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978-1-107-11721-1 - Fantasy of Modernity Romantic Love in Bombay Cinema of the 1950s

Aarti Wani

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## Fantasy of Modernity

Romantic love overwhelms 1950s Bombay cinema. Love and romance is evident in the themes, lyrics and visual aesthetics of films of the period, as it is in the publicity and gossip surrounding films and film stars. Love in cinema becomes significant when social reality constrains its quotidian experience and expression. By bringing a spectacular imagination of love to centre stage, the 1950s cinema deflected anxieties of 'Indianness' even as the new aesthetic and affect of romance offered an alternative engagement with the contradictions of modernity. This book explores the films, the songs, the stars and the extra-cinematic discourse of the period to read love and romance as its most productive trope that mobilized a dynamic and contested public sphere.

**Aarti Wani** teaches at Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune, India. She is the founding co-editor and presently lead editor of the international peer-reviewed journal *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*. Her research interests include Hindi and Marathi cinema, literary criticism, culture studies, gender and modernity.

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## Acknowledgements

**B**ombay cinema of the 1950s has had a special place in our cinematic consciousness. If its black and white magic, the timeless allure of its songs, the charm of its stars, seem unparalleled and the cause of popular nostalgia, it is also the decade that has been pivotal to film studies' early engagement with Hindi cinema. Often considered foundational, the 1950s set the tone in terms of the themes, stories, music, forms and formulae that were to find currency through the later decades. Certain iconic films like *Awara*, *Pyasa* and *Devdas* that continue to be remembered and revisited in popular as well as scholarly writings give the period a certain gravitas as well as colour our perception of this cinematic moment as socially engaged and invested in the production of national identity. Indeed, it was this received understanding that drew me to the 1950s as it framed my initial engagement with the period. Soon, however, as I gradually delved into the fifties; the films, songs, stardom and the extra-cinematic discourse, I was struck by its extraordinary investment in romantic love, leading to an exhilarating discovery of some of the neglected and possibly subversive aspects of the cinema culture of the time.

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