Chapter 4

Spatial (Re)orientations and Epic Structures of the Urban in Fareeda Mehta's *Kali Salwaar*

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Abstract

Kali Salwaar (2001) is Fareeda Mehta's directorial debut and is based on a short story by revolutionary writer Sadat Hasan Manto. The film follows the life of a couple of migrants from the North, Sultana, a sex worker, and her partner, Khudabaksh, a pimp and dilettante with photography. Sultana navigates the streets of Bombay with the help of several stereotypical characters, including sex workers, *bhai*, grifters, and auto-mechanics. Similarly, their spaces are portrayed as vibrant sites of politics, power, and commerce that operate within working-class localities. In the film, structural elements of cinema- gesture, lensing, sound, music, dialogue, lighting, colour, and movement- form distinct sequences crafted to reveal an 'inner drama' that transcends the narrative. By centring the experiences of the migrant labourer and sex worker, the film's form constructs the spatial relations of the city with its inhabitants into an ever-changing labyrinth. The essay begins by historically locating the role of Muharrum in the life of the working classes of Bombay. Drawing on the work on epic cinema by Alex Koutsouraki, I ask, what does infusing the everyday lives of the working class with modernist epic structures do for our understanding of urban life? Utilising neuroscience studies conducted by Vittorio Gallese & Michelle Guerra on movement in cinema and Bregt Lameris's study on colour, I argue that Mehta tweaks these structural elements of cinema and increases the possibilities of urban spaces. Finally, I analyse the cinematic processes by which Fareeda Mehta transforms the spaces realised in Manto's Bombay stories into the visual language of cinema.

Keywords*:* Epic cinema, Indian cinema, Fareeda Mehta, Sadat Hasan Manto, Kali Salwaar.

Conflicts of Interest: The author/s declared no conflicts of interest.

Published by: Rupkatha Books (19 June, 2026).

Edited Volume: Antony, N. P., & Venu, A. (Eds.). (2026). *Urban imaginaries and Indian cities in literature.* Rupkatha Books. ISBN: 978-81-975130-2-2. https://doi.org/10.21659/9788197513022

Chapter: Pinto, E. (2026). Spatial (Re)orientations and Epic Structures of the Urban in Fareeda Mehta's *Kali Salwaar*. In N. P. Antony & A. Venu (Eds.), *Urban imaginaries and Indian cities in literature*. Rupkatha Books. https://doi.org/10.21659/9788197513022.04

4.1 Introduction

Sadat Hasat Manto wrote the short story "Kali Salwaar" in 1941. The film adapts Manto's literary universe and weaves themes and characters common to several stories, such as Mammad Bhai, Sugandhi from "Hatak" and "Babu Gopinath". It situates Manto as a character within the film's landscape. His experiences with Mammad Bhai form a meta-commentary that is sharply critical of the US and filmmaking funded by the mafia. The film is about the use of technology in imaging and sound media. The film provides an ironic depiction of a 'struggling' artist in the city of Mumbai. The film builds and climaxes around the celebrations of Muharram in the city and the desire of Sultana to stitch a '*Kali Salwaar*' for the occasion.

Before writing on the film, the use of the feminist gaze in the film has to be analysed; Kagalwala compliments its ability to "watch Sultana with empathy". The article addresses the role of the labourer in the city and the complexity with which Sultana navigates her relationships with the diverse group of people she encounters in the neighbourhood, or the 'street'. The IIAS newsletter presciently looks at the interplay between the Hindu and Muslim components of the film. Highlighting the religious and the spiritual in Sultana's life, the film creates an "abstract odyssey into migration, marginalisation, and displacement". The writing centres on questions of an 'Indian Muslim' identity through its cultural or religious perspective. Neither writing has analysed the role of the systemic nor has it produced any materialist understanding of the film.

The first major task is to briefly sketch a portrait of the city of Bombay, to show that the material relations of the city are deeply intertwined with the spiritual. The film looks at the city as a manifestation of the material relations of labour, and reveals how the mystical evolves from this material history. Kali Salwaar places Muharram as a climactic event; the religious festival has deep working-class historical roots in the city of Mumbai. In the film, we see a menagerie of characters, all found on the street or the mohalla, and belonging to the working-class of the city. I wish to make a case for the epic idiom in cinema in this film. The epic idiom is a form that utilises and situates the structural elements of cinema in a historical process. Historically, the epic form arose as a response from artists inspired by the philosophy of dialectical materialism in opposition to the lyrical bourgeois and popular Hollywood forms. The film utilises a dialectic of the spiritual and the material, the mundane and the abstract to connect the city, its workers and life.

Kali Salwaar interweaves the complex interactions among the characters while orienting and disorienting the stereotypical imagery of Bombay. As the film oscillates between the sacred and profane, through transgressions designed into the structural elements, it can tell us a story that transforms the surficial "journey of the hero" into a series of interrelated events. This interrelationship is the founding component of what Eisenstein has discussed as the 'weaving of multiplicities' (Khopkar, 1990, p. 23). Simply put, the structural elements of cinema tell us something more than what is told by the plot/story of the film. Some of the broader questions I want to reflect on in the essay are: What does it mean for a film to "take place" somewhere? How does film construct space through explorations of lighting, colour, movement, gesture and subjectivity?

4.2 A port city of festivals

Historically, it is around the eighteenth century that the modern city of Bombay came into existence, following the growth of an export trade in raw cotton to China and America. The growth in the opium trade to China provided the larger impetus, along with the further consolidation of the East India Company in the sub-continent. The East India Company provided more incentives for mercantile ventures in the city. Eventually, by the 1850s and 1806s, the first cotton mills started to bloom, turning it into a major capitalist city. While it is not within the ambit of this essay to plot a historical narrative of the city of Bombay, it is certainly possible to dwell briefly on the kind of city that Bombay was to become. To this end, I turn to Sheetal Chhabra, who adds a critical stance to the myth of the creation of Bombay. Countering the view that we should look past views that see Bombay as a 'mosaic' in which 'distinct social worlds live side by side' and instead be able to think of the role of its internal economy, in the pre- and postcolonial eras (CHHABRIA, 2018, p. 1100). Instead, she turns our attention to how "the city emerged from within a regional commercialisation of agriculture" (CHHABRIA, 2018, p.1101) and how the East India Company reorganised the "spatial and temporal dynamic" of the city. Such reorganising began with the reclamation of land from the Arabian Sea, and it took the shape of labour laws, taxation and urban development. The East India Company, along with the local elite, violently reordered the city. Such as the creation of the Bombay City Improvement Trust, which first began with the creation of Princess Street and Mohammad Ali Road.

As Prashant Kidambi details in his book on Bombay that with the state's failure to keep up with developing urban infrastructure, life spilt onto the street. Even as the colonial narrative sought to visualise the city as a place of flows, movements and circulation (Kidambi, 2016, p.71). This was maintained by the East India Company and the emerging bourgeoisie class of locals, as it connected the hinterland by train and the coast by steamships. Capitalism always relies on what Marx calls the 'industrialised reserve army of labour' (DeFazio, 2011, p. 31) of surplus workers on which it can depend to hire when the need arises and fire when the rate of profit drops. This reserve army is the unemployed daily labourers, grifters, sex workers, eunuchs and several other archetypes of the city that are pushed to the margins. The 'street' and the 'moholla' were thus seen as key sites of labour gathering and spaces where by, "the 1890s, around 100,000 labourers usually slept on roads or footpaths.

In her writing on 'The city of the senses', a historical materialist intervention on the subject of urban studies. Kimberely de Fazio, that the city is the fundamental site of the conflict between labour relations and capital class ambitions. Like the major characters in Kali Salwaar, a majority of the people living in Bombay travelled from geographical and caste contexts, either coming to the city and becoming a part of the tiny capitalist class or becoming a part of the working class. Even a cursory glance at the muslim communities will show us their diversity along the lines of geographic location, caste and class, rather than a homogenous identity.

From the early nineteenth century till about the early 20th century, it was Muharram that defined the class character of the city. By the late 19th century, "Bombay's Muharram was 'a carnival … the like of which, for extent and eccentricity, is to be found in few other cities in the world'. According to Niles Green, Muharram was, "far from being a narrowly Shi'ite event, the festive – and often licentious – atmosphere of Muharram attracted celebrants of many religious backgrounds,

particularly young working-class men". Muharram thus belonged to the working classes, and all the people who thronged the street or the bazaar. It was a combined effort by Balgangadhar Tilak, the British and the morality of an ascendant Muslim wealth-owning class that ended the domination of the working-class gathering of Muharram. By presenting a Brahmanised celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi. In the film, ironically, we get a single glimpse of Muharram celebrations in the city. We do not see the film characters participating in the celebrations, but we assume they are part of it. As the sex workers gather in a poignant moment, to relive the echoes of this tradition, a way to think about childhood memories and places they have left far behind. For Anwari, it is about looking like a character from a black and white film; for Sultana, the texture of the flat black shoes is comparable to the softness of *kajal* (kohl).

4.3 Situating Kali Shalwar: Modernist epic form and the Brechtian 'Gestural'

In his writing on classifications of the epic form, Alexander Koutsourakis interprets films that utilise the epic style and those that have an epic as their theme. For him, the "modernist epic form" is a film that is 'narrative in scope' but that relies on the presentation of episodic/tableaux sequences that privilege collective dramaturgy, rather than individual characters. In Kali Shalwar, there is an emphasis on drawing on the 'epic style' to put it in Koustarakis' terms but in the manner of a Brechtian/Piscatorian kind, it draws on modernist interpretations of city life, such as how technology intersects with everyday life and situations (Koutsourakis, 2021, p. 32).

In comparison to the dramatic form in popular cinema and the bourgeois 'lyrical' forms in the films that travel to international film festivals, Kali Shalwaar uses the Epic form (Koutsourakis, 2018, p. 17). The epic form removes the cathartic processes from films and aims for generalised representations of sequences that are episodic. This prevents interpretations of 'causes and effects' in a linear format, which is dominant in popular modes of filmmaking and instead makes a case for an interdependent sequence of causation. This causation is close to what Eisenstein described in his words as 'a weaving of basket forms'. The epic form never completely abandoned the 'narrative' that the avant-garde and abstract, and artist cinema do. Kali Shalwar reveals the cracks in this structural system that we live in at this time in history, that is, capitalism is the fundamental *relational* term across the planet, and in India, it is intermixed with caste.

In the original text, Manto draws on the ghastly forms created by Sultana's mind of the blue in her veins, merging with the train tracks of the city, which are bringing in thousands of migrants to the city of Bombay. That vision is turned around on its head, right at the start of the film, when Mukhtar goes to buy flowers from the local market. In a series of close-ups of hands perusing flowers and money being transacted, this space is filled with stylised lighting and micro gestures of desire expressed in the hands of the shopkeeper towards Mukhtar. The placement of the hands, the lighting, colours of the flowers create a contrasting schema that complements with vast extensions of it on screen. Following this, there is a mid-length shot of the gesture of Mukthar combined with the pull of her pallu, just as a train passes by, penetrating the back space of her head (Koutsourakis, 2018, p. 30). This evokes a grid-like pattern, revealing the most fundamental parameter of a composition in the visual. Immediately, we are pulled away into the audio space, as we hear a rendition of the composition in the early modern form of the Khayal. The words of the composition are taken from a ghazal written by Mir Taqi Mir. We are then left to the pan as we follow Mukthar

walking through a crowd in a deep focus shot, which renders nearly everything in the fore, middle and background with clarity.

Epic cinema is interested in the emotional responses that films elicit in their spectators and viewers. For example, the use of the gestic principle. In the earlier part of the film, we see Anwari introducing the city to Sultana from the rooftops, set in the background with the blueish and greyish hues of Bombay, Anwari's teal blue and baby pink outfit and Sultana's outfit with striking ultramarine blue, canary yellow and vermilion red are carefully framed in a mid-length dolly shot that brings us closer to them. As it does that, Anwari's hands are outstretched, once again giving us a horizontal and vertical line. Only for her to turn her head around to the other direction, performing half a circle with her head. On the audio, we hear a city drawing to a close in the evening as an azaan (call for prayers) sounds out from the mosque nearby. This gesture holds significance because it is a moment of instruction for Sultana, a moment of pleasure for Anwari and a distinct sylisation (Koutsourakis, 2018, p. 30). These multi-layered gestures point to the possibility that Anwari has done this several times for newer sex workers to the city, but they also reveal a deeper friendship that is blossoming between the characters.

Brecht outlines other methods, such as a direct address to the camera, non-psychological acting and non-linear chronology in narratives as part of his epic idiom. In epic cinema, these techniques are sequenced in a horizontal rhythmic arrangement of audiovisual images placed one after the other to form meaning that is conscious and unconscious in meaning for the viewer. The structural components combine the characterisation provided by actors and the arrangement of sound, including music, noise, foley, natural sounds, ambient rhythms and at times the recorder itself. Along with changes in lighting, camera movement and other elements, this allows for a film to engage in a 'totality' of filmic relations. One of the important aspects of the art forms of miniature painting and Khayal gayiki is that their structure is built for microtonal beauty. Similarly, the structural elements of cinema can be adjusted even on the microtonal level (Koutsourakis, 2018, p. 19). These interventions used by the filmmaker prevent the moment from achieving a natural state; they make us think of other possibilities of meaning.

In the film, the spaces in which the exchange of money takes place are uniquely framed and lit. In Capital, Marx says that commodity exchange in such a mode of production is universalised (Bellofiore, p. 2018). When society is structured upon relations of exchange, Sultana's body turns into a medium that 'replicates exchange operations either through labour but also via the individual's interpersonal interactions' (Koutsourakis, 2018, p. 36). So even as Shankar agrees to figure out a way to get her that Kali shalwar, he exchanges commodities between the sex workers he is deceiving delicately. Similarly, all the major transactions taking place between characters are shot within a close-up, and only the hands of the characters are shown. When they are not shot in close-up, the gesture of counting the money becomes the entire focus. The systemic nature of capital not only redraws the physical map of the city of Mumbai, but it also recasts human relationships in favour of exchange that annihilates relationships and causes deep alienation and isolation. In the film, Sultana is unable to successfully attract regular clients, thus rendering her body incapable of meeting her basic needs. Her life spirals further as Khudabaksh, her pimp and partner, becomes increasingly distanced from her. He arrives in the city with Sultana and continues his work as a photographer in the city, but is unable to obtain any form of sustained income. He increasingly becomes disillusioned with his new environment and turns to a fakir at the legendary

shrine of Haji Malang in Kalyan. The roots of his disappointments can be attributed to the alienation felt by minorities within an Indian society, increasingly bent on 'Othering' Muslims. Though we are not privy to this form of direct instruction by the director, we are given hints throughout about the rise of the Far Right candidates even at local body elections, where the barber grooming Mammad Bhai's character suggests that, 'this time the lotus will blossom'.

4.4 Characterisation in *Kali Shalwar*

The popular and avant-garde cinema lacks a general historical understanding of reality, a reality which is constantly transforming according to the laws of dialectics (Koutsourakis, 2018, p. 15). Under capitalism, even the historical epic is considered and treated as a 'genre'. In popular, bourgeois lyrical and avant-garde cinema, ahistorical depictions of characters and social conditions are presented. Marx talks about the individual, "not as an independent entity, nor does the individual have 'intrinsic' transhistorical characteristics. Even the Buddha comments that reality emerges through a complicated interplay and weaving of so many dependencies between sentient and non-sentient life.

Kali salwar depicts everyday reality in all its contradictions, just as Shankar is shown to be a genius with chess, and as effortlessly as a mechanic, he is a manipulator of the sex workers he deceives. Just as Sultana is ever ready to help everyone around her, providing care, emotional support and financial payments from her savings, almost no one can help her when she needs the only thing she asks for in the entire film. This approach of the contradictory nature of life under capitalism shows us that even what appears as 'natural' is subject to change, precisely because of the specific historical and social conditions in which the film takes place. Sultana's body transforms in various ways while attempting to seduce customers; for example, she draws on several mudras and kathak poses while she stands on her balcony at night, when Shankar sees her from below. Anwari sings a song on the terrace and gracefully dances to "Y*eh Hai Bambai Meri Jaan*" She mimics a dance sequence from the film *CID* (1956) Khudabaksh can be found hands outstretched, altering his intonation and tries his best to sell and perform the role of the "local photographer", the mint green kurta, mixed with a print jacket in red, stands out in a sea of monochromatic tourists.

4.5 Eisenstein's Leitmotif and Synaesthesia

Eisenstein saw intonation, mimicry, gesture and movement as successive stages of human expression, each preserving something from the previous one yet also adding something qualitatively different. *(Khopkar, 1993, p. 163).* Robert Robertson tells us of the simple description that Eisenstein offers on Synaesthesia, he says it is, 'the production from one sense-impression of one kind of an associated mental image of a sense-impression of another kind.' (Robertson, 2011, p. 142) As an extension, Eisenstein adds that "the process of association of sense-impressions involves emotion." In this definition, the sense and the sense-impression produced are dialectically linked but are different. Such sense impressions are subjective and involve emotional states. Furthermore, synaesthesia as understood by Eisenstein could be considered as 'the ability to unite in one whole a variety of feelings gathered through different sense organs. If a person hears an objective sound of a peacock crying, but the subjective sense impression may conjure an image

of blue in the mind, furthermore, it may present the colour blue after having experienced an emotion associated with that sound and that colour. In Eisenstein's understanding, filmmakers have infinite possibilities of evoking emotions in audiences.

Another concept that Eisenstein developed further than the original was the leitmotif. He describes it as.

> the theme expressed in colour leitmotifs can, through its colour score and with its own means, unfold an inner drama, weaving its own pattern in the contrapuntal whole, crossing and recrossing the course of action, which formerly music alone could do with full completeness by supplementing what could not be expressed by acting or gesture; it was music alone that could sublimate the inner melody of a scene into thrilling audiovisual atmosphere of a finished audiovisual episode. (Robertson, 2011, p. 166)

Filmmaker and theorist, Arun Khopkar, elaborates on the use of leitmotif, wherein a leitmotif can establish links between characters, work with creating a mood or a theme but that which gives unity' (Khopkar, 1991, p. 106). Eisenstein states that the act of creation allows us to think of the play of complementary colours, much like the flow of the creative energies of the masculine and feminine (Khopkar, 1991, p. 103). It means that no colour is seen in isolation, even red is only thought of in the absence of blue (Khopkar, 1991, p. 105). In the same essay, Khopkar states that Eisenstein takes up three or four chroma that are combined with the achroma of white, grey and black. Eisenstein assigns each chroma a single thematic function, such as red with revenge, gold with debauchery and black with death. In Kali Salwaar, the secondary characters are all undergoing their forms of journeys in colour and textile. For example, Mukthar is identified with the colour blue, but is seen drying clothes of different colours one evening. Anvari is paired with achroma colours, but from time to time acquires a green or a purple hue. With textiles, there is the texture of the surfaces that are constantly in rhythm.

In this way, Eisenstein saw an 'audio-visual polyphony' possible because of the movement of the chromatic objects (animate and inanimate objects) and the criss-crossing of the plot, inviting the spectators to experience a 'synaesthetic experience' (Khopkar, 1991, p. 108). In Kali Shalwar, we see no direct correlation arising from the use of colours about a single character; the primary colour palette is expressed in as many shades as possible. We see a broad series of colours being associated with Sultana: Red, Blue, Yellow, Green and Pink, and we see a stunning variety in the variation in costumes. Sultana's interaction with other characters and the presence of colours and movement allow us to feel an enhanced sensation of the narrative that goes beyond the dialogue and plot capacities of Manto's text. Sultana's journey is not directly related to the progression of the characters 'inner journey or a psychological journey, but rather is connected with the actions and events around it (Robertson, 2011, p. 160).

In Feeling Colour: Chromatic Embodiment In Film Culture, 1950s-1960s, Bregt Lameris outlines that film is a complex form that includes "the body, its motor potentialities, the senses, emotions, imaginations, and memories" (Lameris, 2025, p. 174). The book provides a general introduction to synaesthesia as a 'cross modal and multisensorial perception'. According to Maurer (Lameris, 2025, p. 174), the first experience of synaesthesia is neonatal. With age, the multisensory neurons require maturation and can only be strengthened through experience (Lameris, 2025, p. 175). Just as Khopkar has highlighted, the presence of contrasts in colour design and art has a centuries-

long connection between why complementary colours catch the eye and how they hold their attention (Lameris, 2025, p. 46). In the film, we see Sultana in neon chanteuse pants, bright pistachio greens, yellows and is seen with high-end shiny textiles, shimmering and sporting gauzy dupattas. Eventually, her transition and increasing alienation move away from the more 'folk' inspired colours and begin to turn towards blue with intermixes. There is a consistent use of primary colour and contrasting colours, and the rich possibilities of a single colour merging with the chromatic tonalities of colour emerge within and outside the narrative spaces. As we experience her journey inwards the text, image and colour all start to move towards the darker end of the spectrum.

Rudolf Arnheim's work on colour theory and harmony says that there are up to seven possibilities of contrast (Lameris, 2025, p. 58). The use of contrasts has a known effect on audiences in their reception; both successive and simultaneous use of contrasting colours allows audiences to retain their attention and provide a stimulating effect (Lameris, 2025, p. 41). Through costumes, we take a journey with Sultana's costumes. They mirror her inner state of mind, and they start to become impersonal as the film begins its journey from colour to black. In Fareeda Mehta's words, "the use of colour came from the penumbra of historical consciousness." By the end of the film, the earthy colours of brown have given way to the ecstasy and mourning of black, and we appear to find the lustre of nothingness spilling onto the screen in one fevered dream of Sultana. As the hands of a tailor using a sewing machine shot in a complete black wall, using his hands to gently and mechanically bring the textile together.

4.6 Movement as a structural response to the city

Kali Shalwar is replete with ornate movements of the camera, within the capabilities of the dolly or the track shot, and the pan and tilt. Often, the camera combines these movements. They signify a remarkably personal rhythm and form in Mehta's cinematic practice, one nurtured over the years in filmmaking. For example, after Khudabaksh has failed to sell anything at the Gateway of India, we are presented with a wide-angle shot. He is confronted by a tourist who responds to Khudabaksh's attempts at communication by mechanically video recording him on his camcorder. As the tourist walks away and Khudabaksh moves to the edge of the promenade, the camera pans left, and as he exits the scene, the camera performs a straight movement towards the sea, holding and waiting (Gallese & Guerra, 2019, p. 92). Both camera movements are performed with subtlety and situate us deep within Khudabaksh's subjectivity, without resorting to drama (Gallese & Guerra, 2019, p. 96). So why does this particular movement matter? This scene adds to our understanding of the alienation created by economic relations. As Khudabaksh must resort to performing and attracting attention to earn his living, he performs the role of a 'working person in the city' and is tired and humiliated as he is subjected to an objectification process.

In *The Empathic Screen*, Vittorio Gallese and Michelle Guerra address cinema and movement through neurosciences. By drawing on the study of mirror neurons, they posit a close relationship between the experience of watching the film in a cinema hall, calling it a "liberated embodied simulation". By bringing together neuroimaging and film viewing, they suggest that it is 'movement which permits articulation of meaning' (Gallese & Guerra, 2019, p. 6). According to them, "Embodied simulation is the foundation of human intersubjectivity in general, and empathy

in particular". Their argument teases the liberatory capabilities of cinema in which mirror neurons can be trained to generate empathy; they can be used to teach ourselves about the reality we live in, through the fictional worlds we conjure up on screen. They study the first impact in the cinema of the train pulling in at the station, which famously sent the audience running in all directions. The movement of the train produced 'visible motor reactions" thus showing how important "movement and its resonances are". Another example cited is of Hitchcock and his use of camera movement, which creates the overpowering sense of tension in his films (Gallese & Guerra, 2019, p. 58).

For Gallese and Guerra, film relies on the 'multimodality of the cinematographic experience'. This movement of the camera takes us deep into the subject's point of view; at the same time, it makes the spectator self-aware (Gallese & Guerra, 2019, p. 76). Furthermore, movement is not the only structural component of cinema that can elicit responses in the spectator, but the average spectator has a higher involvement if the intensity of camera movements is present (Gallese & Guerra, 2019, 91). In an experiment which examined the effects of watching a film taken with a still camera and one with movement, they found that motor activity in mirror neurons in people was at its highest when steadicam or dolly shots were used and was at its lowest when the shot utilised a still camera (Gallese & Guerra, 2019, p. 108).

In Kali Shalwar, when we see Anwari and Sultana walking through the old market areas, we follow the ladies on a y-axis, and then they turn a corner to come back again into the y-axis. This allows us spectators access to view a plethora of activities, shops, and craftsmen. It allows us to comprehend space in the city in a very different way from how the characters on screen experience it. In many of Sultana's interactions, we see her traversing through the space of the city as a *flaneuse,* but for us,it helps us see how little thought is given to urban planning in a city like Mumbai. Sultana's jaunts help us understand how a regressive societal structure, coupled with an exploitative economic base, can deny space to its workers. Neurologically speaking, these scenes with their carefully designed movements are able to help us think on a deeper and non-superficial level and they leave a deep impression on our minds.

4.7 Constructing a meticulous approach to sound

The soundscape in film can be defined as the cumulative amount of everything we hear on the audio. This includes ambient sounds, natural rhythms, musical interventions and noise. Fareeda Mehta's use of sound is an attempt at bringing the whole together on the soundtrack. This is in line with how her ethical stance of working-class life is deeply entwined with the aesthetic project that she pursues. Examples of this can be found everywhere in the film. When Mammad Bhai meets Manto to discuss the development of the script at the local bar, there is an entire conversation on the soundtrack where the woman who owns the bar complains and goads Mammad Bhai into getting rid of a person who has abused her daughter. This conversation spills for a moment onto the main conversation between Manto and him, but it is enough to emphasise that there is a world outside of that conversation.

Similarly, two scenes that explore the radical transformation of place in Kali Shalwaar are - the scene where Sultana begins flirting with Rajat Kapoor's character. Beginning with an establishing

crane shot, moving to a mid-length, we see Sultana to the left of the screen, stationary in her pistachio green, silky yellow and pink outfit as a monochrome blue shirt-wearing white collared worker walks in a straight line towards her. Immediately, we cut to a close-up tracking shot of Sultana's face as she moves sideways into the Indo-Gothic structure. We are then suddenly pulled into a full-length shot in which our characters are standing in the distance on the left, and Sultana makes her way around each pillar of the structure. As she moves through shafts of light and dark, we see her coquettishly attempting to serenade the hero of the scene, and she moves towards the camera. Next in a mid-length shot of the client as he sees the light glisten in her black hair while Sultana moves away from the camera. Suddenly, as she goes around the corner, the camera begins moving, first, left around the corner and then tracks the client running to catch his bus onto the street on the left. The scene closes with a long shot taken from the bus with Sultana in the distance. In this entire scene, there is a major scale pop that is used, and the song sounds very similar to a 90s popular score. This unusual choice for what could be called an 'art film' is deliberate and, on the surface, is a broader comment on how women are objectified in the popular cinema, but here the scene is imbued with feminine sensuality. The choice prevents a naturalised state of affairs from arising and utilises movement and space to convey so much about this possible encounter, by varying camera distances, utilising a dolly and framing the scene in such a manner that the clash of those colours mixed with the gestural body language of Sultana creates a series of encounters that imbue the scene with layers of meaning.

In a follow-up scene to when Khudabaksh has now become a part of the fakir's group, he is tasked with watching a seed. With no further instruction given from the teacher, he wanders around aimlessly, completely indifferent to the adjoining Malang gad hill fort. The hills look down upon him, a tiny figure dressed in a pale lavender coloured pathani suit. In the next shot, we see him walking past a group of locals playing cards. An afternoon game of chance is being played as he takes up a spot near them, but in solitude. As the electric guitar and a synthesiser playing saxophone play out. The music takes us on a different path. The next shot is a carefully designed three-plane medium-length shot, designed to emphasise the free rhythmic associations of the shot. Khudabaksh is in the foreground on the right, the card players on the left in the middle ground and finally the giant hills of Malang Gad in the centre background. These three are in one shot, encapsulating the entirety of the film. Man turns away from collective persuasions only to stare back at a seed (nature) in his palm. Even as nature continues to 'watch' him from all sides. Khudabaksh's subjectivity does not allow him to consider reaching out to others. On the ambient sound, we can hear a bird chirping, only for Khudabaksh to reveal in his palm the tiniest of seeds he has been asked to look at. We then finally revert to an emotionally painful moment for him as he ponders his life in the same three-plane shot. Eisenstein suggests that there are correspondences of different types between music and scene, in which they can come together. For example, "an object or a landscape which can be matched with a timbre in music" (Robertson, 2011, p. 146). Though not a rule, in his work with the composer, Prokofiev Eisenstein suggests other patterning possibilities. Be that the reason why this particular scene strikes out at us in so many different structural components, or we just see a very universalised figure of a man suffering, the landscape and the distant collection of people suggest a historical consciousness akin to how Oedipus seeks his future from the Oracle of Delphi.

In her exploration of the city, Sultana meets a young man who appears to have lost his bearings in conventional reality. Instead, he communicates only in code, action and sound. He comes up to Sultana and asks her to leave on the next train with her. Even as their interaction continues under the shade of some of the oldest trees in the Southern part of Mumbai, we hear a long conversation on the audio between two ladies of the working class who are discussing their lives. Not content to merely use their presence on the 'soundtrack', Fareeda even frames them from a distance that accommodates the primary characters along with the secondary characters.

It is not possible to go into the depths of the musical landscape of the film. The scene in which Mammad Bhai and Manto meet at a local bar benefits from the musical score that is given to his character. A complex blend of sounds, unusual synth textures, distorted electric guitar, slap bass and drum programming that can be described as between techno and punk. And an added layer is the major lighting colour contrasts of Red and Green that are used to demarcate space and create major zones of intersection between the differences and 'danger' present in such spaces in the city.

Similarly, when Sultana is rummaging through her trunk, we hear an accordion that transitions into a synthesiser that first plays Raga Yaman and moves into a combination of new age and smooth jazz, only to then once again move into a melody on the electric bass. Thus, even with music, space is being constructed on the soundscape of the city. For example, the use of Anwari singing "Yeh Hai Bambai Meri Jaan" from CID (1956). Fareeda also uses music as a structural component by which she can imbue a historical consciousness into her characters. The music at several spaces in the film goes against an expressive dramaturgy, raising broader comments about technology and the instruments used to produce that music.

4.8 The dialectics of the spiritual and the material

Mehta never attempts to veil the fundamental conflict between capital and labour; she does not obscure Sultana's retreat to the private, away from the social. Christopher Caudwell sees the individual retreat as a 'fundamentally social process represented as individual' (DeFazio, 2011, p. 138). When it appears that Mukthar is better off, we are reminded that she is deceived by Shankar. The market forces affect all the working classes alike. The "commodity relations have coded" this apparent retreat to the personal as private.

The film explores the dialectical relation between the material conditions of the city and urban experience and inquires into the relation between the human senses' cultivated orientation toward individual consumption. This is explored through the relation of imaging technology in the character Khudabaksh to his complete collapse into mysticism when he is unable to find the real reasons for his precarity. The labyrinth created by capitalism in which even the tiniest of spaces can be used as makeshift tables for a game of chess, the urban is a series of both formal and informal spaces, "different localities, mohallas, wadis and gullies, bazaars, factories, mills and other workplaces" (Legg, 2014, p. 74).

Several characters we encounter in the film are located on the street. The eunuch who throws a pink ribbon at the police officer like a bolt of lightning is endearing and poetic, whereas Sugandhi, who is always chastised by one of her clients, is well-dressed and taking care of herself. The lonely

man who sits at a bar and eagerly looks for someone, maybe a wife, a lover, a child, is constantly drinking away. The misery of the working-class life is not associated with a diminished existence; in fact, it is surviving, like many of the people who come here and remain in the fabric of the city, unfettered yet trapped. The *Moholla* is the smallest possible unit of community in many Indian cities. They were not homogeneous units but fairly heterogeneous in their caste and religious compositions(Legg, 2014, p. 82).

In the film, we do not see a certain stereotype of a Muslim; we do not see a particular type of muslim that is singled out for their religious identity. Only when Muharram starts to become a fixation for Sultana do we become aware of such questions of identity. Throughout the film, we see all shades of working-class people; at times, we even see a challenge posed to the orthodox mindset in the film. As detailed earlier, the music of the film draws from specific instances of popular culture while completely rewriting them for us to produce disruptions and interruptions that prevent a perfect representation from arising. As Brecht suggested, such interruptions point to a 'series of contradictions that cannot be verbalised'. Instead, the spectator is left to ponder (Koutsourakis, 2018, p. 29).

In particular, a scene that continues the exploration of the epic form and transforms public space in the city. What begins as a conventional love story is transformed in a matter of minutes. The beginning of the scene is focused on the mechanic shop, where Shankar works. In the scene, the anchoring colour is blue, it is the colour of Shankar's shirt, it is the colour of the car bonnet, it is the colour being spray painted in a track shot, it is the colour of the little boys hat and in a powerful three plane framing, we see an emphasis on blue suddenly in the background - Mukhtar's *riyaz* . But we see Shankar and the boy in the foreground, the roofs of the mechanic shop and Mukthar's gallery, on which she spreads her pallu in yellow, red and the one she has is green. Then, in a shot located between a granary storehouse and other storage spaces and trucks, we see Mukthar being led by Shankar across a patch of water, even as the cameraman walks behind them. On the audio, a strike of lightning and a peacock's call. The atmosphere is suggestive of Raga Malhar, a pre-monsoon melody and in the miniature painting tradition, the peacock features visually as a bird of sensuality (MET, n.d.). In a matter of minutes, we are lifted away from the mundane, material reality and transported almost magically to another space, through the use of colour, movement and sound. Just as we wait for a further abstraction to take us away from this material reality, Mehta drags us back into the lifting of oversized sacks of grain by workers. As part of the same shot, we see a low-lit godown in which the workers continue their work, even as magical love happens around them.

The song sequence in which we hear the Qawwali, "*Naina Moray*". We are introduced to this scene first through a mid-length shot, which becomes a full-length shot as Sultana dresses up and gets ready to dye her clothes. She dresses in green and blue and wraps up her white clothes, which will go on to become the Kali Shalwar of the story. But she traverses that space in a medium-length shot in which we track her movements diagonally, as she is in profile and so at an angle, we see what is in her background as she walks. As spectators, we are subject to a very intense form of music that details the departure of a beloved. But we see several rooms in which people are engaged in labour-intensive work of dyeing. Eventually, she hands her garment over, and in an extreme close-up of her eyes, we see her closing them inward. As a form of 'acceptance'. Finally, we see the source of the music, as we are taken on another diagonal at a dargah where the Qawalii

singers are singing and women of the working class are feverishly praying for their deepest needs. The scene ends with a shot of a bulbous blue tiled dome framed in half, as an eagle flies by. Like most Sufi texts, the lyrics of the Qawwali detail a lover separated and in intense desire to reunite with the divine or the lover. Such works are common, and Sufis were known to have merged the material realities of labour into a merging with the spiritual or the divine, particularly with the skilled trades through song. This material union is never emphasised, particularly by scholars who see such songs as either metaphors for the beloved or the divine.

4.9 Conclusion

In Marx's analysis of the working day, he relies on the abstraction of the structures of capitalism, rather than the perception (direct experience). One reason for this was that Marx found the structures of capitalism to veil these forms of exploitation and to make wage labour appear as 'fair' (DeFazio, 2011, p. 105). Similarly, Sultana's journey appears abstract but she is reunited with her beloved in the material form of the Kali Shalwar. By focusing on the abstract structures of the city, Fareeda follows the line of filmmakers who are deeply engaged with the epic and the dialectical materialist form. She realises the work of Manto in a radically different manner than the way Manto had envisioned the city. Manto's characters had to deal with the anxiety of a new nation ravaged by the partition of India.. Mehta's characters have to deal with the anxiety of a neoliberal capitalist project and growing communal politics of urban spaces in India. So how does Mehta interrogate the spaces created by Manto further? By bringing in the author in the film, she can bring out the irony, pathos and the comedic, without ever losing sight of the crushing day-to-day life that these characters experience.

In the essay, I have demonstrated how the structural components of film can fundamentally transform a literary piece by reordering and reorienting space. Even as it dips into 'magical' moments experienced by the working class and the marginalised within that class, it can show us that the material relations of society deeply influence the decisions taken by so many characters in the film. The film brings disparate sequences together by rearranging the city into an endless labyrinth through the use of colour, movement, music, sound, gesture, and textile.

The structural, particularly through cutting-edge scientific studies on movement and colour in film, shows us that these have far greater impact on our nervous systems than previously thought. The epic form and its structural uses provide us with a deeper understanding of the relationship between the universalised object on screen and our own subjective experiences. The structure can be thought of as layers in the film, and by imbuing each layer with historical meaning, it points to the possibilities of meaning that extend beyond the cumulative sum of its parts.

Acknowledgement

A special thanks to Sairandhri, Shwetant, Swabha, Rounak, Aashini, Avijit Mukul Kishore and Fareeda Mehta, without whose inputs and feedback I would not have been able to complete this essay.

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