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AWAAZ

VOICES

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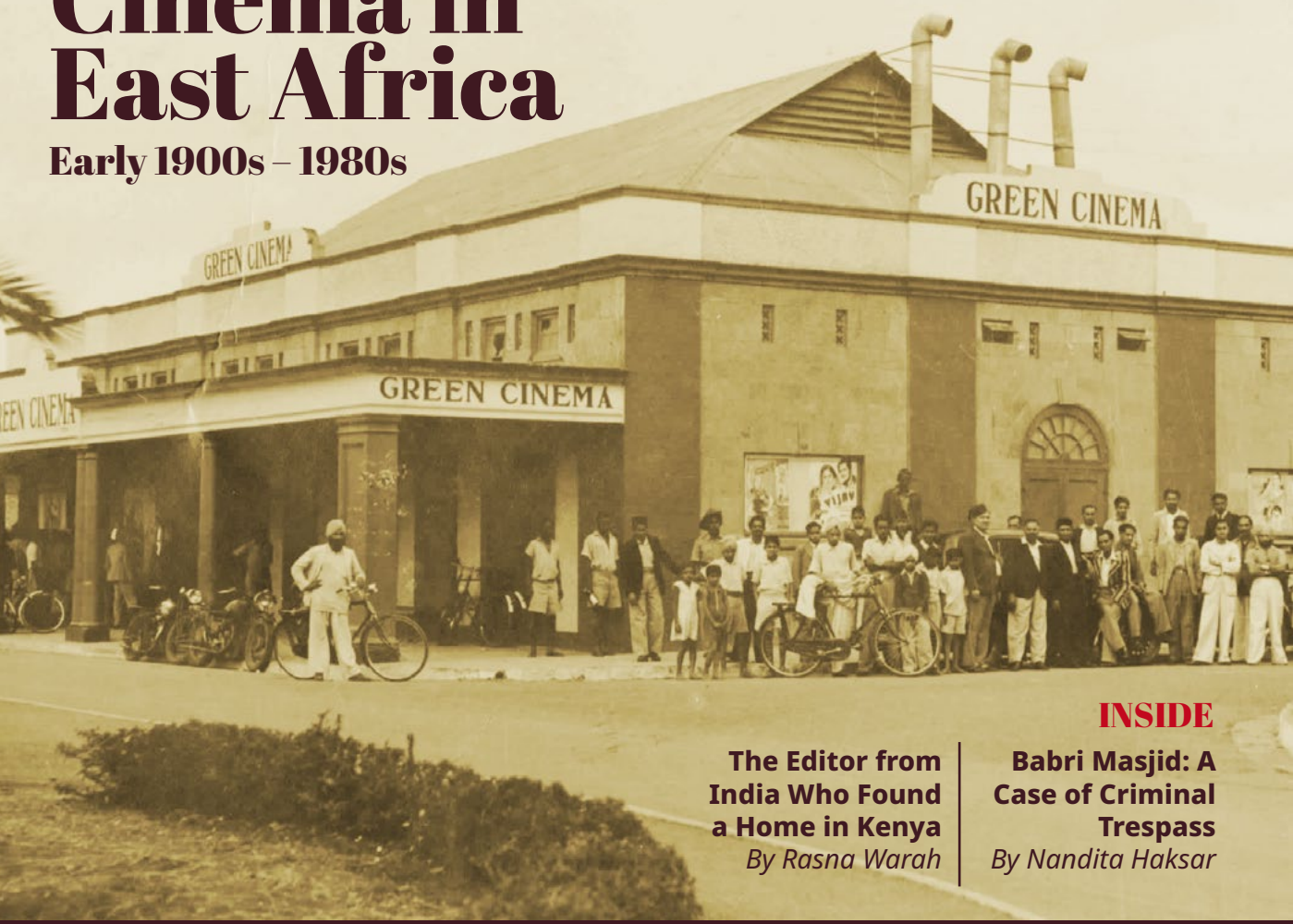
Sultan Jessa
1960 - 2019

Indian Cinema in East Africa

Early 1900s – 1980s



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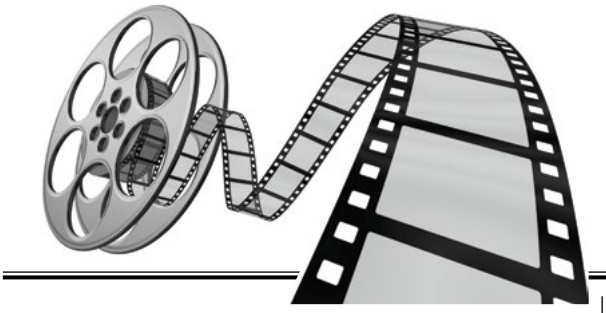

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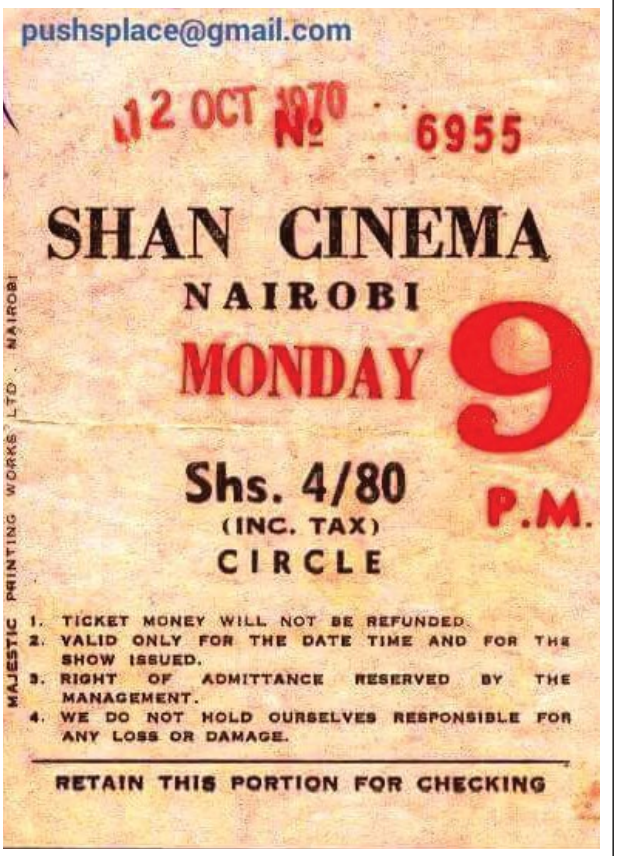
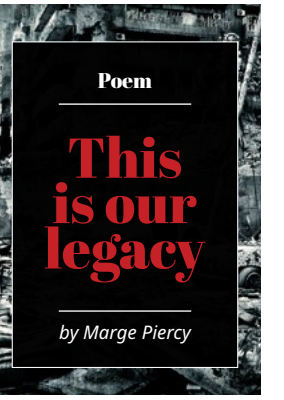
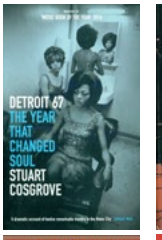
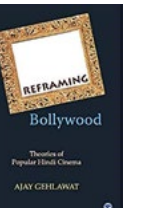




'Indian Cinema in East Africa'

Book Reviews





Editorial Message from the Editors

'Cinema' at one time, as we were growing up, was an essential and much treasured pastime in the South Asian community. We not only avidly watched the films from what is now, Bollywood, but we argued and gossiped about the personal lives of the main actors, mimicked their actions and language and tried out their fashions and hairstyles; and of course played their songs ad infinitum. And it wasn't just 'us'; there were Africans who, though they did not understand Hindustani, enjoyed the songs and dances, the romance and the tragedy and the wildly exaggerated settings and costumes. For a cupla hours we were transported to a magical world of make believe! And the memories lingered as we socialized with other movie buffs later.

Alas! Advances in technology have disrupted this social cohesion, now we watch the movies at home in our private family spaces with minimum social interaction. In this issue AwaaZ captures some of the excitement and challenges of that bygone era – it will be a nostalgic journey for very many of our readers.

And what a journey it has been! We contacted the Savani family who were pioneers of the Indian cinema scene in East Africa; discovered the book Reel Pleasures by Laura Fair; dived into the archives of the 'Coast Week' newspaper; probed pioneer journalist Kul Bhushan; revived the memories of Vali Jamal; retrieved an article by Neera Kapur; prompted Sir Mohinder Dhillon and got a contribution from our own correspondent Ramnik Shah. Brigitte Reinwald allowed us to reproduce her article 'Tonight at the Empire'. Then at the very end came across an article on 'Reviving Zanzibar's Oldest Theatre'.

The outcome is a collector's item of almost 60 pages of a representative history of the 'Indian Cinema in East Africa' consisting of precious memories and photographs from people who lived the scene and whose contributions will remained etched in the digital archives of AwaaZ. To all of them we say Asante Sana. Karibuni and enjoy the issue!

The Editors,
Zahid Rajan and Zarina Patel

An omission amended:
In the previous AwaaZ, Issue 2/2019, in the Footsteps Section the writer of the tribute to Toni Morrison was Margaretta wa Gacheru. Our apologies for the omission.

Previous Issue Cover

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Cover Image
Credit: Manu Savani

AWAAZ mail Letters to the Editors

A critique (last of three) by Karim Hirji of articles in AwaaZ Volume 15, Issue 2 2018.

Kofi Annan

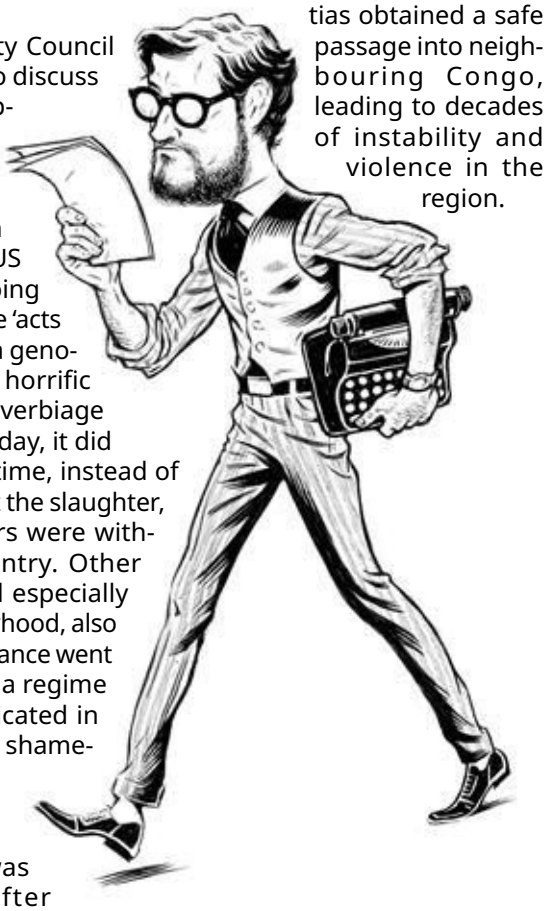
In the year prior to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, there were telltale signs that something terrible was about to unfold. Hate radio programs were gathering momentum, and the political atmosphere was getting bleak. As RPF mounted attacks, the state authorities began to prepare for the worst. But the nations of the West which had many personnel on the ground did not do anything. France continued to arm and give full backing to the government and the US supported both the sides. The UN Peace Keeping forces, under Kofi Anan, remained lethargic.

Within a couple of days from the start, it was abundantly clear to the rest of the world that civilians, young and old, were being massacred in their thousands. Bodies were floating in the rivers. Something had to be done immediately to stop the carnage.

According to the UN Charter the invasion of or military attacks on one nation by another without explicit authorization from the UN Security Council is `a supreme war crime.' Though there is one exception provided to this rule. In the case of an unfolding genocide, the member states of the UN are in fact obligated to intervene in that nation to stop it.

Yet, in the UN Security Council meetings convened to discuss this issue, the US (represented by Madeline Albright) was hard at work to ensure that no such intervention was authorized. The US argued that the ongoing killings in Rwanda were 'acts of genocide` and not a genocide. It was the most horrific display of diplomatic verbiage yet, at the end of the day, it did the job. At the same time, instead of being deployed to halt the slaughter, the UN Peace Keepers were withdrawn from the country. Other nations of Africa, and especially those in the neighbourhood, also did not do anything. France went on supplying arms to a regime that was clearly implicated in the genocide. It was a shameful episode all the way around.

A UN intervention was authorized only after nearly 800,000 people had been massacred. It was led by France, whose forces ensured that the genocidal militias obtained a safe passage into neighbouring Congo, leading to decades of instability and violence in the region.



AWAAZ mail Letters to the Editors

These actions were documented in the official OAU commission set up to investigate the genocide and by other human rights organizations. Madeline Albright and Kofi Annan were implicated as key players in the inhumane saga. But they were not sanctioned in any way. Instead of being tried for crimes against humanity, Albright was promoted to be the first woman US Secretary of State and Annan became the Secretary General of the UN. Both were rewarded for having well served the interests of US imperialism.

As the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan generally toed the US line, and did not accomplish anything of lasting value to Africa. In that post, he also became an accomplice to the second major genocide of the 1990s. I refer to the draconian sanctions imposed on Iraq. The Middle Eastern nation was ringed by the US military. Nothing could move in or out without its approval. Even pencils were withheld. Food and medicines were scarce. The so-called Oil for Food Program could not, despite efficient management by the Iraqi government, provide adequate nutrition for the people. A once prosperous people were reduced to abject poverty. As documented in epidemiologic studies by UNICEF and other health bodies, nearly a million Iraqi deaths, a third of them children, were attributable to the sanctions. Iraq was continually under bombardment. The rationale for all that was that Iraq was producing weapons of mass destruction. After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, it was seen beyond doubt that the case for WMD was based on a decade long deception perpetrated by the US and UK. The sanctions were overseen by the Security Council. In addition to the US and UK leaders, Kofi Annan was a party to this crime against humanity.

Annan's opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq was a tepid one; and his diplomatic moves provided a reason for the US to claim that diplomacy had been given a chance and did not work. It is clear that no matter the outcome, the US was going to invade that nation. And when the invasion was launched without formal approval by the UN Security Council, Annan did not declare that the act constituted a supreme war crime.

Annan has been credited as one of the prime movers in the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle by the UN. It is commonly regarded as a milestone in the prevention of major crimes against humanity and for the attainment of global peace and justice. But this is a simplistic view that disregards the historic and current realities of the behaviour of imperial powers.

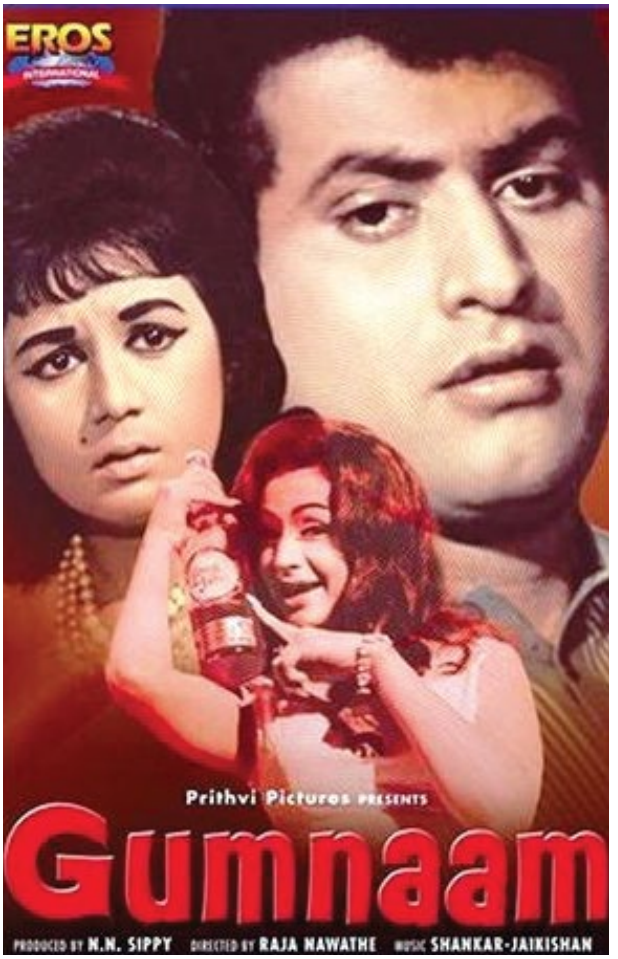
First, when invading weaker nations, powerful nations often declare that they are doing so in order to protect their people from some calamity. European nations colonized Africa to `civilize the Africans.' Almost all the US wars in the past one hundred years have had such a rationale. Yet, the truth always is to the contrary.

As the examples of Libya and Syria indicate, conduct of this sort by the major powers did not abate after the adoption of the R2P principle. In a way, it gained an additional boost, and has led to a fall in the trust of the UN by other nations.

While Kofi Annan has some achievements, like negotiating the post-election peace in Kenya, overall his record is tarnished with numerous episodes of disgraceful conduct. An accurate obituary has to mention his actions in an unbiased fashion. In my view, a progressive magazine like *Awaaz* need not carry superficial and one-sided obituaries of the type found in the mainstream media.

Samir Amin

An additional descriptive obituary of Samir Amin was needed here. While many obituaries of this giant exist in the progressive outlets, few explain clearly the basic pillars of his ideas and why his orientation remains relevant for the liberation of Africa. But that is what the youth of today need; for he generally wrote in a dense style that is not easy to fathom.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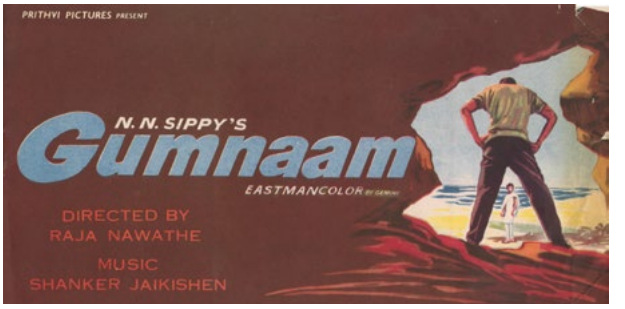
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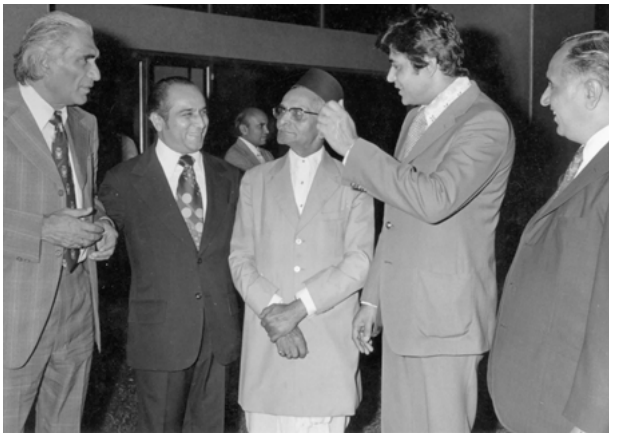


RANJAN·CHITRA
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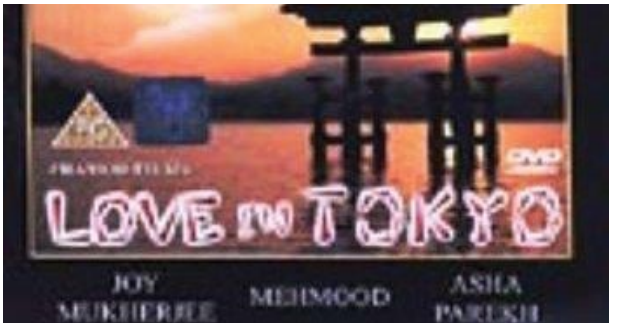
LOVE IN TOKYO
JOY MUKHERJEE
MEHMOOD
ASHA PAREKH

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The Movie Scene in Kenya

By Manu Savani

The Beginning of Mohanlal Kala Savani's Business Journey

The growth of the Indian film business in the history of East Africa is also a chapter in the history of the Savani family in East Africa.

When the late Mohanlal Kala Savani (commonly known as 'Samji Kala'), based on the name of his reputable trading company) disembarked in Mombasa in 1918, East Africa had a very different socio-economic environment altogether. Most people had not even seen a photograph; so seeing a motion picture film was beyond their wildest imagination.

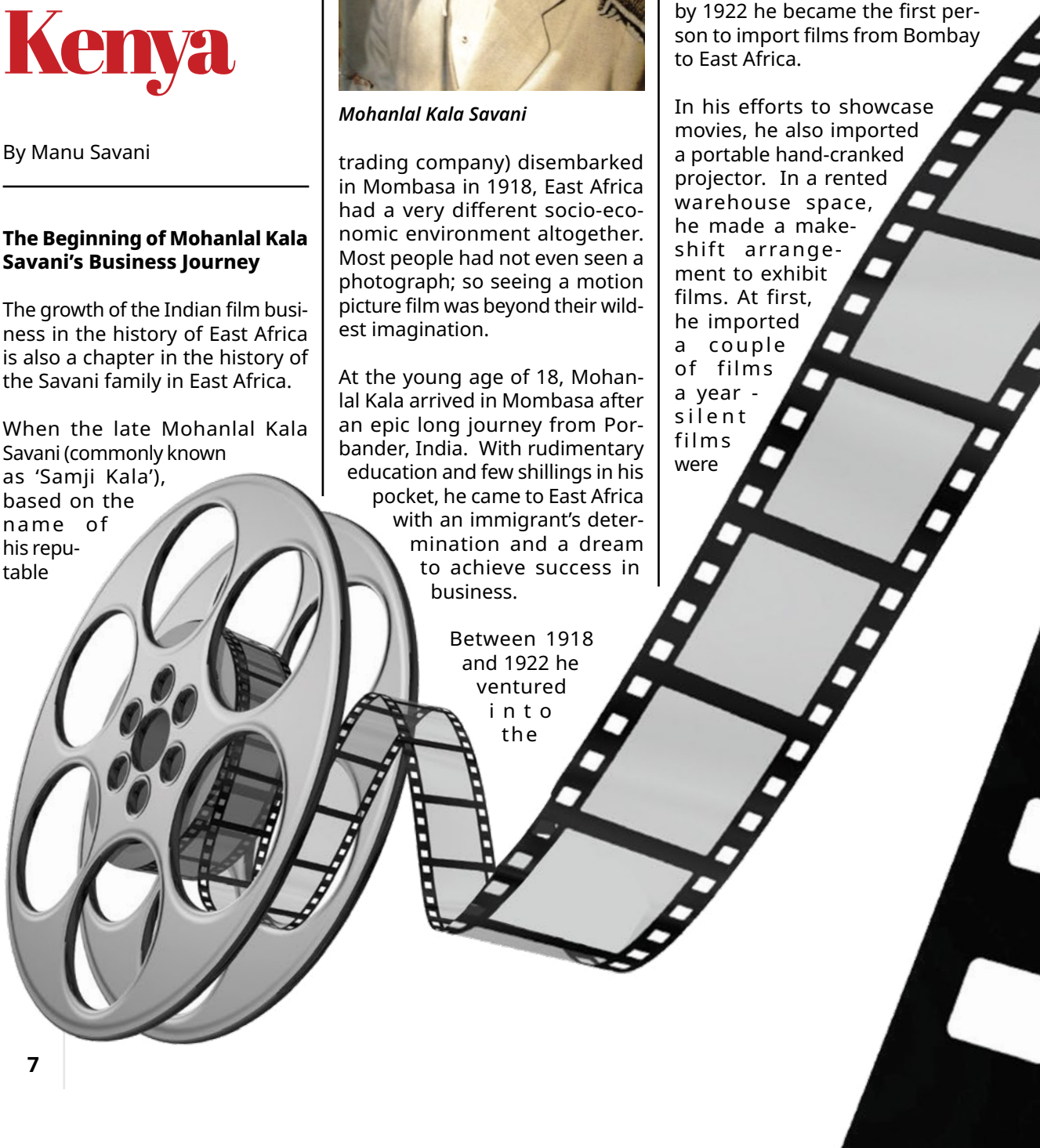
Mohanlal Kala Savani

At the young age of 18, Mohanlal Kala arrived in Mombasa after an epic long journey from Porbander, India. With rudimentary education and few shillings in his pocket, he came to East Africa with an immigrant's determination and a dream to achieve success in business.

Between 1918 and 1922 he ventured into the local grain and textile trading industries, in partnership with his brothers Samji Kala and Nanji Kala who were based in Bombay (Mumbai).

In 1917, before leaving India, Mohanlal had seen the success in India of Babashaheb Phalke's silent movies. With struggles and challenges, he gradually achieved success in the textile business and by 1922 he became the first person to import films from Bombay to East Africa.

In his efforts to showcase movies, he also imported a portable hand-cranked projector. In a rented warehouse space, he made a makeshift arrangement to exhibit films. At first, he imported a couple of films a year - silent films were



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usually short in length but their popularity was building up. Though Mombasa was his primary market he expanded to Zanzibar which at the time was also a lucrative market for films. He formed a liaison with traders in Zanzibar and Nairobi to form a syndicate to exhibit the imported films.

Expansion of Business – the opening of Majestic Cinema

As his business expanded, Mohanlal Kala did a successful barter of Indian film exporting with the import of Arabic language and Egyptian films from Zanzibar. As luck would have it, in 1931 two brothers Janmohamed Hasham and Valli Hasham built a theatre in Mombasa on Salim Road (now Digo Road) and called it 'Regal'. The Regal Cinema started showing English movies and at other times rented the space for live plays and performances. Their clientele was mostly the expatriate British.

In that same fateful year of 1931, India made its first talkie film *Alam Ara.* Mohanlal Kala imported it and rented show

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times at the newly opened Regal Cinema in Mombasa to exhibit *Alam Ara.*

Mohanlal was convinced beyond any doubt that the time had come to bring his dream to reality: build a full time, easily accessible cinema in Mombasa. He was already active in building and developing properties and had a plot empty on the then bustling Princess Street, now called Nehru Road. Princess Street had shops which were already thriving. Samji Kala realized this was a prime location for showing Indian films. It was walking distance from the South Asian residential and shopping district.

Mohanlal realized from day one that a film without a cinema was a useless investment. That prompted him to plan to build a luxury cinema. His mission was loftier than the sky. Family, friends and the local people were very doubtful of the success of such a fantasy business. But Mohanlal was confident of the present and future potential. In 1933 Samji Kala's dream was finally realized in brick and mortar. A luxury cinema was built. It was given a royal name: MAJESTIC CINEMA. The name suited the era of the British in Kenya Colony,

Taking Chances and Finding Success

At the time of Majestic Cinema's opening, Mohanlal was 32 years old. One of his friends Moti D Hira had imported a couple of New Theatres' films such as *Jhoola, Kangan, Bandhan* and other classics. With no experience in show business, Mohanlal decided to build a 700-seat cinema which could also host live shows. The idea seemed remote but he formed a team of able and ambitious close partners. While he took a majority interest, he invited his close friend Maganlal Sanghvi, a local lawyer, to join. Maganlal Sanghvi was skeptical of the project but had immense faith in Mohanlal's business sense so he joined him to form Majestic Theatre Co. Ltd. and the cinema was called Majestic Cinema. It opened with an English film *Trader Horn,* a film on the subject of a hunter in African jungles. The film was a big success. The Indian film which opened the cinema was *Shirin Farhad,* which had 18 songs! The movie was a huge hit and that set the ball rolling for Majestic and the Samji Kala group.

Until then, the movies were still without sound and so the theatre owners made special arrangements for musicians to sit under the stage with instruments to give sound effects to the films. Mohanlal in Mombasa and his elder brothers Samji Kalidas and Nanjibhai Kalidas Savani now had one more enterprise. Nanjibhai started buying Indian films and Mohanlal had a theatre in Mombasa. To this day, I wonder what prompted them to go into this unknown business!

As typical of all his trading practices, Mohanlal Kala did not gamble. The plot where Majestic was built was a very prime location. He decided that he had the following alternative options in case if his cinema failed:

- If movies did not attract enough audiences, he could rent the theatre to live stage productions for plays, or *nataks* as they were called.
- If that too failed, he would remove the chairs and use the theater as a go-down for his textile storage purposes.

As time progressed Majestic became an established cinema on

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This photo was taken around 1945 at Majestic Cinema, Mombasa,
L-R standing management team: Shantibhai Savani, Ramnik (Babu)Bhai Sanghvi, Chunibhai Savani.
L-R sitting the three directors of Majestic Theatre Co: Mohanlal Kala Savani, Maganlal Sanghvi, Nanji Kalidas Savani

The two partners: Mohanbhai Kala Savani with his nephew Dhanjibhai Kala in Neeta Cinema, Kampala.

At a movie function in Bombay in 1973. From Left to Right: Producer/Director B.R.Chopra, Maganbhai Savani, Mohanlal Kala Savani, film star Rajendra Kumar, Hargovindbhai Savani

Mohanlal Kala Savani during a visit to London in 1974, with Hema Malini 3rd from left.

the Kenya coast. The owners of Majestic also became fully fledged film distributors with links stretching, to start with, to Uganda and Tanganyika.

Mohanlal had a sharp business acumen – which led to rapid growth and expansion. He built a stronghold in Nairobi with local partners HR Bhatt and Pandit. In Kampala, he had existing ties with his nephews Dhanji Kala and Popatlal Kala. In Kampala, he took over a cinema called Central Cinema. In Zanzibar, he formed a syndicate with Hassanali Hameer Hasham (commonly known as Hameer Gozi), a local distributor of Arabic films. Thus, the teamwork expanded their foothold in other Tanganyika towns including Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Tanga, Tabora, Moshi, and Arusha. Likewise, in Kenya, the Majestic group showed their strong presence beyond Mombasa and Nairobi by expanding in Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisumu, etc.

His motto was: 'Without cinemas, films were unproductive and likewise without films, the cinemas were empty.' Thus, incorporating film distribution and exhibition under one umbrella made sense. Majestic grew not only in the number of films imported from India but also in the number of screens all over East Africa. Quality of films was another major success for Majestic. Mohanlal believed in acquiring films objectively. Meaning, a film maker was as important, if not more important, than the stars. By 1940s there already was competition in the film distribution business but the strength of Majestic lay on being both film distributor and exhibitor simultaneously.

The 1940s: A Man of Vision

Mohanlal, a man of vision, started making 'output deals' with Indian

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Kenya Cinema ***Courtesy of Slim Nash***

studios such as Imperial Films, Ranjit Studios, Prabhat Films Co. and V Shantaram's Raj Kamal Studios. Unknowingly, Mohanlal had entered a very glamorous line of business, but to him films were only commodities. He acquired rights of films extremely carefully so that his risk was minimal.

A major stepping stone for Majestic/Samji Kala was the film, *Kismat* (1943), starring Ashok Kumar and Mumtaz Shanti. It ran for three years and eight months in Calcutta. It set new records not only in Kenya and Uganda but also in Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The acting of the young and dashing Ashok Kumar and the hit songs created a new frenzy amongst the Asian communities.

In the 1940s, Majestic imported and released such landmark titles as *Ratan, Dulari, Shahjahan, Dastaan* and *Jadoo*. In 1949, the Indian film industry (Bollywood) had its first expensive film - Gemini's *Chandralekha*. The film cost 3.5 million Indian Rupees in production. Mohanlal took a calculated risk in acquiring rights for the whole of East Africa. *Chandralekha* had huge sets and the look of an epic movie. The film was a huge success all over. 1949 is also remembered for Raj Kapoor's own production: *Barsaat* which starred the hottest star pair of the time, Raj Kapoor and Nargis. Besides the music, the film impressed the audience with the romantic pair who were already heart throbs. Majestic had paid an exorbitant price to acquire rights of the film.

Innovating in the Industry

In 1951 came a relatively a small film which conquered the box office: Bhagwan's *Albela*. The movie again ran for weeks all over East Africa. Being always innovative, showman Mohanlal decided to get hand colourized prints of *Albela*. This again gave a boost to the film as the audience had never imagined an Indian film in colour. Though only the songs were colourized, it was sufficient to carry the film through again. If research is ever done to find out when non-Asians and Africans got interested in watching a Bolllywood film, the answer would surely lead to *Albela.* It had songs and music which were a cross breed between Indian, Latin American and Middle Eastern tunes. Had subtitling been done in those days, the film would have attracted even more non-Asians to the cinemas.

C Ramchandra's hit songs sent the audience into waves of hysteria like never seen before in the history of movie going in East Africa. *Albela* was truly an unpreceded excitement. It ran with HOUSEFUL signs outside the cinemas. The film created for the first time a new parallel business: Ticket black marketing.

Black marketing of cinema tickets became a nuisance. For a popular movie the ticket prices sometimes went up 10 to 15 times the actual ticket price. In spite of Police enforcement, it persisted. The black marketer discouraged family audiences from coming to the cinema. The time came when all the theatre owners jointly decided to announce a ceiling on how many tickets one could buy. The limit was put to 10 tickets per buyer. The black marketers tried to beat the system by putting a dozen buyers in line when the box office opened for advance booking. Thereby a cat and mouse game continued.

The distributors and exhibitors jointly decided to share a film with simultaneous release of a film. Thus, a film would open at more than a single cinema. By the 1960s, films were imported and released with two or three 35mm prints. Therefore, when a film opened simultaneously in different cities, the practical solution was to 'cycle' the reels of a film from one cinema to another with one hour time gaps. Here was a classic example of theatres who

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Release of producer B.R. Chopra and Director Yash Chopra's Film "Waqt" lead star Raj Kumar talking with Mohanlal Kala Savani and his nephew Maganbhai Savani of India.

M K Savani with Dilip Kumar 1961 after screening of 'Ganga Jamuna'.

Mohanlal Kala Savani with his six sons around 1957
Standing L - R: Dhirubhai, Ramanbhai, Suryakantbhai, Manu
Sitting L - R: Chunibhai, Mohanlal Kala, Shantibhai

were competitors jointly making money. The system worked like clockwork, mostly!

The growth of cinemas boosted the business of shops near the cinemas as they catered to the cinema audience with coffee, tea, *paan* (beetle leaves), fast foods and soft drinks.

Leaving an Impact

Mohanlal learnt that in order to cultivate a thriving movie business, he needed to expand. He developed ties with his friend in Nairobi, Himatlal Bhatt. Bhatt was also a lawyer. They collaborated to build a cinema in Nairobi: Green Cinema. Green Cinema had a monopolistic situation, similar to Majestic Cinema in Mombasa. Majestic was in the heart of the busy Indian neighbourhood near River Road in Nairobi. Then came Uganda. In Kampala they took a cinema called Central Cinema on long term lease. The cinema was managed by my uncles Dhanjibhai and Popatbhai Kala.

As time went by, Mohanlal started acquiring film rights for not only Kenya or East Africa, but for the continent of Africa. By the 1950s, the Majestic and Samji Kala group were ready to venture into film financing and thereby acquiring overseas rights. 'Overseas' generally meant world rights, excluding India and Southeast Asia. Thus, to name a few, in the 60s the films acquired were colour films like *Kashmir Ki Kali* (starring Shammi Kapoor and Sharmila Tagore), *Himalay Ki Godmein* (starring Manoj Kumar and Mala Sinha), *Gumnaam* (Manoj Kumar, Nanda), *Sawan Ki Ghata* (Manoj Kumar, Sharmila Tagore, Mumtaz), *Love In Tokyo* (Joy Mukkerji, Asha Parekh), *Ziddi* (Joy Mukherji, Asha Parekh) and many many more.

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Cinemas Galore!

Mombasa already had REGAL, MAJESTIC and NAAZ as fully functioning cinemas, but there was a need for one more. So in 1953, an ultra-luxurious cinema was built by Samji Kala. It was known for being the only cinema north of South Africa that was fully air conditioned with Cinemascope screen and Stereophonic sound. It was named QUEENS CINEMA. Later the name was changed to KENYA CINEMA

Nairobi in the 1950s was emerging as a very lucrative market for Indian films. Majestic already had GREEN on Latema Road which was the heart of the Asian shopping area. Majestic also had the EMPIRE near New Stanley but as it was committed to a South African company for six days in a week; Indian films were exhibited there only on Sundays. The decision was made to pull down the GREEN and purchase an empty plot next door to build a modern luxury cinema, named EMBASSY. It was opened in 1958 with fanfare and the release of V Shantaram's *Do Ankhen Barah Haath.*

In Kampala, Majestic had a small cinema house called CENTRAL and was dependent on ODEON and NORMAN to show their films. So, a cinema with nearly 900 seats and the latest equipment was built in the 1960s. It was named NEETA. In Tanzania, there were sufficient cinemas except in Tanga. So, a cinema was built with the name MAJESTIC in 1957. And, the Majestic Group also acquired the PLAZA in Moshi about the same time.

To get more mileage from the films' run, many Bollywood celebrities were guests of the Majestic group when their movies were released, they included: Dilip Kumar, Yash Chopra, K Asif, Sunil Dutt, Raj Kumar and Asha Parekh.

GREEN CINEMA in the mid-1950s. Later it was demolished and with a purchase of the next-door plot, a new modern bigger cinema was built in 1958 named EMBASSY CINEMA, which opened with V. Shantaram's hailed DO ANKHEN BARAH HAATH.

1955: Original Partners And Associates Of Green Cinema, Later Embassy Cinema .

Standing from Left to Right: Rajni Bhatt, Jagdish Bhatt, Chamanbhai Pandit, Chunibhai Savani and Navinbhai (Babubhai) Bhatt

Sitting From Left To Right: Narsibhai Kotak, H.r. Bhatt, Nanjibhai Kala Savani, Mohanbhai Kala Savani, T.k. Pandit, Manu Bhatt

Reportedly, at the release of *Waqt,* the director Yash Chopra and stars Sunil Dutt and Raj Kumar were mobbed and traffic came to a standstill in Nairobi and Mombasa.

Changes in the industry.

By mid 1960s, the scene was changing. Kenya Film Corporation was set up under the Industrial Development Corporation (ICDC). From 1967, all film distribution was under Kenya Film Corporation (KFC). Headed by Nyoike F Njoroge, KFC canalized the distribution business. Likewise, in Tanzania, Tanzania Film Corporation came on the scene. Majestic became a major supplier to both due to their old library and new acquisitions.

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Embassy Cinema, Nairobi

Embassy Upstairs Lobby

Embassy Entrance

Embassy Auditorium

Growing Ambitions and Establishing a Legacy

With the change in distribution landscape in Kenya and Tanzania, Mohanlal in the meanwhile was expanding into other enterprises including real estate development, industries such as blanket and towel manufacturing, imports of textiles from the Far East, import of sundries, and export of cotton. He had groomed his six sons to continue the film distribution and exhibition business on their own. His nephew in India Maganbhai, continued to acquire films. His sons Shanti, operated from Embassy Cinema in Nairobi, Chuni from Majestic and Raman from Kenya Cinema. Dhiru moved to the UK to independently pioneer the business there, Suryakant was based in Bahrain and I moved to New York to start movie distribution independently. All having been groomed by the family patriarch, the late Mohanlal, to continue his legacy.

In Conclusion

In 1923, the Savanis started with the Majestic Cinema in Mombasa, Kenya; and the distribution and exhibition of silent Hindi films. They went on to acquire Hollywood films along with Italian spaghetti westerns and Hong Kong martial arts films and owned a string of cinema houses in East Africa. However by the 1980s there was a change in the local entertainment climate. This was due to the rampant video and internet piracy, declining South Asian population and competition from other ancillary medias. The Savani brothers then wound up the theatre business but continued to distribute films. I am now resident in the USA and still occasionally acquire some Indian film rights and distribute the films.

Reel Pleasures

By Laura Fair

Films and movie-going are the central focus of this book 'For generations, going to the movies was the most popular form of leisure in cities across Tanzania. On Sundays in particular, thousands of people filled the streets from late afternoon until well past midnight, coming and going from seeing the week's hot new release. Films from every corner of the globe were shown during the week, but on Sundays, it was always Indian films that stole the show, serving as the focus of these large public gatherings in city centers across the land.'

In East Africa, cinematography first came to Zanzibar and it was in the early 1900s and for much of the 20th century films were the talk of the town in Tanzania. They were a regular feature of urban night life before cinema halls were built to accommodate audiences and block off the daylight. The book describes how in a society where literacy was the preserve of the few and radio was not yet introduced, films became the focal point of urban conversation. For days, weeks and even months after a premier; animated discussions analysed the pros and cons of fashion, class, politics, romance, modernism and much else portrayed in the film.

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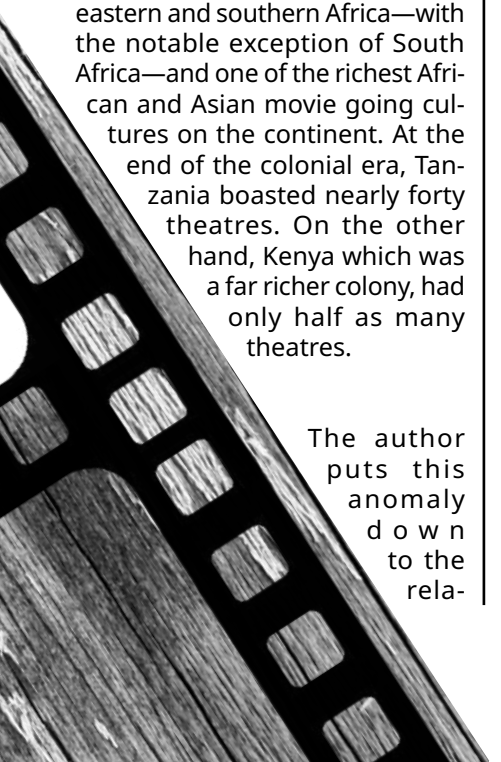
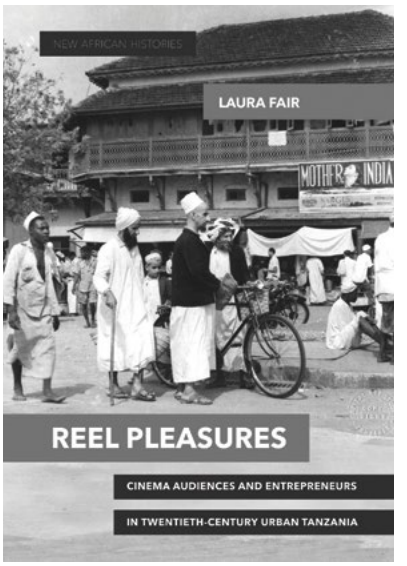
The men (and it was men) who pioneered this industry were almost entirely South Asian and usually they themselves were avid film goers as well as being entrepreneurs. Business and pleasure were intertwined. Their livelihood pursuits had driven them to make contacts in both the east and the west, USA to Europe to Egypt and the Far East. As a result they were able to source their films from a wide range of countries and cultures. 'Globalization' though a contemporary word, has been going on from times immemorial and in the case of celluloid, it was Tanzanians who were driving and directing these flows. This book interweaves the local, national, and transnational.

The cinema was where one not only learnt about global cultures and goings-on but interacted with diverse members of their own town or location. Theatres brought together young and old; rich and poor; male and female; Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Parsi; and African, Asian, Arab, and the occasional European.

By the late 1950s, Tanzania had more cinemas than any country in eastern and southern Africa—with the notable exception of South Africa—and one of the richest African and Asian movie going cultures on the continent. At the end of the colonial era, Tanzania boasted nearly forty theatres. On the other hand, Kenya which was a far richer colony, had only half as many theatres.



The author puts this anomaly down to the relatively higher rate of urbanisation in Tanzania. Movie going was an urban phenomenon. Zanzibar, which is considered the primary source of film distribution in East Africa, had the most urbanised population in sub-Saharan Africa – more than 50,000 people staying in towns BEFORE the British even got there. These people considered the town as home. In Kenya, less than 8 percent of the population was urban at independence, which partly explains why many Africans only began going to the cinema in the 1960s (and many actually never went at all).



In addition in the settler colonies, the African did not have easy access to the towns where they were treated as migrant labour and made to feel unwelcome. We were surprised to read that in Nairobi, Africans needed a special, government-issued permit before they could buy a ticket to a show. If that was not bad enough, a patronizing list of rules and expectations—detailing a dress code and mode of comportment while in a theatre—handed out with the special pass also hampered Africans' desire to go to a film. The presence of white settlers who included Boers from South Africa led to a much stricter and blatant form of racial segregation and discrimination in Kenya than in Tanzania. In the latter the authorities did attempt to exclude Africans but both cinema patrons and owners protested and won the day. Also the fact that the cinema was usually owned by a local resident, as opposed to being one in a film distributing chain, meant that the owner did everything possible to maximise his audience attendance. Excluding movie goers because of race or class would have been counter-productive. From the earliest days Africans comprised the majority in cinema audiences. In Dar-es-Salaam the cinemas were located in the city centre and therefore away from the 'African zone' but regardless of that thousands of Africans went to the movies totally ignoring the 'administrative imaginary lines'.

Sunday shows were in Tanzania, as in Kenya, family shows when wives got to spend time with their husbands who also used the opportunity to bond with their children. It was a weekly event that was eagerly anticipated as apart from the film itself, meeting with other movie goers, munching snacks, secret rendezvous and exhibiting the latest fashions were just some of the added perks. As the author writes: 'Cinema halls were not lifeless chunks of brick and mortar; they resonated with soul and spirit. They were places that gave individual lives meaning, spaces that gave a town emotional life. Across generations, cinemas were central to community formation.'

The women-only shows, or *zenana* as they were known, gave women and their children a space of their own to let their hair down in. In Zanzibar, women from the royal family joined with hundreds of less prominent citizens to watch Indian and Egyptian films. Wearing

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The Sultana Cinema, Zanzibar Town, Malindi, early 1952. *Credit Ranchhod T Oza Capital Art Studio*

purdah or not, for those two hours or so women could claim this public space away from the usual patriarchy ever present in their lives.

Films can often have an impact not even envisioned by their producer. In the 1970s a group of young men illustrated a popular meeting spot in Zanzibar as 'Jaws Corner' following a showing of the blockbuster hit *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975). They painted the first shark on a wall and christened the area Jaws Corner. Forty-some years later, this area is still referred to by that name, and the symbol of Jaws is still regularly repainted on the walls of the buildings to mark the territory. Given Zanzibar's turbulent politics post-revolution; the Jaws metaphor was used by the opposition to represent 'the crushing power of the state'.

Previously in colonial times, apart from the duty imposed on films entering the country, the government did not impose any further taxes on their usage. After independence the cinema industry was brought under state control and following the Arusha Declaration in 1967, it was nationalised. The cinema buildings were nationalised and film distribution was monopolised but the industry continued to be managed by the original owners. These, however, were often accused of being 'blood-sucking capitalists' as they were nearly all of South Asian descent.

Regarding the Asian community, the author focuses on two aspects: one is the common tendency to lump all South Asians as *dukawallas* meaning 'conniving shopkeepers'. While without doubt there were some of this kind, this approach completely ignores the class, religious, occupational, educational and cultural diversity of this community. Two is the practice by political leaders in Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar and to a lesser degree Kenya to target this minority in order to distract

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The new Majestic Cinema after its opening in 1955. Credit Ranchhod T Oza Capital Art Studio

attention from the Government's failings. What is interesting is that the cinema owners were well-known and integrated in their local social settings; so much so that the majority of them stayed on in Tanzania long after their compatriots went into exile. *Reel Pleasures* elucidates 'how South Asian immigrants and their children developed not only businesses but also social and cultural institutions that built bridges rather than divides'.

Most interviewees said they went to the movies once a week but there were quite a few who went two or three times a week. When asked why, the general response was, 'the desire to learn about new people and places and see how others lived'. An old Swahili maxim said, 'Travel to learn/open your mind'. Film offered a slice of the traveller's vision to those who never left home. In the audience were those who marvelled at the upholstered seats, the electricity, the air-conditioning and who felt like royalty as ushers politely escorted them to their seats and made sure they were comfortable. And you were exposed to the latest in film production via global standards of technology and sound.

To conclude, newspaper ads in the 1950s and 60s show a preponderance of Hollywood movies but in reality it was Indian movies which caught the imagination of Tanzanian movie goers. Stars were known by their names and the tunes of popular songs were hummed even though the meanings of the lyrics were not always clear. At this time East Africa was the most lucrative overseas market for Indian films in the world and this is where Bollywood really went global.

This short summary is an introduction to a fascinating and highly informative book which readers are urged to delve into. AwaaZ is grateful to the author, Laura Fair,

for permission to quote from her book, *Reel Pleasures – Cinema Audiences and Entrepreneurs in Twentieth-Century Urban Tanzania.*

Laura Fair is the recipient of the African Studies Association 'Ogot Book Prize' November 2019

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'Tonight At The Empire'

Cinema And Urbanity In Zanzibar, 1920s To 1960s

By Brigitte Reinwald

This article deals with cinematographic history in Zanzibar from its beginnings in the late 1910s; and looks at evolving programme patterns and changing audience preference trends during the colonial period and the initial transition years to post-colonial rule. Cinema-going developed during the course of the 20th century to a popular urban resident pastime, all social classes and 'ethnic' groups considered.

The remnants of Zanzibar town's three former cinema theatres, which up to about 1996 were the patronized sites of a favourite pastime, are still visible. The old *Empire* is now a supermarket, and the *Sultana* – a name considered inappropriate in the course of revolutionary re-conversions and hence renamed *Cine Afrique* – that is likely to survive merely as the picturesque façade of a stylish shopping mall now under construction. And finally there is the *Majestic,* the still-striving-to-survive-modestly venue where Bollywood videos made in India are screened on a regular basis.

One of the first cinematographic performances in Zanzibar took place one evening in May 1916 at Victoria Gardens, attended by a predominantly European public. Hassanali Adamji Jariwalla, a Bohora merchant in silk and fancy goods who had come to Zanzibar in the late 1890s, invested in cinematographic entertainment as merely a side line at first. However, in the course of the next two decades he became Zanzibar's foremost cinema pioneer. From August 1916, the date of the first licence accorded to him for a theatrical performance, he managed the *Zanzibar Cinema/White Tent* in the Mnazi Mmoja quarter, and from December 1916, the *Merry Theatre/ Alexandra Cinema*, both located in one building in the neighbourhood of Mchambawima/ Mkunazini on the same site as the future *Empire Cinema*. He advertised his product as 'short-running silent films exhibiting only the best and latest releases from home', i.e. the United Kingdom. In 1921, presumably induced by the profitable prospects of his cinematographic venture, Jariwalla erected a large cinema palace in what was described as the better part of Zanzibar town: the *Royal Cinema.*

Others now followed in his footsteps. From about 1917 on, a third cinema was operated in a large corrugated iron sheet building located in Malindi, a quarter close

Poster Birha ki Raat Source FilminIndia, Vol 15, No 11, November 1949, P64. Courtesy National Film Archives of India, Pune

to the harbour, and thus probably in the immediate vicinity of what was to become the *Sultana Cinema* in 1951. The island of Pemba was not to be left out. From 1928, Hassanali Nazarali Punja operated the *Regal Cinema* in Wete, followed by the *Imperial* in Chake-Chake which was run by Soni Narandas Zaverchand, a goldsmith and pawnbroker.

Hassanali Nazarali Punja's application 'to carry on a portable travelling cinema in Pemba' and to erect a temporary cinema tent was refused by the colonial authorities. The reason was that plantation workers would flock to the shows and neglect their work, especially during the clove season. The clove plantation owners and British administrators shared a common interest in preventing spontaneous gatherings of 'lower-class' Africans as this could lead to social unrest. Racial stereotypes were well entrenched and widely accepted.

When H A Jariwalla liquidated his business in Zanzibar in 1936 and

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moved to Dar-es-Salaam, he subsequently opened three further cinema houses there. In Zanzibar, the *Royal Cinema Theatre* was leased in December 1937 to Kassamali Jaffer Hameer, a prominent member of the Ismaili community and he renamed it *Majestic*.

In a similar change of hands and name, the *Alexandra* – renamed *Darajani Cinema* and managed by a certain Ebrahim Sheikh Esmailji – was eventually purchased by Sawakshaw H Talati, a joint proprietor of the Dar-es-Salaam registered Indo-African Theatres Ltd, and operated as the Empire from 1940 onwards. Talati also opened the *Sultana Cinema* in Malindi in December 1951, renamed *Cine Afrique* in 1964.

From early on, Africans had a lively interest in the films though Indians formed the bulk of the audience. Although almost all of the 120 odd films imported annually to Zanzibar during the second half of the 1920s were Hollywood and UK productions, it was observed that, 'there is a noticeable increase in the number of films obtained direct from India'. Many of these represent historical tales and scenes taken from Hindu mythology. As time went on, the popularity of Indian movies soared, that of UK productions dropped and were equal to Egyptian and European films proportions. The first Kiswahili dubbings probably appeared in the late 1950s. Even after the Revolution in 1964, in spite of all the ideological rhetoric, this ratio hardly changed - films from the 'brotherly socialist' countries barely reached 7%.

The early business links between the western coast of India and east Africa developed into more formal organisational features and joint venture activities which provided Indian movies for cinema theatres in Kampala, Mombasa, Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam and Zanzibar. A similar evolution can be observed with regard to Egyptian films.

Censorship in Zanzibar was practised right from the beginning of the cinematographic era as political authorities worried about the negative effects that films exerted on urban populations from the lower classes. The British Protectorate Government showed a keen interest in controlling the programmes. In spite of the fact

Aan (Savage Princess Hindi 1952) a hit at the Box office in Zanzibar Source FilminIndia, Vol 18, No 8, August 1952

that Zanzibari audiences were heterogeneous in their social and professional background, government representatives insisted on implementing a segregated cinema policy that not only ran counter to cosmopolitan cinema-going habits, but also denied 'African' audiences the faculties of moral judgement.

British officials in Zanzibar shared the convictions of their mainland colleagues that African

'The old Empire is now a Supermarket,'

populations needed special teaching in order to develop soundly. Worried about the popularity of 'useless' and 'harmful' pictures among both urban and rural audiences, they advocated that 'Africans' be shown films with an educational goal. So they provided 16mm silent strips produced by the British Film Institute in London, such as *Amazing Maize, The Flea, Bug* and *Louse, Denizens of the Shore* or the unavoidable and long-lasting 1928 classic *Unhooking the Hook-Worm*. Locally produced *Agricultural Methods at the Experimental Station of the Agricultural Department* and *The Work at the Women's Outpatient Department* were tried but needless to say, they were a virtual failure.

From the research findings it can be concluded that cinema as a favoured leisure activity responded to the widespread desire of the Zanzibari people to express and perform their modern urbanism. While offering themselves as it were fares to areas beyond the shores of the Indian Ocean, the programmes induced them as much, or perhaps even more, to further exploring the waters within its confines. And finally, persevering as they did in their search for pleasure, the Zanzibari people were obviously not prepared to accept the artificial cinema projects subsequent governments presented to them, as they plainly failed to meet their expectations.

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Films And Music In My Life, Then And Now ...

By Valli Jamal

The Drive-In was the place to be on a Sunday evening when Indian movies were shown. Teenage boys and girls, parents, even grandparents would do the pre-film ritual walk around the City Square in their best linens and silks. The 1% would show off their Mercs and BMs. In consequence the Sunday outing was the only time there was a traffic jam in Kampala in those days. Idi Amin got caught in one of them, driving back to Entebbe with his foreign minister Wanume Kibedi. 'Where are we?' quoth the President, 'In Bombay?' And the expulsion happened, right? Well, let me not exaggerate, but South Asian wealth was on display on the Sundays accompanied by their notions of exclusion, and let us not forget that those two variables – income inequality and racial arrogance – figured heavily in Amin's decision to expel us.

The announcement was made on a Saturday. It was at first taken as a joke. The next day people went to the Drive-In as usual. Picnics were laid out and beauties admired off-screen. *Khilona* was the Film of the Year and the eponymous song the 'Song of the Year'. I give a full page to it in my book, *The Uganda Asians – Then and Now, Here and There, We Contributed, We Contribute.* And who was the 'Actress of the Year 1972'? Mumtaz Begum, Mrs Mayur Madhvani, no less. I have this scenario in my mind that at the launch of the book a mixed Indian-Ugandan band will perform songs of our past and then at the climax launch into Khilona, in Hindi and Luganda. I have this dream that Mumtaz Begum will come to the stage and sing a solo stanza.

The Drive-In continued to function after the expulsion. Dr Mukhtar Ahmad recalls in his story for the book that he and the High Commissioner of Pakistan would go to the Drive-In with the family to watch movies [sic]. They'd see two-three on any evening – i.e. after each roll the operator would (unknowingly) put on a roll from another film. The Drive-In is gone now but the screen still stands, mouldy from rain and fungus-attacks.

Cinemas do not exist either, as people just watch movies at home on large-screen TVs. In those days there were four theatres – Norman, Odeon, Neeta and Delite. Odeon was the people's favourite. Those of the upper-classes

Opening of Drive-In Kampala, Uganda

would arrive just before the call-bell rang out and take their dedicated seats in the fourth row. The hall would fill up with perfume on their arrival, the ladies in sarees matching those of the actress on the screen. Yes, our textile importers made sure the 'Saree of the Week' was flown over by them for the premiere. *Awara* is probably the most remembered film. People came from the *bhur* (villages) for the first show. One newly-married couple coming from Jinja drowned as their car overturned at a culvert bridge and fell into the stream. That landmark was forever remembered as the Awara Bridge by most Asians and the story figures in the book in many accounts. Odeon was special and is fondly remembered

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for its bar on the second storey. It was run by Ramzan Mamdani (Ramju). He himself was a teetotaller. He recounts several youths who started their drinking habit at his bar. They'd be seated in second-class and those seats would begin to rock after the interval. There was a third-class, almost exclusively patronized by African boys. They knew all the Bollywood songs and would even sing along with the playback on the screen.
Talking of 'rock', how could I forget the screening of *Rock Around the Clock!* I mention this to highlight the fact that the next generation of South Asians born around 1945, were by the mid-1950s very much into western films and music. *RAtC* was screened at the Norman Cinema. We had a Saturday half-morning session and trooped into the cinema, with Pepsi in hand. We knew teenagers in England and USA were dancing in the aisle straight from the first tune and we did the same. The older generation mostly continued to watch Indian movies.

Affection for Indian films by East African Asians worked both ways: We were important to Indian film moguls. Almost the whole galaxy of Indian stars visited East Africa as did their top playback singers. Jagjit Singh's career took off after a performance at Machakos. He was brought over to perform in Kampala but just at dawn Amin's coup took place and the group left hurriedly, past a scary road block at Mabira Forest. Sarv Daman Gautama recounts the story in my book. Sarv Saheb hosted Raj Kumar and the two did a car race to Safari Lodge where Raj was staying. Why such a lot of attention by the Indian film industry (the ugly derivative-expression 'Bollywood' did not exist then) to East Africa? It was 'all about the Benjamins' - we were per capita the richest collection of people of

Norman Cinema

Aw and FB cinema in Kamuli

Odeon cinema

Former Globe Cinema now Delite Church.

South Asian origin in the world then. The Gulf came much later.
It has gone now – from Uganda, but also from the www (whole wide world). Bollywood just doesn't make movies like that anymore. It's now song&dance and the hero particularly has to know Michael-Jacksonesqe steps. Acting consists of looking into the heroine's eyes with his own eyes misting over. That signifies eternal love now in Bollywood movies. The hero will quite likely be filming three-four movies on any given day and he doesn't know which one he is acting out at any given moment. Misty eyes will do for all! Films about poor people are not going to be made anymore as the ruling party wants to depict India as a heaven for the middle-classes, which it is, with the poor people left behind. No more are we going to see actors of the likes of Dilip Kumar, Nargis and Raj Kapoor. No more singers of the likes of Mohamed Rafi, Talat Mahmood, Mukesh and Lata. No more will movies be made about Mughlai culture because that is just frowned upon. Because love has been banished from Indian movies.

So, we of the gone generation forever sing Jo Wada Kiya. We sing Suhani Raat; Tu(n) Kahe Agar; Mere Mehboob – because that is how we fell in love and because there are no love songs written in Bollywood anymore.












Cinema Halls In Mombasa In The Mid And Late 20Th Century

By Anjum Asodia

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My Personal Story

I joined *Coastweek,* at its inception in 1978 as a typesetter. Desktop publishing was unheard of then, so I would type all the stories, captions and headlines on a typesetting machine (very noisy with just one small line as the visual screen) on photographic paper. The canister with the rolled up paper was then developed in a dark room. Sometimes the paper would get stuck in the rollers because of the chemicals and I would have to retype everything all over again (very painful at 3.00am on a Wednesday night as it was always a full day and night work for us). Editor Adrian Grimwood would then measure the stories on the sheets, cut and paste the stories making sure everything fitted properly. Those were the days of cut and paste jobs. An error there sometimes meant having to retype and redo the entire page again.

Having been a good storyteller and writer (no professional training) I was given the task of writing the film previews for the paper. Both my father and grandfather were huge movie buffs. In the absence of Google, cine goers relied heavily on the film previews - the catch was that the film was only released on the Friday which was when the paper went out on the streets. That meant I had to write the preview usually on the preceding Tuesday or Wednesday when the film had not even arrived in Mombasa. So I used to get press releases or synopses from the theatre owners which gave me either the whole story or a shorter version. The first few weeks were quite difficult but then I got the hang of it and I ended up writing film previews for *Coastweek* for more than 32 years.

Drive In Cinema

This was the only cinema, where one could drive in with their cars, park at the best spot possible, lug a heavy speaker onto your car window and enjoy a film on a massive projector screen in front. With a capacity of about 375 cars, in good weather one could sit on the ground on mattresses and enjoy the film. This extra seating could take about another 300 to 400 viewers.

Going to the Drive In was not just a cinematic experience, it was more of a social event. Sundays being the day for the newest film to be released, people would dress up in their finest (especially the youth who were on the lookout for 'eye candy'), pile into their cars and join the queue as early as 5.00pm for the 7.00pm show.

The hours preceding darkness when the film would start was as good as any fashion parade when decked-up teenagers would walk around between cars, elders would be sitting outside their cars on mattresses chatting or playing card, kids could enjoy themselves in the playground at the back (it was very safe to leave children alone in those days).

It reached a peak in the seventies when one could be sitting in the queue for more than an hour to get in, starting from the box office right up to Makupa Causeway, sometimes causing you to miss the beginning of the film.

An ingenious idea was born then. Those with more than one car (neighbours would pool) would drive to the cinema as early as 2.00 or 3.00 pm. At 6.00pm or slightly earlier the second car would be brought out and driven to the cinema, parked outside the gates on the main road (it was very safe then) and the passengers would walk in, pay for their tickets and get into the car already parked inside with their chairs and mattresses. There were times when tickets would be bought in the afternoon only to be shown as they entered on foot to save more time. After the film, one male member would then get off outside and collect the parked car and all would drive home. The second show at 9.30pm would be a 'house full' if the film was good but the lengths people went to to catch the first evening show was just amazing.

'The first few weeks were quite difficult but then I got the hang of it and I ended up writing film previews for Coastweek for more than 32 years.'

The Drive In Cinema screened both English and Hindustani films, the latter pulled the largest audiences. The biggest English film crowd pullers were the James Bond films whose visuals on this huge screen were fantastic.

Sundays was reserved for the latest Hindustani film. A repeat English film would be the first show on Saturdays to be followed by a

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repeat Hindustani film at 9.30pm. Wednesdays was a favourite for many. Only one Hindustani film (a much older repeat) at night and to see that, one did not pay per person but by the carload regardless how many people were crammed into the vehicle. So all sorts of 'box bodies' (or vans in today's world) would be fitted with mattresses to accommodate eager film-goers packed like sardines. The entry charge used to be only Kshs10 shillings for the car!

I met up with Gordhanbhai Patel (a very good friend of my Dad) who was in charge of the booking office at the Drive In Cinema and got some history. Umedbhai Patel and Bhoghilal Patel owned the Bellevue Drive In Cinema in Nairobi. Seeing the popularity in this, a plot of land was identified in Changamwe and the Mombasa Drive In Cinema was established in the late 50s early 60s.

Apparently despite the favourable weather conditions and the amount of interest, the Cinema initially did not do well and was showing losses. Bhogilal approached his friend Manubhai (who was Gordhanbhai's brother-in-law) to lease the Cinema for five years. Gordhanbhai was roped in to run the show at night, while working at a full time job in the harbour.

Within a year, the Cinema was showing good profits and after the second year, the owners wanted it back with a condition that Gordhanbhai would remain at the helm. This made him a very popular figure in Mombasa and most of the South Asians knew him. A deal was struck with Manubhai and as a result Gordhanbhai left his day job to continue at the Drive In Cinema for the next 25 years or so.

Film Star Shailendra Singh for Coast Tour

HANDSOME, ROMANTIC, 27-year-old Shailendra Singh who rocketed to fame with just one song in the Indian film Bobby will soon be coming to perform in Mombasa, writes Anjum Manji

Shailendra Singh who is accompanied by an experienced female singer, Susmita, a one-man backup orchestra is also joined by the up-coming singer Anne Mallik

The group has just held successful performances in the United Kingdom. They have also widely travelled the United States, Canada, Middle East and Africa performing to capacity crowds.

Their first performance in Kenya will be at the Nairobi Hilton on [illegible]. Thereafter, the group travels down to the Coast on a tour which is to be confirmed [illegible]

Shailendra got into the film industry at the young age of 19 with the song "Main Shair to Nahin" (in Raj Kapoor's [illegible] which soon caught up with the masses and in time became a household name.

Other films in which he has sung in playback are: Khel Khel Mein, Amar Akbar Anthony,

• Shailendra Singh

Parvarish, Suhaag, Dada, Do Jasoos, Rafoo Chakkar, Chalte Chalte.

In between singing songs, he has also tried his hand at acting in the following films: Do Dost, Pyar Mein Sauda Nahin, and Zaheeelee.

He is also responsible for bagging the H.M.V. Gold Emblem award winner for the incredible sale of 100,000 Bobby L.P.s in one year.

SELL • SWAP • SEEK • SHARE • SAY

24/10/1976

According to him, the canteen (whose main sales were chips, sausages, beers and sodas) had a bigger turn over then the ticket sales, thus it was the canteen that was the driving force at the Drive In Cinema, proving yet again that a visit to it was more social than film-driven. He revealed that they used to start making chips in the morning and in spite of that, on a good day, the chips would run out at the interval (I can vouch for the queues that used to wait for their chips even before the interval break).

We used to carry newspapers and some people carried raw potatoes in the car in case it rained. We would rub the paper or the cut potato on the windshield to make the rain drops slide off faster so we would not have to use the wipers too much and interrupt the film.

However, with the advent of television and particularly videos whereby people could watch the films at a fraction of the price in the comfort of their homes, attendance at the Cinema declined and the cost of operations went up. The Drive In Cinema was

then closed down for a few years and eventually sold to Combined Warehouses as a storage depot. This was very sad as the Drive In Cinema was a major icon in the history of Mombasa.

Regal Cinema
Its story is covered in a separate article.

Moons Cinema
Very little is known about this theatre which was in the Makupa area. I remember going there as a very small child. It was supposedly built in the fifties by a Parsi then bought over by Mahendra who eventually closed it down and moved to Nairobi. The first film shown there was the 1952 *Baiju Bawra* with Bharat Bhushan and Meena Kumari, a musical megahit.

Plaza Cinema
This was also a very small cinema which did not last long. It was situated in a shop on Makupa Road and owned by an Arab proprietor.

Chox Cinema
This was an unusual cinema theatre. Previously called Liberty Cinema and Princess Cinema, it was the only open air cinema hall in

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COASTWEEK Friday, November 10, 1978 11

DATELINE: NAIROBI / DAR ES SALAAM

Usha will be back soon

reports IVOR DAVIS

I'M convinced Usha star is the first of a new breed of Nairobi showbiz entrepreneurs watched thousands thronging the International Casino early this year experiencing the phenomenon (there's no other word) called Usha.

The Calcutta housewife-cum-mad evening with her singing dynamism, her wit and that je ne sais quoi that equals star-dom.

They decided, rightly in my view, there was a tremendous potential of Nairobi people who enjoy light, popular entertainment - our local TV station isn't, let's face it, the greatest - and they set about providing it.

There have been the inevitable problem areas and organisation in some cases needs tightening up. Some of the charges have been a bit way out, but I'm the first to admire guts and the pioneering spirit, and I feel the groups bringing out Boney M, Helen Shapiro and Millie Jackson deserve every encouragement.

I don't go along with my friend Jorge Amado's views about inviting artistes using up valuable foreign exchange.

Not all the ticket receipts go to the artistes, and we wouldn't like Kenyans who make the big time overseas (and there are

• USHA and Ivor Davis, our man in the Capital City, are pictured discussing the lovely singing sensation's latest project – a 'live' cassette recording for Kenyan fans.

Before I go further, I ought to declare my own interest in showbiz - I was on the periphery of Usha's Kenya performances and I'm involved in the production of a new cassette Usha Live! Her many fans in Nairobi and Mombasa will be pleased to learn that she'll be heading again in this direction early next year.

★★★★★

And returning to this office

level that I'd like to get off my chest. Helen Shapiro, whom I know personally, was top of the bill when she appeared on tour with the Beatles when they were first making a name for themselves in Britain.

When she sings "Don't Treat Me Like A Child" and "Walking Back To Happiness" - the songs which made her famous when aged 14 - even a middle-aged Beethoven enthusiast like myself gets caught up in the excitement and genuine person.

So why do they have to guild the lily?

Why do they have to try she's heading for some Las Vegas spectacular when she has no intention of making such a safari. Who cares anyway where she's heading after Kenya? Why does she have to be involved with John Travolta and Ryan O'Neal, when she has never even met those gentlemen

Dinosaurs and false alarms

THE FIGHTING along the Tanzania-Uganda border between defence forces of the two armies was the talk of the town with most people - Tanzanian and non-Tanzanian alike - trying to read between the lines from the bickerings of 'Big Daddy' Amin and the war communiques from the Tanzania defence forces.

Many people were however taken for a ride when a false alarm saw shoppers and drivers jamming groceries and petrol stations to replenish their existing stocks in case of any unexpected rationing or shortage.

★★★★★

Dar es Salaam residents were caught by surprise last week when European tourists took photographs in remote and off corners of the city.

Also people wondered whether they belonged to the American C.I.A. or the Russian K.G.B. The visitors were part of a group of 30 Russian tourists brought down to Tanzania by Kearlines - the tours wing of Kearsley (T) Limited.

During their stay in Tanzania, they made a hectic tour of the well-viewed game at the Mikumi National Park - some 300 Kms west of Dar, and rounded up their stay with an evening of cultural mosaic from the two countries.

But one wonders whether the Iron Curtain has become ductile, for it is understood that Kearlines are working on to bring another group of 25 early next year.

It is gratifying to note that a private company is breaking into new ice soliciting tourists from Eastern Europe following the Government's policy of tapping every market.

★★★★★

from TONY BARROS

an unusual subject. The Biological life of Dinosaurs - the large extinct reptiles which lived on the earth some 40 million years ago.

The site is not the Olduvai Gorge or some tourist spot in Northern Tanzania but the Tendaguru Hills, 50 Kms. west of Lindi in southern Tanzania.

The film which will be partially shot in Tanzania in late 1979 follows the completion of the research and script by a three-man team from Canada - Mr Roger Tetrault of the National Film Board of Canada and Dr. Dale Russell and Mr. Pierre Beland - Paleontologists with the National Museum of Canada. They spent four days at the site. Mr. Tetrault told COASTWEEK that all beasts - be they extinct or not - stimulate the imagination of man, and form an important chapter in the history of the earth.

★★★★★

The Bahari Beach Hotel on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam which was gutted by a fire last month is returning to normal routine, although the hotel will only be in full operation early next year.

The hotel must have surely lost a lot of business and the outcome has aggravated the

Coastweek
FIRST ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION PARTY

• Photos — ASHWIN SANGHRAJKA

'PIRATES' HIT FILM INDUSTRY

BOX OFFICE FALLS TO VIDEO CRAZE

KENYA IS among several countries spanning three continents where an organised video racket ring is making a fortune out of pirating top shows from abroad. Illegal copies of top films and T.V. programmes which take years to reach the Kenyan screens, are already in the homes of video-owning families in the country.

Cashing in on the growing video craze, the big-time international pirate network based in United Kingdom and America, is said to be operating in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

In Kenya, comedies like 'Mind Your Language' — currently topping the comedy chart on the Voice of Kenya television — are alleged to be big sellers in the market and families have been able to watch whole series from illegal copies even before they appear on the Voice of Kenya television screen.

And Indian box office smash hits like "Rocky", "Kaz", "The Wah, Rat" and "Red Rose" are also up for sale in the country from India.

Copies of A.T.V.'s contro-

are then copied and stocked in laundry shops, supermarkets and even transport firms where they are sold to customers under the counter.

Suspected dealers in the business in Mombasa refused to give any details of the racket when approached this week. It is claimed no receipts are issued when the cassettes are hired out to customers.

Sources close to the racket estimate that the so-called video cassette libraries and shops make about Shs. 40,000 to 50,000 per month from the hire of video cassettes. Some hire out about 300 cassettes

EXCLUSIVE from GRAY PHOMBEAH

a lucrative business is booming in the black market

It is claimed that when these cassettes arrive in Kenya they

TURN TO PAGE TWO

Mombasa Mayo

Close Ties with

Kenya in that it had the four walls but no roof. Located in Majengo, it was run by a person called Fakhru Noorbhai.

He had borrowed money for the venture but the cinema was not doing very well, so it was eventually auctioned by Datoo Auctioneers in 1962 and bought by Kurji Rajan. The cinema operator, Mohamedali, ran it for about 14 years on lease from Kurji Rajan. Thereafter, it was run by Kurji Rajan's grandson Sadrudin Merali and became a very popular movie hall in that area as it was not very expensive and did not need fans because of the open roof. Mosquitoes were a bane to cine-goers there but apparently that was a small price to pay for a good movie at a very reduced price.

Most of the films there were repeats and I remember sitting on one of the 150 metal (later plastic) chairs watching the film which was projected onto the wall (not even a screen). And because they owned the property, thus no rental, the owner's costs were very low in turn relating to cheaper tickets. The previous owners used to run English films but after Kurji Rajan took over he just played Hindustani films and their Eid or Diwali attractions (even though repeats) usually ran to full house.

Of course the movie could only be played after dark and when it rained people still sat through the film despite the rain, Mombasa was great in that when it rained it did not get cold, but was pleasant. Of course if the rain was very heavy, the show had to be cancelled. Sadru Merali remembers how people sometimes used to throw stones over the wall to disturb their patrons.

Naaz Cinema

As the local population started moving out of Old Town to settle nearer to the centre of Mombasa, a cinema was built on the periphery of Old Town, just outside of Kibokoni Road and on Makadara Road, very close to the Central Police Station.

Harbans Lal owned Shaan Cinema in Nairobi and decided to expand into Mombasa. Syed Mohamed Kassamali Shah (aka Mithoo) was brought in as a partner/manager of the newly built and very modern Naaz Cinema. Despite not being very exposed to films beforehand or having a fixation of watching films, Mithoobhai just loved the 'movie scene' and all that came with films.

Samina Sheikh, Mithoobhai's daughter, recalled some stories from her childhood, including running up and down the ramp that led to the hall. Shortly after the cinema was built, part of the roof caved in so it was closed for reconstruction.

Naaz was the only theatre in Mombasa to show Pakistani movies and in what had become a trend that was started with the Majestic group, the lead actors were

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brought in for the opening of the film. Notable Pakistani actors who were brought to the enamoured audiences in Mombasa were Shamim Ara, Zeba and Mohamed Ali. Sometime in the mid-fifties Princess Margaret and the then Governor of Kenya visited Naaz Cinema to attend an event that was taking place there.

Mombasa being a predominantly Islamic population, Naaz also introduced (like the other theatres) the Ladies' show (usually on a weekday afternoon). During these shows, tickets were only sold to women and their contact with the male employees was very limited. These Ladies Shows, or aptly named Zanana Shows, were extremely popular at all the theatres and were mostly sold out. Samina remembers how the women used to love Mithun Chakraborthy's films. Prior to that, when *Bobby* was released in 1973, all the young girls and women created *hungama* at the theatres when it was released. The downside was the cleaning up of the miraa and cigarette debris later on!

Samina fondly recalls some of the staff who worked for her father. Bakari was the bartender until the cinema closed down, Suleiman was at the helm of the box office and during a new release the phone would not stop ringing from clients and friends of Mithoobhai who would request Suleiman to book their seats on the phone, to save them queueing up in the long lines. Then there was Saleh, and the indomitable Mbarak, who were the only ones who could control the ladies during the Ladies' Show.

Even here, as in the Regal Cinema, the special 'box seat' (lovers' seat) was very popular among the youth.

Despite being rivals in business, Mithoobhai and Ramanbhai (of Kenya Cinema) were best buddies and would get together almost every night. Eventually ill health forced Mithoobhai to sell the establishment and it was relaunched as Lotus Cinema. It ran for a few more years before it too (same as the Regal) was consumed by a fire and shut down permanently. To date the plot remains vacant.

Majestic Cinema

Just two years after the first cinema in Mombasa was built (Regal in 1931), a new cinema opened its doors in the Old Town of Mombasa on Princess Street (now Nehru Road).

Mohanlal Kala Savani had gauged the enormity of cinema and how it could be a successful business enterprise. Having imported some films directly and screening them in the newly opened Regal Cinema, he knew he had hit a jackpot. Later going into the business of importing and distributing the films, and eventually buying rights for the films was a win-win situation!

Mohanlal developed Majestic Cinema right in the midst of where the major South Asian and Arab population of Mombasa worked, traded and lived. It was touted as a 650 seater luxurious cinema and was thronged by cine-goers, especially when new films were released.

Between 1949 and 1952, Majestic Cinemas (the entity) had three major fires which destroyed hundreds of film prints with posters, brochures and film trailers. The fires, two were in Mombasa storage locations and the third was in a Jomvu godown. Until 1952 the celluloid films were nitrate based worldwide. These were highly flammable especially if they were stored under high temperature, as was the case in Mombasa with the lack of air conditioning.

Thousands of films world-wide were destroyed, some of them permanently, including some classics. Outside of India, it was only Kenya that was the main market for Hindustani films at the time. So when some films were similarly lost in India, the producers and the archivists relied on Majestic Cinemas to retrieve the old gems. Alas, often the loss was irreparable and these classics were only alive in the minds of the movie-goers. Some early silent films plus pre-1940s films of KL Saigal, Ashok Kumar, Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand and Madhubala are no longer available.

Not satisfied with a Majestic, Mohanlal decided to create an even more luxurious cinema hall outside of Old Town, right in the town centre on Nkrumah Road (across what was the Ministry of

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Water and now the NSSF Building). This was to cater for the upper classes and those that lived in the more affluent areas of Ganjoni, Kizingo and Tudor.

Kenya Cinema

Built in 1953 and called Queen's Cinema (it changed to Kenya Cinema after independence), was the first fully air conditioned theatre with Cinemascope screen and Stereophonic sound in East Africa – a true game changer by Mohanlal Kala Savani. *Daag* with Dilip Kumar and Nimmi opened the doors to the theatre, and this was followed by super hits over the many years it operated. Being the buyers and distributors of course was the icing on the cake.

Yet another gimmick adopted by the Majestic group was of bringing in the lead actors of the big movies on opening nights. This was an exceptional move as now the film-hungry audience could actually see its hero and heroine in the flesh; something Mombasa had never experienced. Some of the major actors that graced Kenya Cinema on their film's opening night were Dilip Kumar, Bindu, Jeetendra, Helen, Sunil Dutt, Raj Kumar, Sadhana and Asha Parekh.

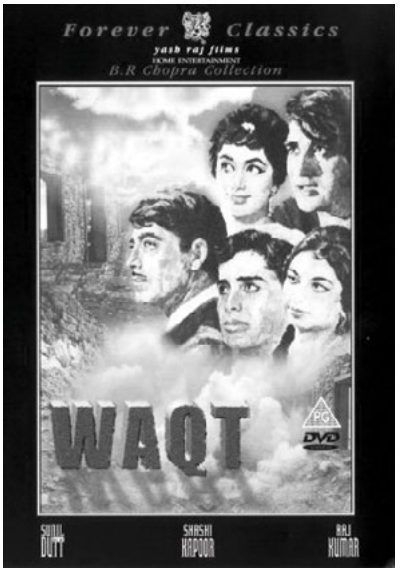
When BR Chopra and Yash Chopra's *Waqt* was released Yash Chopra, Sunil Dutt and Raj Kumar were invited after two months into the release to re-energize interest in the film. The crowds went wild with excitement and traffic came to a standstill. Women mobbed the theatre and wanted to touch Raj Kumar with the result his wig was pulled off - a secret until now! Rooms in more than three hotels were booked under their names and they were finally checked into a fourth hotel to avoid the crowds.

When the roof of Naaz Cinema fell in, Queen's Cinema, though a newer building, was also asked to close down and redo their roof as the architect was the same for both cinemas. The structure of Kenya Cinema was such that it was very conducive to host live performances and I do remember attending a show by Pakistan's ghazal king Mehdi Hassan, while Hema Malini had also held a dance recital there.

Jayanti Solanki started working at Kenya Cinema as an usher but was promoted very soon as a doorkeeper and then onto the ticket office. He knew how to handle the rough hooligans (mostly rich folk) who thought the world was at their beck and call. Black marketers who would buy bulk tickets and then sell them at exorbitant rates outside the theatre were also wary of Solanki who worked, for 34 years, with Chotara who was head of the security office.

The famous actress Mumtaz after marrying business tycoon Mayur Madhvani used to live in Mombasa for many years. Solanki narrates that every time she wanted to watch a film, she would call him and reserve her seat, a side door would be opened for her when the film had just started and she would leave the same way before the movie ended.

The sixties were known for mythological and historical films and romantic dramas, while the seventies and eighties were more into action-oriented love dramas. Since Majestic Cinemas were the owners and distributors of the films and each film was between two or three rolls, the first roll would be shown at Kenya Cinema, then rushed over to the Drive In for their first show. The second roll would follow in the same way and the first roll was returned for Kenya Cinema's second show. This happened many times and



especially for a very popular film. Sometimes the same roll was screened at three different locations - we did not have traffic issues in those days.

The 1980s saw a widespread slump in movie-going following the advent of videos and pirated copies. Kenya is among several countries spanning three continents where an organised video racket ring is making a fortune out of pirating top shows from abroad. Illegal copies of top films and TV programmes which take years to reach the Kenyan screens, are already in the homes of video-owning families in the country. However, of late there has been a revival with ultra-luxurious cinemas and small theatres in multiplex where one has a choice of more than one film. But I don't think that movie-going can ever reach the popularity and level of the 60s, 70s and 80s that was indeed the golden era of cinema.

South Asian Films in Kenya:

A Major Cultural Influence

By Kul Bhushan who reviewed them from 1967 to 1980 and interviewed most stars and playback singers who visited Kenya during this period.

Bollywood movies are an essential and an emotional link of overseas Indians with their motherland. These films influence their thinking, behaviour, fashion and lifestyle. In fact, they are a major influence on popular culture. Kenya is no exception to this as most local South Asians and indeed, quite a few Africans, watch these films and sing their songs.

I began reviewing films in 1967, first in the *East African Standard* and then in the *Sunday Nation*. Since there were no press film previews, all I had were promo booklets with story outline and songs for these films which I collected on Thursdays and handed in my review the next day. These booklets with full colour covers started with the story line and ended with a cliffhanger for the climax. Never knowing how the film ended, I had to be careful in my comments.

Nairobi Cinema Theatres

Asian women liked to dress up in their best and latest colourful sarees decorated with bling-bling patches for visiting the cinema. Every major new release inspired new fashions in terms of patterns and designs of these sarees which were imported in no time from India. The young ones soon copied the latest hairstyles and mannerisms of the heroines. The

Shan Cinema - Nairobi - 1960s Credit Harjinder Kanwal

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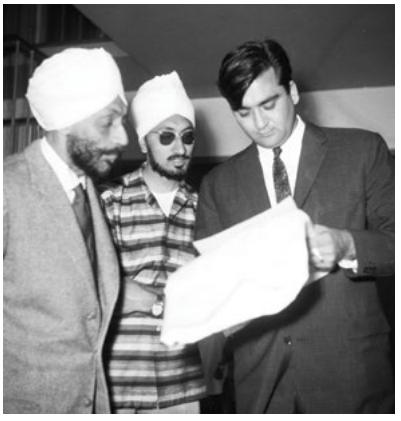
Anil Vidyarthi with Dilip Kumar
Credit: Anil Vidyarthi



Sunil Dutt and Khushal Singh
Credit Natwarlal Chudasama

Lata Mangeshkar
Credit Natwarlal Chudasama

men were conservative but the boys went out of their way to woo the girls with their tailor-made copies of the styles of the heroes.

Shan cinema in Ngara was one of the earliest 'modern' theatres in Nairobi. Its unique architecture like a shell on a hillside drew patrons in the fifties and sixties; its afternoon House Full Ladies Show on weekdays was very popular. Liberty at Pangani was always popular with the Eastleigh and Pangani crowd. Two cinemas in the city centre, Odeon and Embassy, were also crowd pullers for new releases and concerts by visiting movie playback singers. The Globe was a late entrant on the Nairobi scene. Perched on a hillock overlooking the Ngara roundabout, the Globe became the first choice for cinemagoers for new releases as it became the venue to ogle and be ogled by old and the young. It had its share of live concerts plus Gujarati plays from India.

Game Changer Drive-In

Belle Vue Drive-In, on the way to the airport, changed the game for movie viewing. Going to the Belle Vue became a family ritual on weekends as cars started arriving by 4.00pm loaded with the entire family, kids, mom, dad and grand-parents; carrying a packed dinner, mostly *bhajias* and *purees.* After getting into the concourse, the families started to walk around to greet friends and relatives and exchange the latest news and gossip as the children played on swings near the huge screen. After the show, it was a mad rush for the exit. It would be well past midnight when the families got home.

Bollywood's Golden Decade

1965 to 1980 can be termed as the Golden Era of Bollywood films, as posted on the web. No less than seven of the top ten all-time great Bollywood movies were released in this period: *Waqt (1965), Guide (1965) Bobby (1973), Garm Hawa (1973), Sholay (1975), Aandhi (1975)* and *Golmaal (1979)*. The hero of *Waqt*, Raj Kumar, came to Nairobi for its release and was mobbed no end as the women fawned on him. Dev Anand's *Guide* released the pent-up frustrations of many local women who wanted to live their own lives with their real love. *Bobby* became the classic teen romance imagined by all desperate lovers. Inspired by this tale, one couple eloped until nabbed in Mombasa. *Garm Hawa* resonated with the angst of a Muslim in the newly independent India.

Greatest Movie Ever Made

Sholay is still one of the greatest movies ever made with its dialogues popular till today, leave alone the acting of the main stars, especially the villain Gabbar Singh as all youngsters who wanted to act tough mouthed his dialogues. A thinly veiled biopic of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, *Aandhi*, though a controversial tale had a delicate song hummed even today. My comment on this movie elicited a polite comment from an Indian diplomat to take it easy. A rib-tickling comedy, *Gol Mal*, was about a non-existent 'double' playing hockey and no wonder it was liked by Kenya players.

Equally Memorable

Overseas travel was an unaffordable luxury for most; no wonder *Evening in Paris* was a great substitute for all hankering for night club hopping. Multi-award winner, *Aradhana,* showed the travails of a secret marriage. Widow re-marriage was the theme of *Kati Patang* with Asha Parekh. Manoj Kumar's *Purab Aur Paachim* highlighted the values of the east versus the west, making Indians swell their chests in pride. Amitabh Bachchan and Rajesh Khanna's immortal lines in *Anand,* this classic about

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Kul Bhushan with Mukesh Kumar *Credit Natwarlal Chudasama*

battling cancer, were imitated by many fans. Based on the life of rock star Janis Joplin who died of a drug overdose, this Dev Anand movie, *Hara Rama Hare Krishna*, was a stunner with Zeenat Aman and her gyrations. Rajesh Khanna in *Amar Prem* has the eternal line, 'Pushpa, I hate tears'. Its music still rings in my ears. The mega-production *Pakeezah's* hit song was Chalte and finally, *Muqaddar Ka Sikandar* was welcomed about an orphan making good at last.

Top Bollywood stars visiting Kenya

A galaxy of stars visited Kenya during this period. Some came for the release of their films, others on holiday but one of them, Mumtaz, arrived during her romance with a local tycoon, Mayur Madhvani of the famous industrial group in Uganda. She denied all rumours when I interviewed her in Nairobi but later got married to him in India.

The legendary Dilip Kumar came twice; once with Lata Mangeshkar to introduce her in a heart-warming speech in chaste Urdu and sophisticated English that entranced a packed hall at Kenyatta Conference Centre. He returned for a holiday with his wife, Saira Banu.

Two Heroines

Asha Parekh came with dancer Gopi Krishna and made a big splash with their live performances. She went to Nairobi National Park for a photo-op with wild animals and was stunned when a baby cheetah pounced on her. Sharmila Tagore arrived with her husband, the Nawab of Pataudi, for a Kenya-India cricket series. Lots of dinner parties and cocktails with a trip to Mombasa thrown in!

Raj Kumar came for the release of his film *Waqt* and went on a motoring safari on Mombasa Road. Shashi Kapoor had an argument during the shooting of a scene at the Safari Rally finish and left in a huff soon after. Rajender Kumar had a quiet visit for the release of his film. Two comedians, Johnny Walker and Jalal Agha, came to generate laughs and succeeded. In the early Sixties, Sunil Dutt, Nanda and Sadhna were among the stars who made it to Kenya. Sunil Dutt came to promote his film, *Yeh Raste Hain Pyar Ke* but returned with Mother Teresa many years later.

Top Bollywood Playback Singers

Since music is an integral and important part of Bollywood fare, its playback singers are as popular as the top stars. The iconic Lata Mangeshkar led this group when she came to perform at the giant Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi with a full orchestra. No less than another icon, Dilip Kumar, introduced her in a memorable speech. After I interviewed her at the airport, I was really surprised to get a call from her the next morning. She asked me to suggest a Swahili song for her concert. Without hesitation, I proposed 'Malaika' and in less than a day, she had mastered the tune and the lyrics for this song which she sang to a great ovation.

Another distinguished singer who came was Kishore Kumar, the great crooner who could sing in any genre. For a light touch, he brought along the comedian Johnny Walker. Their shows were a great hit at the Globe cinema. All-time great singer Mukesh performed at the Embassy cinema and regaled the audience with his eternal hits in his honey and brandy voice. Ghazal king Jagjit Singh first arrived in Kenya with his wife Chitra, in 1969 in a troupe; but that performance was not a great success. That is until our well known producer, Chaman Lal Chaman, invited them to sing on radio. Listeners were enthralled and the couple were inundated with invitations to perform in private homes. This success followed them back to Bombay; Kenya had launched a star!

The film shows go on even today and with ever more diverse audiences...

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Embassy Cinema, Nairobi *Credit Harjinder Kanwal*

Odeon Cinema, Nairobi *Credit Harjinder Kanwal*

Bellevue, Nairobi
Credit Harjinder Kanwal

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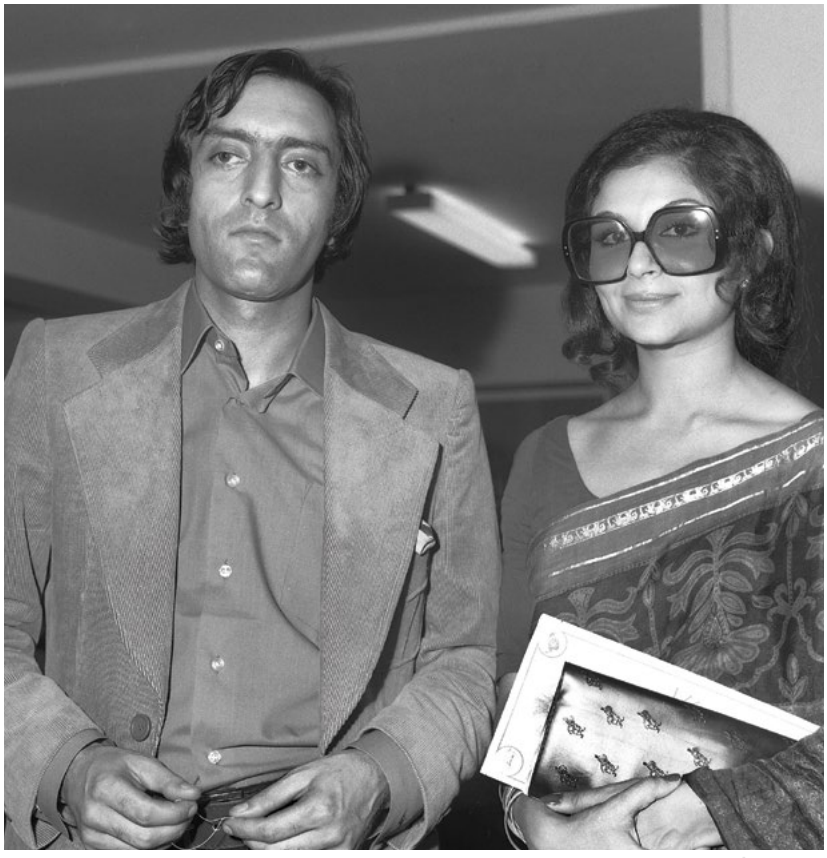
Nanda with Savani brothers at airport on arrival *Credit Natwarlal Chudasama*

Kishore Kumar with Shah, owner of Globe
Credit Natwarlal Chudasama

Rajender Kumar shopping in Nairobi
Credit Natwarlal Chudasama



Sharmila Tagore and husband Pataudi in Nairobi
Credit Natwarlal Chudasama

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Indian Cinema in mid-1940s Nairobi

By Neera Kapur-Dromson

The age of cinema arrived – even in Nairobi – all the way from Bombay (Mumbai), which had not yet gained the famed status of Bollywood. It seemed like love at first sight. First came the silent English films. Then the long, melodramatic Indian motion pictures with at least ten songs. My mother tells me that they were mesmerized, most of all her younger brother Surinder. Apparently, even my maternal grandfather, Lala Lajpat Rai, was seduced. He ordered a projector from India, along with some films for their personal use. Private viewing! This was when they still lived in their duka-house on River Road. Grandfather's herbal medicine store was in front and their very tiny apartment, with even smaller three bedrooms at the back. So the viewing of the films would have to be on the roof.

At first mum (who was about 10 years old then) and her siblings were happy just watching slides of the Taj Mahal or the Lal Kila (Red Fort). Or even a bear dancing to the tunes of his master. A hooded cobra or a naked fakir -- stereotypical images of India. But when grandfather Lajpat screened the first Indian film *Raja Harishchandra*, the slides were immediately forgotten. This was a path-breaking film of the silent era. Now, they were being treated to the tale of the truth-obsessed king, a film that had been released in Bombay just before the First World War, at a time when they were not even born, when my grandfather Lajpat had not yet met his future wife-to-be, Yashoda, when he had not even arrived in this part of the world. Yet, even now, so many years later, they were mesmerized by this silent film. It had characters who communicated with each other through dialogue cards. The Indian director Phadke could not find a female actress, having been turned down not only by 'respectable' women, even prostitutes would not be seen on screen. He had to be content with small, slim young boys to play female roles. By the time our family in Kenya had the pleasure of seeing the first Indian talkie, *Alam Ara,* that had been released in 1931; the film was already history in India. For them, however, the talking-singing-dancing was still a novelty.

All lights were switched off as grandfather Lajpat Rai started the projector. It made a whirring noise. A ray of light bisected the dark space. The white bed sheet pinned on the wall to serve as a screen flickered alive. Their necks were already strained waiting for the show. Many children sat on the floor in half-lotus positions - those from other families had been charged ten cents on the quiet by mum's brothers - for ice cream later on - grandfather Lajpat never got to hear of it! The children clapped enthusiastically as the first images came up. For the next half-hour (before reel change), they watched in silence until the lights came on again. Then they cheered

Krishanlal and Krishna Kapur

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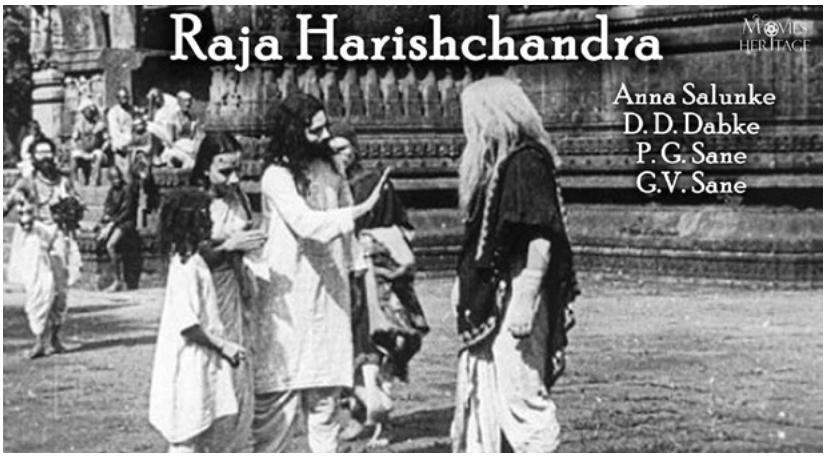

in joy. The vicarious thrills of the fantasy world had engulfed them. And when mum's father ordered *Yamla Jaat* (the crazy farmer) for screening at the Theatre Royal (the present day Cameo), the real love affair with cinema bloomed.

Theatre Royal had been built sometime in 1912. It was one of the first entertainment spots in colonial Nairobi. Here the British elite welcomed new arrivals. During the two World Wars, it was used to raise funds for war efforts and to entertain mostly British and Kaburu South African soldiers. In the 1960s, the owner Teddy Meddicks sold it. Completely renovated and refurbished, it became the Cameo Cinema. From noon, with continuous shows until midnight, very often the same film, it soon gained popularity, especially as you had to pay only once and no-one threw you out if you decided to stay on until the last séance! It then became a restaurant but that didn't last too long before its hall was used for church services. Now it has another life - that of a casino.

Allauddin Qureshi, a connoiseur of Indian performing arts in Nairobi, tells me that in the era of silent films, during reel change, local Indian musicians would sit on stage in front of the screen with their instruments - to play, sing and entertain the viewers. He could still recall a silent film about the arrival of a train at the station and a girl with her hair that literally shot up. This was at the then Green Cinema on Latema Road. In the 1950s, Green Cinema was demolished, and in its place was built the Embassy.

In the early 1950s, Allauddin went to watch an English film, *King Solomon's Mines* at the Playhouse Cinema. Opposite the present City Market, this cinema was run by Sir Ernest Vasey's New Theatre Ltd. It screened mainly British films. Indians could and did sometimes hire the hall for theatre plays, but Indian films were not screened here. Moreover, there was segregation in seating, with the whites on one side of the aisle and coloureds (Indians and Africans) on the other side. Segregation was of course extended to the toilets.

Mum's brothers sometimes went to the Playhouse to see an English film, but my grandfather would not allow his teenaged daughter (my mother) the freedom of going with the elder brother, especially when he went with his friends. It was almost taboo. As a result the first English feature film that my mother saw was after her marriage - accompanied by my father, of course! This, despite the fact that my maternal grandparents were considered more liberal than many other Indian families of the time who did not allow their female members (wives and mothers included) to go to the cinema at all. Watching a film was in some families considered immoral; it opened your mind to foreign and seditious ideas!

Rattan, a landmark film of 1944, was to influence my mother's sentiments and emotions in many ways. It awakened her imagination and involved her emotionally. It unnerved her, touched her, deranged her with its very moving story. It opened her door to romance. She began to mimic the film as in real life. Mum said she cried for days, could not sleep many nights disturbed by the image of the lovers who could not consummate their love, took their lives by putting 'pan' into each other's mouths. Pan, betel leaf, in the Indian culture, is considered an aphrodisiac, a symbol of love and of pleasure. Mum's younger sister was highly influenced by fashion trends of the day through Indian cinema. When having two hair plaits, for instance, was considered too fashionable and too liberal in our community after having watched a film where the lead actress donned her hair in this fashion, my aunt too defied the rules. After leaving home, she would open the tight one plait that her mother had combed and reshaped it into two plaits - just as in the films!

The business of cinema and cinema hall construction flourished in the 1950s in Nairobi. The Odeon Cinema came up on Latema Road, a short distance from the Embassy Cinema. There was the Empire Cinema, where the IPS building now stands (next to the New Stanley Hotel), Film India that became

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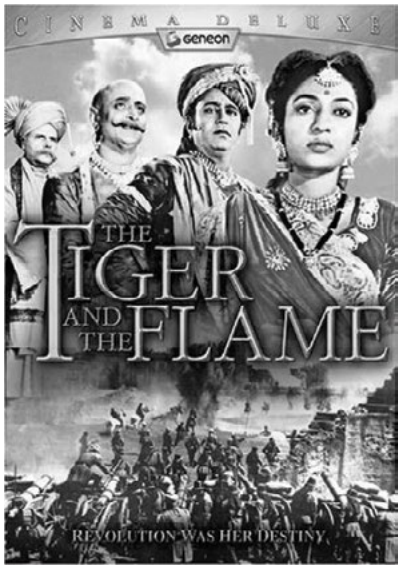

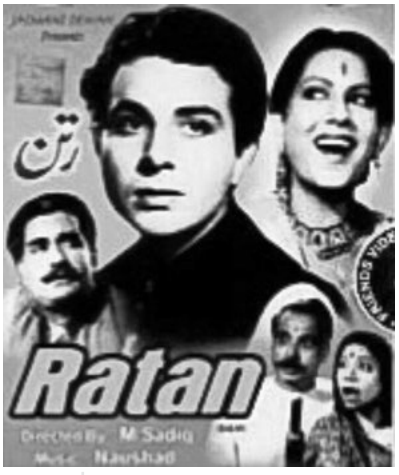

the Casino Cinema, a little further on. Grogan Road (now Kirinyaga Road), River Road, Bazaar Street (now Biashara Street) were the hub of the Asian dominated areas in an apartheid city. These were also the locations of mostly Indian cinema and cinema-goers of the day. The Embassy especially catered largely to Asian audiences, the films coming mainly from Bombay.

Allaudin Qureshi tells me that sometime after India and Kenya became independent, films from Pakistan began to be shunned by the Kenya Film Censor Board. He thinks this was so because the board had a large number of Hindu members. When *Kartar Singh,* a Pakistani film was banned in the early 1960s, the Muslim Youth League of Nairobi protested strongly, eventually succeeding to bring in one of their members on the censor board. The film was eventually screened at the Liberty Cinema in the Pangani area, and other Pakistani delegations began arriving soon after together with their films, to be screened mostly at the Liberty and at the Shan Cinemas. However, films from Pakistan never made it big here, as did those from India.

No matter which film was being screened, their Sunday evening seats were reserved. My grandfather Lajpat always made arrangements for booking seats in advance. It was an elaborate affair. Dressed in their best, Amma Yashoda, my grandmother, mum and her sisters looked forward to an evening of the latest films from India. My grandmother would become so hooked that she took to attending even the mid-week afternoon special ladies' show. The spectators were Hindu women in colourful saris, burqa-clad Somali women, and many Sunni Punjabi Muslim women. Men were strictly prohibited in the séance. The women's long black veils would come off; they would shout in joy and excitement. They screamed at the moving images. They clapped at the good guys, they yelled their own dialogues at the bad characters, they sang with the singers. They refused to name their children 'Pran' as the actor Pran who more often than not had the role of a villain (and was very good at it), yet he was despised - and when he was beaten up, the applause in the cinema hall was thunderous. They even threw small coins toward the screen to express their happiness, especially during dance scenes. Sometimes, fights broke out. It could happen that in the dark hall a woman had stealthily opened the bag of her neighbour in the hope of pilfering her money!

Half a decade reeled under the impact of the serendipitous forties. Action-packed stories and idolized stars ruled the minds of the movie-goers. There was the beautiful Anglo-Indian actress Ruby Myers and her handsome Parsi paramour-acting partner D Billimoria. Then, Sohrab Modi's *Sikander,* immortalized by the great actor Prithviraj Kapoor. Alexander, the Macedonian king, became their new mythical hero as the movie showed them horse-ridden battles, court scenes, and of course his romance with the beautiful Persian Ruksana. There was *Jhansi ki Rani* - one of the first Indian films in technicolour - leading her army against British forces in 1857. This film, together with some other Indian films, would be banned by the British colonial authorities during the Mau Mau episode, as they were deemed too revolutionary!

All the children as well as mum's River Road and Pangani friends were clearly inspired. They cut

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swords out of cardboard biscuit boxes, silver lining intact, and led their one-man armies against each other. They internalized the bold and dramatic dialogues; their language became more and more colourful, even managing to copy all the onomatopoeic sounds that went with the dialogues - the ooohs, aahs, dishyums! However, once the actress Nadia made her appearance on celluloid, their restless spirits found the perfect channel. With her, the stereotype of a passive, compliant, meek, obedient, quiet and unassuming heroine was quickly buried as she fenced with villains atop moving trains. She swung from chandeliers and whipped the bad guy. The Greek-born, Australia-bred Nadia did wondrous acrobatics without ever resorting to stunts-manship. Caged with a lion, jumping from dizzy heights, her role as *Hunterwali* earned her the title 'fearless Nadia'. Fortunately, neither mum nor her brothers didn't, rather couldn't, try any of these tactics! Neither possessing Nadia's energy, nor her guts. Clearly though, the chimera of films was consuming their youth and influencing their cultural growth.

The Indian epics, the *Mahabharat* and Ramayana, continued to exert a profound influence on thought and imagination, particularly through the narratives as Sanskrit drama also combined music, dance and gesture to create a vibrant world. Usha Shah, who had been a teacher for many years 1950s onward, often attended the Wednesday afternoon ladies' shows with co-teachers as mid-week there was no school in those days. She told me that the moral values she had imbibed through the Vedic teaching at the Arya Girls School, were clearly re-emphasized in her being by the films of the time. And these values she has tried to re-impart to her students.

Then came the era of K L Saigal. What a poignant voice he had! His nasal singing haunted them. His nomadic persona only added to his attraction, from the dark eroticism of his brooding looks to the vagrant locks of hair. Saigal was bald and always wore a wig. Conventionally, he could not have been called handsome. But whatever his looks, Kundan Lal Saigal was a star. Even before the end of his era, he had become a legend. They all took to looking like *Devdas* in his career-defining role based on Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya's desperate character. They identified with the singing superstar with his sonorous sweep. His immortal songs 'Diya jalao' and 'So ja rajkumari' remained with them for a lifetime. My uncle Surinder saw Saigal's films not once or twice, but eight or ten times, and took to articulating the dialogue of the drunk mourning his lost love in a perpetual abyss of despair. And to some extent, *Devdas* was a film about social protest against arranged marriages.

For the two hours or so that they could live in this 'no-man's land', it released them from limitations, filled them with a spirit of freedom and adventure. It was a world totally removed from the conventions and norms of societal rules. Here at least they could dream of another kind of life. The suspense, the drama, and the melodrama; the musical and the love triangle; this cellophane wrapped world of commercial cinema enamoured them. Noorjehan, Suraiya, Madhubala - the lives of stars and divas became theirs for a time. These so called *masala* films started taking on influences from other sources - Parsi theatre, folk theatre, Hollywood - to enhance elements of fantasy.

Liberty Cinema, the first cinema in the Pangani area, opened

Yashoda and Lajpatrai Behal

sometime in 1958. Right next to the Liberty Cinema was situated the clinic of a very popular Indian doctor. The small waiting room was always crammed with patients. But that never deterred him from taking ample breaks to enjoy a few scenes of the film being screened, before returning back to the waiting and the ailing. In fact, very often his first question to his patients was if they had seen the last Indian successful film -- and whether they had enjoyed it. He would even recite dialogues, criticize the actors and heroines or confirm the wordings of a particular song. And of course, he gave the same antidote to all his patients - little packets with the same white pills, wrapped in newspaper! The doctor is no more, his clinic long gone, but some of his ex-patients still swear by him and the efficiency of this style of treatment!

The Romance Of The Regal

By Ameer Janmohamed

Regal Cinema, Mombasa

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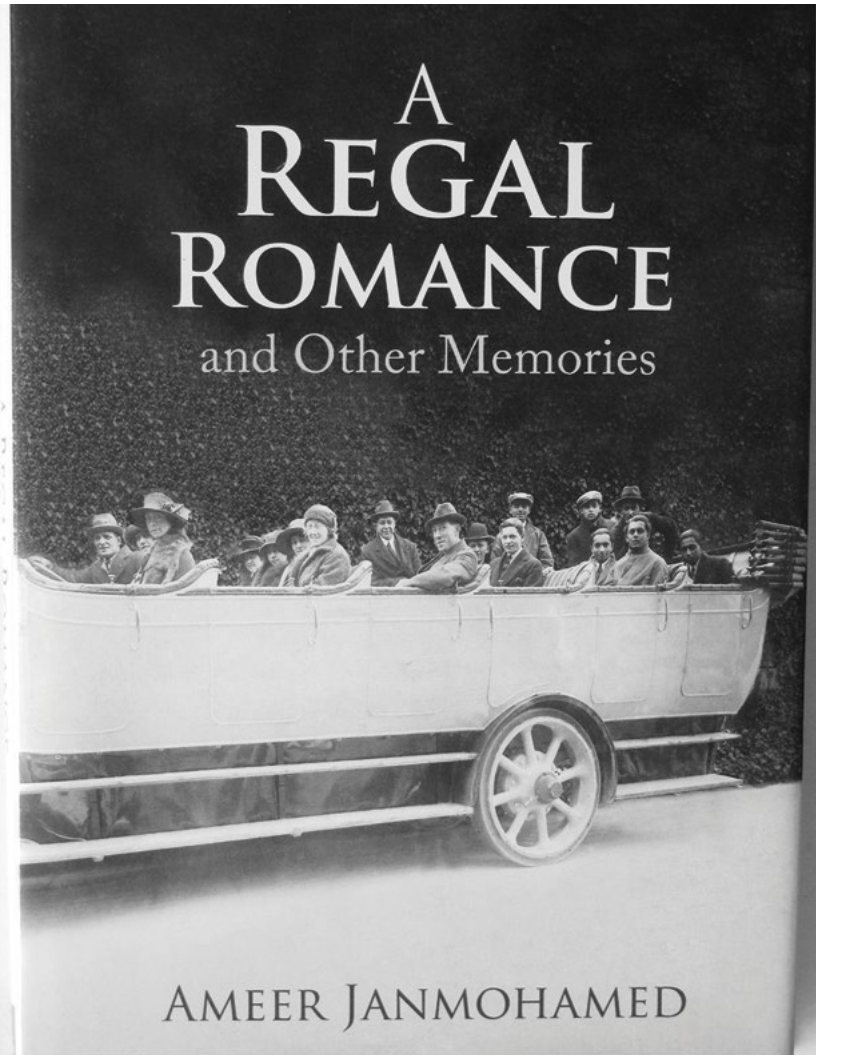
1931 was an eventful year in the history of the Janmohamed Hasham family with my birth in Kisumu, on the shores of Lake Victoria, on 6 June, and the death of my grandfather, Janmohamed Hasham, in Mombasa twelve days later, on 18 June. The other important event of 1931 was the completion of the Regal Cinema building, which was the creation of the two brothers, Janmohamed Hasham and Valli Hasham.

The two brothers had been together in business since their early days in Kenya and traded under the name of Valli Hasham & Company. In those days entrepreneurs like Janmohamed and Valli Hasham would usually acquire plots of land and then build houses and shops. To this day I cannot figure out what prompted these two brothers to build a Theatre/ Cinema, the very first one in Mombasa back in 1930/1931. Did they think that Mombasa was ready for a nine hundred seat state of the art theatre? To this day, this has remained an enduring mystery. I will never cease to be astonished at the entrepreneurship and imagination - even the romance - of building a theatre in Mombasa.



We know that the building was designed by a pioneer British architect, William Miller Robertson, who also designed the New Stanley Hotel and the Synagogue in Nairobi. The Regal Theatre building was situated on what was then Salim Road, [now Digo Road], very near the intersection with Kilindini Road [Moi Avenue]. The ground floor foot-print of the building consisted of six shops, two with wide frontages onto Salim Road, with a wide foyer entrance with a large metal gate, which led into the cinema part of the building. The two front shops were tenanted by Husseini Stationery Mart and Edward St Rose, the chemists. Round the corner from Edward St Rose on the East Street frontage, facing Pandya Building, were the other four shops, two of which were tenanted by Messrs PD Brothers and Messrs DJ Brothers, both of whom were leading makers of Bespoke shoes in Mombasa. Another shop was tenanted by Jaffer Pan Walla. On this frontage there were also two wide entrances, one leading to the front stalls seats in the cinema and the other leading up to the Regal Restaurant, which was a spacious restaurant above Husseini Stationery Mart and Edward St Rose, on the Salim Road frontage.

The cinema hall itself was a very high ceilinged and elegant auditorium, with about five hundred seats on the ground level, and four hundred seats on the upper balcony. The number was reduced later when two separate internal staircases serving the balcony had to be built to comply with new and more stringent fire regulations, following the collapse of the roof of the Naaz Cinema, which was built in 1951, twenty years after the Regal.

Because the Regal was built as a theatre rather than a cinema, it had a stage which was both wide

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and deep behind the cinema screen, with a large orchestra pit at the front, and a number of dressing rooms for actors and spaces in the wings. The stage was housed in a tall structure to enable scenery and backdrops to be raised and lowered when plays were performed. The stage also had a number of trap doors in the floor, for quick exits and entrances, and in the centre, near the foot-lights was a little cubby-hole, invisible from the audience, from where a 'prompt' could help actors who had forgotten their lines!

As a child, my favourite spot in the cinema was easily the projection booth right at the top of the steep balcony, where one could look down at the audience through a number of little square widows which were set at different heights into the wall. We had two enormous 35mm Kelly projectors and a slide projector. The music played before the start of films and during intervals was controlled from there. The records were supplied by Assanand & Sons and Shanker Dass & Sons, who were Mombasa's leading music stores. The arrangement was that they supplied records without charge, and we gave them free publicity and popularised their music by continuous playing in the Theatre. Our three projectionists Tulsi Vithlani, Kurban and Otieno, also controlled the lights, the five minute bell before the film was to start, or to signal the end of the Interval, and of course the opening and closing of the magnificent velvet curtains in front of the movie screen. The projection booth was the nerve centre of the cinema. To me it resembled the bridge of a great ship, with the Captain and his officers controlling what was going to happen next.

One other thing the projectionists were in charge of was the playing of the recorded British National Anthem. Initially the anthem was played at the end of the main feature, when lights would come on, and the audience would stand to attention whilst the anthem was played. The Europeans, mainly British would stand tall and erect. The Indians stood somewhat self-consciously, even sheepishly, because they knew that they were not accepted as real British Subjects, but only, as their Passports stated, as 'British Protected Persons'. (For the benefit of the uninitiated, persons born in the United Kingdom were 'Citizens of United Kingdom' whereas persons born in British Colonies were designated as 'British Protected Persons'. Inevitably the divide was racial, because the child of a white Citizen of UK, even though having been born in a colony would still be designated as a Citizen of the UK).

There was also an ambivalence in the indigenous population in those days. There was a large body of opinion which felt that Mombasa and the Coastal strip of Kenya were really part of the domain of the Sultan of Zanzibar, and not part of the British Kenya Colony at all. There were elements in the audiences, particularly in the cheaper front stalls, who would not stand for the anthem but would insultingly walk out, looking with defiance at those who stood to attention. I believe this insulting behaviour was an expression of class envy as much as the then incipient discontent with the colonial masters. This problem was circumvented quite simply by playing the National Anthem before the programme started instead of at the end.

According to Edward Rodwell, 'The Regal began receiving a regular supply of excellent shows in 1938 when shows making their way to India would try to meet running expenses at the ports through which they passed'. During the second World War, the Regal reached its peak in performances when catering for the many naval and military personnel passing through Mombasa. This also included the provision of an open air cinema for the armed forces. The authorities made available to us a large plot of vacant land exactly behind where the Arch of the Elephant Tusks stands on Kilindini Road today. The Regal used to operate this open air cinema for soldiers and sailors, who, on their way into town from the port, could take in movies if they were so inclined. Any person in uniform could walk in. There were

'As a child, my favourite spot in the cinema was easily the projection booth right at the top of the steep balcony,'

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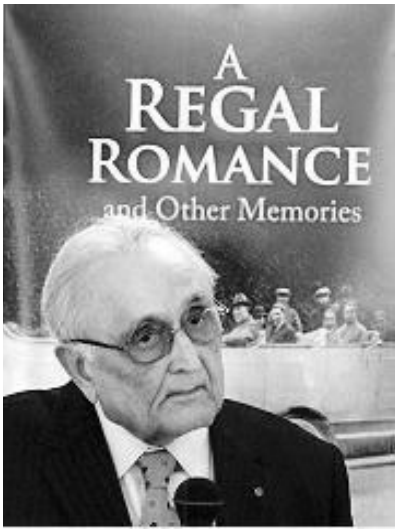
no tickets. All we had to do was to provide the films and the projection facilities.

I especially remember the incredible time in 1955 when La Scala De Milano performed Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* on the Regal stage. The cast of La Scala De Milano were on board the Lloyd Triestino liner MV Europa, en route from Genoa to South Africa, Aficionados like Commander Gibbs, who was the Resident Naval Officer, Ted Stairs who was the Editor of the Mombasa Times, and the Provincial Commissioner, Mr Desmond O'Hagan, had made overtures to them to give a performance in Mombasa during their four day stopover in Mombasa harbour.

The company's first question was, 'Is there a theatre in Mombasa which can handle one of our lavish productions?' The answer was a resounding yes. There was the Regal, which had been built twenty-four years previously by two Indian brothers, Janmohamed and Valli Hasham, which had all the facilities a modern Opera company could desire! The following headline in the *Daily Nation* gives a flavour of the famous occasion. OPERA TOOK KENYA BY STORM by Monte Viana. After the opera, the artists agreed that the acoustics of the theatre were *magnifico.*

The very first show ever at the Regal was a stage production called 'King of *Jazz*', In between the regular screening of movies, there were a large number of stage shows which included the nightingale of India, Juthika Ray; Madame Butterfly; the Coon Carnival from South Africa and Wilbur de Paris, an American band leader described as the King of Slip Horn. [There was ballet and dancers from England and India; as well as famous singers from India such as Hemant Kumar, Yusuf Azad, Shakila Banu Bhopali, and Asha Parekh.]

The Regal auditorium was also used to hold political meetings, most famously when three candidates, A B Patel, Dr Mohamedali Rana, and Kassamali Paroo were



contesting the two seats allocated to Coast Asians in Kenya's Legislative Council. Each eligible Asian had two votes to cast. Kassamali Paroo and A B Patel were elected on this occasion, the former with a thumping majority.

The Regal Theatre Building went up in flames one night in September 1985. The fire started after mid-night, well after the last performance had finished; there was no loss of life or injuries. The Fire Department was of the opinion that somebody had left a lighted cigarette on an upholstered seat! [Eventually bought over by a businessman, the building was demolished and rebuilt, now housing some offices and a supermarket.]

But nonetheless, the Regal will live on in the minds of people as a memory, especially in the minds of those who loved it, or had a sense of identification with it. Many others will have fond memories of shows they have seen there.

Extract from *The Regal Romance and Other Memories* by Ameer Janmohamed.

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A Nostalgic Look at Naaz Cinema

Naaz ki Kahaani Meri Zubani. (The story of Naaz and my testimony)

By Ramzan Allan

Up till the time that the Naaz Cinema finally rose up at this site in the early fifties, Messrs Samji Kala and their company Majestic Theatres ruled the roost. Other than the Regal Cinema which screened mostly English films, there was no competition and films lay canned in Samji Kala's warehouse at times for more than two years before being released. There were no DVDs or VHS or Internet at that time! Then the Moons [Cinema] loomed up on the horizon and the race was on!

Enter Naaz with its popular movies like *Awaara* and others that gradually forced almost all roads to lead to Mithu's Naaz Cinema. In no time, Majestic declared an all-out war - fortunately to the advantage of the film going public - by offering 'special shows' at special price..... one shilling all round, special ladies show, *jagraan* show, two movies for the price of one, etc! Still Naaz stood tall and steady! In no time, Majestic Theatres changed gears and surprised the public by putting up the Queens Cinema almost overnight! And the rest is history!

Apart from the regular patrons of this theatre back then, it was a place where many relationships started innocently and went on to be sealed with the marriage vows! There were many other budding relationships that had begun in earnest but were nipped in the bud by 'heartless' elders before sprouting wings as the courting couple was caught red handed.

Syed Muhammed Shah, popularly known as Mithu, was the manager of Naaz Cinema and was always dressed smartly, mostly in safari suits or kaundas and on special occasions he cut out an imposing figure sporting a well pressed white shirt and a red tie. He would be found strolling carefree in the terrazzo-covered foyer of the theatre taking stock of the situation. Sales depended on the movie itself and the first releases were almost always money spinners at least for the first few screenings till the reviews from the patrons hit the street. Mithu would always be seen with a tin of '555' in one hand and a heavy bunch of keys in another. He was referred to as 'Bwana 555' in our little neighbourhood group in Kibokoni!

Right at the front entrance of the theatre there used to be the all favourite popcorn machine. To the right was the canteen that did roaring business during all intervals. The inside was air conditioned and initially it boasted of a sky blue heavy brocade curtain on the stage and I think there were stars cut from golden coloured metallic fabric that were sewn on that heavy curtain to complete the picture of a star studded sky. There was also a row of coloured lights that were hidden from view but cast very soft shades of lights along the bottom edge of that heavy curtain.

Outside the theatre, one would find vendors of assorted goodies selling *katchri, bateta, ganthiya, jugu, bisi, watana, dariya, hambul,* chewing gum, toffee and other such items. With some snacks, we would retreat into the half lit well of the theatre's metal spiral staircase which came down on one of the side walls located in the dusty lane between the cinema and the fence of the police station where we would seat ourselves on the raised concrete landing at the

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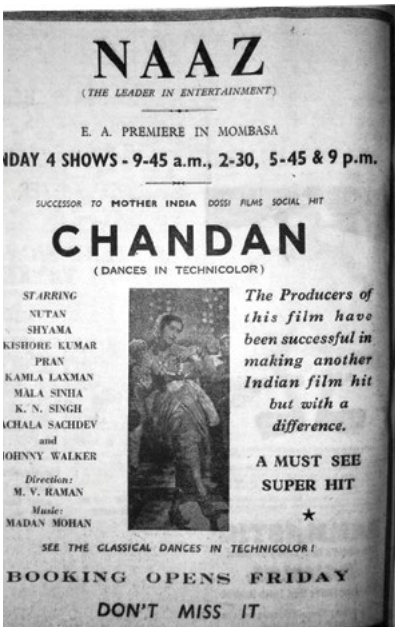

bottom of the *gaazi,* (stairs), then open the package with fumbling hands and unhidden urgency and spread the paper all around so that none of the *rus* (sauce) got away and dug into the mouth-watering mix.

One night, I remember standing outside the Naaz Cinema in pouring rain, just by that spiral staircase, lying in wait with the hope of catching a glimpse of *Sunil Dutt* who was to make an onstage appearance as part of launching and promoting his song laden movie *Ye Raaste Hai'n Pyaarke.* Later on in life, there were a few Baluchi lads who were my neighbours in Makadara that worked as ushers in Naaz, Regal and Kenya cinema as well and therefore I was at times 'smuggled' in by these 'kind' friends..... so long as there was enough space inside the auditorium. When English movies were screened at such places, the feature film usually began after the second interval and so I would first finish my dinner and then go to either Regal or Queens or Naaz to kill my time gulping kahawa that was vendored by the likes of Salim Karama who also resided in Makadara. Being my neighbour, he too would never charge me a dime no matter how many pegs of kahawa I gulped or even if I was there with a friend.

Then the bell for interval would sound ... and the foyer of the theatre would get crowded with patrons looking for something to munch, or to enjoy a steaming cup of *kahawa* (sugarless swahili black coffee) or *tangawizi* (cinnamon tea without milk but with sugar). Then another bell would signal the end of the interval and all of a sudden the whole place would be deserted, and it would become quiet as if the earlier busy scene was some kind of a dream. I would wait patiently for my usher friend to beckon me from the steps at the main entrance of the cinema. He would usually whistle and then shine his torch in my direction flashing it on and off to signal to me that it was all clear. Then I would make my way towards the entrance of the theatre where my usher friend would part the dark heavy curtain at the entrance door and lead me to my seat by swinging the ray of light on to the floor in a front and back motion and once the right row was reached, he would raise the torch and aim it at the seat that he would want me to occupy.

There was an instance when I was still a kid, may be ten or thereabouts, when there was a partial collapse of Naaz Cinema resulting in the death of at least one lady who happened to be the mother of a very very dear childhood friend of mine. The exclusive weekly ladies shows were a hit with all 'our' women on the island who had nothing better to do and - in most cases, unknown to their husbands - had managed to save a few shillings through cutting corners when planning the

daily meals. On that particular day of a ladies' show, all roads led to Naaz cinema. These festively draped women, dressed in all their fineries would be seen hastening towards their destination in the scorching coastal sun.

There was no tropical rain storm vicious enough that could force these women to stay in their barracks. Some in their *buibuis* and others dragging a couple of little ones behind them whilst ordering another little one to clutch her dress so as to keep pace with her! It was like a mad house out of control. Many Swahili, Baluchi and Arab women anointed themselves with assorted attars ... all having their own distinct fragrances. Others would be sporting strings of sweet smelling flowers like *asmini* and *mtundaufu* in their hair. There was however one specific breed in this crowd that also literally fumigated itself and its clothes with *auood* and the fragrance in many cases was very 'intoxicating' even to a pea brained *katoto* like me. Hijab or the plain head covering so common today had not yet been

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Naaz Cinema, Mombasa

'discovered' amongst the Muslim women in Mombasa, although one could occasionally see one or two at the most.

Suleiman, the senior booking officer and Mithu's confidante and right hand man, could be seen lurking in a dark office. One could hear the thumping of his rubber 'stamp' that he so rapidly banged on the tickets that were flying out of his booking office ... and then suddenly he would slam shut the window of his booking office after slapping the dreaded 'HOUSE FULL' sign on it. Suleiman was one guy who was partially responsible for the disappointments and miseries of so many patrons, not to mention those half a dozen ticket touts who made all the hay possible by scalping the scores of tickets that they had on them! As soon as Suleiman disappeared from the premises, magically these black marketeers emerged out of nowhere like a menacing shoal of barracudas that suddenly appear from the depths of the ocean ready for easy prey! These guys were absolutely ruthless in their trade and rumours of inside collaboration at almost the highest level were not uncommon but I will let all those souls rest in peace!

Because the older women of the household had no interest in seeing any movies, they would look for a male chaperon for their daughters and if the brother or a cousin was not available, then I would be selected as their Dobberman. Though I was only knee high to a grasshopper, the mums considered me one smart cookie and trusted me as their watch dog for their frisky fun loving daughters. They would hand me a penny saying: *Haya mwanangu ... pokeya hilo peni na nenda kaji nunuliye chakaleti kwa Bereki!* (Here my son ... take this penny and go and get yourself a candy from the shop of Bereki.)

Mithu, the Naaz icon, passed away on 24 July 2004. In an obituary in the *Coastweek* dated 30 July, Shakur Bythea wrote that when questioned by a friend about why he was glued to the cinema business for so long, as a person of his calibre who had formerly been a Mombasa Municipal Councillor, he sighed and quietly admitted: 'Because the word CINE...MA has a sentimental value for me - it ends with MA and I loved my mother'.

Life for Ramzan then was one long picnic pleasantly interspersed with food and drinks, song and dance! But of course, nothing lasts forever. May Naaz rest in peace!

Courtesy: http://kenyanjustice.blogspot.com/2012/09/enjoy-mombasa-nostalgia-old-photoswrite.html

The above article by Ramzan Allan was posted by Natwar Joshi, and forwarded to AwaaZ by Laura Fair.

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Bollywood Films in Kenya

By Mohinder Dhillon

In 1945, two years before I emigrated to Kenya I watched a silent film in India. The projectionist screened the film on a hand-wound projector. This would not be possible with a film with sound which must run 25 FPS (frames per-second) to avoid any distortion of the sound. This means that there are 25 pictures being projected in one second with a break between the pictures. There is a momentary gap when the frame has to change to the next one. It happens so fast that you get a continuous motion hence the name 'motion' films.

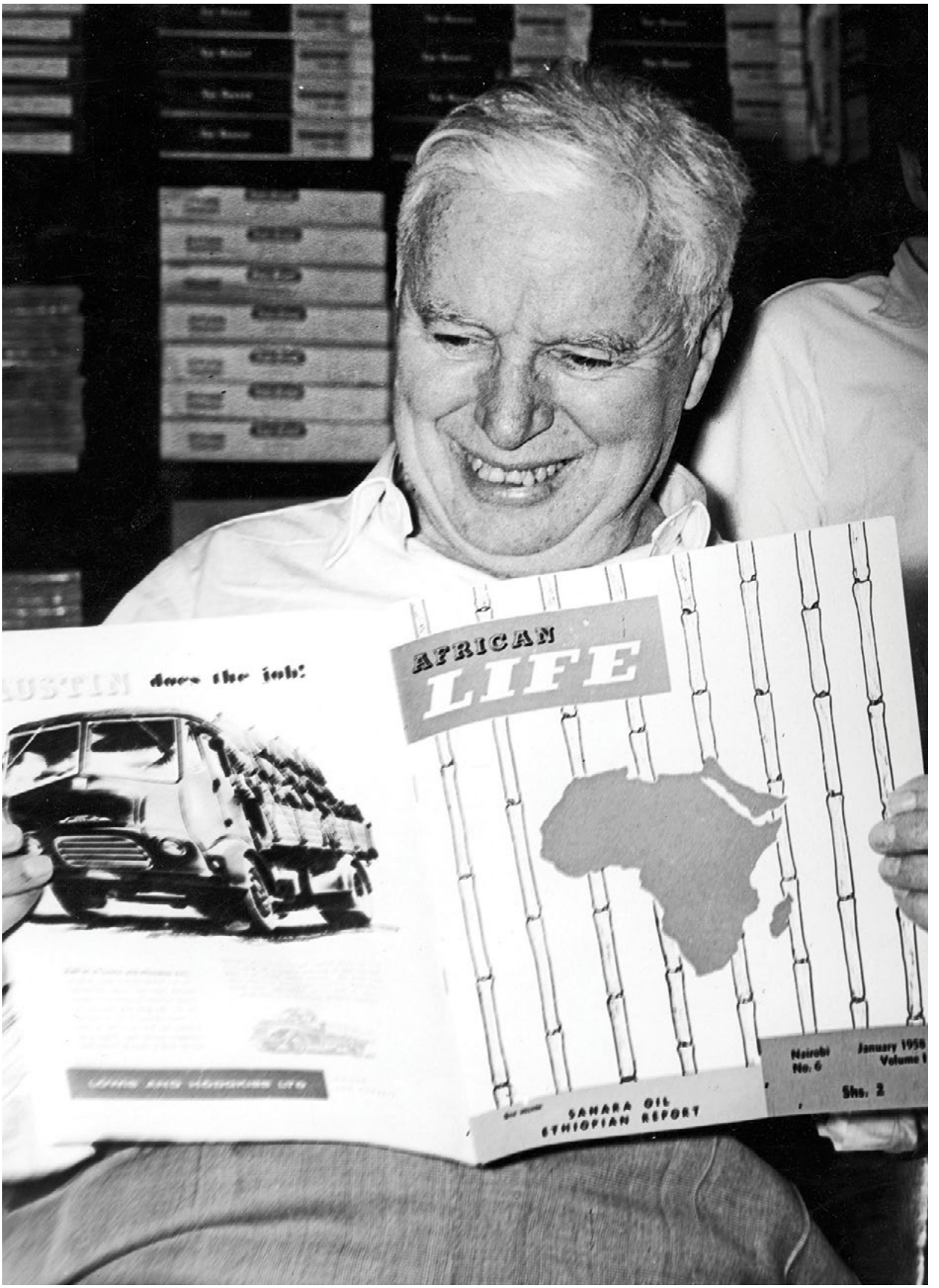
The screen was a white sheet nailed to the wall. We sat on small rickety benches with no back support - very uncomfortable even for a youth! At the time I did not know about the king of silent movies, Charlie Chaplin, but I met him later in person in Kenya. I was then the picture editor of an African Wildlife magazine and I have a cover with Charlie Chaplain reading it.

It was in East Africa in the 50s that I watched a film with sound for the first time. Unlike Hollywood, the Hindustani films are post synched as they have full control inside a sound proof studio, shutting out unwanted sounds like a plane in the sky, traffic noise and heavy winds. To film technicians this is not acceptable. The actors have to be inside the recording studio to lip-synch which is an art. Also one misses the ambience sound on location, doors banging in the background, etc. and it felt wrong.

We were intrigued by the posters and photographs announcing the forthcoming films. Posters and pictures in the foyers of cinema halls would be competing with each other, often bearing comments made by hand with a marker. Outside one cinema hall was a poster about movie *Aag* (fire) and the other had a movie running *Barsaat* (rain). Handwritten on one poster was: 'First came *Aag* putting the place on Fire, now we have brought *Barsaat* to extinguish the fire!'

Amongst the big names of female stars were Nargis, Hema Malini, Zeenat Aman, and Beena Roy. Madhubala known as the 'Dream Girl' adorned the cover of Life Magazine. Suraiya Begum with a long nose was a natural singer and recorded her own songs in the film - she was considered as the queen of acting and the first melody queen.

We as boys were not allowed to go to the movies and had to be back by a certain hour every evening. Boys will be boys and we would



Charlie Chaplain *Credit Mohinder Dhillon and Africapix*

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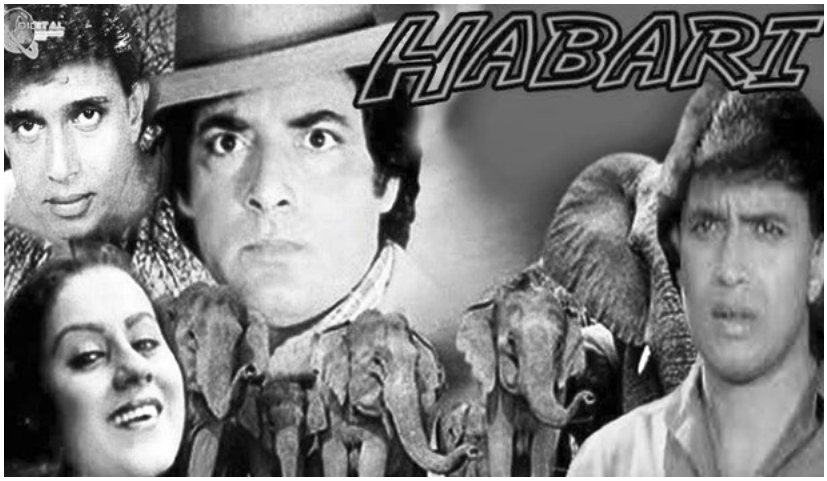
skip part of school to buy tickets first, then watch a movie. Our mothers protected us. If we were late coming home my younger sister would smell my clothes and start singing loudly – 'caught a cheat red-handed' - so that my father would hear her. My mother would try to cover up for me. This was out of jealousy because girls were not allowed to go to movies at all so this was a sort of revenge by my sister. The compromise was that I would narrate the story to her and my mother and they listened attentively asking questions. Parents in those days never went to the cinema, this despite the fact that female stars were always decently dressed. Much later, my father and mother would not even watch films at home on TV in case an embarrassing scene like two actors embracing tightly came on.

In 1961, I graduated from taking still pictures for my new company Africapix Media to shoot 16mm films for TV, followed by 35mm newsreels for cinema for the British government which supplied free newsreels to cinemas in all Commonwealth countries including Kenya. They had the hidden agenda of promoting their products like farm machinery, etc. Hollywood feature producers occasionally hired me as a second or third unit cameraman. I always got a thrill watching my films on the big screen.

One day a medical doctor from England, Dr Malik, rang me saying he wanted to shoot educational wildlife films for Indian cinemas and he had persuaded the Indian government to waive the entertainment tax. He said he had bought short-end 35mm Eastman colour films from a short-end stock-shop in Wardour Street, London. Both Hollywood and later Bollywood shot on 1,000 feet rolls



which they then sent to Labs for overnight processing. Quite often they would not use up the entire 1,000 feet and the balance e.g. 200 feet, would be canned by a camera assistant and sold cheaply to a short ends shop. There would be nothing wrong with the films.

I was lucky as I had some fantastic wildlife shots and this side show was 30 minutes long. Luck plays a big part in getting unusual shots. This success upgraded me to DOP, Director of photography cinematographer. Every film I made would not only be shot efficiently but would meet the production budgets. Every game park in Kenya has camping sites and I used my own tents. I hired a professional hunter friend of mine, Mohamed Akbar, who was unemployed due to the hunting ban. He jumped at the idea and it helped to get him out of an oncoming depression.

One sunny day I had a phone call from Bollywood producer Sher Jang Singh Punche that he wanted to shoot a film, a carbon copy of a Hollywood film, *Hatari* (danger), which had a star cast of well-known actors like John Wayne, Elsa Martinelli, Hardy Kruger, Red Buttons and others. This film was a very big hit in India, in fact in the whole of the Far East, Middle East, Africa and other countries. It put Tanzania on the world map.

Actually, *Hatari* was planned to be shot in Kenya but the chief game warden refused to issue a license on the grounds that it will be cruel to the animals. So to Tanzania we went. This was a bonanza for Arusha where grocers, butchers, vegetable and fruit sellers; service providers such as dry cleaners, barbers and transporters benefitted for almost a year. The film sets were later donated for development services like hospitals, bungalows used by the stars became houses for doctors and other professionals.

The budget of *Hatari* was generous and Howard Hawks is one of the top producers who would not compromise on anything. In comparison *Habari* (news) had a shoe string budget. The onus was on me to produce a very good film on that shoe string budget. With my contacts I got them free accommodation in all the expensive lodges, use of a helicopter where the production company paid for fuel only. We did not have to do expensive recces as I knew all the animals. In 1973 there were no endangered species. I knew where to film certain species like

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Gerenuk, Gravy Zebras and Reticulated Giraffes which were found in Samburu District in Northern Kenya.

Back to drawing board and I sat with the Director (Punche) and worked out a new plan and script, Punche wanted to play safe and did not want to risk any injury to the hero, Mahendra Sandhu, and the actress, Preeti Sapru. The story line was that of a Game Warden fighting to keep the poachers at bay. The poachers killed Parkash Gill who was demarking Game Parks allotting more land to Wildlife Sanctuaries, making it difficult for the poachers. Mafia Godfather Sapru sent his key man Narendra Nath with a bag full of money but Parkash refused. He was tied behind the poachers' Land Rover and driven through the rough terrain of the Game Park and brought to his house where they killed both Parkash and his wife, Salma Shamsudin.

I got involved for I loved being in the wild; no money was involved. I shared offices with Bholi Mangat who ran Greyline Safaris which supplied all the transport at a special price. Apparently in India they will announce a film with its star-cast, and investors will invest heavily if the stars include big names like Shahrukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai, Dharmendra or Hema Malini. The hero Mahendra Sandhu was as handsome as Dharmindra and Preeti Sapru was a new face, good looking with blue eyes. Her mafia type god father, the Poacher, was played by her real father well known actor DK Sapru of *Pakeeza* fame. Child star Raju was a simple, good-looking boy who could plead for animals and could cry without having to put tear drops in his eye. And Mohammed Rafi and Kishore Kumar rendered tuneful songs. The cinematographer captured very good footage of wildlife at its best, I had got him to shoot the wildlife earlier and this was then cut into the film.

Although I had no business arrangement or contract, being an outdoor man I wanted to contribute with all good intentions. But very early in the shooting I had to walk away from the film having objected once politely. Indians have this penchant for changing costumes after every two lines of a song. I was told that the changes are made to fit certain lines in the song, the weather and atmosphere of the landscape. I thought it resulted in a lack of continuity. It made me mad; here was a golden opportunity to make this film a box office hit. Instead it was a flop. I felt let down as I wanted to portray Kenya as a Mecca of unique wildlife in abundance in its very natural surroundings.

Sadly another opportunity too was missed by compromising when there was no reason whatsoever to compromise. The lion had eaten just before he was darted by Kenya National Parks veterinarian, Dr Ngethe. I found Punche in a panic: 'Let us shoot the scene in a hurry, the lion is breathing heavy and going to die.' Dr Ngethe explained: 'He is not going to die. I have checked his heart rate and respiratory system and he is all clear of any danger. Heavy breathing after a large meal is quite normal.' This assurance by the vet did not have any effect on the director. The child star Raju was all charged up to plead with the poachers not to take away his lion. I requested Punche to let Raju hang from the side bars of the helicopter, only a few feet from the ground and the poacher could hit his hand to let him drop from the chopper. Then cut to the next scene where Raju is pleading looking towards the rising helicopter with the poachers laughing, Raju pleading, get a close up of Raju's tearful face to drive home a powerful message. Punche's refusal was the last straw for me, I continued consulting and did not care if they took my advice.

In my life-time I have noticed the change in Bollywood's modus operandi.

In my lifetime I have noticed the change in Bollywood's *modus operandi.* The films of the 1940s were simple, shot in studios, using painted landscapes, mostly painted trees, doors and windows. Now no romantic scene is complete without beautiful scenes, hero and heroine rolling in the snow embracing each other, scenic valleys at Simla Hills which guarantee plenty of snow hanging from tree branches. Then came family drama, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, bad behaviour, tragedies often overdone. Some women used to say that if the film did not make you cry, it was no good. But of late, Bollywood films like *Jodha Akbar* and others are of international standard and are in great demand.

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Reviving Zanzibar's oldest theatre

The Royal Cinema Theatre, later the Majestic in Zanzibar

By Billie Odidi

The once imperial building in the historic Stone Town of Zanzibar now stands dilapidated. It is a pale shadow of its once thriving stature as one of Africa's first cinema halls. Unlike the busier times when it still screened, the Majestic is shorn of its grandeur; the imposing architectural masterpiece stands only as a monument to a bygone era when the cinema attracted film lovers eager to watch the regular blockbusters screened there.

The Royal Cinema Theatre, as it was known, was in 1953 destroyed by a fire but it emerged from its ruins. The hall was replaced two years later by a cinema hailed as one of best designs of the time, where locals thronged to watch mainly Indian and Egyptian films and some Western classics. Amidst the coconut palm fringed golden sand in this tropical island, the Majestic standing on the Indian Ocean island is sadly now desolate, with a leaking roof and broken chairs inside the hall, yet the state of the cinema has not stopped locals from watching films here.

This was the only remaining cinema on the island after another venue, the *Cine Afrique*, was recently closed and turned into a supermarket. As of now, plans are underway to convert the Majestic into an office block for civil servants.

No cinema halls

'Even though there is no roof on the cinema at the moment, the local people often set up a projector of their own and screen films, even if it rains on their heads,' says visiting English filmmaker Nick Broomfield. The award-winning director behind documentaries like *Biggie* and *Tupac* and *Battle for Haditha*, has been holding workshops at this year's Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF). He has used this platform of East Africa's biggest arts and film festival to launch a campaign to restore the Majestic Cinema to its former glory.

Despite having the longest running and most popular art and film festival in East Africa, the island of Zanzibar has no working cinemas. Originally called the Festival of the Dhow Countries, the festival now in its 14th year, attracted an attendance of up to 45,000 foreign visitors from 52 countries and more than 120,000 local guests to the twin islands of Zanzibar and Pemba as well as mainland Tanzania in 2010.

Mo Verjee sent us the following piece (writer unknown): 'The once "cinema culture" in Zanzibar could be ascribed to the influence of Gujarati Hindus. The first cinema house was a tin shack on the open Darajani ground, its screen being a white bed sheet (introduced by a Khoja Abdulla Thaver nick-named Masi) and its entrance 20 cents then. Later emerged four theatres – Empire, Majestic (gutted in one of Zanzibar's worst fires in the early fifties and later rebuilt), Sultana (later Cine Afrique) and the Sauti Ya Unguja building at Raha Leo (discontinued long back). It was the era of "black & white" films with vivid memories of *Beju Bawra, Deedar, Awara, Albela* etc. The public hero-worshipped Ashok Kumar, Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor and

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Majestic Theatre - Zanzibar

Devanand. Nargis, Madhubala and Meena Kumari were some of the favourite heroines. Their picture cards came with chewing gum and [were] exchanged enthusiastically among the youths. The Cinema Poster Corner at the market was the centre of attraction for passersby. There were various cinema shows including morning, matinee (afternoon), zanana (ladies) and the 'one shilling allround' ones. A partisan section among the audience in the theatre dropped soda bottles on the entry of the main hero shouting "asanjo!"'

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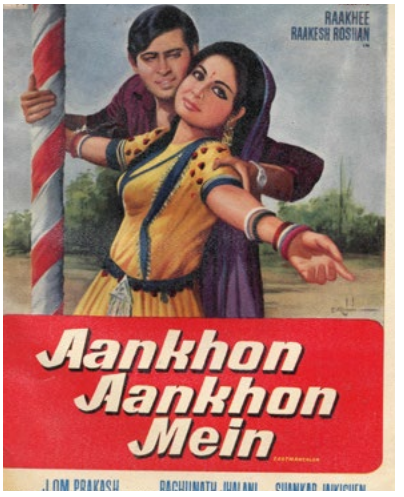

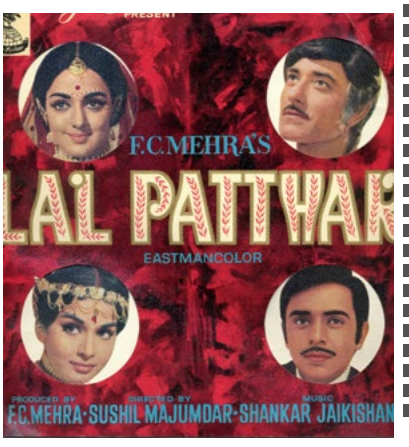

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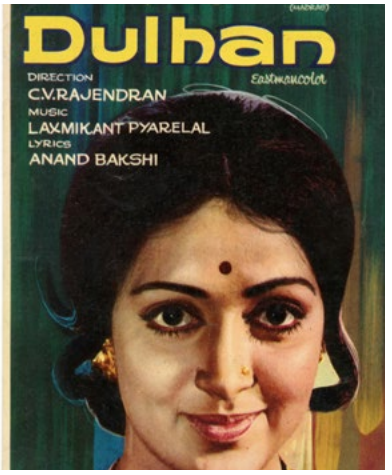
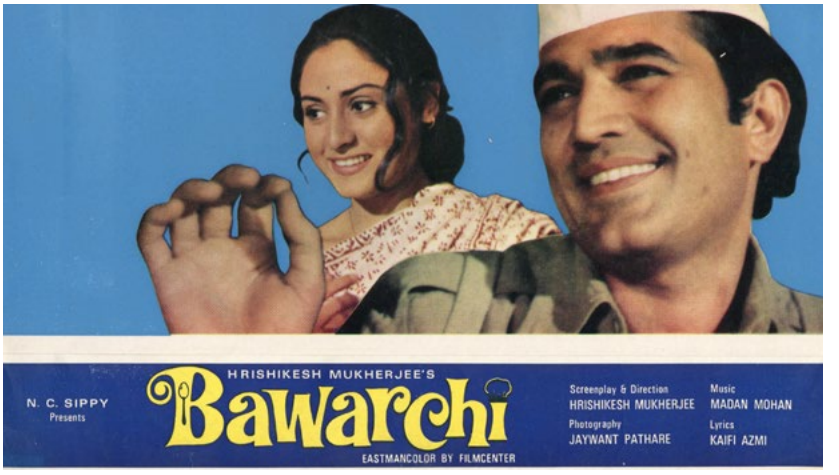
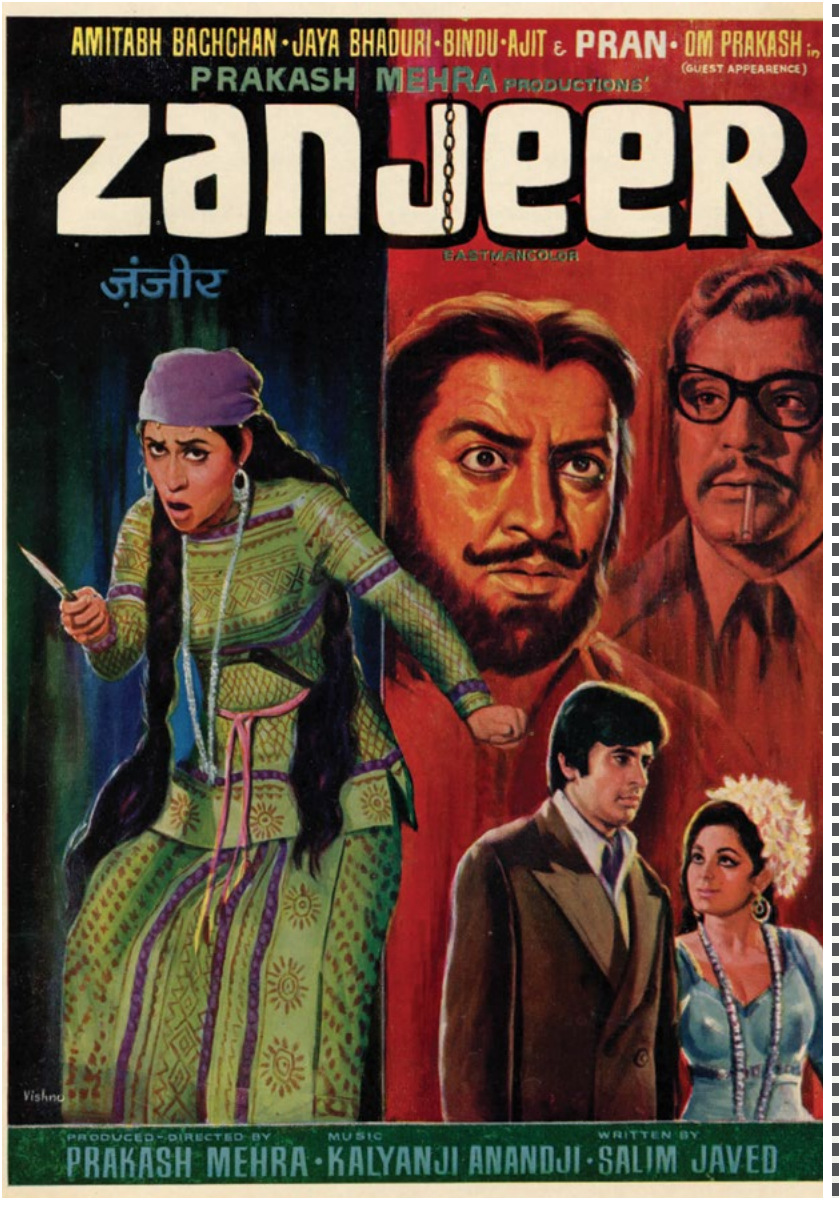






Cinema Nostalgia

London Calling

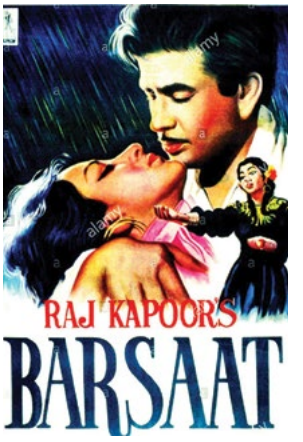
By Ramnik Shah

Ramnik Shah, born in Kenya, practiced law in Nairobi from 1964 to '74 and then for the next 30 years in England, where since retirement he has been engaged in academic research and writing on migration and diaspora related subjects and general literature. His first book *Empire's Child* has just been published.
See also *www.ramnikshah.blogspot.com*

My earliest memory of going to the cinema is being taken to the Majestic Theatre in Mombasa by my sisters, in the company of their neighbourhood friends, to `zenana` shows to see Hindi movies (the term Bollywood was unknown then). These were ladies only afternoon matinées, to which boys of my age could be sneaked in as part of a family group. And I can still virtually savour the aura of the sweet smelling scented burqa clad Arab, Swahili and Asian Muslim women who, once they got in, dared to bare their colourful inner finery beneath the black *bui buis!* So freed from the male gaze, they would indulge in much bonhomie, loud yelps of joy and deafening chatter all around. Other than that, I don`t recall much, except that sitting in the front row of the balcony seats, it felt overpowering to look at the celluloid images flashing by across the black and white screen. I could see the action but not understand what was being said.

The Majestic and the Regal up on Salim Road were the only two cinemas in Mombasa then, in the late 1940s. The NaaZ and the Moons came later. The next phase was my early teenage years, which also coincided with the onset of such iconic films as *Aan, Awaara, Anarkali, Baiju Bawra,* and *Mother India*, all of which I remember seeing. These hits were the talk of the town, so to speak, as were some earlier ones such as *Andaz* and *Barsaat.* Then *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje*, with its classical dance sequences, had a high profile gala premiere in the newly opened Queens Cinema on Fort Jesus Road in the presence of local Indian leaders and the Provincial Commissioner and his entourage as specially invited official guests. The songs and the music associated with them all were heard everywhere and particularly in places like the Blue Room, which had a thriving juke box, a novelty in those days, much patronised by boys and young men, invariably, who sat around having ice creams or endless teas and *bhajias.*

From the mid-50s, as secondary school pupils we switched to `English` films and that, together with the language itself and the accompanying literature, opened up a whole new cultural dimension. Then my cinema-going experience took on a different trajectory. On Saturday afternoons my mates and I would join the crowds of youngsters, including girls and European kids, eagerly queuing up to see cowboy and adventure films at the Regal or the Queens Cinema. In fact the street scene in Mombasa on Saturdays was dominated by excited groups of boys and girls loitering around Salim and Kilindini Roads, eyeing each other and making merriment. In the cinema foyers, the box office clerks, sitting behind grilled windows in their tiny booths, would expertly dispense paper tickets marking the seat numbers in a barely decipherable scrawl and we would pile into the auditorium, and



if the lights had gone out and the show had begun then the usher would shine their torch to guide us to our seats.

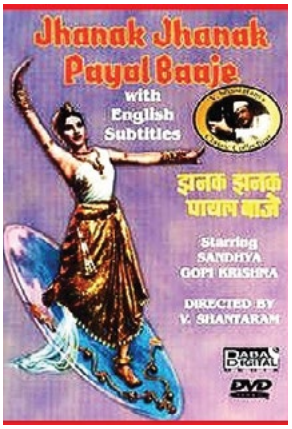
In the dark, however, there could be mischief and shenanigans. Once I saw my form teacher, a young Mr Pereira, busily engaged in necking (what the Americans call `making out`) with a woman and another time a couple of Goan girls were vigorously doing the same with each other, with their skirts hanging out through the back! These incidents remain imprinted in my mind for what they`re worth!

As one grew older, the dynamics changed, and so did the choice of films. I then began to see more serious films on my own and was much influenced

by the content. Those that come to mind are Charlie Chaplin`s *The Great Dictator* (mocking Hitler`s antics at his mass rallies) and *The Gold Rush*, both of which were shown during a revival of his old films at the Queens Cinema, where around the same time I also saw Alfred Hitchcock`s *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*. Thus it was that I became a lifelong Hitchcock fan, and also developed an interest in Chaplin`s later films. The other films that I saw during the same period, circa 1957-8, were *A Night to Remember* (about the Titanic) and *Sayonara*.

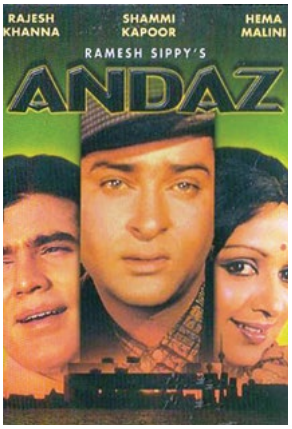
School days over, I came over to England for higher studies. I had just turned 18 and like any other young man on the threshold of maturity, let loose in the great metropolis of London, was only too eager to broaden my horizons and embrace new experiences. The next 4-5 years were a time of awakening and education.

It was common in those days for British cinemas to have continuous roll over performances, so one could go in at any time and leave when the cycle was complete, back at the starting point, though it was perfectly okay to stay on longer. These were usually double bills, including either a second `B` film or a documentary, which meant a total of some 3+ hours – useful and welcome in the cold and damp months of winter to keep oneself warm.



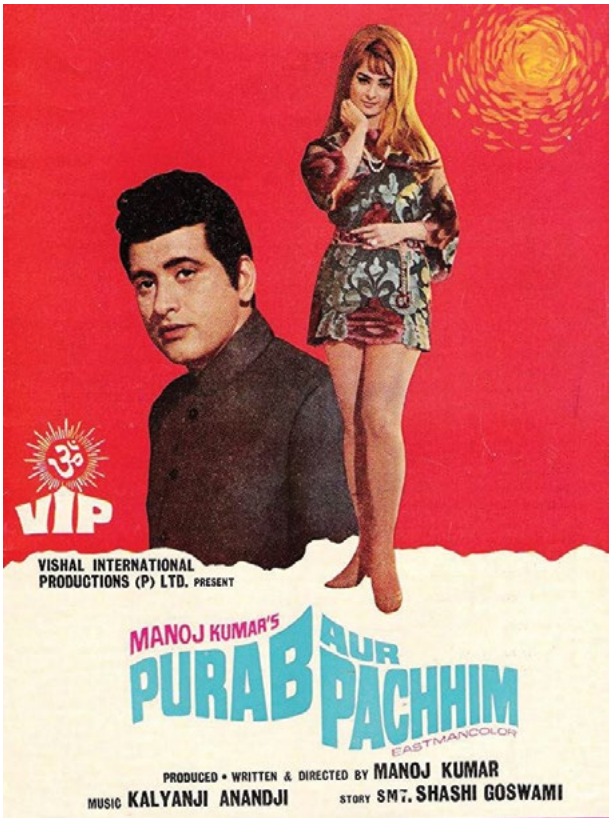
So in the popular genre, I saw, in no particular order and out of many, many more, the Hitchcock movies *(North by Northwest, Psycho, The Birds)*; the first two Bond films: *Dr No* and *From Russia With Love*; the two films about Oscar Wilde`s trials circa 1960; the war epics *The Great Escape, Lawrence of Arabia;* the sci-fi *The Day of the Triffids;* British social dramas *(Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, A Taste of Honey)*; romantic comedies (*Breakfast at Tiffanỳ s; The Apartment*) and a whole host of others, even one or two soft porn movies! Then there were the continental `new wave` and other foreign films, mostly with subtitles: *La Dolce Vita; La Strada; Jules and Jim; Breathless; Viridiana; Last Year in Marienbad* and so on, including *Satyajit* Ray`s *Pather Panchali.*

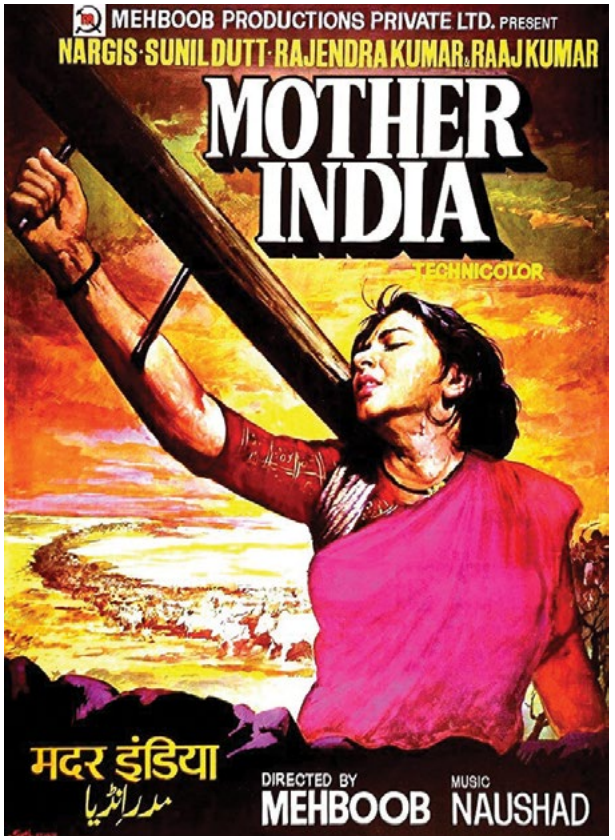
I should also mention the Studio 1 and 2 (I think) on London`s Oxford Street, where they showed hour long news features, documentaries about recent history and weekly updates, again on a continuous roll over basis. The aftermath of the war, which had ended 15 years earlier, was covered extensively, with shots of badly damaged buildings and infrastructure both in the UK and Europe. More importantly, I vividly remember seeing the grim footage of what the British and allied forces had found in the Nazi concentration camps of Germany and Poland: not only the grisly remains of those who had been exterminated in the gas chambers but also the sight of thousands of malnourished and spindly survivors in their pitiful condition. Most people seeing these images were moved and left the cinema in a dazed state, as I did. These newsreels were shown day after day, week after week and made painful viewing.



Coming back to Kenya on the exact eve of independence was an incredibly exciting moment. I have written about it elsewhere. And so I spent the next ten years as a young professional at a time when the country was going through momentous changes, coinciding with those in my own personal life. Vast new vistas were opening up and a lot happened during the next decade on every front.

Right up to the end of the 1960s, Nairobi was to retain its old-world charm of an easy going midsize capital city. New cinemas had sprung up and some old ones had disappeared, and a few more were to emerge later. In those days, one could drive back into the city centre in the evenings to a late evening film show, park the car without much hassle and afterwards even have time to have





a drink and snacks at the few coffee houses that kept open until late. There was one in particular behind the City Hall that was our favourite. Then from the early `70s, parking became the preserve of the enterprising `parking boys` who would find a spot and keep an eye on your car until the show was over, for a tip which you were only too glad to give. Late night coffee places had however gone by then.

There were just too many memorable popular films of that period to list any of them specifically. Suffice it to say that one saw all the blockbusters. But I should mention the Kenya Film Society. It was run by a dedicated trio of expatriate academic type young guys who would give a short introduction to each film. The membership was largely confined to the capital`s growing university, home-grown professional and international elite and the venue used to be either at the National Theatre complex or one of the commercial cinemas. Out of the many films that we saw, four come immediately to mind: *Shakespeare Wallah, Hiroshima Mon Amour, The Bespoke Overcoat,* and *A Man and a Woman,* the last at the Kenya Cinema on a Sunday morning! These were proverbial movie classics.

But apart from the cinemas in town or the suburbs, there were the two Drive-Ins, the one on the Thika Road and the other, the Belle Vue, on the Airport Road, which were perfect for Saturday night family outings. The Belle Vue was the larger of the two and showed mostly Indian films. One I remember seeing there was *Purab Aur Paschim* (East and West), which had some stunning musical numbers. I used to like the Thika Road one for the tasty toasted sandwiches with chips they used to serve during intervals, as you rushed in to join the queue it was amazing how efficiently and quickly the counter staff coped with the demand for varied orders during the short break. The Drive-ins were also where men and women, whether married or not, could ensconce themselves in the back seats of their cars to engage in sexual activity of sorts. It is impossible to say whether there were any LGBTQ couples doing the same, though I doubt it.

I have come a long way in the 45 years since, but the foundations for my enduring passion for the cinema were laid in those far off days in Mombasa`s magical Majestic, Regal and Queens cinemas!

The Editor from India Who Found a Home in Kenya

By Rasna Warah

Usually it is writers who have a fan following, but in the case of Ali Zaidi, it was writers who were fans of the much-loved editor, as I discovered when I attended the many garden parties which he held in his home in Loresho, one of the greener suburbs of Nairobi. There, people like Binyavanga Wainaina (who passed away three months before Ali died and whose death had really shaken Ali), Yvonne Owuor, Parselelo Kantai, Judy Kibinge, Muthoni Wanyeki, Tom Maliti, the late Susan Linee, Zarina Patel, Zahid Rajan, Dana Seidenberg, among many, many others, would gather, often in small circles around a fire or under a tree. Occasionally, international celebrities like John Githongo and the British author Michela Wrong would make an appearance.

Ali would mingle with this motley crowd of journalists, writers, scholars, activists, and filmmakers while his partner Irene cooked a pilau for the gatherings that seemed to get bigger with each invitation. It is these parties that spawned a generation of writers and journalists who got their tutelage under Ali either when they worked under him at *The Executive* or at *The East African*, or both. As the Ugandan writer David Kaiza wrote, 'By convening and hosting a circle of writers who would have an impact on the arts and culture on the continent, Ali Zaidi was also outdoing his predecessors. As with all editors of note, you wrote primarily for Ali Zaidi, and only secondarily for the paper.'

Kenyan journalist Kwamchetsi Makokha aptly described Ali's contribution to journalism and literature in Kenya. In an obituary published in the *Kenya Journalism Review*, he wrote: 'For the 21 years Ali worked for *The East African*, first as senior editor, then as consultant editor, he policed its depth, style and aesthetics with a caustic tongue, delivering tough love to writers with big titles and fragile egos. He coached, nurtured, cajoled and threatened a colourful cast of copy editors, writers, cartoonists, illustrators and photographers whose collective effort would meet the exacting journalism standards that have maintained *The East African's* reputation as a respected weekly regional newspaper.'

He could also be extremely hurtful to the writers he nurtured. One never knew how Ali might demolish you or your article with his acidic tongue. And just when you thought he was going to reject your piece, he would publish it. I once asked him why he did that. Why did he feel the need to demoralise writers? His response? 'I am a writers' groupie. I admire writers, but I also need to show them who is boss and put them in their place.'

Ali was best known for his cryptic and humourous headlines. 'His headlines were racy and saucy but also true, such as "KQ Ready for Virgin Entry" to describe Kenya Airways cockiness when Virgin Atlantic announced the start of flights to Nairobi; or "No Sex without Movement" to compress the threat of a bedroom strike by Ugandan women if men did not support President Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement,' remembers Makokha.

> **'He often said: "In Africa, people accept you as long as they sense that you are genuine."'**

Ali Zaidi

But it was the parties that many remember, not just for the flowing alcohol and the food, but for the conversations, which often turned into debates or heated arguments. Ali brought people together who would go on to form lifelong professional or personal relationships – some ending not so well. He had a knack for knowing who 'his tribe' was, and which tribe members might get along with another. And he loved bringing them together, not just for their sake, but for his as well. Kaiza describes one such party in an article he wrote for *The Elephant* shortly after Ali died in September 2019. 'He was addicted to people. I could see that. He could not get through an evening without the company of at least half a dozen people. People were his element. He was happiest in large groups,' he wrote.

Others were drawn to Ali for his political beliefs, like the anthropologist/writer Paul Goldsmith (aka Usama), who shared Ali's Marxist leanings. Goldsmith had come to Kenya from America in the 1970s when Kenya was still a hopeful country. He met Ali, who was also an immigrant, and who like him, had stayed on in the country throughout the eras of Moi, Kibaki and UhuRuto.

While Kenya hurtled from one political crisis to another, Ali and Usama stayed on in their adopted country, perhaps in the belief that Kenya offered something their home countries could not: a place that was cosmopolitan and tolerant enough to accept their brand of politics – even as that brand became increasingly unfashionable in a post-colonial Kenya hung up on all things Western. 'Perhaps we were lucky. Ali and I parachuted in [to Kenya] when it was easier to form relationships and friendships based on our shared interests and common humanity. We arrived as outsiders and Kenya became the selectionary mindf**k that forced us to co-evolve,' he wrote.

'Ali's Marxism,' wrote Goldsmith, 'was not about quasi-religious abstractions. It resurfaced in the decategorised approach Ali personified through his highly interactive lifestyle. Everyone counted. He shared and communicated without pretention, and he was a positive influence on the ever-widening circle of those who came into contact with him.'

Ali led a complicated yet simple life. He had left his son Azar from a previous marriage in India when he came to Kenya, and chose to create another family in Kenya with Irene, a sculptor he met in Kitale when he was an expatriate teacher there. They had four children: Franco, Emma, Hassan and Tara.

Ali did not aspire for things that Kenyans of a certain class aspire for. I don't think he ever learned to drive (Franco was designated this role), and apart from a small shamba outside Nairobi he owned no property. He didn't believe in material things. Wealth for him was his family, friends, colleagues and admirers.

When his relationship with Irene ended after nearly three decades, he was crushed. 'It broke me,' he confessed to me a few months before his death when he had developed various medical complications.

At his wake, which was held at Shamura's, his favourite joint in Parklands, I discovered that he came from a highly accomplished Indian family of writers and academics. But he had shunned that life. Perhaps Kenya offered him the opportunity to be whatever he wanted to be without having to conform to societal pressures and expectations, which can be quite intense in class-conscious India. Ali was definitely not a conformist.

Kaiza says he would like to think Ali found a home in East Africa. 'He seemed happy. He often said: "In Africa, people accept you as long as they sense that you are genuine."'

Babri Masjid: A Case Of Criminal Trespass

By Nandita Haksar

Nandita Haksar, is a human rights lawyer, teacher, campaigner and writer

Even before the adoption of the Constitution, in November 1949 India had embarked upon the stupendous task of preparing the electoral rolls on the basis of universal adult franchise. The exercise turned adult Indians into voters even before they had become citizens. Some authors have called this exercise the 'greatest experiment in democratic human history'.

One writer has said: 'By late 1949 India pushed through the frontiers of the world's democratic imagination and gave birth to the largest democracy.'

Right back in 1928 Nehru in a report had stated: 'any artificial restriction on the right to vote in a democratic constitution is an unwarranted restriction on democracy itself and the colonial notion of keeping the numbers within reasonable bounds for practical reasons has to be faced.'

During the colonial rule, electoral institutions were largely a means to co-opting the ruling elite and strengthening the colonial state. The Hindu Mahasabha was established in part as a response to the British India government's creation of a separate Muslim electorate under the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909.

And now 173 million Indians were on the electoral roles and 85 per cent of them had never voted. The first elections took place on October 25 1951 and February 21 1952.

At the very moment a group of dedicated bureaucrats had started getting ready to prepare the electoral roll, in November 1949, the Hindu Mahasabha was preparing its diabolic plan of converting the Babri mosque into a temple in Ayodhya.

The British had left behind a legacy of divide and rule which was in large part responsible for the bloody and violent partition of the country; and now many right wing nationalists' worldview was influenced by the colonial discourse revolving around Hindu/ Muslim dichotomy. And this discourse is reflected in the very first paragraph of the Supreme Court judgement on the Babri Masjid where they see the dispute as being between Hindus and Muslims; not a conspiracy by a Hindu nationalist organization involved in the murder of Gandhi.

The thousand-plus page judgement by the Supreme Court of India on the dispute over the Babri Masjid dispute begins with this paragraph:

'The British had left behind a legacy of divide and rule...'

'These first appeals centre around a dispute between two religious communities both of whom claim ownership over a piece of land measuring 1500 square yards in the town of Ayodhya. The disputed property is of immense significance to Hindus and Muslims. The Hindu community claims it as the birthplace of Lord Ram, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The Muslim community claims it as the site of the historic Babri Masjid built by the first Mughal Emperor, Babur.

'The lands of our country have witnessed invasions and dissensions. Yet they have assimilated into the idea of India everyone who sought their providence, whether they came as merchants, travellers or as conquerors. The history and culture of this country have been home to quests for truth, through the material, the political, and the spiritual. This Court is called upon to fulfill its adjudicatory function where it is claimed that two quests for the truth impinge on the freedoms of the other or violate the rule of law.'

Although the Supreme Court judgement mentions Hindu Mahasabha by name in several places and the Defendant no 10 was the president of the organization at the relevant time; it continues to conflate the Hindu Mahasabha with Hindus in general.

The Hindu Mahasabha denied that there was any incident in December 1949 in which some Sadhus broke the mosque locks and installed idols of Rama under the dome. According to the written statement of the President of the Hindu Mahasabha, 'the idols were in existence at the time immemorial. According to the written statement the site is the birthplace of Lord Rama and no mosque could have been constructed at the birthplace'. (Page 43 of the judgement).

This statement contradicts the stand of the Hindu Mahasabha that Ram's idols appeared at the mosque in 1949 miraculously.

Ayodhya has been associated with the birth of Ram in various texts but nowhere is the exact place actually mentioned. A shot in Anand Patwardhan's famous documentary *Ram Ke Naam* shows clearly that many temples in Ayodhya claim to have been built at the site of Ram's birthplace. Many Sanskrit inscriptions mention Ayodhya as a holy city but are silent on the birthplace of Ram.

A mosque was constructed in 1528 which later became famous as the Babri Masjid; next to it was a raised platform on which Hindus worshipped Ram. The two communities had continued to worship side by side. But the British were threatened

by Hindu-Muslim unity and spread a rumour that Babar, the first Mughal, had built the mosque at the site of a Ram temple. That is the origin of the claims that Babri Masjid was built by destroying the Ram temple – a claim that the Supreme Court says has no basis in archaeological evidence.

Conversion of Babri Mosque into a Temple

The statement of the Hindu Mahasabha that the idols of Ram were present from times immemorial is belied by the FIR filed in December 1949 at Ayodhya Police Station. The FIR was filed by Pandit Ramdeo Dubey, the officer in charge, Ayodhya Police Station, Faizabad at 9 a.m. on December 23, 1949.

The FIR was filed against Abhiram Das, Ram Sakal Das, Sudarshan Das and 50 to 60 other persons, whose names were not known, under Sections 147 (rioting), 448 (trespassing) and 295 (defiling a place of worship) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC):

'That at about 7 in the morning when I (Ramdeo Dubey) reached the Janmabhoomi, I came to know from Mata Prasad [Constable No. 7, Ayodhya Police Station] that a group of 50 to 60 persons have entered the Babri Masjid by breaking open the locks of the compound and also by scaling the walls and staircases and placed an idol of Shri Bhagwan in it and scribbled sketches of Sita, Ramji, etc. in saffron and yellow colours on the inner and outer walls of it. That Hans Raj [Constable No. 70, who was on duty at the time when 50-60 persons entered] stopped them [from doing so] but they did not care. The PAC [Provincial Armed Constabulary] guards present there were called for help. But by then the people had already entered the mosque. Senior district officials visited the site and got into action. Later on, a mob of five to six thousand people gathered and tried to enter into the mosque raising religious slogans and singing kirtans. But due to proper arrangement, nothing happened. Committers of crime [Abhi] Ram Das, [Ram] Sakal Das, Sudarshan Das with 50 to 60 persons, names not known, have *desecrated [naapaak kiya hai]* the mosque by trespassing the mosque through rioting and placing idol[s] in it. Officers on duty and many other people have seen it. So the case has been checked. It is found correct.'

'The two communities had continued to worship side by side'.

'The story of how the Ram idols were placed inside the Babri Masjid ... has been well researched and documented'

The story of how the Ram idols were placed inside the Babri Masjid on the night of December 23 1949 has been well researched and documented by Krishna Jha and Dhirendra K Jha in their book entitled *Ayodhya: The Dark Night - The Secret History of Rama's Appearance in Babri Masjid (2012)*. They have documented the facts leading to the installation of the idol and described the characters involved in the conspiracy.

From the accounts of that day it is clear from a legal point of view it is a criminal trespass committed by a group of Sadhus or ascetics affiliated to a particular religious sect but members of a political organization called the Akhil Bhārat Hindū Mahāsabhā, a right wing Hindu nationalist political party in India.

Role of the District Administration

The Supreme Court judgement acknowledges that, 'Officials of the state refused to thereafter remove the surreptitiously installed idols despite orders from the State Government, further confirming their alliance with the miscreants who desecrated the mosque'.

The District Magistrate was one KK Nair who had links with the Hindu Mahasabha and he refused to remove the idols despite being told to do so by the State Government. His wife, Shakuntala Nair, organized an *akhand kirtan* to keep militant sadhus from leaving the compound of the Babri Masjid. And in the meantime the Hindu Mahasabha and its affiliates spread the rumour that Ram's idols had appeared at the mosque miraculously.

Both KK Nair and his wife got seats in the Parliament on tickets from Hindu nationalist parties.

Nehru's Concern

Barely two days after the idols of Ram were installed in the mosque, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the Chief Minister of the United Provinces (now UP) to ensure that the idols were removed.

Akshay Brahmachari, a Congress-man wrote a series of letters to Lal Bahadur Shashtri, went on fasts and recorded what was happening in Ayodhya. But other Hindu leaders such as Baba Raghav Das supported the move.

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Pant, the Chief Minister, on December 26, just two days later:

'I am disturbed at developments at Ayodhya. Earnestly hope you will personally interest yourself in this matter. Dangerous example being set there which will have bad consequences.'

Nehru wrote to Pant again on February 5, 1950:

'I shall be glad if you will keep me informed of the Ayodhya situation. As you know, I attach great importance to its repercussions on an all India affairs especially Kashmir. I suggested to you when you were here last that, if necessary I would go to Ayodhya.'

Pant discouraged him and used the communal atmosphere to defeat a socialist candidate. And by then KK Nair had got an order from the court to attach the dispute under section 145 of the CRPC with the help of Babu Priyadatta Ram, the Chairman of Faizabad-Ayodhya Municipal Board. He became the receiver of the property. This was in violation of the Section 145 which states that if a party has been forcibly and wrongfully been disposed then the property should be restored to the rightful owner.

'India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the Chief Minister of the United Provinces (now UP) to ensure that the idols were removed'.

A case of criminal trespass which could have been dealt with by the ordinary criminal law became a national issue which even the Supreme Court of India did not dare settle in accordance to principles of the law and the Constitution.

This injustice will further divide Indian citizens along religious lines and will have consequences that will touch the entire region.

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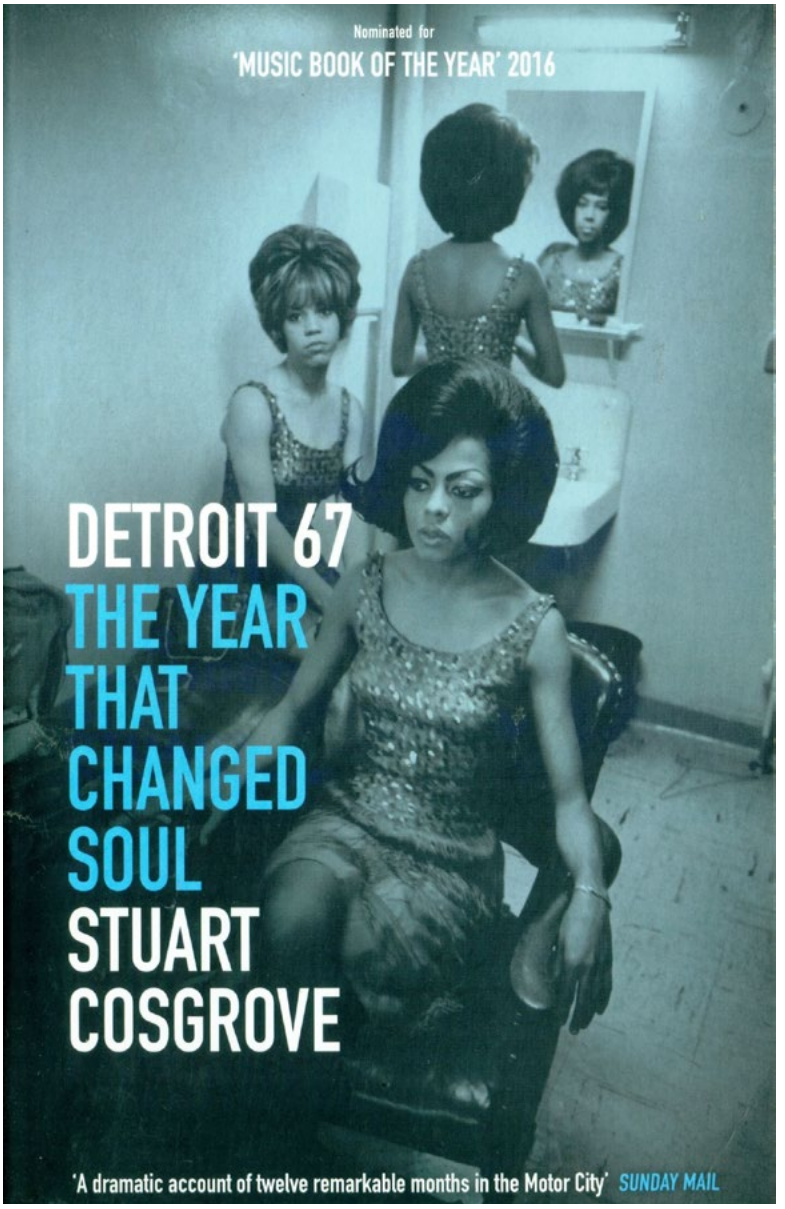
BOOK reviews



Sixties Soul Trilogy:

Detroit 67: The year that changed soul

Memphis 68: The tragedy of southern soul

Harlem 69: The future of soul

Author: Stuart Cosgrove
Publ: Polygon, Great Britain 2016, 2017 and 2019

Reviewer: Diana Lee-Smith

The profound cultural change taking place in the United States of America in the late 1960s is carefully documented in this trilogy, so we can understand its origins, the threads of events that brought it about and its echoes that continue. It is a meticulous social history of a sound. The sound of soul came from somewhere and was made by particular people. It changed meanings, was heard by everyone around the world and remains with us. Stuart Cosgrove's history is a passionate academic work that has rightly won several awards because it makes clear

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how social change takes place. Who made what changes in the sound of soul music is described in painful detail. It is indicative of the power of the sound of soul that the person who has written its history, Stuart Cosgrove, is a Briton who was inspired by it in his youth and moved from being a fan to a music writer.

The books can be read independently, each documenting a single year in the late 1960s, with chapters addressing sequentially what happened in the three different cities. Each chapter can be read as an essay on a topic, such as in Detroit 67, 'July: Riot'; or 'Harlem 69', 'December: King Heroin'. The middle book, Memphis 68, departs from the strict month-by-month beat of the other two, having more chapters, perhaps because too much was happening that year, including the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr in that city. There are five chapters set in April, the month of the assassination, including 'Agent 500's Busy Afternoon: 4 April'. The chapter that deals with the aftermath 'Booker T Jones and the Paris Riots: 30 May' encompasses international events.

Each chapter and each book can be read like a popular novel, but each chapter and each book also contain exact details of who was making what music and includes the business arrangements, titles released or not released but heard and found in archives, interpersonal conflicts and the relationships of musicians. There is a story line for each chapter, each book and for the trilogy as a whole. It is a literary structure that is musical.

Soul music comes from the history of the enslavement of African people by white people and the continuing struggle for the right to be heard as citizens of the United States and beyond. Inevitably the books cover politics, the background of the Vietnam war including people's involvement with it, the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968, the Black Power movement and the Black Panther party, as well as the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. People's beliefs and religious worship are also intrinsic to soul, with the story of the secularisation of gospel music as well as how church structures and community institutions supported the development of the Detroit sound and its business model for example.

It is clear that soul music comes from black musicians but is heard, played and sung by everybody, as witness the author of the books. This is documented as meticulously as everything else in the three books.

Detroit 67: the year that changed soul

The main character in the story of the first book in the trilogy is Berry Gordy, a 38 year-old African-American businessman in Detroit who made millions in music as the driving force behind the Motown Corporation that produced the 'Detroit sound'. Diana Ross of the Supremes became his girl-friend and was the main beneficiary of the group's phenomenal success, which stems from his understanding of the music industry from the streets and the recording studios to every aspect of the business, from promotion, chart-watching and market segmentation to taxation. The Supremes were not the only group that scored success from his entrepreneurial abilities and the book documents them all – their origins, their sound and their relationship with Berry Gordy, including what they thought about him.

Stuart Cosgrove's sources are archives of the music press, in which he himself worked although in a different continent. The writer does not take sides, so we get the story as it evolved at the time, including the tensions between and break-up of the Supremes with tales of what happened to all of them over time in their lives, careers and Florence Ballard's death. Berry Gordy's older sisters were in the music business before him and stood behind the Motown Corporation, making it in his mind a 'family'. Their mother's community was civil rights and church-based. The older sisters had the images that we associate with the Supremes – the immaculate grooming, fur coats and diamonds.

The music of Motown took the old Rhythm and Blues of the South where the population of Detroit mostly came from, merged it with 'pop' music and targeted a mixed black and white audience in the USA and then the world. It rested on technical excellence, orchestral backing and well-organized studio performance. It also derived from the machine sounds of the 'motor city' where Detroit's population worked on the assembly lines, their families having migrated North from rural plantation work as the institutions of the slave economy declined. But racial segregation was entrenched, in schools, in society generally and in places where music was performed. People listened to and performed segregated types of music. Motown changed that, deliberately and consciously. It was part of the civil rights movement.

The book's story is set in Detroit at the time when the motor

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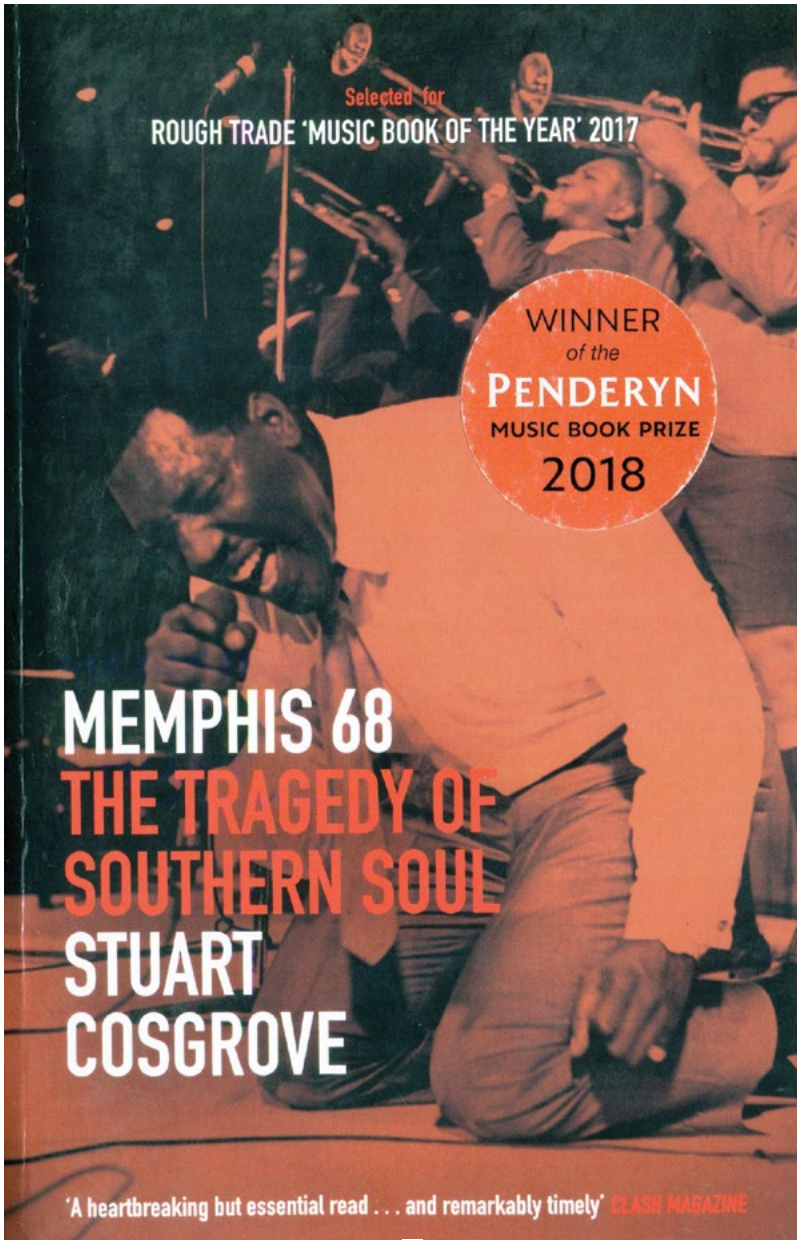
industry was declining and strikes and riots ensued, fuelled by racial discrimination and police targeting of African Americans, mostly young men. The story begins with a snow storm that brought the city to a halt and ends with a chapter called 'December: Flight' that documents the decline of the city to what we know today as the 'rust belt'. The story of Mohamed Ali, his political struggles and transformation from Cassius Clay in the world of boxing and on the global stage, is told in the chapter 'June: War'. This documents the boxer's resistance to the Vietnam War, woven into the story through his appearance in Detroit and his impact on the changing self-image of the African American people.

It is important to read this detailed history today as we witness current events that are grounded in it. Too many things that Cosgrove's book documents have not changed, although the music remains and has evolved. The evolution began in 1967 and is duly documented: as the riots and social conflict emerged so new record labels such as Stax in Memphis went with a new, rawer sound that caught attention more than the TV specials and commercial success of Motown. Otis Redding and others had a song encouraging kids to 'Stay in School: Don't be a Drop-Out' and this caught the attention of politicians concerned about the racial divide. But it was the newer sound that really caught attention.

Motown and Berry Gordy also shifted with the times. Although he worked more in Los Angeles, he fostered the new music emerging as well, through the sounds of Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye, whose album 'What's Going On?' became an inner-city anthem.



Memphis 68: The tragedy of southern soul

The middle episode of the trilogy, this book is a sustained blast of information on changing music and socio-political tragedy. It is written like anthropology in accurate detail, but the effect is to convey the feelings captured in the changing music. But it is also written in parts like a murder mystery – the five chapters on the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr set the scene of the crime, draw the characters and present incriminating evidence. 'Ben Branch's Solemn Promise: 4 April' is the chapter that describes King's death (in minute detail) and the events leading up to it. These include the words of his famous 'mountaintop' speech and the weather at the time, which was a freak thunderstorm that prevented Ben Branch, the saxophonist, from reaching Memphis in time.

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He does however finally arrive and is talking to King at the time of his shooting. King's last words before he was shot were to ask Branch to play 'Take My Hand Precious Lord' on his saxophone which he had with him.

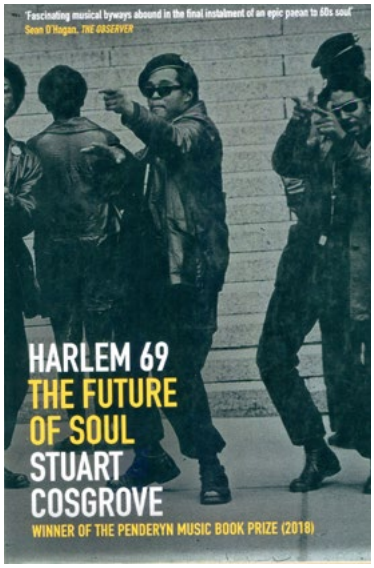
That chapter ends with the words, 'And then the inner cities erupted', the events which permeate the following chapters. But those events are dealt with intertwined with the music: who played what, when and where, and how the sound changed as a result of those events. Ben Branch, apart from collaborating with King on musical activities for 'Operation Breadbasket' feeding the poor and during his civil rights march in Selma, Alabama, played for Stax Records, the Memphis based company that is the main actor in the book's story line. Branch we learn became a successful entrepreneur later in life, running the first African American owned soft-drinks company. Branch's music came from R&B, spirituals and jazz, and he played with the young Isaac Hayes among others.

King had come to Memphis to support the sanitation workers' strike there. They had been locked in a battle about their appalling working conditions, up against the Mayor and the weight of the police and other agencies of power. The chaos that broke out after the assassination defeated these forces, which caved into their demands, unable any longer to exercise the same oppression. Across the country, residents of the inner city rose up in more riots that echoed those of the year before about working conditions in Detroit. Memphis and Washington DC were especially hard hit.

The year had begun with the mourning of Stax Record's greatest singer, Otis Redding, who replaced Elvis Presley as the world's top male vocalist. Both from Georgia in the US South, Elvis Presley who held the top spot from 1956, and Otis Redding who held it from 1965, both sang soul music based on R&B, their two sounds riveting the world's listeners. According to Cosgrove's research, it was their vocal range that set both of them apart. Both recorded their music in Memphis. Redding had been killed in a plane crash, but like Elvis, his music lived on, including the iconic, 'Sitting on the dock of the bay'.

There was continuity across the racial divide in Memphis also in Stax Records, where white and black musicians worked together. This relationship was sorely tested after the King assassination however. By the end of 1968 Stax records had begun its long decline to collapse in 1975, but not before one of its greatest moments came in December 1968 with the breakthrough into funk music pioneered by Isaac Hayes at the Tiki Club in Memphis. Hayes went on to break into movie music and much more. But his transition to the spoken-word rap music with his backup band the Bar-Keys in December 1968 created the music that took over the world subsequently. Hayes had reportedly had a breakdown after Martin Luther King's death, but recovered to make his musical mark.

Another event of December 1968 was the resurgence of Elvis, returning to his musical roots in R&B with his TV special that made him a colossus in the music industry. According to Cosgrove's research, his meeting up with his old R&B musician friends backstage led him back to the music of his first success that had created the rock and roll movement twenty years earlier; and changed the world of music from the nineteen fifties onward.



Harlem 69: The future of soul

The last book of the trilogy takes us to New York, where music continued its explosive transformation, emerging from the street sounds of Harlem, labelled the black 'ghetto'. The main character of the third book is not really a person or a music company but a place: a central part of the slim island of Manhattan that constitutes New York. In 1948 James Baldwin described, 'Harlem's invincible and indescribable squalor' born forty years earlier 'under the great weight of frustration and bitterness', where one lived in the bowels of the city among garbage and decay. The word came from 16th Century Venice when Jews were confined to a 'ghetto', and was later used to characterise an overcrowded area of a city occupied by newcomers and low-income people (pp 85-86).

The lives and music of Harlem's inhabitants are documented alongside political events and social movements, mainly Black Power and the Black Panther

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Party, and a spectacular show trial at New York's Criminal Courts building, starting in October 1969. The cast of characters is large, all documented in Cosgrove's meticulous anthropological style.

One is Betty Mabry, who fled to Harlem as a teenager from an oppressive Pennsylvania town built by Dale Carnegie, the Scottish proponent of capitalism. She built a career as a musician, song writer and performer, as well as a model and night club worker and owner. Her creative influence on jazz musician Miles Davis, to whom she was married for one year, 1969, is explained. The book documents their relationship, including their clothing and demeanour at Malcom X's funeral. Betty Mabry created the Afro hairstyle and promoted the natural look. She was also an aggressively sexual feminist years ahead of her time in music, creating and performing songs that predated Beyonce, Madonna and Prince by twenty years. She got Miles Davis to listen to funk and Isaac Hayes, which brought him new success. Yet her later life was spent looking after her parents back home in the rust belt.

Spanish Harlem, the area predominantly occupied by Puerto Rican migrants to New York, is the main character in another chapter featuring the 'Young Lords' a gang turned social activist movement. They created and ran the 'Garbage Offensive' that cleaned up East Harlem in mid-1969. Boogaloo was Hispanic music merging R&B, funk and salsa to generate a wild party scene in Harlem that presaged disco, club and House music. Music signalled and activated the transformation of that generation of Hispanic immigrants, and led to them demanding more as citizens of America than their parents had. The assassination of Malcom X in New York in 1965 is flagged as the moment many people in Harlem followed him in converting to Islam, changing their names, identity and values. The life of Malcolm X, including his personal friendships, is told in detail, including his death and the undercover police literally working with him. This story line is cross-linked to the subversion of the Black Panther party and its main leaders. The subversion contributed to the splits in that party, including between the West and East Coast branches. The latter was based mainly in Harlem, and the arrests of several of its leaders and their trial forms another major narrative arc of the book.

Malcolm X was a friend of Nina Simone, whose life is tracked especially in relation to her performance at the 'Black Woodstock' festival that took place in a more organised but less publicised way than the Woodstock Festival also in New York State in August 1969. Black Woodstock was actually called the Harlem Cultural Festival and took place in a public park in Harlem. The book shows that the funding, management and acoustics of the Harlem festival, which took place first, were much better. Some performers even moved from one to the other.

Nina Simone's performance changed music and African American consciousness and attitudes profoundly. A child prodigy as a classical pianist, she had been discriminated against and had an erratic career as a result. Her voice – merging speech and singing – and piano playing transfixed the Harlem crowd and many others. Her song 'To be young, gifted and black' and others calling on African Americans to rise up against oppression, were change makers. Miles Davis is reported to have been stunned by her musical prowess.

The drugs crisis of Harlem and elsewhere in the African American community feature towards the end of the book, as many questioned the values of soul music as transmitted especially through the movies and other forms of performance. Michael Tabor of the Black Panthers wrote a report 'Capitalism Plus Dope Equals Genocide' in 1969. He was the eloquent spokesperson of the party who conducted his own defence at the show trial and went into self-imposed exile while on bail. He and Donnie Hathaway are the two young men of Harlem to whom the book is dedicated. Hathaway was another musical genius whose song 'The Ghetto' changed perceptions and who grasped and performed the entire historical range of soul music. His co-worker Roberta Flack, herself a skilled musician, records his genius in the Cosgrove book. Hathaway suffered from mental illness and died in in 1979. Michael Tabor lived out his life in Zambia, until his death in 2010.

Critique

There is much to praise in these books, including how they hang together as a dramatic narrative. There is one criticism, and that is the omission of the original source of the music. Cosgrove only tracks the origin of the blues as far back as 1837 – when slavery was still practised – to the music of W C Handy. He writes of the crude instruments and the degrading minstrel shows that entertained white audiences then. He analyses the feelings involved in blues music.

But he fails to write of the work of his fellow Briton, Paul Oliver, whose book *Savannah Syncopators* describes his research in

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the Sahel of Northern Ghana and in the clubs of New Orleans. Oliver tracks the origin of the guitar and the specific beat of the blues back to the praise singers – the 'griots' – of West Africa, who were social commentators. This work was done in the 1960s when Cosgrove himself was growing up, with the blues brought to him on radio and in records. Paul Oliver died in 2018 and his life was celebrated as Cosgrove brought out his last book.

SOUL CAME FROM AFRICA.

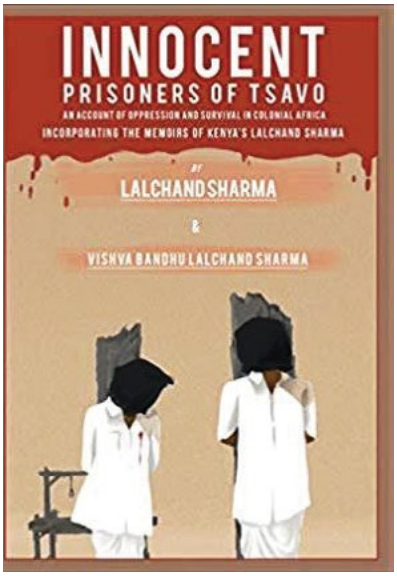
Innocent Prisoners of Tsavo

Author: Lalchand Sharma and Vishva Bandhu Lalchand Sharma
Publ: Life Rich Publications

Reviewer: Neera Kapur-Dromsom

'My book should be called The Innocent Prisoners of Tsavo. The Uganda Railway line passed through Tsavo, where a pioneer engineer, Lt Col JH Patterson, worked. He named his book about the shooting of two horrible man-eating lions, Man Eaters of Tsavo, (a school text book under British Raj). Since the core incident of my life occurred in the same Tsavo area, the title of my story should resonate with Patterson's best seller. The irony is that in my tale, the man eaters were British colonialists....'

With these introductory words in the Prologue, the author Lalchand Sharma, sets the framework for



his memoir. Lalchand Sharma was taken prisoner in the Tsavo area during the First World War by the British military in Kenya for a crime he did not commit. He became a victim of crass racism, political and military ineptitude and propaganda by the then British colonial structure.

Forty years after Lalchand Sharma passed on, his son Visho Sharma has carefully compiled his father's notes written over a period of twenty years, which we are now fortunate to see recorded in *The Innocent Prisoners of Tsavo.*

The book is set in two parts. The first eighty pages or so are the memoirs of Lalchand Sharma, a life that begins in India and thereafter when he moves to British East Africa; his traumatic experiences and incarceration in Kenya during the 1914 -1918 Anglo-German war. Interspersed throughout are illuminating explanatory notes by Visho Sharma that set in perspective the father's accounts; these deal with the circumstances leading to the accusations and incarceration of the prisoners, some of whom were executed. In the second part, Lalchand Sharma's diary notes continue as he moves on in his life 'after' the trauma.

Lalchand Sharma was born in Gondpur, Punjab to Jawaharlal (Chachu) and Badam Devi in 1895. He started school late, was in and out of schools and finally quit this quest altogether. Not attending school was normal in the village. Still in his teens in 1912, he touched his parents' feet and boarded the German ship, SS Marka Graph bound for Mombasa. In East Africa, plagued by illness in the beginning, he was in and out of odd jobs along the railway line, until he settled in as a sub fuel contractor supplying wood as fuel to the Uganda Railway (UR).

Between 1896 and 1901, some 32,000 indentured labourers had been recruited by the British administration in Kenya from British India to construct a rail line from Mombasa to Port Florence (Kisumu). The broad objective was to cull cotton in Uganda and control the source of the Nile and thence the Suez canal - hence the name 'Uganda Railway'. A remarkable engineering feat aside, the construction of the railway was widely believed to be of a financially unsound investment; it came to be called 'the Lunatic Line'. Many workers died of malaria, blackwater fever, insect bites and thorns from acacia trees especially in the Taru desert areas of line construction. Moreover, approximately 2,500 labourers were killed by two lions who had become man-eaters, mostly in the Tsavo and Simba areas during this period.

To Winston Churchill, the UR was a 'brilliant conception'. He wrote: 'Through everything, through the forests, through the ravines, through troops of marauding

lions, through famine, through war, through five years of excoriating Parliamentary debate, muddled and marched the railway.'

During the 1914 -1918 Anglo-German war, the strategic importance of the Uganda Railway was immeasurable for British imperial interests in Eastern Africa. The war that was fought here was forced upon the non-European workers and civilians in Eastern Africa who had nothing to do with it. The 1885 Berlin Treaty stated that the colonies should remain neutral in the event of a European war – bringing East Africa into the European War arena was a breach of the treaty. A European war became a World War.

The presence of the Germans with well-fortified posts and a smaller but brilliant and competent army haunted and humiliated the British commandment. Compounded by malice, mediocrity and mendacity and with no-one clearly in charge and no clear objectives, the British army's strategy and tactics were confined to keeping the UR secure. The guerilla tactics of the legendary German General Von Lettow-Vorbeck, his clear and strategic vision, military skill and unspeakable courage made the task of the British military increasingly difficult.

'Lettow-Vorbeck's brilliantly timed and executed raids had the effect of paralyzing rather than galvanizing the British,' quotes Visho Sharma from Hill and Mosley's books. The German guerilla units continued attacking the UR line in the Tsavo area; the British commanders blundered and muddled through as they searched for scapegoats, putting the blame on the Indians working in the Tsavo area.

The 'muddling through' persisted in the first two years of the war with fateful circumstances. Writes Visho Sharma: 'A hundred years ago, Britain's civil administration in Kenya determined that, under martial law imposed during World War 1, the British military had unjustly executed three fuel contractors. They were innocent, caught in a web crafted by British authority to intimidate Indians demanding equal rights with Europeans'. Neither the victims nor their families ever received any apology or compensation for this gross injustice. The publication of this memoir lays bare the perfidy and brazen inhumanity of British colonialism – is it too late for the British Government to express remorse?!

'Innocent Indians were executed; those spared by their British tormentors suffered long, hard-labour incarceration, some being deported to British India after Armistice (11 November 1918). The British were served by a deficient intelligence which clumsily linked the "offences" by the Indians with both the Indian demand for equal rights in Kenya and the larger freedom struggle in India,' in the words of Visho Sharma.

During the First World War, an anti-imperialist Ghadar Party established a branch in Eastern Africa, attracting support from some of the Asian community living there. Led by an educated elite, the Ghadar (rebellion, revolt) Party, that became a movement of the Indian diaspora, had its roots in the Punjab, India. Its base in San Francisco was initiated by Indian immigrants (mostly Sikhs), initially for rights in the USA and for Indian independence from the British Raj.

Through its paper, the *Ghadar*, the militant and anti-imperialist movement spread its message globally, including Western Europe and British East Africa. The British authorities saw it as a terrorist movement and their response was swift and brutal. These innocent Indians were falsely accused of being in possession of what the British termed as 'seditious literature' and were incarcerated. The British military used all sorts of devices - harassment, lies, even payment to perjure for the crown. Law and any sense of justice had broken down.

Lalchand Sharma and his two cousins were convicted on trumped up charges for allegedly assisting the Germans to blow up the UR line. They were imprisoned in Fort Jesus jail and denied access to their lawyer. The cousins were shot at dawn by a British firing squad hours after the verdict by a kangaroo court martial trial; another was hanged in public. Lalchand Sharma's sentence was reduced to ten years hard labour and so he lived to tell the tale.

In a moving paragraph, Lalchand Sharma writes, 'The cousins faced their unspeakable end with great courage. They had taken a cold shower and worn white dhotis ... sat stoically through the ritual *havan* (sacred fire ceremony) chanting the few mantras ... prayers said, they walked resolutely to their death in bare feet ... the military authority cruelly denied the two innocent martyrs the last rites, burying their bullet ridden bodies in that very compound in unmarked graves.'

This non-fiction life story narrated in the first person is an important contribution to our history offering new information on the evil legacy of the trauma of colonialism as well as racism. Visho Sharma's additional research to help elaborate

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his father's journey goes a long way in putting light on history never revealed to the public before. He writes, 'The record of the horrible episode remained inaccessibly buried in the British War office vaults for 80 years; and what was recorded turned out to be perfunctory.'

There is mention of leaders like AM Jeevanjee and MA Desai from the Indian Association and A Visram trying to assist for his release. This reflection on the past shines a light on how consequences and decisions have a ripple effect. There is a very interesting synthesis on the World War 1 strategies used by the Germans and the British in East Africa as the British muddled through with no one clearly in charge. Many pages are dedicated to the war conditions that prevailed in the Tsavo area to put in context the historical conditions in which his father found himself - to be falsely accused and to be condemned to 'death by hanging'.

The vivid portrayal and analysis of the war incidents are well developed. The war is not only a political event, there is also social segregation, racism and inequality. Moreover, archives can be as limiting as they are telling, especially when you are trying to find stories of people who have been pushed through the margins. Visho Sharma is well aware of this when he and his support team go through various records and come across biases in class and race, the harsh facts of history therein.

It is also a story of courage, and of resilience. After such a traumatic experience, that Lalchand Sharma was able to pick up the threads of his life, tells the reader that even in the event of all odds, a successful challenge to adversity is possible. Lalchand did not allow the incident of the 1914 -1918 war to embitter him, but took it all philosophically.

The story shifts from military jargon to building a new life in the next 170 odd pages. His youth might have been constrained and compromised by circumstances, but clearly Lalchand Sharma was a survivor who matured through all these experiences into a man of uprighteousness and with a philosophical streak.

As part of their 'divide and rule' policy, the British had encouraged the formation of separate institutions based on religious and linguistic affiliations. The Arya Samaj, an independent religious/ reformist movement started by Dayanand Saraswati in India in the 1870s calling for Swaraj, 'India for Indians', was founded very early in British East Africa. The adherents were mostly from the Punjab, and Lalchand Sharma found a base that gave him strength, and that he gave back to. His strong roots in Arya Samaj beliefs gave him the needed courage and force to move on.

Bearing witness is a step forward toward liberation in time of crisis. The portrait is of a youth in dire political times and the lasting impact of political trauma when things often fall apart, as he seeks a way out. The memoir is worth reading precisely for all these reasons. In the second part, the book narrates the stories of Lalchand re-commencing education, becoming a law clerk, a shopkeeper and finally an industrialist. He marries Badam Devi and the couple have two daughters and three sons who as adults move on to India and the USA.

In the epilogue, Visho Sharma writes of post-independence betrayal of their lofty dreams in Kenya and for Kenyans by the new leaders. 'Quite clearly, as we read his writing, a huge paradigm shift occurred; even as people changed Kenya, Kenya changed them. Gradually Kenya became their substantive home; India began to recede in their minds as a distant reality...' India was the home he had left, Kenya was the home where he matured. Yet, after the independence of Kenya, Lalchand Sharma was disappointed and dismayed. 'Our father shared with JM Nazareth an impassioned love for Kenya,' writes Visho, quoting the poignant words of Nazareth, 'To the African: No Guest Am I', and the reluctance by the new leaders to accept 'immigrants', some of whom were 4th and 5th generation Kenyans, many who had played a role in building the country and fighting for independence.

Finally, this is also a story of immigrants, trying to rebuild new lives and new support networks in the adversity of discrimination both by the colonial and independent governments.

Even though it merits better editing, especially regarding some repetitions in the second part and the relatively blurred quality of photographs that might be a bit jarring; ultimately they don't derail what is a book of importance. This rich and deceptively simple work, is actually detailed with well researched historical notes and cultural and traditional anecdotes. You can see that the book is written with love as the author talks of his family and friends. Visho Sharma has indeed done justice for putting it all in proper perspective not only as his father's memoirs, but for a more just and inclusive history.

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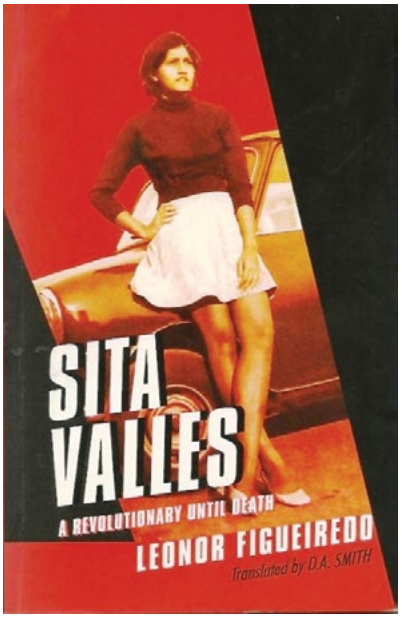

Sita Valles

A Revolutionary Until Death

Author: Leonor Figueiredo
Translator: D A Smith
Publ: Frederick Noronha for Goa 1556 Saligao, India. In Association with Golden Heart Emporium, 2019

Reviewer: Adolfo Mascarenhas

Who Is Sita Valles?

The original book, in Portuguese, was published in 2010, by Ms Leonor Figueiredo, a journalist from Portugal but who reported from Angola. In January 2019 in a book store in the small town of Margao, Goa, I saw the striking cover of the book in dominant red and black, designed by Bina Nayak. I had not heard of Sita Valles.

However, there she was, more standing than leaning on a Morris Minor sedan of the 1950's, tallish, determined jaw, crossed legs, a shortish white skirt topped by a polar necked long sleeved blouse. The red back cover of the book, had four paragraphs inscribed in white lettering – I was convinced that the book, along with others, should go into the 'to purchase cart'.

Sita - the beautiful, Goan communist had an African heart. She and her two brother siblings were born in Angola, not in the hospital but at home where the roof leaked so an umbrella had to be used. Sita's mother, Lucia, was born in Mombasa; Sita's father was raised in Goa, studied agriculture in India and was the Portuguese Consul in Mombasa. His grandfather had lived in Portugal.

Sita Valles was a doctor who at the age of 26 was executed without a trial at dawn on August 1 1977, she was shot with a single bullet on each leg and each arm. It was the year when an estimated tens of thousands of Angolans were massacred. Sita's closest Angolan friends were the militants including her husband Jos Van-Dumen, and Nito Alves.

'Alves Nito' was the *nom de guerre* of Bernando Alves Baptista; a young black Angolan born in 1945. Nito and Sita were particularly articulated and could talk impromptu on various issues hindering development. Their very virtues became their death sentence. Nito was a fast thinker and an analyst and rose rapidly up the ranks to become a member of the Central Committee of the MPLA and a Minister in independent Angola.

The book gives a detailed account of the histories of both Portugal and Angola, colonial and post-colonial. Leonor Figueredo, a Portuguese journalist, was well informed about the events in Portugal and its African colonies in the 1970's and 80's.

In Portugal, the iron-fisted Antonio Salazar ruled from 1932 for 42 years through his institution of terror, the PIDE, The International Police for Defense of the State. This way of governance did not just operate in Portugal but was replicated in full in Africa and beyond. It must be mentioned that Salazar was 'highly esteemed in Europe'. His dictatorship continued under Caetano and then Franco whose death in 1975 heralded a return to democracy.

It was at this time that Sita Valles travelled to Lisbon where she experienced the euphoria of the Union of Communist Students, the secret meetings, the Carnation Revolution. She returned to her country Angola, but the country was not the same any more. Colonialism in Angola had ended; it was now another Angola with different thinking and premises, and distinct social, political and cultural realities.

Sita did not fully realize that in post-colonial Angola; despite the Alvor Agreement (1974) to share power, the three powerful armed groups UNITA, FNLA and MPLA were still at war. There were complications. What about people who were born in Angola, liked the place and had contributed to its development? This included Portuguese deserters of an unjust war, people of mixed races who had formally even taken vows in churches. Incredibly such people were accused of subversion! They were whites or brown but such discrimination did not make sense. Agostinho Neto's own wife was an Azerbaijani,

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and therefore a Caucasian. President Neto bowed to pressure from his party compatriots or so it seemed; perhaps he had wanted to marry an indigenous Angolan!

Jose Agustinho Neto, an avowed communist, was Angola's first president. He died in 1979 and was followed by Jose Eduardo dos Santos who ruled from 1979 to 2017, slightly more than 37 years, during which he eliminated all functioning forms of democracy. In early 2017, President João Lourenço, out maneuvered the formidable attempt by President dos Santos to put his family members, especially his daughters to succeed him. President João Lourenço, has decided to act against the open corruption and amassment of wealth and there is now a ray of hope for Angola.

Sita Valles' struggle for Angola, where she was born, was not in vain. She was not a violent revolutionary; it remains to be seen if the new leader of Angola will make amends to Bernando Alves, Sita Valles and Van Dunem. More than that, there were thousands of others who were also massacred during the 'Angolan Marxist Revolution'.

In 2018 in Goa, the recent past Minister Alina Saldanha, noted:

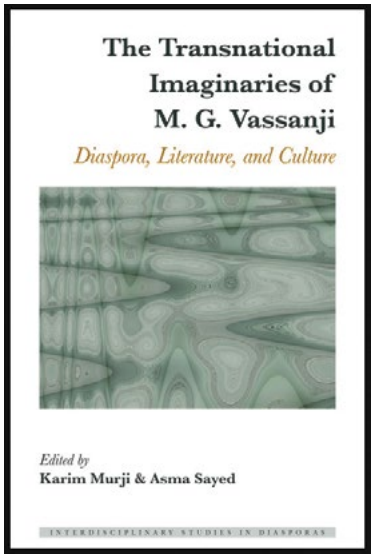
.....Sita, a great human being who lived her life fearlessly to ensure a more just society, especially for the downtrodden and the underprivileged. Sita Valles and my late husband Matanhy Saldanha were closely related: the similarity in their thought processes on some aspects of their life and the deep love for their respective lands is both striking and amazing.

A fine tribute from a Member of Parliament of modern day India, who had just experienced, how even in democracies, political manipulation can oust those who believe in ethical behaviour.

The Transnational Imaginaries of M G Vassanji, Diaspora, Literature, and Culture

Author: Karim Murji and Asma Sayed
Publ: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers

Reviewer: Farah Qureshi



This book calls for a rebranding of Vassanji's work by studying the author through a transnational context. The editors Karim Murji and Asma Sayed explain that we must read the author as both emerging from and representative of cross-border and cross-cultural movement. To do this, they explore the nature of 'transnationalism.'

Prominent Vassanji scholars join Murji and Sayed to explore the representations of transnationalism in Vassanji's multifaceted characters or personal accounts. The articles situate Vassanji not only within postcolonial, diasporic, and migration conversations, but a hybrid intercessory space connecting them.

Murji and Sayed orient the book through two simultaneous thematic directions. The first is a movement through Vassanji's types of writings: from memoirs in the first part through to fictions in the second. The second is a geographical arrangement, moving from South Asia to East Africa, and finally North America, similar to Vassanji's own movements. This double arrangement of the book is not as jarring as it sounds. Overlapping themes questioning identity, belonging, and movement ensures smooth transitions between chapters.

Chapters criticise phrases often utilised in building a sense of 'otherness' or exclusion. Authors note how discussions of segmentation, globalisation, and visitor identities (Ball, Munos, Alexander, Hart) are often reinforced through accepted concepts of intimacy (Desai), violence (Barasa), spirituality (Kanwar), gender (Pandurang), and social networks (Rollins). These perceptions only reinforce a dismissal of transnational culture. The authors instead encourage a fluid understanding of identity and memory in both historical and geographical trails (cf. Rosenberg, Ozawa, Siundu). While many of the articles question concepts of 'national'

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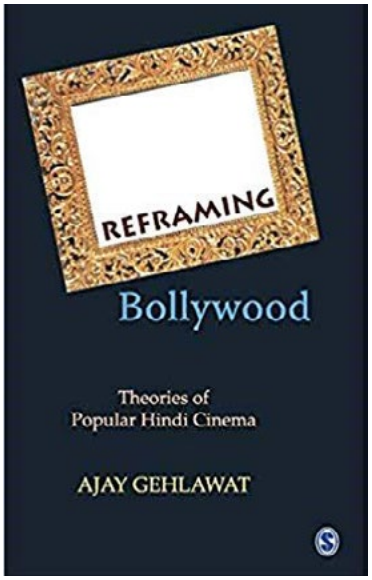
belonging, the points of enquiry are not general. Many chapters also approach detailed analysis of specific sections of Vassanji's work.

I must note that I am a reviewer who has not explored all books from Vassanji's oeuvre. I may have missed particular nuances and details discussed by the authors. The reason I mention this is to clarify that despite this limitation, I was not isolated from understanding the discussions. Instead, I finished motivated to read more, enriched with perspectives provided in this book.

This book is not only for Vassanji's fans. The essays explore topical and contentious debates relevant in contemporary political discussion. Authors show how themes in Vassanji's work are still contentious in modern society. With many governments across the world aggressively defining 'national' belonging, this book instead debates if a national identity even exists in translocal worlds. Is there even a true concept of nationally belonging? Vassanji's personal and fictional experiences help question the binary of native and foreign. Methodologically, studying individual local perspectives can inform understandings of the social.
Vassanji's works explain a dislocation from the colonial process, relocation, and international travel. A Vassanjian reflection on the realities of belonging and identity in historical and political contexts can broaden social science scholarship by understanding that translocal nationals can identify through an international flexible citizenship.



Reframing Bollywood:

Theories of Popular Hindi Cinema

Author: Ajay Gehlawat
Publ: SAGE Publications Inc.

Ajay Gehlawat is Associate Professor of Theatre and Film at Sonoma State University, California

This book combines multiple theoretical approaches to provide a fresh perspective on Bollywood - just as a Bollywood film that transgresses multiple genres-and challenges the homogenizing tendencies in much of the ongoing scholarship in the area. It covers five areas of controversial theorization: the religious frame, the musical frame, the subaltern frame, the (hetero) sexual frame and the 'crossover' frame. By deconstructing each of these hegemonic paradigms, it reshapes the understanding of a Bollywood film and restructures its relationships with multiple disciplines including film and theatre studies, post-colonial studies, South Asian studies, queer studies, and transnational studies.

This fusion is also representative of the larger objective of this work, namely, to destabilize Bollywood's position within any one sphere of reference and, instead, to illuminate how several realms of meaning are at play in its construction. The aim in doing so is to demonstrate how a variety of critical methodologies can enable a more comprehensive reading of the films making up this corpus.

Empire's Child:

My Writings 1967 - 2017

Author: Ramnik Shah
Publ: Austin Macauley Publishers

Reviewer: Zarina Patel

Ramnik Shah is to date the longest serving writer and columnist of *AwaaZ* Magazine (of which I am the Managing Editor). In these 13 years, his thought-provoking and promptly delivered commentaries have covered a wide range of issues both in subject matter and historical interest; and so it is no surprise that this collection of his writings follows a similar pattern.

Empire's Child is a banquet, no less. The reader is offered an array of views, comments,

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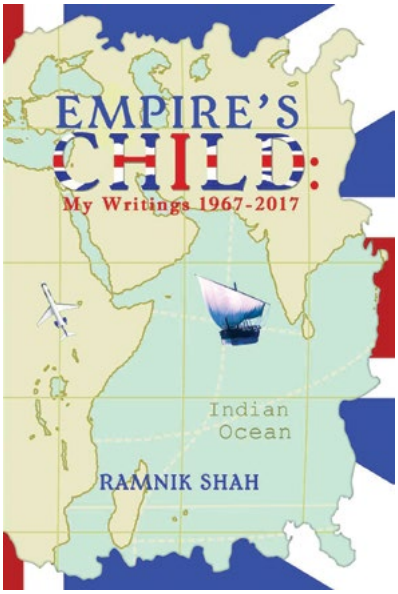


exposes, insights and critiques prepared primarily for the diasporan audience; but of interest to those seeking a Third World taste of global, especially US-EU, happenings. Ramnik's presence in *AwaaZ* is heralded by the title 'London Calling' – from his base in the UK he shares with us his wealth of experience starting within his motherland Kenya and spanning the continents of Europe, Asia and America. And what a spread it is!

Let us start at the beginning: the cover of the book. It depicts *London Calling's* very first appearance which was in Issue 1 of *AwaaZ* 2006; the topic was, 'They came in Dhows and left in Jets'. The accompanying article on page 59 is preceded by a historical sketch of colonial and post-colonial East Africa and the role of the South Asians in it.

The focus then moves to Britain and highlights legal issues around the betrayal of her overseas citizens and its resolution in 2002. From pages 85 to 163 under the heading 'The Culture' we are then treated to a veritable feast of book and film reviews that the author has penned over a quarter of a century, remarkable both for their extent as their literary as well as cinematic significance. Among the authors are Paul Theroux, Urmila Jhaveri, George Alagiah, Sultan Somjee and Judy Aldrick; the topic is 'Africa'. 'India' is the focal point of the film reviews; the works of famous directors such as Deepa Mehta, Danny Boyle, Shyam Benegal and Asghar Faradi are brought under the microscope.

Part V has a selection of six columns from *AwaaZ* in which Ramnik reflects on contemporary issues. In a selection of letters published in *The Times* [London], the earliest dated 1980, Ramnik puts forward alternate views on the 'Nationality Bill', 'Apartheid in South Africa', 'Ethnic Schools' and 'Arranged Marriages'. 'Gunboat diplomacy in Iran' written in 03-04-2007 is an indication of how old is the West's on-going conflict with Iran. His interaction with the print media started earlier in Kenya during the late sixties and early seventies as he berated the British Government's newly imposed restrictions on citizenship and its fallout. A section on migration studies has his reviews of six books focussing on the USA and India and including Rozina Visram's *Asians in Britain – 400 Years of History.*

The Gujrat Studies Association was formed in the UK in 2005 and Ramnik presented several academic papers to its annual conferences. 'Gandhi and Jinnah: A Study in Commonality and Contrast' is a fascinating read of comparative aspects of these legendary figures.

In Part Eight the author expresses his personal opinions on a variety of topics ranging from Wangari Maathai to Nehru's First TV Appearance and Muslim-related issues. They were posted in his blog (www.ramnikshah.blogspot.com) or the Namaskar-Africana List. In the travelogues which follow we journey with him to Cuba, India, South America and the USA.

All writing is 'partial and subjective' (Ramnik's comment in Namaskar-Africana in 21/01/2002) and no writer is expected to 'say it all'. However, in our present very volatile global politics, the term 'Empire' has a distinct ideological aspect which I daresay the writer has largely ignored or avoided. The travel in Gujarat, India, surely merited a mention of the 2002 Gujarat Massacre; in Cuba the 'different perspective' needed elaboration; in the historical overview of Kenya the anti-colonial struggles predated the end of WWII and the South Asian component including that of the press and the Ghadar Party were significant. The absence of our most loved and revered patriot, Pio Gama Pinto, a South Asian socialist; his assassination and the ideological tensions of that decade which reverberate even today is notable.

But as I said earlier, these 'digital footprints for eternity' are a banquet; not every dish will appeal but the reader has a wide choice to pick from. Fiction, History, Biography and Travel are the ingredients, the layout and list of contents makes it easy to zero into a special interest. Ramnik Shah is both a prolific reader and writer; he must be commended for the well-ordered and easy-to-follow classification and categorisation of such a large and varied body of writings. And for giving us introductions to such a rich and varied choice of books, films and articles.

Sultan Jessa
1960 - 2019

By Shamlal Puri and Kul Bhushan

Sultan Jessa passed away on 22 August 2019 in Montreal, Canada, aged 77. The man who was born in 1942 in Moshi, on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, rose to towering heights in journalism, first in East Africa and later in Canada.

Sultan was born in a family of East African pioneers. His grandfather, Hasham Jessa, made the arduous voyage from Gujarat, India at the dawn of the 20th Century and settled in Mombasa. He later migrated to the then Tanganyika, set up shop near Moshi, ventured into the bee-keeping business and expanded his business to include a cattle and fruit farm and built the landmark Tanganyika House in Moshi. He was called 'Lord Jessa' and was known for his business ethics and charitable spirit, which Sultan imbibed.

Sultan is the son of Kamrudin Jessa who started his business in nearby Arusha expanding his conglomerate to include a coffee plantation, a bakery, a dairy and still having time for community work. From a young age, Sultan chose a career in the media rather than joining the family business.

His early foray into publishing was the launch of his magazine *Scholar's Digest.* His big break came when he joined *The Nationalist* newspaper, mouthpiece of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) as a trainee reporter. The Nationalist sent him on a scholarship to study journalism at the Berlin Institute of Mass Communications in Germany. Then he went to England, and returned to Dar es Salaam and reported on the Independence Day. He was privileged to work under the editorship of Benjamin William Mkapa, who later became the President of Tanzania.

He joined the *Tanganyika Standard* which was then owned by Lonrho before nationalization, and later called the *Daily News.* He covered many stories on the union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar and on the efforts by Presidents Nyerere, Obote and Kenyatta as they struggled to establish the East African Community.

The field opened further for him when he started freelancing for western news agencies – Agence France Presse, United Press International, Associated Press, Reuters and Ceteka, the Czech news agency. He also wrote for *Adruica* magazine of London, *Drum* and the *Kenya Mirror* as well as Kenya's Nation Group. In a decade of working in Tanzania, Sultan interviewed former global leaders like German Chancellor Willy Brandt, Robert Kennedy, Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara, cowboy films legend Roy Rogers, Harry Belafonte, John Wayne and Sidney Poitier – Hollywood icons. He was transferred to Nairobi in the early 1970s and covered the Parliament and ventured into news features. TV stations invited Sultan to interview luminaries in Kiswahili.

But his most significant break came when covering the 24th biennial Boy Scouts Jamboree in Nairobi. Sultan saw Prince Shah Mahmoud, third son of the deposed King Mohammed Zahir Shah of Afghanistan and approached him. The Prince was shocked when Sultan broke the news to the Prince that his father had been overthrown. This was an international scoop for Sultan and his reputation as a hard-core newsman went up many notches.

Idi Amin's expulsion of the Asians from Uganda, an exclusive interview with Dr Robert Ouko, Bing Crosby the famed American singer and Stan Musal, the American baseball superstar established Sultan as an international journalist.

When Tanzania banned *The Nation*, Sultan returned to Tanzania and launched his own newspaper, the *Northern News* in Arusha. In 1973, he moved to Canada with his family, initially settling in Cornwall, Ontario, where he got a job on *The Standard-Freeholder,* a small community newspaper owned by the media giant Thomson group. Sultan did not wish to leave Tanzania but its nationalisation programme had hit his family hard. He continued in journalism in Canada and finally retired in 2005 at the age of 63 having worked in the profession for 30 years.

Throughout his life, Sultan never forgot his role in helping the entire community and for this he was honoured with Canada's highest and most prestigious Order of Canada award. In 2010, he was voted as one of Canada's top 25 immigrants – no mean feat bearing in mind the country has over 7.54 million immigrants. Sultan received numerous other awards including the Queen's Silver, Golden and Diamond Jubilee medals for voluntary work.

Sultan was someone exceptional. He was nicknamed 'The Sultan of Selflessness' for his uncanny ability to raise funds for local charities. Canada's former Prime Minister Paul Martin sent Sultan a personal message saying, 'You can take pride in your accomplishment over the course of your remarkable career.' Sultan continued to pen articles till the end – a weekly column on national and international affairs and numerous travelogue stories of his worldwide travels.

He is survived by his wife Rosila, who was born in Mozambique but later migrated to Portugal, two daughters Anaar and Yasmin and grandchildren.

Sultan Jessa at Parliament Hill in Ottawa with former Prime Minister, Stephen Harper. Photo: Sultan Jessa Collection, Montreal.

Sultan Jessa with Her Excellency Adrianne Clarkson, the former Governor General of Canada.

Canada's Governor General David Johnston with Sultan Jessa receiving Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal on Monday, Sept 10 2012

Flashback to 1990: Sultan and Rosila with daughters Yasmin (left) and Anaar. Photo: Sultan Jessa Collection, Montreal.

Photo credits: Apocalypse by inSOLense

Poem

This is our legacy

by Marge Piercy
(Nov 01, 2019)
Topics: Capitalism , History , Political Economy
Places: Americas , United States

How will they curse us,
the 3rd, 4th generations,
the ones that survive
the deaths we left them?

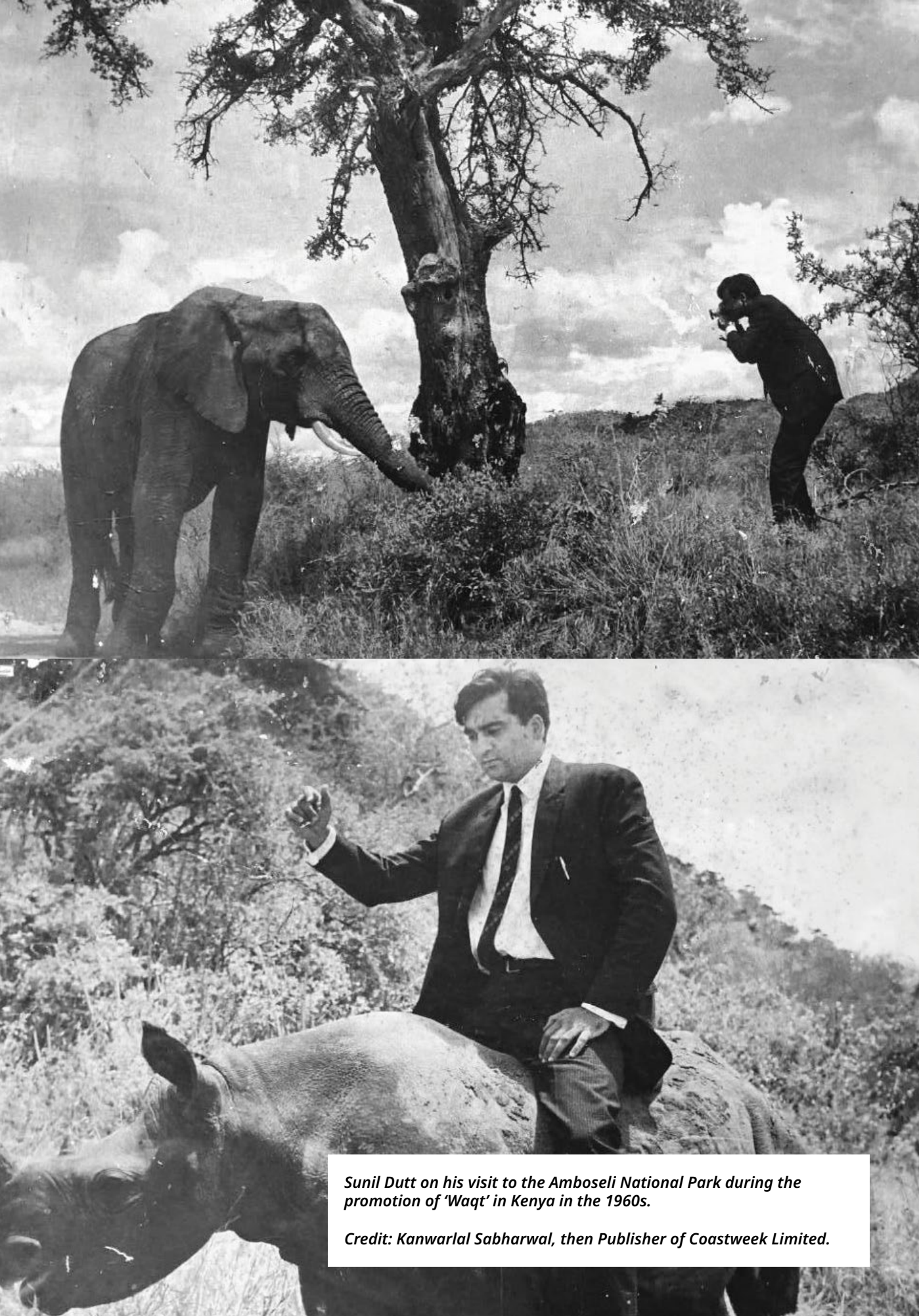
How could we explain
the world on fire, species
wiped out daily, oceans
with more plastic than fish?

That we let a corrupt man
stomp refugees fleeing
rape, murder and hunger
that we let him set blazes

no one could put out.
We saw the cliff ahead
We were well warned
We took everyone over.

That was how our world
ended, in lies and greed
vast and numerous maggots
dining on the corpse of hope.

This poem first appeared in the Monthly Review on 1 November 2019 for which acknowledgement is made.



Sunil Dutt on his visit to the Amboseli National Park during the promotion of 'Waqt' in Kenya in the 1960s.

Credit: Kanwarlal Sabharwal, then Publisher of Coastweek Limited.

Contributors

A special acknowledgment to all those who contributed to this special edition.

1. **Manu Savani**
   Indian Movies in Kenya

2. **Laura Fair**
   Reel Pleasures

3. **Brigitte Reinwald**
   'Tonight At The Empire'

4. **Valli Jamal**
   Films And Music In My Life, Then And Now ...

5. **Anjum Asodia**
   Cinema Halls In Mombasa in The Mid and Late 20th Century

6. **Kul Bhushan**
   South Asian Films in Kenya

7. **Neera Kapur-Dromson**
   Indian Cinema in mid-1940s Nairobi

8. **Mohinder Dhillon**
   Bollywood Films in Kenya

9. **Billie Odidi**
   Reviving Zanzibar's Oldest theatre

10. **Ramnik Shah**
    Cinema Nostalgia

AWAAZ
VOICES