, with its eight-five kisses, was edged out by what she calls “the increasing conservatism in films”; she left to get married. So, despite the suggestion by film histories that Muslim cinema stars transitioned well, in fact the most globally modern of them were eased out.

The uneven transition of cinema stars through the 1930s in part reflects the growth of the studio system. Studios were organized, Hollywood style, with artistes and actresses, technicians and office workers all on their payroll. They bore the entire costs of film production. As the urban population increased and the number of studios grew, there was increasing competition for a share of the market. Actresses were much more likely to be cast to type. For example, Sulochana continued to play the glamorous working girl in her silent film hits that were remade as talkies in the mid- to late 1930s and were very popular, but Gohar was

increasingly cast more narrowly as a docile wife. With the proliferation of studios, the need for big stars to sell movies increased and the impulse to manufacture the image of the stars became more explicit.

In 1939, the *Illustrated Weekly* ran a series on film personalities that actively reconstructed movie Modern Girls as good “respectable” national icons. In one article, Glorious Gohar, now respectfully called Goharbai Mamajiwala (*bai* is a suffix in Marathi affixed to names of married women) was represented as a “good” woman character in the claim there was “nothing ‘actressy’” . . . about her; and that she was “doing her bit to making her profession a respected one.” Non-“actressy” behavior was described as Gohar’s not smoking or drinking and her spending her time reading “biographies, fiction and religious literature” (*Illustrated Weekly*, 60).

In another feature in the series on the actress Devika Rani, Devika’s antecedents were traced not only to her great-uncle, Rabindranath Tagore, but also to her doctor father, the surgeon general of an important state in the colonial empire. She was celebrated for traveling to London to study art and for acting in highly acclaimed plays all over Europe. Her success in making Indian movies in English and their popularity, were seen as enhancing the “prestige of the Indian screen in the eyes of foreigner.” By now, acting had become professional work, an activity that “trail-blazing” upper-caste Hindu women had to be educated into and work extremely hard at. That is, acting was being recoded as acceptable work.

But for acting to be recoded as acceptable, the “private” lives of the stars had also to be aligned as respectably modern. So, unlike Sulochana, whose breakup with her on- and offscreen lover was posited as one cause for her decline, Devika Rani was posed gardening at home “at an unpretentious little villa in a Bombay suburb” (22). She was also shown horseback riding. In another profile, Shobhana Samarth—a “most cultured Maharashtrian girl”—was similarly constructed as saving acting in films from being the career of disreputable women (23, 62). Again, her credentials, like those of Devika Rani, rested on her patriline—she was the daughter of a highly educated man, a banker with a PhD—and in addition, she had traveled widely since childhood, to the United States and Europe and even alone to China and Japan, and she worked hard at her craft of acting. A third actress, Sadhona Bose, was described as “having a well-won reputation as a danseuse.” She was the daughter of “a barrister

of the Calcutta high court, a family well-known for its culture. Her grandfather was the great social and religious reformer Keshub Chandra Sen, who founded the Brahmo Samaj.” Sadhona Bose’s dance is portrayed as drawing not from the *kothi* dances or Muslim courtesan traditions but from the “Hindu” “expressive movements” of Manipuri, Kathakali, and Kathak (23). Like the others, she was pictured reading a book.

By 1940, the imagination of something “Indian” as Nation was achieved through symbolically orchestrating a certain kind of acceptable modern Indian womanhood. In *Looking Back*, it is the representation of Anglo-Indians as those who “identified with the ruling British . . . and modeled themselves on the ruling [Hollywood] deities of the day” (*Looking Back*, 41) or what the film historian B. D. Garga calls their “anglicization,” that reinscribes and thereby eclipses the process of remembering them from the point of view of nationalist history. The national forgetfulness of the Anglo-Indian *sitara* is part of a more general forgetfulness about the past that is needed in order to achieve and sustain a “national” memory. Forgetting, as Renan argues, is crucial in the creation and imagination of nations (Renan 1990) So convincing is this historiography that today it is Devika Rani who is remembered as “the first lady of the Indian screen” (Raheja and Kothari 2003, 35),<sup>29</sup> not Patience Cooper, who was the first woman to act in an Indian film eleven years earlier.

## CONCLUSION

This essay recovers the history of the Anglo-Indian female cinema star of early Indian cinema and celebrates her existence as a vibrant social persona and as an icon of gendered modernity, widely embraced by movie directors and hugely popular with fans from all classes, if only for a brief time between the mid-1920s and the late 1930s. Headily modern, single, sensual, sexy, and “free,” her hybrid body was a zone of contact where the global inhered in the intimateness of a body language of dress, make-up, deportment, and fashionable accessorization as much as new ways of being and belonging. To view these daring young women as mere opportunists who glowed in the adulation of fans when there was no one “more cultured” to take up acting and to dismiss them as mere mimics of Hollywood, as popular film histories do, is not just to do them a disservice but also to consolidate the hegemony of nationalist historiography.

The bodies of Anglo-Indian *sitaras* were the literal (and imagined) product of interracial intimacy. They encoded a long and contested history

of British colonial and Indian upper-class and caste racism toward “Eurasians” or those of mixed descent. Because the “mixing” was freighted toward claiming a British patriline, the Indian mothers of Anglo-Indians have disappeared from the historical record. Although recent scholarship, such as Blunt’s excellent study of “the roles of Anglo-Indian women as wives and mothers in fashioning Anglo-Indian domesticity,” go a long way in retrieving their stories, there is still a deafening absence of Modern Girl cinema stars from the historical record. Caplan’s otherwise informative study mistakenly concludes that “[Anglo-Indian] Women themselves were therefore conspicuous by their absence from public affairs and had no platform for self-expression” (Caplan 2000, 874).

There is no memory of the Anglo-Indian Modern Girl of early cinema in Indian feminist history, either. Excellent though the recent scholarship on gender, modernity, and history has been, it has been saturated with concerns of nationalism and anticolonialism and the various possibilities (and impossibilities) of feminist agency and collective feminist organization within that framework. The Modern Girl is difficult to accommodate within this framework, as she is not anticolonial: she is not the New Woman of social reform feminism, nationalist feminism, or radical movements. Nor is she a critical internationalist of either the communist sort, like women who joined the Communist Party of India, or the liberal sort, like the many women who deployed international liberal ideologies to win rights as “national” citizens.<sup>30</sup> Rather, the Modern Girl’s global modernity was intimate and performed narratively and visually. She drew on a global and Indian cultural palette and self-consciously crossed religious, racial, and national boundaries. Since “Westernization” has long been a charge that Indian feminists have had to contend with, their hesitance in embracing the Modern Girl is perhaps understandable, but the political stakes of not doing so are considerable; we need to document how the Anglo-Indian Modern Girl became a code for the expression of un-Indianness.

By foregrounding race, this essay provides a different lens on the cultural politics of gendered modernity in India. The otherwise admirable (though insufficient) Indian feminist scholarship that pays heed to race has focused on British imperial feminists (Burton 1994); on the representation of Indian men’s sexual proclivities toward white women (Sinha 1997); on how Indian women who traveled abroad disrupted racial narratives (Grewal 1996); and on the articulation of race through familiar

discourses of civilization, Christianity, hygiene and science.<sup>31</sup> Attention to the Anglo-Indian Modern Girl offers an account of the depoliticization of race in nationalist histories. Instead of blaming more advanced filmmaking technologies and the sitaras' poor language skills, we are now in a position to understand how interracial intimacy and the transgressive sex it is stereotyped to represent were the grounds on which Anglo-Indian women could be eclipsed in the nationalist construction of the "cultured" upper-caste stars.

Attention to the Anglo-Indian cinema star also offers new insights into the emergence of "sexual economies" in colonial India. Mary John and Janaki Nair's pathbreaking anthology, *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, does much to shatter "the conspiracy of silence surrounding sexuality" in India but curiously omits any mention of interracial descent, except in a passing comment on the unions between Indian prostitutes and British soldiers. Similarly, there is mention of mines, mills, plantations, and family farms as sites where new sexual economies emerged but no treatment of the urban occupations that Anglo-Indian women newly filled—as typists, stenographers, office receptionists, telephone operators, and cinema stars (John and Nair 1998, 1–51). The laboring Anglo-Indian Modern Girl elucidates how interracial descent was the condition for entry into a public domain in new urban commercial spaces that were also feminized. In celebrating this labor, Anglo-Indian historians move from racist constructions of gender difference to positive markers of identity (John and Nair 1998, 1–51).<sup>32</sup>

A final reason to pay heed to the Modern Girl cinema star is that their own attitudes to modernity—as the cultivation of the self—may suggest alternative affective entailments to those suggested by nationalist historians. Sulochana, in a column titled "Love," published in *Filmland* in 1934, wrote: "Every woman needs romance. But every actress needs an entirely different kind of love—the unselfish, unswerving kind that inspires ambition. . . . I have never been helped by people who have been in love with me—but by people who loved me. . . . Every actress needs love. Art cannot thrive without it" (Rajadhyaksha and Willemsen 1994, 101). Sabita Devi, responding to the charge that "actresses come from houses of ill-fame who have already thrown their morals to the airs and who find the filmland as a proper scope for their enjoyment" (Rajadhyaksha and Willemsen 1994, 101; "Should Respectable Ladies Join Films" 1931, 109), replied that she was always accompanied by her mother to the

studios and both had always been “shown every respect and consideration.” She goes on to offer a ringing critique of upper-class morality: “It is true . . . that some of the lesser lights in Filmland have been recruited from the lowest strata of society; but for this reason prospective artistes should not be deterred by having to appear in the same picture as these unfortunate women; the sooner they realize that it is far nobler to sympathize than to criticize, this difficulty can be overcome. . . . I have come in contact with these people, yet have found them always quiet and reserved. . . . As artistes we are not concerned with the private life of an individual . . . rather we are concerned with the attitude and behaviours of the person during working hours” (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1994; “Why Shouldn’t Respectable Ladies Join the Films” 112).

These quotes and the behavior of Modern Girl cinema stars suggest that they were historical actors who themselves actively articulated and reworked the possibilities of modernity. They may not have succeeded in reshaping the “interior frontiers of the nation” in the 1920s and 1930s, but they productively interrogate nationalist historiography and contribute to feminist politics today. The Anglo-Indian cinema Modern Girl, with her fluidity between multiple affiliations and her flexible incorporation into varied identities, was incompatible with not just nationalisms demand for irreducible difference but that of contemporary nationalist historiographers as well.

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## NOTES

1. This research grows out of my participation in a collaborative research project with five colleagues at the University of Washington, Seattle. See *Modern Girl Around the World* Research Group 2005, 245–94.

2. Thinking about the Indian Modern Girl as a “charged space” of interracial intimacy and colonial governance draws on Foucauldian-inspired scholarship, such as Stoler 1995 and 2001. My interest is, however, different from Stoler’s inasmuch as I am concerned with not just colonial governance but how Indian elite nationalists and ordinary women not directly connected to the nationalist struggle shaped the intimate domain as gendered moderns.

3. The most famous studios in the era of silent films that employed Modern Girl cinema stars and produced films with Modern Girl story lines were Imperial, Kohinoor, Madan, Ranjit, and Sharada. Between 1931 and 1940, the studios Imperial and Ranjit were more likely to produce Modern Girl films than New Theaters, Sagar, and Wadia, which along with Imperial and Ranjit produced the most films.

4. The histories of early Modern Girl cinema stars who worked in the regional film industries and, through them, explorations of regional expressions of gendered modernity are waiting to be written.

5. I could not possibly have done this newspaper and magazine research without the able assistance of Serena Maurer, Gazelle Samizay, Michelle Acupanda, Amanda Berman, Sarah McKay, Dipika Nath, Amy Piedalue, and Amy Bhatt. Thanks are also due to the Modern Girl Project research assistants: John Foster, Katrina Hagen, Kristy Leissle, Teresa Mares, Rebecca McColl, and Helen Schneider.

6. My own mother remembers reading the *Illustrated Weekly* out loud to my great-grandmother, who didn’t read English, in the 1940s.

7. For a selection, see the section “The Stars Speak,” in *Indian Cinema*, 101–15.

8. There is no mention of Jewish actresses in the Indian Jewish histories I checked except a brief biographical sketch in *Roshani* 1998. Because popular film histories misidentify Jewish actresses as Anglo-Indians, I chose to focus this essay on what the characterization “Anglo-Indian” codes.

9. From 1920 on, when India attained fiscal autonomy from London, elite nationalist leaders mobilized mass support to expand Indian authority in government. In the 1930s, Indianness came to be a major social identity through multiple forms of political agitation and cultural production; this is also when a constitutional framework came into being. India achieved freedom from British colonial rule in 1947 (Ludden 2002).

10. Modern Girl movies include *Cinema ki Rani* (Queen of Cinema), 1925; *Typist Girl* (also called *Why I Became a Christian*), 1925; *Vamp*, 1926; *Telephone ni taruni* (Telephone Girl), 1926; *Bambai ki Bili* (Wildcat of Bombay), 1927; *Indira B.A.*, 1929; *Cinema Girl*, 1930; *Daily Mail*, 1930; *The Wronged Wife*, 1930; *The Enchantress*, 1930; *A Woman’s Vengeance*, 1930; *Miss 1933*, 1933; *Indira M.A.*, 1934; and *The President*, 1937. The film synopses, on which I base this categorization, are from Rajyadhyaksha and Willemen 1994.

11. In *Wild Cat of Bombay* (1927), for example, the female star is a medical student

and a mysterious do-gooding criminal who plays eight roles, including a policeman and a European blond woman in the process of cleaning up the nefarious activities of a local hoodlum and his marauding, murderous henchmen.

12. “Night clubs . . . Turkish Baths . . . College Life of Girls” reads an ad for *Telephone Girl* (*Times of India*, 1927). The Sulochana silent movie hit *Indira, B.A.* (1929) about a college girl was so popular it was remade as a talkie, *Indira, M.A.* (1934).

13. For example, *Cinema ki Rani* (Queen of Cinema), 1925; *Typist Girl* (also called *Why I Became a Christian*), 1925; *Vamp*, 1926; *Telephone ni taruni* (Telephone Girl), 1926; and *Cinema Girl*, 1930.

14. This is a common motif in Modern Girl films around the world.

15. Chatterjee (1989, 233–53) has argued, most insightfully (and famously), that Indian male intellectuals resolved the conundrum of wanting to be modern but different from their colonial rulers, in the mid- to late nineteenth century, by separating the material from the spiritual realm and claiming superiority in the latter. They did this by accepting the superiority of Western values in the material realm—science, technology, and economic organization—but asserting the superiority of India in the spiritual sphere. Women, as representatives of the inner domain of spirituality, and keepers of “authentic” Indian culture in the home, represented the indigenist alternative to Western materialism.

16. For histories of women and feminist involvement in the Indian nationalist movement (an other anticolonial movements), see Kumar 2003 and Forbes 1996.

17. This pose—“one arm curved above her head to reveal a hairless underarm”—and its adoption by the Zip depilatory company are commented on by Peiss 2001, 7–23; quote at 16.

18. On the impossibility of a “pure” Modern Girl look, in Hollywood or in any other location, see the Modern Girl Research Group, “Modern Girl Around the World.”

19. Note that this is the 1938 version of *Mother India*, not the more famous 1957 version starring Nargis.

20. According to one bio, it was Patience Cooper’s “sharp features and distinctly European looks . . . that allowed the use of eye-level lighting” (<http://www.indiaheritage.com/perform/cinema/person/silentstar.htm> [accessed June 9, 2003]); Raheja and Kothari 2003, 20.

21. The other route to early cinema was from the Muslim courtesan tradition. In popular film histories Muslim actresses transition from silent films to talkies easily because they can sing and dance and, most important, speak Hindustani. More on this later.

22. In 1881, of a total population of some two hundred thousand English speakers, the census of India counted some sixty-two thousand Eurasians.

23. The year 1911 was also when “communal representation”—the representation of group political interests in the (limited) electoral system based on group identity by religion or ethnic particularities—was established; this categorization as the basis for group political rights was reiterated in 1919, with the Montague-Chelmsford political reforms towards “Indianization.” Communal identities

became solidified as the basis for constitutional recognition in 1935 through the Government of India Act. For Anglo-Indians to take part in Indian politics it was important that they be accorded constitutional recognition, and indeed community leaders fought hard for it.

24. A Pauperism Enquiry of 1891–92 and a second committee of 1918–19 reported destitution “among Indo-Europeans in Calcutta,” where the largest Anglo-Indian community resided (Blunt 2005, 34–35).

25. In addition to Ballhatchet 1980 and Blunt 2005, the Anglo-Indian histories I read include Buettner 1998; Bear 1998; Caplan 2000, 863–92.

26. For Indian cinema houses, Hollywood films were also much cheaper to rent than Indian films because their costs were distributed across a by-now global network. Starring such silent screen actresses as Mary Pickford, Norma Talmadge, Clara Bow, and Pola Negri, and their male counterparts Douglas Fairbanks and Rudolph Valentino, these films were immensely popular in India, as were the action serials and spectaculars of Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd.

27. See, for example, the following, all from the *Times of India*: “The Cinema and the Child,” 1924; “The Cinema of Crime,” 1925; “Entertainment Tax Not a Real Hindrance,” 1927; “American Films in India. Harmful Effects,” 1927; “Present Censorship of Sex and Crime Films Adequate,” 1927; “The Cinema Inquiry,” 1927; “Indecent Films,” 1934; “Discrimination and the Cinema,” 1934.

28. The British desire for film censorship was as much about preventing the use of cinema by Indian directors in the anticolonial cause. Actual deletions from Hollywood and Indian films by the Board of Censors were to references to “liberty” and “freedom.”

29. See also <http://www.upperstall.com/people/devikarani.html>. Patience Cooper’s first film was *Nalla Damayanti* (1920); Devika Rani’s was *Karma/ Nagan ki Ragini* (1933).

30. For more on Indian women’s internationalist leanings, see Kumar 1993. For the deployment of liberal internationalism, see Sinha 2000, 1077–82.

31. There is a voluminous scholarship that could be cited here. For an influential collection of essays (though all are not feminist) see Robb 1995.

32. The continuing stereotyping and marginalization of the Anglo-Indian community in India—their numbers have reduced from about a quarter of a million in 1947 to half of that today as a result of migration—makes their contribution all the more imperative.

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