Poetics and Politics of
Sufism and Bhakti
in South Asia

Love, Loss and Liberation

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Viraha

A TRAJECTORY IN THE NEHRUVIAN ERA

Kumkum Sangari

As an affective complex, the trajectories of viraha were tied not only to medieval sufis, sant and bhakti configurations but also to representations of this-worldly love. In the late 1940s and through the 1950s, viraha picked up and rephrased the pain of Partition, and came to be refracted as a nationalistic sign, because it gave a renewed agency to passion and suffering. These transitions were mapped on many sites—narrative, visual, musical and cinematic—some of which I propose to explore in this chapter.

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The transitions within the affective economy of viraha were most vividly mapped on the figure of Mirabai, a classic virahini, who was remodelled as a nationalist symbol that could be mobilised to suture the rifts of partition. (There were several ideological currents in nationalism—this discussion is confined to the Nehruvian-secular.) It may be appropriate to begin with three moments that surface the implication of Mirabai in nation-making, a libidinal refection of the virahini and modes of access to Bhakti, Sant and Sufi compositions that militated against a parochial nationalism as well as a triumphal notion of indépendence in India and Pakistan. The three moments also index the tensions and striations within the (far from monolithic) secular-nationalist imaginary of the Nehruvian era.

The major nationalist relocation of Mirabai took place under the aegis of M. K. Gandhi. By the late 1940s, her bhajans had been incorporated into the higher service of a Gandhian nationalism, and now marked at once the old (domestic) and new (political) boundaries of ‘disobedience’. At the same time, Mirabai’s compositions were also identified with the transgressions and consolations of viraha, the capacity of the ‘heart’ to anchor, sustain and internalise what was materially absent, lost or unattainable: a powerful metaphor in the context of Partition.

Chandra Prabha Cinetone’s Meera starring M. S. Subbulakshmi was to be released, consciously and symbolically, on 15 August 1947 as a ‘devotional’ film endorsed on-screen by Sarojini Naidu. Advertised as ‘the musical movie of your dreams’, Mirabai’s songs were represented as revealing ‘her spiritual triumph over the world’s conflicting forces’ (Times of India 17 August 1947; George 290: 175). The preview in Delhi (in November 1947) was attended by Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and several prominent Congress figures. In her friendship with Gandhi in the early 1940s, the bhajans she sang for him, and her multilingual repertoire that seemed to bridge north and south, M. S. Subbulakshmi added another national dimension to Meera, a film that was first made in Tamil and released in Madras before it was reshot in Hindi. Her personal history that moved from transgression to restraint was deep in colonial and nationalist male reformism. As the ‘reformed’ daughter of a devadasi (she left home to join the already married Saddasivam in order to escape her mother’s plans to settle her with a rich businessman, and was in love with another man before she married Saddasivam), with a professional life orchestrated by her brahmin husband, she fell into a story of ‘uplift’ and (self) brahminisation. Indeed, after her enactment of Mirabai, the saintlike, devotional and pan-Indian persona seems to have been consolidated through a quick exit from cinema, charitable concerts, the increased rendition of bhakti compositions of north-Indian saints, a de-eroticised repertoire and a domesticised bhakti; she was to become an official representative of the national tradition in the international arena. These dynamics of her subsequent life seem to blend her own identification with Mirabai in the course of shooting the film (Sarojini Naidu said that M. S. Subbulakshmi’s performance showed that she was not an interpreter of Mira but Mira herself) too smoothly with the absorption of Mirabai into the ‘story of India’, its devotional faiths and Indian womanhood, and the ways in which bhakti was pressed into a sublimatory mode consonant with middle-class nationalism’s discomfort with the erotic.
Though M. S. Subbulakshmi’s life can retrospectively be read as a victory of reformism and the film Meru fixed as a precursor moment in the embourgeoisment of Mirabai, yet the iconic pressure in the film and its songs exceeded such containment. Her own charismatic radiance and the identification with Mirabai seems to absorb narrative progression into the stasis of an iconicity that was not only commensurate with the personalisation of bhakti but fused a chosen affiliation with typified personification, a self-projection with self-effacing immersion. The iconicity into which these symbolic meanings converged, was an effect produced in part by Meru’s American director, Ellis Dungan, who shot a plaster cast of M. S. Subbulakshmi from different angles in varied lighting and then chose the best for the close-ups.²

In Guru Dutt’s Pyasa (1957), a Vaishnav kirtaniya or sannyasin sang:

Aaj sajan mohe ang laga lo, janaan safal ho jai
Hriday ki pinda, deh ki aagni, sab sketal ho jai

Come my beloved, clasp me now to your bosom today, so that I may fulfill my destiny. This pain in my heart this fire in my body (of separation), may it all be calmed.

At least one line in this song—‘janam janam ki dasi’—patently carried Mirabai’s signature. Yet the film marked a distance from Mirabai. M. S. Subbulakshmi rendered an iconic, already transcendent Mirabai; her last and most passionate moment of being enclosed by the idol of Krishna is in fact that of the least rebellious and most contained of the several extant versions of Mirabai’s life: a temple-centred Mirabai pleading with Krishna. But Pyasa remobilises and splits the iconic convergence into a fraught play of yearning and transcendence through a delicate and wavering line between the aural and visual, and an imagery of ascent and descent that is both libidinous and sublimating. The transcendent image of the pleading devotee at once divides and brings together the sensuous yearning of the virahini with the spiritual sublimation of viraha. These are embodied in two different women: one is the kirtaniya who sings ‘aij sajan’ encircled in the ‘autonomy’ of transcendent rapture even as she performs in public; and the other is the not-respectable, sexually liminal (inviting, knowing, innocent), mobile figure of the streetwalker Gulabo (played by Waheeda Rehman) fully implicated in a self-making desire and a

love that may not be reciprocated. In the first staircase scene, Gulabo climbs up the stairs followed by the pinnless poet Vijay (played by Guru Dutt): she is a streetwalker rejecting what seems to be a customer with no money. She runs down soon after to apologise when she learns he is the poet she claimed to be, but Vijay has left. In the second scene, she is chased by a policeman and saved by Vijay who pretends that she is his wife. Vijay then walks away and climbs the stairway of a building. Gulabo, still bemused, stands outside, hears the kirtaniya sing (the two women never come together in the same visual frame), continues to listen to and love this female devotional voice as she climbs the stairs—a virahini and an aspirant for love. She watches Vijay on the roof terrace—standing, smoking, gazing at the sky, perhaps listening to the same song—stares at his back as his dhoti flutters sensuously in the breeze, her own clothes flutter in the same breeze. She walks up to approach him but does not dare to touch him and runs away without declaring her presence or her love. Subsequently, Gulabo rejects the pimp and her profession. One may read this as a devotional narrativisation of a woman reformed by love and symbolically making the same ascent as M. S. Subbulakshmi, a narrative in which ofscreen identities also inflect onscreen personae. However, Gulabo’s agency in the third and fourth ascent scenes alters this reading and ‘equalizes’ her with Vijay. It is she who consoles and ‘rescues’ the drunk Vijay and helps him up the stairs to her room. In the last staircase scene it is she who runs down to meet Vijay to the background musical score of ‘aij sajan’.

The imagery of ascent and descent, both libidinous and transcending, is complicated even more when the couple walk away together on level ground: as a poet in torn clothes and an ex-streetwalker, they secede from the model of ‘uplift’ centred on marriage and social respectability. Further, in the famous composition of Sahir Ludhianvi, Vijay has already rejected ‘duniya’—a nexus of family and friends, of greed, profit, commerce, capital and inequality—combining a socialist indictment of structural inequality with the affect and gesture of saintly renunciation that links him to the kirtaniya and is reminiscent of Mirabai and many other male and female renouncers. In Pyasa the project of love is tied to a project of social transformation, love and viraha derived from the Bhakti-Sant-Sufi complex are relocated in the new nation, or more precisely, in the failure of the new nation-in-the-making. By walking away from ‘duniya’ together, Vijay and Gulabo paradoxically renew the promise of what the nation should have been but did not become. While Gulabo moves outside the circuit of exchange from her earlier positioning as a commodity
primarily through the circulation of affect (she also refuses to sell Vijay’s poems), Vijay’s defiant move is propelled by a self-absorbed and increasingly dark political caspian.

In medieval Bhakti, Sant and Sufi compositions, the space of the heart or 

mu\textsuperscript{n} was enlarged in a way that could transgress the norm as 

well as embody the norm and petrified (as I have argued elsewhere 

and will return to) the emergence of a new interiority. In 

Pyasa, 

that 

very interiority seems to become a mode of individuation and 

a resource for a new subjectivity which entertain but relinquishes 

the shallow bourgeois modern carried in the ‘shareef’ Meena Sinha 

(played by Mala Sinha) who marries for status and security, represents 

a skittish sentimentalism, and a betrayal of ‘love’. This subjectivity is as 

yet undefined but suggested in the corporeal splitting/aural rejoicing of the sannyasin (an image of insistent yet sublimated desire) and 

the streetwalker (an image of irreconcilable yearning) by the frame song 

in a shared sensuousness and common structure of feeling that fall 

within the provenance of viraha.

Qurratulain Hyder’s Ag ka Darya (1998, translated as River of Fire 

in 1998) is staged in four historical moments across 2,500 years in 

which a central set of characters reappear with partly altered names 

or in recognisably similar situations.\textsuperscript{5} In each moment characters 

and relationships become more complex as they are inflicted by their 

earlier persona and preceding webs of love and friendship. In 

the second story, Abdul Mansur Kamaluddin of Nishapur arrives in 

Hindustan in 1476 steeped in the etiquettes of chivalric romance. 

However, he not only writes a Persian ghazal but a gasida (panegyric 

ode) in Arabic in the style of old Arabic-Andalusian odes (for Rokeya 

Bano), but also dohas in the polyglot Hindawi, a language used by Sufis, 

sants and bhaktas, that he has learned after coming to Hindustan. 

When he hears Amir Khusrau’s gawwali,

\textit{Bahut kathin hai dagar panghat ki} 

Kaise mein bhar laun madhva se nakti

The road to the well/source is fraught with perils, 

how do I fill my pitcher with water....\textsuperscript{4}

being sung in a sufi khangah, Kamaluddin instantly recognises its 
double reference to romantic predicament and spiritual travail. His 
love for Champavati gradually transmutes into a union in spirit under 
the sign of viraha, blends sufi and vaishnav strains, and is subsumed 
into the search for the divine. His understanding that the earthly 
flows into the divine and his internalisation of Champavati (as the 
principle of divine love), exceed the desire to ‘possess’ her. He himself 
becomes, metaphorically, like a Champavati, who in turn is likened to 
the Radha of Jaiddev (he hears Vaishnav women sing Jaiddev’s songs 
in \textit{raga} Basant), the ecstatic human soul ‘yearning to be one with the 
Divine, what the Sufis call \textit{jana-fi-Allah’}. Kamaluddin is simultaneously 
positioned as an immersed actor and a detached composer: he wants 
like Maulana Dawood, the author of Chandayan, to write ‘a mystical 
allegory’ called ‘Champavati’, but eventually loses the urge to do so. 
The ‘love’ of Champavati is modelled as a sufi allegory (see Hyder 
1998: 97 and 100).\textsuperscript{5} Champavati herself disconcerts Kamaluddin with 
her belief in elemental love: ‘If I was married to you in my previous 
janams, I’ll marry you now too.... If my \textit{karma} and \textit{sanskars} are such, 
I’ll become a Muslim and be your spouse’ (Hyder 1998: 78). The 
echoes of Mirabai are unmistakable: ‘Parub janam ki frett hamari 
sajni, so kahan rahai ri tukai’; ‘Meri unki frett purani’; ‘Mira daasi janam 
janam ki’. In Mirabai’s corpus, belief in rebirth sanctioned love for 
Krishna and asserted the merit of past karma; elemental love released 
the devotee from fear of karma and rebirth and the projected span of 
this love gave it a subversive quality (see Sangari 1990: 111–13). 
For Champavati in \textit{River of Fire}, karma sanctions illicit love and affines 
the stranger, Kamaluddin, in the elongate time of rebirth.

In the last episode of the novel, after Partition, a ship brings the 
student Kamal Reza, an ardent nationalist and socialist, back from 
Britain to India; a Mirabai bhajan sung on the ship by a Maharashtra woman temporarily unites religions (Hindu and Muslim), regions 
(Maharashtra and Awadh), and political affiliations (Gandhian and 
socialist). Kamal returns to a desolate Lucknow; the abolition of 
zasimpadi in 1954 has impoverished his parents, their ancestral 
property is unfairly confiscated as evacuee property, and disposed, 
they are compelled to migrate to Pakistan.

These three moments raise a set of intertwined questions, about 
the rapprochements between viraha and new nations-in-the-making, 
the apparently ready availability of its Bhakti, Sant and Sufi vocabulary 
the in the late 1940s and 1950s as well as the repositioning of viraha as 
an affective complex that could negotiate the Partition.

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At one level, the trajectory of viraha is evidently tied to representations 
of love. Love, unavailable as the thing-in-itself, perceived, gendered, 
mediated by or filtered through its multilingual oral and literary
representations, was evidently enmeshed in problematics of class, caste, embourgeoisement, and in the catastrophic political events of the Partition. Since the centrality of representation facilitated the historical persistence as well as the retrieval of repertoires of love that (particularly from the mid-nineteenth century), became an increasingly complex and concurrent repertoire, a history of viraha would also have to recall the inter-animated scenarios of the representation and instantiation of love, and the past languages of love—oral, textual, musical, theatrical, printed, and later, cinematic.

The conditions that made the panoramic representation of love, cohabitation and marriage (ancient, medieval, colonial and contemporary) possible in Ag ka Darya thus have a wider significance. The historical depth of its repertoire of love, the range of references for employment, texture and images seem surprising: Sanskrit drama, sufi qawwals, vaishnav bhakti, masnavi, qissas, dastaans, colonial/ Anglo-Indian inter-racial romances, multilayered courtly romances, sentimental Bengali reformist novels, historical novels, Urdu opera, ghazals and other lyric poetry, nautanki and Parsi theatre romances, the stranger/pardesi romance, Bombay cinema, Shakespeare, the expatriate romance, folk stories, folk and film songs. From these, Hyder's novels make a multifaceted structure of affect that draws upon and leads out into art, music, religion, philosophy, mysticism, as well as into several linguistic and regional languages and lineages of love. In Ag ka Darya, many 'older' forms of love in which love is acted, enacted, represented are concurrent and held in tense synchronic suspension by their simultaneity either as subjects of retrieval or as traces in the sediment of popular culture. Styles of love are always in medias res, the grammars already in place; the more sophisticated lovers know the settled vocabularies of desire and alterity that exist before and beyond them. Beginning in the middle is here particularly conducive to a cross-referentiality, which preserves that a common stock of images and stories is available to its readers or listeners. Thus, in some sense repetition, even when ironic, becomes central to the apprehension, recognition and enactment of love.

The repertoire available to Ag ka Darya in the 1950s had decided historical coordinates and was not-yet an archive. First, the simultaneous retrieval of representations through print, music, theatre, cinema, into colonial and then anticolonial nationalist imaginaries had turned what could have been an archive into a readily available, dynamic and transforming repertoire. In different ways, and retrieval could be equally inventive, and old love stories gathered new twists and inflections. Second, since the retrieval of an older love story often occurred, in interlinked and catalytic fashion, across forms and genres, it also generated new thematic bonds between disparate forms and genres. Hyder's fulsome use of love stories is not surprising since (at least in the north) these stories continued to live new lives and old lives, went from genre to genre, from orality and manuscript to print and performance, and from print to orality. They moved from classical to regional languages, moved from one Indian language to others through translation, and had even settled into colonial English through translation and compilation into compendiums of medieval romances and folk stories. At the same time, the great medieval romances themselves continued to appear in verse, prose and performance in some regions till at least the 1930s.

From the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, love acquired a literary density, a density that was the effect of continuity, retrieval, new renditions of old love stories, and new love stories, which were juxtaposed, recomposed, and sometimes interactive. Retrieved love stories were reframed by colonial and nascent bourgeois ideologies, mediated by the new positionality of love, and appeared simultaneously in varied regional locales, in both popular and high literature. The interaction of Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, English and regional languages added more unity layers. An accelerated transnational circulation subverted indigenous notions of retrieving authentic cultural documents since 'originals', variants, translations, and orientalised adaptations circulated side by side and contaminated the reading of each other. For instance, Shankuntala had passed through William Jones’ English adaptation (Saconita or the Fatal Ring 1789) and Theophile Gautier's French ballet (Seconita 1851). Gerard de Nerval adapted Sudraka’s The Little Clay Cari for the French stage in 1885. A few decades later, a 'muslim' tawaf played Shakuntala for Parsi theatre (Hansen 2003: 81).

Medieval romances as well as the romance-oriented dastaans had multiple locations—in verse and prose, in the orality of song and narrative, in print, in nautanki, in Parsi theatre. Parsi theatre itself drew from the stock of several narrative (Sanskrit and Persian), performative (Shakespeare, Victorian melodrama, colonial theatre) and musical practices (north-Indian courtesan). It staged, often with Eurasian and Muslim actresses, Shakuntala, Shrin Farhad, Laila Majmun, Indar Sabha, and some of its repertoire overlapped with nautanki. In Hyder's River of Fire, Nala Damayanti, Indar Sabha and Laila Majmun are staged in nautanki in the 1930s and 1940s in a village near Lucknow: A Master Chapati played Majmun.
They sat on cane stools watching Laila Majnun against the backdrop of a crudely painted fountain, a palace and the the full moon. The nautanki percussionist played kaharva on his tabla. A motor launch went past noisily. (Hyder 1998: 309)

The intertextuality of love stories burgeoned from the mid-nineteenth century with print and performance in new ways through selection, amplification, adaptation and transformation, that often went against the grain of reformism. Intertextuality did not of course ‘originate’ in the colonial era. Medieval love stories and romances were already cross-referential, replete with expectation, allusion, quotation, elaboration, extension, and can even be said to have conjured entire narrative configurations. For instance, in Punjabi qissas the ‘lover’s inventory’ in which lists of lovers were lined up as a collective testimony to the power of love was a favorite topos (this device had Persian exemplars). Such lists were not standardized, and the international sets found in the Persian masnavi widened to include local tales. A kafi by Bulle Shah invokes Heer-Ranjha, Mirza-Sahiban, Sassi, Sohni and Roda. Inventories were used till the nineteenth century. Thus, the qissa of Miya Muhammed Baksh of Jammu on Sohni Mahinwal (1857) listed Laila-Majnun, Shirin-Farhad, Yusuf-Zuleikha, Roda-Jalali, Heer-Ranjha and Chandarbadan-Mahyar blending the symbolic worlds of the Quran, Arabia and Iran, and the pagan and tribal cultures, in which love cuts across status disparities and religious distinctions (see Shackley 2000: 59–62). In Waris Shah’s Heer Ranjha (1767), Heer cites the ‘community’ of lovers—Zuleikha, Sohni, Laila, Sassi, Shirin—to allay Ranjha’s chauvinist doubts and to show that women could be steadfast in their love (Shah 1976: 41–42). In Ahmad Yar’s qissa, Raj Bibi, the eponymous heroine is instructed by Laila, Heer, Sassi and Sohni. In Hafiz Ranjha Barkhurdar’s late-eighteenth century qissa Mirza Sahiban, the narrative world of the lovers is framed and informed by the actions of other legendary lovers; the illicit, contested but always tragic loves of the past, structure the experience of Mirza and Sahiban and build a sense of inescapable doom.

If love itself is an act of elective affinity, then these acts of connection were analogues and synonyms of love. The convention of invoking a community of affiliations appears in other narratives and performances as well. In the courtesan novel Nishtar, Hasan Shah sees himself like Majnun and Farhad. In Sangeet Rani Nautanki Ka (1882), the heroine puts her love in the self-annihilating mode of Laila and Shirin. In other nautankis, lovers vow to love each other until death and to be remembered like Laila and Majnun (see Hansen 1992: 24, 158 and 161). In the village nautanki in River of Fire, Majnun compares Laila with Zuleikha. In River of Fire, inventories of lovers surface not as lists, but as an expansive cross-referential system of textual and cultural affiliation, and in the self-affiliating consciousness of lovers (even when it is ironic). If I may borrow a formulation from a different context, here the ground of continuity rested on ‘identification not identities, acts of relationship rather than pregiven forms’, the ‘tradition’ invoked here was ‘a network of partly connected histories, a persistently displaced and reinvented time/space of crossings’ (Clifford 1997: 268).

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By the 1950s, Bombay cinema had reproduced and reinvented a vast historical repertoire of love in a vocabulary that was at once typified and hybrid, and drew as much on orientalist stereotypes as on regional narratives. As a medium, cinema was informed by an ‘intertextual excess’ that borrowed from low and high culture and recombined them in unexpected ways (Pandian 1995: 950). Medieval romances were already embedded in the visuality of illustrated manuscripts and individual painting which had reproduced set scenes that encapsulated a whole narrative. Thus, Laila-Majnun, Sohni-Mahival, et al., were part of pre-print and pre-cinematic visual traditions. The visuality of cinematic reproduction of medieval romances was most heavily mediated by Parsi theatre, a genre that was itself intersected by illustrated print reproduction and interacted with the pictorial melodrama of Raja Ravi Varma’s paintings.

Even more than theatre, cinema naturalised shifts between historical periods. It could and did bring disparate time strata into a new order of visual simultaneity (see Gillespie 1994: 298). Perhaps the best way to evoke this is to see how a film actor could be the same film ‘star’ in a new role, costume and time, or singularly span centuries and visually bind many styles of loving. Zubeda, for instance, starred in the silent Indar Sabha, Devdas, Laila Majnun, Heer Ranjha, and in the early talkie Meera Bai (Times of India 23 May 1925 and 21 September 1988), thus bringing together in her person nawabi spectacle, bhadra sentimentalism, female devotion and medieval tragedy. (M. S. Subbulakshmi had enacted Sakuntala (Shakuntalai 1941) before playing Mirabai.) Particular stars could become a synchrodoche of romance: Laila Majnu (called a ‘Musical Extravaganza’) and Shirin Farhad (described as ‘Eternal Love Romance of the Orient’) were both screened in 1931 and both starred Master Nissar as the
hero and Miss Kajian (described as The Nightingale of Bengal) as the heroine (advertisement in Times of India 28 May 1931 and 12 September 1931).

Early cinema not only used multiple narrative forms but also combined different forms of music—songs from company drama, Parsi and Marathi theatre, Hindustani ragas, folk music, devotional music and even jazz. Recorded and film music also built a repertoire of love. In Hyder’s River of Fire, at one level, music is a cumulative symbol of continuity; at another level, it is a synch Troya for a syncretic cultural history that moves from Vedic recitation and temples, to the more cosmopolitan locales of medieval courts or Sufi khanaqahs. Amir Khusrwad represents the intersection of Indian, Arab and Persian poetic and musical forms. Sultan Husain Shah Shargi of Jaunpur was the innovator of khayal. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh, who wrote under the name of Akhtar Pya, developed the Lucknow style of thumri and tappa. Hindu and Muslim girls learn Hindustani classical music in homes, schools and colleges in Lucknow. These histories shade into a more popular domain—the mijras of tawaifs, the music of domnis and mirasis, the songs of the Bauls, the personal repertoires of the lower classes (in Ag ka Darya, Qadeer, a chauffeur from Mirzapur, sings nautanki songs, ghazals, kafir, sadra, thumri, birha and the ballad of Alka and Udal)—and culminate in the 1950s in the All India Radio, government patronage and concerts in Mandi House.

Early cinema also continued and completed the process begun in Parsi theatre, not only of aural and visual seduction on behalf of other lovers and their stories, but also of bringing in a new transnational erotic that remodeled the old romances. The publicity shot of Imperial’s Heer Ranjha shows a deep and passionate kiss, while Madan Theatre’s Leila Majnu had a European and Eurasian cast, and was advertised as ‘The Great Romance of the East’ with H. B. Waring ‘The Great Shakespearean Actor’ and Miss Jeanette Sherwin (Times of India 15 August 1922). A version of Romeo and Juliet made by Sharda Movietone was called Sashir Peunho (Times of India 10 May 1934), virtually fusing what were similar yet distinct stories.

The visual, musical, performative and literary were interconnected and inextricably linked in many formal and historical terms. The same narratives of love surfaced as song, tale, verse, theatre, film, producing a similarity of content and a formal polyphony. Old romances were rendered in different registers in each genre, reanimated by individual authors, subject to dilution and different endings (sometimes even happy ones). At one level, such semantic and temporal reinscription had prehistories: romances were never (generically) sealed texts.

Medieval Bhakti-Sant-Sufi oral practice and compositions had lifted local songs, stories and romances from resonant folk and popular locales while the great medieval romances inscribed the form with the differing chronotopes of romance, separation and devotion. From the mid-nineteenth century ‘love’ became an even more ‘open’ (cross)cultural text, constantly reinscribed, because of the expanded intersections, involved relationships and rapid circulation between music, performance, orality, print, and later, recorded music and cinema.

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The 1950s was an era of great romances in cinema: in their musicality, in the broad themes of viraha and love across class difference, and in the width of the audience which spanned classes, religions and regions, films both extended and took over the space of the medieval romances. Within the secular nationalist problematic too, friendship, love and a Nehruvian cosmopolitanism occupied, at one level, the same spaces as Sufi-Bhakti devotion—each was a form of voluntary affiliation. Bhakti, Sant and Sufi figures, perceived as placing voluntary affiliation above institutional sanction, could be privileged as bearers of a new nation’s past: voluntary affiliation could reposition friendship and love in a secular/composite nation as elective affinities. Friendship across religions had become a staple secular trope in fiction, and became more pronounced after 1947. Friendship represented the composition of non-family and even non-feudal networks. Both the continuity and the breakdown of friendship acquired a growing symbolic significance. The semantic of love thus became adjacent to that of friendship.

The episteme of the post-independance Nehruvian era was the episteme of romance. Love across class, caste, religion, region became a sign of the national-secular. Though this was undoubtedly facilitated by the simultaneous availability of a repertoire generated by a century of retrieval and the co-constitutive colonial and nationalist fixation with antiquity, there was a perceptible and qualitative shift. The past now came as understood through the trauma of partition as well as the emphases and projections of the Nehruvian era. As is evident in Ag ka Darya and Pyasa, love became a form of elective affinity that insistently, even if briefly or casually lifted the barriers of caste, class, religion, region and nation. Transgression was in the air. At one level, this was a nationalist carryover—love marriage had become a secular nationalist cause celebre with many famous couples, for
example, Ashalata Sen and Kazi Nazrul Islam, Aruna Ganguly and Asaf Ali, Hasan Ara Aziz and Kanai Lai Gauva. At another level, this was situated in a conscious anti-feudalism and ‘unity in diversity’ as well as the institution of an encouraging legal space for intermarriage that marked Nehruvian nationalism. It consciously disavowed and distanced both the colonial racialising of intermarriage and the communalisation of interreligious marriage, which had marked Partition violence. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 eased intercaste and interreligious marriage between consenting adults, and moved towards envisioning individuals as secular citizens rather than as members of a caste or religious community.

Love could become a synonym for many freedoms including the freedom from religious ascension; it occupies the corporeal and the symbolic body and be positioned as a transforming and liberating ideality. In Barsaat ki Raat (1960), the hero Aamaan, a poet and radio singer (played by Bharat Bhushan) sings Sahir Ludhianvi’s composition (with its reference to Bulle Shah’s kafi, ‘Hindu nahn na Musalman’) in the frame of a declamatory cawwali.

ishq aazaad hai, Hindu na Musalman hai ishq,
Aap ki dharm hai aur aap ki iman hai ishq
Allah or Rasool ka farnaam ishq hai
Yooni hadees ishq hai, Quran ishq hai
Gawat ka aur Maseeh ka armaan ishq hai
Yeh kaya nast jism hai, aya jaan ishq hai.
Khaak ko but, aar but ko devta karta hai ishq
Inteha yeh hai ki bande ko khuda karta hai ishq!

Love is free, it is neither Hindu nor Muslim
Love is its own religion, its own faith and creed
It is the message of Allah and the Prophet
It is the Hadith (saying of the Prophet), it is the Quran itself,
It is the dream of the Buddha and the desire of Jesus
If this world is the body, the love its life
It turns dust into idols and idols into deities
But the ultimate truth is that love brings man closer to his creator.

The song literally summons his beloved Shabnam (played by Madhubala), impels her to leave her affluent natal home and family: ‘Ishq Majnu ki woh awaaaz hai jiske aage/Koi Laila, kisi deewar se rohi na gai’ [Love is the voice of Qays (the Bedouin poet and lover of Laila) the maddened one (‘mad’ in Arabic is majnum), before which no wall could stop his beloved Laila].

Romance became a major signifier of the new-nation-in-the-making, especially in Bombay cinema of the late 1940s and the 1950s; it populated devotional and historical, mythological, social, crime melodramas and its heyday was between Awara (1951) and Mughal-e-Aazam (1960). It had a dim after-life after the Nehruvian era that only remained incandescent in the songs. In challenging familial authority and barriers of status, early cinema re-enacted a major thematic of medieval romance. In the 1950s, screen marriages were predominantly love marriages often with men who at the moment of meeting were unemployed, lower in status or downwardly mobile (in Awara the hero is a vagabond, in Aar Paar a taxi driver, in Chalti ka Naam Gaadi a garage mechanic, in Shri 420 a laundry worker, in Chori Chori a modest journalist), and these cross-class unions were usually also stranger romances. Barsaat (1949) combined the stranger romance (‘Bachche hue pardesi, ik baar to aana tu’) with the chosen affiliations of medieval romance; Reshma (played by Nargis) decides to be (the loyal unto death) Sohni rather than Heer Syl (who let herself be married to another man); she declares: ‘Mein Sohni banungi’.

This trend in cinematic romance that challenged the social order was sustained by a Nehruvian cosmopolitanism that deparochialised nationalism, but did not abnegate it, the individual energies of poets, writers, producers, actors, lyricists, music composers, directors who either belonged to or were influenced by the Progressive Writers Association and/or the Indian People’s Theatre Association (for instance, Sahir Ludhianvi, Shailendra, Kivwaja Ahmed Abbas, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, the early Raj Kapoor), and could even entertain a quasi-Marxist internationalism. The screenplay of Dr Kotnis ki Amar Kahani (1946, directed by V. Shantaram) by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas (who also wrote the script for Awara) was based on his own book And One Did Not Come Back. It screened the true lifestory of Dr Dwarkanath Kotnis who went to China in the Indian Medical Mission from 1939 to 1943, fell in love with a Chinese woman, a colleague in his medical work, married her, and died while still in China. Pardesi (1957), an Indo-Soviet co-production in Hindi and Russian, also directed by K. A. Abbas, was about the first Russian to set up a trading mission in India in the fifteenth century; it showed his travels and discovery of Indian civilisation through an Indian woman (played by Nargis). Even as filmic contests between dil (heart) and the law continued apace, as in Awara, there was a conjoining of energies with what were seen as liberal state agendas.

Though some cinematic romances were doomed and tragic, and some offscreen star romances could be read in this mode (Nargis-Raj
Kapoor, Suraifya-Dev Anand, Waheeda Rehman-Guru Dutt), most films had happy endings; curiously there are none in Hyder's Aag ka Darya despite the vast array of love and romance from different historical periods. Hyder's novel belongs to this Nehruvian episteme of romance, yet loves are repeatedly interrupted or frustrated. Men love women they cannot, will not, do not marry, they hover but seldom come up to scratch. Women are separated by war, deserted, and wait for men who do not return. They are subject to male deferral, male self-definition, fickleness or indifference. Yet, even if it ends in bitter disappointment, love remains an act of male and female agency; the agency exercised in choice and in the pain of separation is more resonant than a conjugal denouement. This is partly because the Champa characters take shape under the shadow of the great medieval romances where women—Sassi, Hir, Sohni, Sahibani—had a greater agency but became emblems of viraha and tragic love. Women in medieval romances may well have been represented as more active in expressing desire precisely because of the crossover from material to spiritual love, and because the romance was bound to fail. Love here was transgressive and implied renunciation of family ties, status, wealth, et al.—it became a form of 'purgation' because it was free from internal ambivalence and only subject to external constraint. If love was not the norm for marriage, then romance had to be blocked from translating into marriage, perhaps to preserve its transgressive and/or its spiritual potentials. However, the valorisation of foiled this-worldly love in Bhakti-Sufi models purchased another sort of permanence in viraha and hij—it eternalised 'longing'. Failure was success.

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The axes of identification between romance/love (foiled or consummated), and the new nation are significant not because they can approximate that historical moment more adequately, or that the familiar heteronormative settlements of romance can be posited as yet another cognate of secular nationalism (and romance made to stand alongside its rival, realism), but because they lead into a more profound relation between viraha and the nation-in-the-making. The symbolic exorbitation of love also magnified viraha. Viraha, as a condensed notation of transient love, unfulfilled love, as well as many shades of loss, separation, transience and lack, may provide a reading that is not a nostalgic return to medieval romance or devotional traditions. Indeed, if the deep or recent 'past' can be understood from the inception of print in the nineteenth century as a melange of oral, visual, performative, textual and cinematic transmission, reinterpretation and transformation—that is, as different temporalities of transmission, change and novelty held together by contiguities of consumption and retention, and as disparate modes of 'national' and 'transnational' mediation/circulation—then one may well ask, what was the true 'other' of modernity? It may not have been that which is termed 'tradition'. If the continuous transmission of some genres and texts was coextensive with retrieval and existed on the same historical plane, then the more productive question may be about the blockages and continuities of transmission or the discontinuities of appropriation in new political economies—questions that refuse the rhetoric of a grand civilisation or colonial rupture but can address the longue duree.

A number of material and devotional histories and several genres—visual, aural, poetic and narrative—came together in the trope of viraha. Viraha was bound to martial and mercantile travel, courtly male profligacy and patriarchal privilege. Female viraha is repeatedly generated by male deceit, fickleness, profligacy and, of course, male travel. The classic figure of Shakuntala, the subject of misogynist male ascetics, was reworked extensively in painting, drama and early cinema. In non-devotional love poetry and song including the barahmasa (a form that extended from folk to court poetry, crossed over into many genres, and continued to be written in the colonial period), the pain of separation from an absent or forgetful husband/lover is often expressed by an abandoned, neglected or deserted but blameless and powerless wife/woman. Images of love and (emphatically male) travel intertwined in metaphors of the musafir, pardesiya, pardesi piya and rohigir in folksongs, and in Hindi and Urdu poetry. Viraha was tied to the history of the female voice in both non-devotional and devotional compositions, and registered many nuances of female desire. In folk songs as well as in the bandishes of Hindustani classical music, metaphorically speaking, even unlettered women sang of writing—the patiyas in viraha poems were usually in the female voice. The recurring voice and figure of the courtseen in love reiterated viraha not only as separation from the one man she truly loves or because her 'true' love was inevitably doomed, but also because her liaisons were temporary and all lovers like wayfarers. The light classical genres, ghazal and thumri, associated with the nineteenth-century tawaif's salon played out courtseasal vulnerabilities in nuanced ways: viraha was adjacent to sorrow and gham in the ghazal (the pain inflicted by a heartless beloved) as well
as a common theme in thumri (in which the absent man is often lost to a co-wife or a rival). Given the regional variations in ghazal, there were not only overlaps with thumri in the locations of viraha, but also interfaces with folk and bhakti compositions. Thumri, developed most extensively by courtesans, could elaborate the bhava of viraha in self-reflexive even ironic ways. Viraha encompasses the suffering in love as well as the idea of transient love; transient love seems to be more prominent in the repertoire of thumri. The gendering of the ghazal and Sufi conceptions of ishq was ambivalent, and these like the male usage of the female devotional voice and the virahini could transgress heteronormativity and take in a wider range of affective relationships. 

In medieval romances (whether in verse, prose narrative or folk tale), and their crossovers into Bhakti-Sufi compositions, viraha had a double character—it arose from material prohibitions on both marriage and extramarital love, but it was a valued path of devotion. The notion of viraha dominated Vaishnava bhakti (as in the corpus of Jaidev and Mirabai) as well as sant devotion (as in Kabir’s corpus) and was adjacent to the Sufi concept of ishq celebrated by the Chistiyya silsilas. In sufi traditions, hijr, the moment of temporal and spatial disruption/disjunction or the disconnection/separation of the devotee from the pir/murshid was the very moment the devotee had to internalise in order to understand the intensity of ishq. Viraha and hijr (as departure of the beloved) were both used in the dual contexts of spiritual and romantic love, pain and joy; and there were medieval interfaces, rich interactions and convergences between them. A verse attributed to Amir Khusrau literally yokes two linguistic registers of the long night of separation (shab-e hijr and andhri ratiyan):

Shabse hujr daraz cheon suf, wa aze wosat chu umr kotah
Sukhi piya ko jo main na dekhun, o kaise kaatun andhri ratiyan

The night of separation is long like black curls, the day of meeting is short like life
O friend if I do not see my lover then how do I spend these dark nights

The disruption of hijr could be as generative as the separation of viraha. A couplet attributed to Shaikh Farid and Kabir reads:

Kabir viraha biraha jini kahau, biraha hai sultan
fai ghari biraha na sanchrai, to ghari sadhaa masaan.

Do not abuse that viraha, for viraha is a king
The body deprived of viraha is for ever a burning ground

Viraha did descend into more convention, affection or stylisation as well (especially in medieval court poetry), but was not confined to formulaic usages alone because of its multiple, shifting and improvisatory sites. Songs and scenes of longing and separation spread into performance (Indar Sabha had viraha songs and used the barahmosa), especially the nautanky and jatra, and from here into early cinema. Embodied in persisting and reformulated traditions in the nineteenth century, viraha thus entered early devotional and romantic cinema through musical, poetic and performative pathways. In fact the recurrent mise en scène of the monsoon in film songs often quite literally represented the upsurge of desire in the season of separation and potential reunion. Many film songs from the 1940s and 1950s (even if the films had ambivalent endings or were romantic comedies) spoke of unrequited love, waiting, yearning and desertion. (Pyasa: ‘Jaane woh kaise log the jinke pyaar ko pyaar milta’ [Oh the wonder of those blessed ones, whose love was returned with love]; Barsaat: ‘jiya bekarar hai, aa ja morale baalma tera intizar hai’ [The heart is restless, come my love, I wait for you]; and ‘Mere aankhon mein bas gaya koi re, mohe neend na aaye, kya karoon’ [Someone lives in my eyes now, I am unable to sleep, what shall I do] and ‘Chhod gaye baadal, mujhe huye akela chhod gaye [My love left me, he left me alone]; Paying Guest: ‘Chand phir nikla magar tum na aye’ [The moon arose once again, but you o my love, never returned]; Madhumati: ‘Dil tarap tarap ke kah raha hai aa bhi ja’ [ whilst suffering in agony, my heart says, return]; and ‘Aa ja ye parda, mein to kab se khazai is paar ye akhayyan thak gayin panth nihar’ [Come o stranger, I stand on the far bank separated from you, my eyes tire with watching the path for your return...].) There were recurring motifs of the destruction of a known, anticipated, imagined or hoped-for world,

Toote hue khoobaob nein hum ko ye sikhakaia sai
Dil nein jise paaya tha, aankhon mein ganaa qua hai
Laut aaye sadhaa meri, takraa ke sitaron se
Urji hui duniya ke sunsaan kinaaron se

(Madhumi, lyrics by S. H. Saigal)

Alas, my broken dreams have taught me this,
The one my heart has won, is lost to my eyes
My cries come back too haunt me, crashing against the distant stars,
Against this barren universe, against deserted shores.
plaints of homelessness and uprooting (‘Jaayen to jaayen kahaan’, Taxi Driver 1954), joy contaminated by sorrow,

Chaman mein reh ke veeraana, men dil hotaa jaata hein
Khushi mein aaj kal, kuch gham bhi shaami hotaa jaata hai

(Deedar 1951, lyrics by Shukeel Badayuni)

My heart is in this beautiful garden (of love/life), yet it becomes lost in the wilderness, (of solitude/loneliness).

These days the happiness of this heart becomes diluted with sadness.

an inexplicable lack,

Aise mein bhi bechain hai dil
Jo bhi mein na jaane kya hai kami

(Chori Chori 1958, lyrics by Shailendra)

Whatever be its state, my heart is never content
what I wonder is missing from life....

These motifs were often more recessive and darker than plots warranted and functioned as ominous allusions with a missing referent. Glimpsed, lost, unattainable, but a somehow imaginable, even potential, plenitude became the substance of these songs—almost as if the romantic sensorium was subliminally connected to other forms of this-worldly desire and loss. For instance, the motif of irreversible destruction appears in this lyric from a film's comedy of errors:

Hamse aaya na gayaa, tumse bulaya na gaya
Faasla pyaar mein dono se mitaya na gaya...
Kya khabar thi ke mile hain to bicharne ke liye
Kiski nahi banaayin hai bigarne ke liye
Pyaar ka baag bahaayaa tha ujarne ke liye
Is tarah ujra ke phir hamse banaayaa na gaya

(Dekh Kabira Roye 1957, lyrics by Rajendra Krishan)

I could not bring myself to come, you could not bring yourself to beckon
Together we could not bring ourselves to erase these distances
What did we know that the reason for meeting was separation
That fate wove us such destinies only for their undoing
That the garden of love was brought alive only for its destruction
Thus was it destroyed, that we could not make it once more

The relative externality of the song’s affect to the filmic narrative, the disjunction from scene or story, point towards a social disposition (in which the use of the plural ‘hum’ suggests more than a common poetic convention), and the pressure of a thematic outside the story which is so insistent that it leaks into un-related sites, vitiates the very imagination and instantiation of love. This easy interpolation of songs was undoubtedly facilitated by the formalisation of song in cinema as an interlude that segmented the running text. It was also an effect of what Madhava Prasad defines as a cinematic mode of production in which autonomous units of production generate different components (music, dance, dialogue, et al.) and disperse the story into a series of segments each with its own conditions, expertise and economy (Prasad 1998: 29–52), and what Ravi Vasudevan renounces as the disaggregated nature of the popular form (Vasudevan 2000: 10). This disaggregation is significant because it can explain the entry of conflicting ideologies that defy the resolutions of employment, pinpoint the song as the moment of reflection bounded by affect, explain the egress of discrete segments from the films, and historicise the irresolute contemporaneity of Bombay cinema. Precisely because a film as a whole did not need to sustain the affect in a song or a song could be an insertion with a weak relation to the filmic text, viraha-infused songs (including songs about travellers and strangers who were prone to leave as suddenly as they arrived) edged out of the films to enter another affective constellation of transgressive and unspent utopic visions—purane gaane—that picked up songs that preceded 1947 and spilled into songs of the 1960s. They could wrap in Pankaj Mallik’s ‘Piya milan ko jaana’ [I must journey ri meet my beloved] (Kapalkundala 1939), Zohrabai’s ‘Chale gaye chale gaye’ [He has left, he has left ...] (Pehele Aap), Amrabi’s ‘Milke biichchod gayee akhiyaan’ [after meeting, separate were our eyes] (Ratan), and of course the melancholy oevres of K. L. Saigal and Noor Jehan. Further, as a discrete aurality assisted by the introduction of radio broadcast, playback singing, the proliferation of songbooks and mnemonic games, the recorded songs achieved the dispersal of affect over a wide social domain. They remained within the penumbral of cinematic romance yet the film in which they were housed could often become merely the name and pace from which the song originated. The intertextuality and recursivity of cinema itself fed this process (an old K. L. Saigal song playing on the radio reconnects the couple in Mr and Mrs 55).

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In *Ag ka Darya* and *River of Fire*, viraha is the space of maximal temporal and spatial concurrence, millenial continuity, and multigeneric intertextuality. It is the point at which many genres and languages of love meet—the point where many streams of love, longing and female desire converge. Hyder's texts open into a significant historical problematic that is crucial not only to reading the refractions of the Nehruvian secular and filmic romance in her novels, but to the antinomial valences of the decade after 1947. The seasonal flush of desire and waiting women of the barahmasa arches across *River of Fire*, which begins with the monsoon as a metaphor for the burgeoning love of Gautam and the viraha of Champak in the first chapter, and closes with the monsoon in the last chapter when Partition has irrevocably parted friends and sundered the webs of friendship which nourished love. In both these chapters despair and exhilaration, endings and beginnings are woven into each other.

This was hardly gratuitous—medieval viraha as an affective configuration expressed sadness but without the elegiac closures of grief or nostalgia.

As a bhava, viraha signifies not an emptiness but a fullness, or a claim to presence based on absence. Unlike karma which speaks an absolute past containing the present, viraha speaks an unfinished present, an incomplete time-in-the-making... [T]he time of viraha is never finally resolved. (Sangari 1990: 113)

By the twentieth century viraha had become a complex emotion which carried not mere sadness but a 'lilt' within itself, and this came from more than its reach into other-worldly consolation. It came from the multigeneric blends of intoxicating love and absorption, the stylised aesthetic and seductive patterns of the lyric, music or performance. Together these crafted viraha into a composite emblem of exquisite suffering, of the youthful beauty and engrossing sensuality of the actresses and filmscapes in which it was embodied, the descriptions of imagined pleasures that were denied, the exhilaration of the landscapes and seasons (especially the promising fertility of the monsoon) that it celebrated, the sense of interricity and transgressive female desire that it offered. Further, viraha as an antinomial affective configuration that could express sorrow and exhilaration (a combination which predominates in its cinematic locations in the 1950s) could enfold new antinomies and speak to the violent coupling of Partition and Indipendence.

What does it mean to say that the coincidence of Partition and Independance (for two nations) could be enfolded in the single trope of viraha? The first is the heterocultural formation of viraha as an emotional complex. For instance, the varied ancient, medieval, and colonial trajectories of travel that shaped the stranger romance may well have deepened the resonance of viraha. Perhaps the multivocal, often surprisingly high, valuations of strangers, outsiders, migrants, travellers (who invited suspicion and hospitality) in the past, along with the poignancies of not-belonging, either came to be attached to, or themselves crystallised into a structure of feeling that could be evoked and encapsulated in the vocabulary of viraha and the pardsie. So could the fact that 'culture' in the broadest sense is never entirely portable. Not all migrants or refugees can carry everything: food, objects, possessions, artefacts, language, music, anecdotes, narratives. Did that which was 'left' behind by migrants get 'preserved' by those who stayed on? Or did migration alter the point of departure as irrevocably as the point of arrival? If not all migrants or refugees retained or wished to 'keep' their past as memory, then did what was elided or repressed linger as dimmed images, as traces of conscious forgetting? Perhaps, what was left behind, or only fractionally transmitted by migrants or refugees, persisted as an unarticulated depth that could be transmuted into the affective structure of viraha.

In their adjacent and intersecting circulation around disconnection and migration, hijir and viraha had the capacity to connect diverse forms of travel (a sanctioned Sufi mode associated with ihsq) and spiritual itineraries with materialities, to attach the abstraction of the perpetual seeker, and a permanently elusive truth (as embodied in Laila and Majnun) to the narratives of palpable separation, and could together configure the subcontinent as a migratory complex. Within this complex, Partition had now produced the most traumatic of remembered migrations, changed the meaning of migration into that of a mass exodus (hijrat) preceded and prompted by violence, as well as reinflected many older signifiers and traditions.

The capacity of viraha to straddle the transition into capitalism, to enfold the ruptures of Partition, and to stretch into the Nehruvian era—the affective surplus that it conveyed, the 'soul' that it suggested, became possible precisely because it was a point of confluence of many forms, histories and temporalities, a register of profound loss and an abstract lack, as well as a transformative emotion that could open into a multiplicity of resolutions, promises and beginnings. Perhaps
that is why viraha came to be effortlessly attached to the migration of labour and to early urbanscapes such as the sound and image of the moving train in early cinema, and why it could transmit the sense of lack or of being left behind that was attendant on progress.

The tenacity and lability of viraha may have stemmed from two related factors. First, viraha carried over from precapitalist formations but it was always a constantly transmitted emotional constellation, and its multiple temporalities made it a capacious medium. Second, the sign of viraha, in its historical development and in late colonial (or what can be named a colonial modern) perceptions and renditions, was in some sense the closest approximation to the secular—as materiality, subjectivity, agency and individuation—in premodern signs.

As it developed in the contexts of devotional, romantic and mundane separations, viraha tacitly acknowledged material and patriarchal constraint, social segmentation and hierarchy, the proscriptions of class, caste, region and religion on marriage. Yet, even as it emerged from a socially determined world, displayed patriarchal relations of dependence and subjugation through the female voice (a notation that was standardised in the Bhakti, Sufi and Sant vocabulary), and entered into a sensuous inwardness with a socially constructed (female) vulnerability, viraha also imaged a transgressive love (un)able to transcend these barriers. Thus with Mirbai, customary subjection was transformed into a matrix of rapture and agency, and achieved new dislocations and contradictory spaces. A woman could become an agent in her passion ('mein hun birah diwani').

Viraha composed a subjectivity (even if this was often abbreviated by standardised conventions) that was deeply entangled in the medieval transition to a new affective interiority, and in this limited sense, was perhaps itself an 'early modern' moment. By the late seventeenth century, Sufi, Sant and Bhakti compositions had already crafted an enlarged interiority, in spatialised metaphors—mun, hriday, dil, ghar, angan, ghata, geh—that appeared to bypass social norms. For Kabir, the female voice of yearning was ideally placed to contest upcaste religious institutions, since it was by definition true, intuitive, affective, unlettered. The very doubleness of viraha and hijr could make room for a secular semantic, one that did not need to or feel compelled to disavow other-worldly connotations with any severity.

If viraha was imbricated in transitional and subversive forms of agency and subjectivity, it also approached the secular in the promise of individuation, albeit only to parted and suffering lovers. Here it becomes significant that all the great Indo-Persian tragic romances in

the north, whether in Panjabi, Siraiki, Urdu or Awadhi, were structured around viraha as narratives of separation and Sufi transcendence, and almost continuously rewritten. This seems to indicate that 'love-in-separation' had become the matrix for nurturing notions of personal will, freedom and choice, even if these were eventually frustrated or denied. This taut combination of emergence and denial, assertion and frustration, love and separation, could be secured as either adjacent to, or as the antecedent of, a secular-modern notion of individual 'freedom' and tethered to the dream of a less encumbered world.

The filmic viraha song, often induced or bracketed by patriarchal actions or resolutions, could also be a space of becoming and self-making for women and men. In House Number 54 (1956), the opening scene is a song of estrangement, homelessness and loneliness. Here viraha becomes a moment of emergence and individuation that positions the impoverished pavement dweller outside the grip of his circumstances—he has grown up in the streets and has no family. The opening song has no narrative space and is a precursor and subliminal (pre)text of the recomposition of urban streets in which the partition refugee, the migrant and the destitute could become a composite signifier.

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As far as a revivification of viraha as an antinomical complex by Partition is at issue, it is perhaps not coincidental that Bombay cinema was itself a migratory complex populated with migrants and refugees (in every capacity including filmakers and lyricists); that it was fascinated with stranger romance and played out stories of urban migration as well as the settlement of migrants into non-biological families and the restoration of their class status with such intensity; that it crossed the boundaries of India and Pakistan by reiterating a shared history of Indo-Persian romances as well as through its own (now 'cross-border') circulation. In Ag ka Darya and River of Fire, not only is Filmmaker being read in East Pakistan but Lata Mangeshkar's resounding voice and the Urdu dialogue of Bhaiju Bawra can be heard from a bamboo cinema hall in East Pakistan. In Bhaiju Bawra (1952), Gauri (played by Meena Kumari) loses her heart to a romantic singer (played by Bharat Bhushan) who produces his best music in the pain of separation from his beloved. Significantly, some of the songs in this historical film set in Akbar's court spoke of the loss of childhood friends and lovers: 'Mohe bhool gaye samwariya' [The dark one (Krishna/ the veiled god/ the imagined lover) has forgotten
me ...] and ‘Bachpan ki mubhakat ko dil se na judaa/jab yaad meri aaye, milne ki duaa karna’ [Pray to never separate our innocent childhood love from your heart, whenever you think of me, wish that we be united] (lyrics by Naushad).

Viraha also infused the personal trajectories of individual poets, singers and lyrics. Sahir Ludhianvi returned to India, Noorjehan left India after Partition. Her departure retrospectively semanticallyised her songs across borders and gave them a gestural quality: ‘Mere bachpan ke saathi mujhe bhool na jaana’ (Anmol Ghadi) [O companion of my childhood/innocence, do not forget me ...], ‘Baithi hoon teri yaad lekar’ (Village Girt) [the weight of your memory sits heavily with me], ‘Aa ja tu jhee afsaanee judaee’ [Come let me relate to you the tale of my sorrowful separation] (Mirza Sahiban).

Amir Khusrau’s bidai song, ‘Kahey ko byaha bides, sun babul mera naaihar chhhooto hi jai’ [Why have you married me off to far away lands, hear my pleas O my father, as I depart from the home of my birth/ancestors], now carried more than the wren of a classic separation, that of the young bride from her natal family, and spoke to other cleavages of families by Partition in 1947.24

The filmic song can thus also be read as a public missive, a cross-border message analogous to the patian. The internal grammar of these 1950s songs (as sign of loneliness and a vector of communication between individuals when other pathways were blocked or prohibited), matches and meets some of the intransient political realities of partition. The radio itself became an aural sign of viraha: a medium for emphasising and overcoming separation as in the filmic motif of couples joined through the agency of a song broadcast on radio (for instance, in Barsaat ki Raat and Mr and Mrs 55). The train, a spatial sign for viraha that signified a going-somewhere and a leaving-behind, meeting and parting, and was never a univocal signifier, also acquired new resonances. It carried the new possibility of cross-border return—the impermeability of borders, the finality and permanence of Partition, were only to sink in for many refugees in India and Pakistan over a number of years. Further, the sounds and images of arriving and departing trains connoted more than the partings enforced by labour migration; they evoked an excessive poignance, sadness, melancholy, desolation and fear (that cinema refracted but did not invent) which secreted catalytic rumours and indelible memories of trains spilling with refugees, trains as sites of gross partition violence. As a sign of vulnerability, the train (read too glibly as the technological or Nehruvian modern) carried a heavier freight after 1946.

Cinematic representation was implicated in the emotional complex of Partition but, unlike fiction, elliptical about the (violent) nature of the event. As a public medium inexorably bound to visuality and commerce, popular cinema could not perhaps replay the violence of Partition when its memories were so raw and its effects dotted the social terrain—abandoned or annexed homes, refugee settlements, destitution, and bureaucratic procedures of physical rehabilitation and ‘restoration’ of abducted women.35

Nor can the culpability of Bombay cinema be forgotten. In the early 1940s, the Hindu names of Muslim actors and actresses were open secrets that nevertheless certified the formal abnegation of identity required to establish symbolic eligibility for stardom; and there were episodes of active communal discrimination against Muslims between 1946 and 1948 (Vasudevan 1995: 522–23). Precisely because direct political discourse on Partition violence was skirted, viraha in its many registers of loss, lack and separation served simultaneously as the site of suppression and surfacing, displacement and acknowledgement. The popular cinematic locutions of viraha participated in the seduction of a nation-in-the-making and undercut a triumphal notion of Independence and could generate both a turbulence and a quietism. Further, as the bearer of an early modern self-reflexivity and individuation grounded in a generalisable ransience (the recognition of a common fate of humans and their social worlds), that was also the condition of its own creation, viraha came to provide a space in which individuals could recognise their own unique conjunctures of difficulty or sorrow.

In sum, viraha was the affective space of Partition and Independence, and encapsulated the pleasures and pains of 1947: as a sign of transience and a trigger for personal/collective memory it carried the pressure of reminder and elision. What one may risk naming the ‘soul’, borne in cinematic romances and film songs of the late 1940s and 1950s, can thus be seen as a product of solitude and connection, rupture and relatedness, lack and plenitude. This ‘soul’ was experienced like viraha and through viraha as desair/exhilaration—Independence/Partition provided the political conditions for both.

Viraha signified both continuity and rupture—in its internal grammar as well as in its multiple relocations culminating in the late 1940s and 1950s. Did this constellation of viraha and filmic romance separate viraha from its historical mooring and referents, and give it a relative autonomy? Or was the shared anchorage in historical referents itself an ideological stake in the underlining of 1947 and
subject to different resolutions among which viraha was one? Did the affective complex of viraha have a radical antitraditional edge because of its historical density and shared history? In other words, were the very terms of its contemporaneity in the 1940s and 1950s set by its own past?

Most of these questions deserve separate attention. The trajectory of viraha did underscore the multilinguality of subcontinental (mismarked 'Indian') 'culture': only particular languages were not the homes of specialised oeuvres but specialised oeuvres could have many languages and certainly more than one 'nation'. It is, however, evident that the trajectory of viraha does not present a case for asserting the mere continuity of Bhakti-Sant-Sufi traditions, establishing an intersection between the premorden and modern, or seeing cinema in the binary frame of a modernising agent—a conserving home for the premodern. Rather, it can be read in several registers. In the literary-cultural field the trajectory of viraha seems to ask for a reformulation of the modern as inherently stratified and historically segmented; a recognition of discontinuity that does not overprivilege the so-called ruptures of the colonial modern (the rupture of 1947 may have been equally or more profound); and a reformulation of 'traditions' as heterocultural, mutating and open to conjunctural rehabilitation in new political, economic and social relations. Sufi, sant and bhakti traditions were not a (teleological) resource for modernity but themselves implicated in a complex process of change wherein the 'past' could be reworked to negotiate transitions to capitalism only because historical processes had made it malleable, processes that I have syncopated in the term 'concurrence'. This concurrence was not an inert simultaneity but indexed and abstracted historical processes. The flexibilities of the 'past' were shaped by the several interpretative logics of (novel, habitual, tense) contiguity in a multi-religious and migratory formation; an intermediate orality within which the inception of print and recorded music fostered rather than closed the return to orality and improvisation; and the colonial and nationalist annexation and reinterpretation of 'tradition'; and as such demand a historicisation of the connections or disjunctions between affects and ideologies. Some of these processes were equivocal and could be pressed into different ideological directions while the latter had especially grave patriarchal implications on the social terrain.

Finally, the articulation of viraha with modernity, itself an antinomical complex, also works on another register. At one level, viraha signifies slow time in which the emotional urgencies of the desiring subject must—because of the very nature of the lack—be protracted. The insertion of this temporality into the technological apparatus of cinema and contracted into the three-minute song worked as a reminder/reminder of a slower and thicker precapitalist time, as a sign of both absorption and resistance, especially in the urban mise en scène. In other words, this temporality of viraha could at once register loss and resonate with the temporality of capitalism (repeatedly noted in cinematic melodrama through contrasts of rich and poor, dualities of city and village), and be harnessed to the aspirations of a 'mixed' economy and a 'new' nation in the 1950s. Thus, instead of formulating the modern as pervaded by multiple temporalities, each determined by its regional and geopolitical specificity it may be useful to think of modernity as the conscious or subliminal inhabitation of uneven and multiple temporalities wherein knowing more than one time and place can be a mark of becoming modern.

Notes


2. Here I take my cue from Gita Kapur's definition of religious iconicity—'an image into which symbolic meanings converge and in which moreover they achieve stasis'—and its (secular) privileging of the actor's face and body (Kapur 1987: 82, 1998: 23).

3. Since there are significant variations in the two texts, I refer to them both separately and together.

4. Khusrav here alludes to the path of 'tasavwaf/ i t i r i q a t to the fount of the true knowledge. This and all other translations in the essay, unless otherwise indicated, have been done by Dhruv Sangari.

5. Chapter 13 of the novel, an extract from Kamaluddin's journal, is titled 'ChampaPati: A Sufi Allegory'.

6. I have elaborated the textual and historical coordinates of simultaneity in the novel as well as the new relationships between transgressive love, viraha, a secular 'ex-centric' nationalism and Partition in my article (Sangari 2006).

7. For instance, Khwaja Ghulam Farid's latest nineteenth century corpus of kafis (a form that suited qawwals) in Siraiki drew heavily on Sass-Punnun.

8. Ahmad Yar lived from 1768 to 1842, and composed his own versions of Heer Ranjha, Sass-Punnun and Yusuf Zulukha (see Kohli 1993: 110).


10. Gita Kapur points out that there were back and forth transactions between Ravi Varma and Parsi theatre. Not only did she see a lot of Parsi theatre productions, but his main model, a Parsi woman, may have been an actress (personal communication, 2004).
11. The last chapter of *River of Fire* notes the musical and performative profile of Delhi in the early 1950s: the silent tomb of Nizamuddin Auliya, Sheila Bhatia's opera *Heer Ranjha*, a concert by Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali, and *The Little Clay Cart* directed by Habib Tanvir. The same actress who plays Heer is scheduled to act as Vasantasena.

12. Cosmopolitanism has been usefully defined as emphasizing voluntary affiliation, interest and tolerant engagement with others, as anti-racist and open to diversity: 'Although cosmopolitanism has strong individual elements (in its advocacy of detachment from shared identities and its emphasis on affiliation as voluntary), it nonetheless often aims to foster reciprocal and transformative encounters between strangers variously construed' (Anderson 1988: 277, 279 and 270).

13. In the last chapters of *River of Fire*, the sense of evacuation and alienation for Gautam and Hari is related to the misfortunes of male friendship as well of friends who became lovers. Hari recites: 'Ghauslen, tum to waqif ho, kaho Majnoon ke marney ki, / Dwana mar gye, aakhir ho, vierancy pe kya guzar' (Hyder 1998: 426) [O deer, you must have seen Majnoon dying/But, tell me, how the wilderness lives without him ...].

14. For instance, in *Nau Do Qarah* (1957) the heroine runs away from an arranged marriage. In *Dil Dho ke Dekho* (1960) the heroine sabotages her own arranged marriage.

15. These could be played out in patriarchal ways: for instance *Mr and Mrs 55* describes the domestication of a spoilt rich girl by those 'below'. There were less unconventional cross-class relationships with women too: in *Madhumati* a tribal woman, in *Sujata* a low caste woman, in *Sadhna* a courtesan, in *Mughal-e-Azam* a servant girl.

16. For instance, *Aar Paar, Awara, Shri 420, Chalti ka Naam Gaadi, Barsaat ki Raat, Pyasa, Madhumati*, were all stranger romances.

17. *Times of India* 31 August 1946. The synopsis in the booklet of *Dr Kotonis* read: 'This story is stronger than fiction of a gallant young patriot. Dr Kotonis was the youngest and luckiest of all as he was the one who never came back home. He died serving the sick and wounded on the battlefield of China. Young Kotonis lived for the cause of world freedom and loved his life at the altar of liberty' (emphasis mine, cited in: Dyer and Patel 2002: 140).

18. Ravi Vasudevan points out: that speculations about Nargis's family background and suspicions of her chastity following her relationship with Raj Kapoor seemed to repetitively feed into, and be resolved within, a host of films in the 1950s from *Andaz* and *Laajwanti* to *Mother India* (Vasudevan 1995: 323).

19. Since marriage implied worldliness and hierarchy, and was an institution that maintained class, caste and religious boundaries, love and marriage were seldom coterminous: a happy ending would merely fold love back into these hierarchies.

20. For instance, Mulla Dauood's *Chandayan* is said to have been close to the viraha barahmasa (see Thaçar 1999: 195).

21. There was, for instance, an Urdu tradition of the barahmasa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries written by at least three quite disparately located poets—Sufis, educated provincial officers and bazaar poets (see Orsini 2002).

22. On the male use of the female devotional voice, see Sangari 1990.


24. Here I draw on Moinak Biswas who says that songs of the 1950s signified 'reflective moments in the absence of a proper apparatus in the form' (Biswas 2000: 125).

25. For instance, in *Baat Ek Raat Ki* (1962): 'Na tum hame jaana/no ham tumhe jaano/magar lagta hai kuch aisa/ment humdum mil gya', or Bandini (1963): 'O jaano wale ho sake toh laut ke aanaa'.

26. In *River of Fire* the songs of Pankaj Mallik, Talat Mahmud and other old Lucknow radio songs are recollected as well as sung by characters in the 1940s and 1950s.

27. This constellation, consolidated through radio (including Ceylon and Pakistan), acquired a certain formal autonomy in 1957 with the inception of Vividh Bharti on AIR. The discreteness of the radio, film and record industries, and the control of production of the commercial music industry by relatively few persons may have been a contributing factor in forming this constellation, and not merely a matter of enforcing homogeneity as it is for Peter Manuel (1993: 48 and 58).

28. The novels note most of the sites of viraha that I have discussed here.

29. As Afzal Khan points out, the motifs of travel—in hijr, safar, mansile-shaqq—and homelessness were central to Sufi thought.

30. Aamir R. Mufid, through an analysis of Faiz Ahmad Faiz shows that in the Urdu tradition, the disconnection and reconnection of hijr and visal acquire a concrete materiality after partition. Originally referring to the emigration of Mehmood from Mecca to Medina in *Ad 622*, the beginning of the Muslim calendar, hijrat was appropriated for the dislocations and emigration that accompanied Partition, lent an epic quality to it and sought to contain Partition itself within a narrative of leave-taking and the parting of ways (2004: 260).

31. These two paragraphs are based on Sangari (1990).

32. 'Teri duniya mein jee me to behar hai ki mar jaye/n ko to aisa ghar hata/jahaan se pyaar mil jaate/ossi begane chehre hai jahaan paunche jahaan jayen' [It is better to die then to live in your world/If only there was a home from where I could get love/I see the same strange, unknown faces wherever I arrive, wherever I go].

33. This song is sung presciently, prior to Partition, by Kamal Rez's sister in *River of Fire*.

34. The bidai song in general was re-inflected, for instance, Shailendra's lyric in *Chori Chori* 'Main bhowan ke ghar jaye goti ... hamen na bhulana'.

35. As described by Biswas (2000: 125).
36. Thus, its characteristic villains were vamps, playboys, feudal fathers, husbands, landlords, employers, and denizens of the urban underworld.

37. As I have suggested, the individuation and subjectification associated with modernity may have been historically much more segmented and cannot be conflated en bloc with colonisation, and the modern cannot be seen as merely a colonial consequence.

38. As Fredric Jameson notes, within the ‘modern’ of early urbanisation, city dwellers who came from the country could ‘still register the coexistence of uneven worlds’, and this unevenness and coexistence could be registered in a sense of loss as in Baudelaire’s Paris (Jameson 1998: 54).

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