Female Flanerie in Indian Cinematic Space

Urban Allegories of the Kotha

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Abstract

The flaneur is a figure of perception and an embodiment of liberation in the metropolis - an uninhibited spectator of the city, seeking the pleasures of its indulgent atmospheres and basking in the vibrancy of its unfolding urban life. However, this simple, cognitive engagement with the urban realm is reserved for male authorship, where the basic human requirements of time, space and leisure are gendered. The male flaneur defies the scrutiny of the public gaze, unperturbed by the fears of assault and societal convention while enjoying the luxuries of idleness in the midst of a bustling street. On the contrary, the female flaneur is obscured, her space and time in the city compromised at the behest of patriarchal constructs. Where is her space in the city? How does she reclaim her ownership of the urbanscape?

Moved by the question of female flanerie in the metropolis, this essay delves into the idiosyncratic realm of the *kotha* - a spatial typology that emerged in the Indian subcontinent during the Mughal rule around the 16th Century. The *kotha* was similar to a salon, where women (known as *tawaifs* or salon ladies) adept in the arts of dance and music, would perform for elite and royal male patrons. Being a dedicated space of performance embedded in the city's fabric, the *kotha* oscillated between the public and private realms, never fully belonging to either. Through the changing socio-political condition of India across its colonial, post colonial and contemporary eras, the *kotha*, just like the metropolis, has undergone a shift in identity and spatial expression - thereby mirroring the condition of the female flaneur, now embodied by the *tawaif*. Interestingly, the *kotha* has time and again been a subject of interest in South Asian visual media culture, particularly represented through its cinematic space.

Therefore, tapping into my own fascination for South Asian cinema and drawing on the spatio-corporeal realm of the *kotha* as a specific case, this paper seeks to unearth the greater question of women's space in the city - their modalities of expression, their reclamation of citizenship and above all, their personification of the flaneur - a figure of perception and an embodiment of liberation in the metropolis.

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<u>Introduction</u>

Flânerie : aimless or idle quality or state (Flânerie Definition & Meaning, n.d.)

The description of a city, as per Walter Benjamin in *Return of the Flaneur (1929)*, can be addressed through the eyes of two kinds of subjects - the first being the native and the other, the outsider. Benjamin argues that the outsider engages only with the superficial pretext of the city - the exotic and the picturesque. On the contrary, one imagines that a native's method of describing his city would stem from a more intimate and personal space - a journey into the past. He goes on to describe the memoir-like quality of what such an exploration of the metropolis would constitute, using Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* (1929) as a precedent. Hessel does not describe the city, but *narrates* it and in this way, what becomes of the city is an endless spectacle of flanerie (Benjamin, 2005, pp. 262-263).The specific narrative approach lends Hessel an opportunity to consume Berlin in its completeness, and in turn, he himself is consumed by it. In this way, Hessel somewhat appropriates Benjamin's perspective of the native flaneur.

Similarly, Benjamin's other kind of flanerie - that of the foreigner - has been explored, for example, by Italo Calvino in *Invisible Cities (1978)*. Calvino's protagonist Marco Polo embodies the foreign flaneur in his explorations of Kubali Khan's expanding empire (Calvino, 1978). Polo is the outsider, yet his journeys conjure up both his memory and imagination, transcending the superficial and picturesque encounters expected from Benjamin's ideated persona of the outsider.

In a way, regardless of the nature of the flaneur, as a native or a foreigner, both Benjamin and Calvino speak of the city as an *indulgence* -

The above arguments are reiterated in Anke Gleber's *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar culture (1999)* where she articulates -

"Since the nineteenth century, flanerie has not only been the privilege of a bourgeois, educated, white, and affluent middle-class but also, above all, has remained a luxury of male society" (Gleber, 1999, pp. 171-189).

As Gleber argues, the flaneur is a figure of perception (Mazumdar, 2007, p. 92) - a freely walking, uninhibited spectator of the urban realm. The flaneur roams freely in the pursuit of the modern city, taking pleasure in the sights, sounds and smells of the daily humdrum. Gleber goes on to argue that in the western societal structure of power and domination, even the basic human requirements of leisure, time and space are gendered. Therefore, moving through public spaces naturally emerges (almost) always as a gendered practice reserved for male authorship. The male pedestrian is neither restricted by anxiety nor intimidated by the fears of assault, convention or modesty (Gleber, 1999, pp. 171-172).The flaneur thus - in this simple cognitive act of perception - is by default, a male.

Building on this idea of "The art of taking a walk" or loitering as a predominantly male privilege, I aim to question what constitutes the framework of the woman's proprietorship of the complete urban realm - not only in the form of streetscapes and public spaces, but also in the form of semi-public and private domains which together form the totality of the city.
Is the woman's space in the metropolis hidden? What have been her portals to the outside world? What must it take for her to have equal proprietorship of the city? Or, what enables her to express herself unabashedly in the urban realm despite the male gaze?

The constructs of domination and power in the city do not only hold true for western society, but are equally prevalent in South Asian culture and are often reflected through its cinematic space. Moreover, a peculiar narrative that intrigues me within South Asian cinematic representation is that of the *kotha* or salon, a recurring architectural typology which was traditionally used as a space of performance by women for the entertainment of elite and royal male patrons, as early as the the 16th century Mughal rule in the Indian subcontinent (Iyer, 2020).

The imaginary architecture of cinema is a historiography in itself. A so-called screen architecture demonstrates the way people attach notions and their own interpretations of the lived space (Jacobs, 2007, p.10). The architecture of the screen therefore becomes a tool that transcends the physical bounds of space and time, articulating histories of worlds both lived as well as imagined. Therefore, I aim to use films as a medium of research, putting to test the idea of the *female* flaneur in the context of the *kotha*. While both Gleber and Ranjini Mazumdar touch upon the concept of female flanerie in cinematic space, its analysis through a predominantly architectural lens seems rather obscure, particularly in the context of Indian cinema as well as the domain of the *kotha* exclusively, which opens up possibilities for a new exploration and literary contribution.

India served as a colony of the British Raj between the mid 18th century and until its independence and partition in 1947. Amidst these political shifts and changing eras, the woman's narrative also underwent considerable upheaval, including the women of the *kotha*. Meanwhile, post- colonial periods, particularly around the 1970's saw a surge of urban women's protest movements stemming from social evils such as dowry, which in turn reflected now on the woman' position as educated and somewhat independent (Sangari & Vaid, 2014).

Some of these discussions have been encapsulated by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid in their Anthology, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History (2014)*, with essays which question the inter-relation of patriarchal practices and marginalisation of women with political economy, religion, law and culture. On the other hand, Sumanta Banerjee introduces "the upper class English educated *Bhadramahila*" (Banerjee, 2014) while Usha Iyer explores the architectural and social space of the "Dancing Woman" (Iyer, 2020) across the 1900's. While some of these discourses address the Indian woman broadly, they are nevertheless crucial in understanding the greater picture before directing my study towards the woman of the *kotha*. Therefore, I seek to keep these commentaries as sources of historiographical relevance which will time and again tie in with my analysis.

With this changing landscape of power and authority over the colonial and post colonial periods, how did the shift in national identity impact the urban-architectural space of citizenship and participation for the obscure *tawaif*[1] *(*woman of the *kotha)* as the female flaneur?

As a response to this question, I seek to trace the origins and development of female flanerie through films set in India's colonial, post-colonial and contemporary periods and particularly based on the spatial domain of the *kotha*. Considering the female flaneur as the central character

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[1] *Tawaif* is a term for the woman of the *kotha* - sometimes referring to a courtesan who is a performing artiste, other times referring to prostitutes. Since the female flaneur has donned the specific role of the woman of the *kotha* in this essay, the terms flaneur, tawaif and *mujrewali* should be read as synonymous to one another.

navigating her way through the changing Indian metropolis, I wish to narrate and discover how her space of expression has changed amidst India's changing socio-political identity, and what that may entail for the future of her space in the modern metropolis.The flaneur dons different characters and roles through this journey, which leads her to experience the *kotha* as well as the changing metropolis in different ways and through varied spatial contexts.

Has the independence of the nation and its thriving modernity paved the way for her unhindered expression?

Possibly, the potential discoveries and awareness stemming from this research can become tools to paint a new cinematography or imagery of women's space in today's modern world, within the domain of the *kotha* and otherwise, regardless of borders and territories.

The essay is structured in three chapters, where each chapter comprises a selection of one or two films, ranging from the colonial to postcolonial to contemporary eras. Although dealing with different socio-political contexts, these films are tied together through the common and predominant spatial typology of the *kotha*/salon and its contemporary forms like the brothel, normally depicted through the films' cinematography and narrative. Looking at the same spatial typology through a dynamic range of films will equip me with the possibility of analysing the flaneur's experiences of the *kotha* across time, political and socio-cultural phenomena.

Next to the discourses discussed earlier and photographs of film stills as a means of analysis, I seek to use the technique of the montage, similar to miniature paintings as a further substantiation of my arguments (See Fig. 0). Miniature paintings originated in the Indian subcontinent from Persian influence as a means of storytelling and documenting important moments in history. They possess the unique quality of representing space and its narrative, through a non-perspective and flattened drawing which often lacked spatial depth. In doing so, sometimes the plan, section and elevation of the space converged within the framework of a singular representative image, highlighting each detail in equal measure. The lack of spatial depth worked in favour of the painter, who could now depict even the most distant objects as distinctly as objects in the foreground. Therefore, using this technique as a starting point will enable me to narrate the story of not only the film, but also of the flaneur and her space in an illustrative manner.

Due to a lack of archival material on the set designs of these films, I seek to use the film itself as a primary source for my drawings and therefore, the representations are not necessarily accurate in measurements and dimensions but instead, strive to capture an interpreted essence of the space and its elements - a methodology previously adopted by Steven Jacob in *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock (2007)*.

Fig. 1 : Emperor Babur receives a courtier by Farrukh Baig (*Lecture Series: Devlet and Divan: Mystical and State Authorities in Early Modernity | Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies*, n.d.)

The first chapter discusses the flaneur as a dancing courtesan during the colonial period. The *kothas* and salons of this time hold an interesting space in the metropolis, where they are neither completely public, nor exclusively private - as encapsulated by Iyer in a chapter of the same title, these spaces are "Dance architectures of public intimacy" (Iyer, 2020, p. 68). The chapter first traces the origins of the courtesan and *kotha*, understanding its historical relevance in the colonial context, after which the *kotha* is explored through the lens of two films - Umrao Jaan (1981) by Muzzafar Ali and Devdas (2002) by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, both set in the late nineteenth century Indian subcontinent.

Fig. 2 Umrao Jaan (1981)   (Verma, 2021)

The second chapter delves into the transformation of the *kotha* after India's independence in 1947 and the advent of modernisation and globalisation in the Indian metropolis. There is a focus on understanding first, the positioning of women in general and subsequently, the case of the *tawaif* (courtesan) during this period of shifting political stance, thereby analysing how this shifting dynamic translated into the architecture of the modern *kotha*. How did the *kotha* represent the female flaneur? How did she now experience the metropolis? This chapter seeks to answer these questions through the case of Gangubai Kathiawadi (2022) directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali and set in the modern India of the 1960s.

The third and final chapter deals with more current discussions on the *kotha*, which is now synonymous with a brothel, rather than being a space where the courtesan would showcase her artistry. In this contemporary world of shifting images and an explosion of visual and auditory stimuli in the form of photo, video, radio, news, signage and advertisement, the metropolis is imploding into a billion miniscule fragments of spaces. Within this proliferating spatial and urban condition, the *kotha* is obscure and so is the flaneur. How then is its space found? How does the flaneur find her presence in the gargantuan metropolis? Drawing from Ravi Sundaram's discussions of the "non-space" (Sundaram, 2010, p. 241) in major metropolitan cities and Mazumdar's theoretical corroborations on the issue of the urban crisis in the new gangland metropolis, this chapter uses the case of Talaash (2012) by Reema Kagti as an investigation of the neo-noir Bombay and attempts to locate the obscure flaneur within the nocturnal city.

Chapter 1

The kotha of the Mujrewalis

Introduction to the kotha

The _kotha_ or salon represents a recurring, key architectural typology in Hindi and regional cinema - particularly as a domain that is predominantly female centric. The _kotha_ has been explored extensively in the Indian cinematic space, with its earliest representations in the cinema of the 40's and 50's to its more recent depictions in contemporary film genres such as psychological and political thrillers. However, regardless of the vast array of films and storylines that encompass this spatial typology, what almost always emerges as a focal point in any of its depictions is the story of its primary inhabitant - the courtesan or _tawaif_ (the woman of the _kotha_) - and her space of performance or _mehfil._ As described by Iyer :

The space of the _kotha_ hosts the event of the _mehfil_ where a paying audience (almost always composed of men) is seated on three sides of a room, the musicians on the fourth, and the female _tawaif_ or courtesan dances in the middle. The dancing body of the _tawaif_, her gestures, and movement vocabulary belong to and are indeed defined by the characteristics of this architectural environment and the arrangement of bodies within this space (Iyer, 2020, p.68)

The _kotha_ therefore, is a layered and complex spatial domain - it is an architectural environment, a social space and a performance space all at once (Bhaskar, 2022). The courtesan's dance and performance zone form its core, while the remainder of the space is peripheral, facilitating not only social interaction amidst its users (elite male patrons), but also the opportunity to gaze and spectate.The tawaif typically dances in a central square or rectangular space, performing in sitting, standing, and supine postures, directing her attention to each member of the male audience by turn through eye gestures, hand movements, and by dancing up to them (Iyer, 2020, p.69).

Fig 3 : A still from Pakeezah (1972) depicting the _mehfil_ of the _tawaif_ (Amrohi, n.d.)

Before delving into the intricacies and affordances of this architectural space of the flaneur - who now embodies the role of the cinematic *tawaif*, it is crucial to understand the historical origins of the relationship between courtesan and the *kotha*. How did this spatial typology come into existence and what was its evolutionary path?

Origins

The origin of courtesans dates back to Vedic times (1000 BC), where their classification varied from those who provided sexual services (*Vesya*) to temple dancers (*Devadasi*) to the refined salon lady or *mujrewali*[2] , who was a connoisseur of the literary, theatrical and musical arts (Jhala, 2016, p. 106). Reflecting on this categorization of the various kinds of courtesans, one may immediately assume that the performance arts were reserved only for women. However, historically, the foremost artistes of the *Kathak*[3] dance - a precursor to the courtesan's *mujra* dance - were actually all men. As noted by Mohan Khokar in his discussion of the history and origins of *Kathak*, Women's place in the realm of Kathak existed, but was of a different order. They were known as *nach-walis*, or nautch girls, and their dance was called *nach* or nautch (Khokar, 1984 in Bhaskar, 2022)

The *nach* or nautch eventually became the *mujra or* court dance, and finds its origins in the Mughal era. With the advent of the Mughal empire between the 16th and 19th centuries, Persian influence was rendered visible not only in art and architecture, but also in the form of dance, music and performance arts. The tradition of the *mujra* dance therefore came into being, when there was a wholesale importation of dancing-girls from Persia, for the entertainment of the pleasure-seeking rulers. Khokar stresses that the girls eventually began performing the traditional *Kathak* in their own styles and interpretations, which, while retaining the basic graces of the art, directed itself towards sensualism and the dancers came to be characterised as women of easy virtue (Khokar, 1984 in Iyer, 2020).

However, it was not until the early nineteenth century decline of the mughal empire that the *mujra* gained prominence outside of the King's court, marking its own territory and creating an exclusive architectural environment for its expression. During this period of declining political autonomy, smaller kingdoms and feudal orders plagued the subcontinent. Without a monarchical order, scattered princely states turned into epicentres of *tawaif* or courtesan culture, where elite and princely men would enjoy extravagant lifestyles and spend their wealth on entertainment. With wealth from feudal tax collection and inheritance at their disposal, these patrons indulged in gambling, drinking and visiting *kothas* as a nightly ritual.

From an architectural standpoint, the design of the *kotha* was therefore tailored to suit this lifestyle of ease and indulgence. With the inflow of money from elite patrons, a rich and ornamental interior was made possible. As a consequence, the *kotha* began to embody a sense of grandeur and luxury, not only in its stylistic expression and ornamentation but also in its spatial configuration which

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[2] Mujrewali derives from the word *Mujra - A* rendition of the kathak dance form which was performed by courtesans *; Mujre-wali - A* female who performs the *mujra.*
[3] *Kathak* is a traditional Indian dance form. In Sanskrit literature, the name of the dance denotes a form of storytelling where the *Kathak* would be a storyteller who narrates the *katha* or story through posture, mime and expression (Walker, 2016)

allowed the spectators to sit in a relaxed and casual manner while having an unhindered view of the performing *tawaif*. What is ironic is that the ornamental and spatial qualities of the *kotha*, which came into existence primarily as a space of the artiste and her art, inadvertently transformed into a reflection of its audience's whims, fancies and lifestyle choices.

Case 1 : Umrao Jaan's kotha

An accurate depiction of the *kotha* culture and spatial realm during the early nineteenth century is visible in Muzzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jaan* (1981) - an adaptation of the Urdu novel *Umrao Jaan Ada (1889)* written by Mirza Hadi Ruswa and based on the story of *a* courtesan in Lucknow, which was a prominent epicentre of *tawaif* culture during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The plot follows the story of a young teenage girl Amiran, who is kidnapped from her hometown in Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh and sold to a brothel in Lucknow. The madam of the brothel is Khanum Jaan, who trains her to be a proficient artiste of dance and classical music in order to lure wealthy and aristocratic clientele. Amiran is renamed Umrao Jaan (played by the actress Rekha).
The narrative of the film explores the dichotomy of the Umrao's life as a *tawaif*, who on one hand exhibits a shy and pensive persona as an avid poetess, while on the other, is a popular courtesan revered publicly for her unparalleled performative talents and outstanding beauty.
In a famous song sequence of the film, Umrao makes her first public appearance in the *mehfil* as she performs for the nobility and elite men of Lucknow. As described by Angma Dey Jhala in *Royal Patronage, Power and Aesthetics in Princely India :*

[she] enters the stage in a haze of ivory, emerald and gold. The men recline on satin cushions and bolsters laid out upon silk persian carpets, surrounded by silver candelabra and crystal chandeliers. They wrap themselves up in fine cashmere shawls, while enjoying sweets, paan (betel nut) and the delights of the hookah. The Urdu *ghazal* [4] she sings, invokes love, desire and the divine as her body dances the *mujra* of longing (Jhala, 2016, p.106).

Fig 4 : Visuals of Umrao's performance (Screen capture)   Fig. 5 : Seated men gaze upon Umrao (screen capture)

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[4] *Ghazal* : Originally an Arabic verse form dealing with loss and romantic love, mediaeval Persian poets embraced the ghazal, eventually making it their own. Consisting of syntactically and grammatically complete couplets, the form also has an intricate rhyme scheme. In the Persian tradition, each couplet was of the same meter and length, and the subject matter included both erotic longing and religious belief or mysticism (*Ghazal*, n.d.)
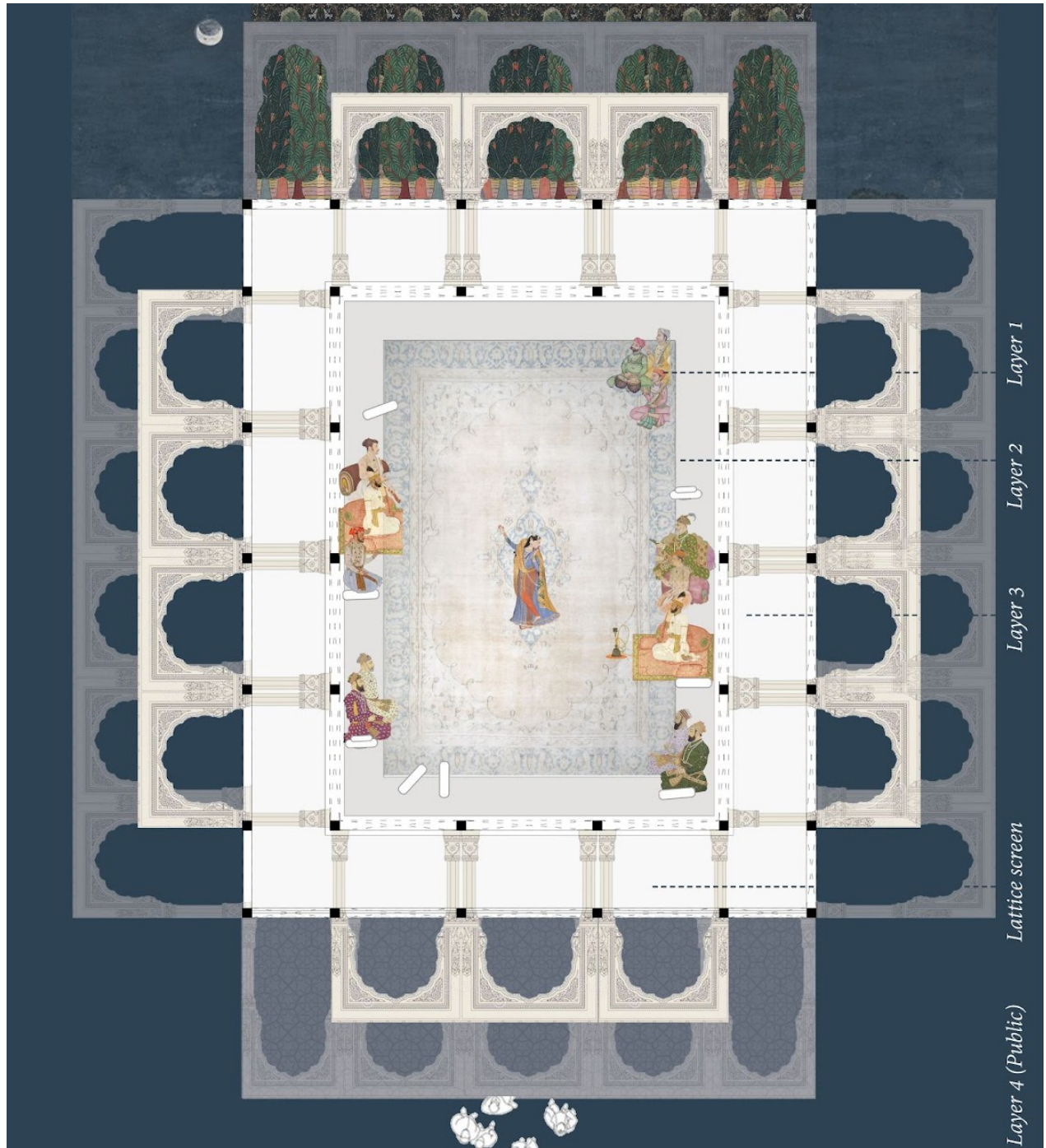
Fig. 6 - Interpretative plan drawing of Umrao's *kotha* (Credits : Author)

Layer 1

Layer 2

Layer 3

Lattice screen

Layer 4 (Public)

Returning to the interio-spatial analysis of the *kotha*, its opulence and grandeur are immediately noticeable. The interior is embellished with ornamental mughal arches and lattice screens around a rectangular room where Umrao takes centre stage. Umrao's spatio-corporeal realm however, is a point of contradiction - on one hand her movements and bodily gestures are free and fluid, yet the persian carpet beneath her feet becomes an invisible threshold, the boundaries of which she cannot cross. This demonstrates that the *kotha* is a layered space, with the *tawaif* in the centre, the realm of the spectators offsetted around her and a final enveloping layer of the arched walkway (Fig. 6). What lies beyond the arches is not discernable in the film's visuals and stills. Yet, the lattice work on the southern end of the room (Fig. 4 & 6) hints at the possibility of the street or public space beyond. There is a possibility that the lattice screen allows the passersby to partially encounter the happenings of the interior. This design could also be seen as an attempt to invite street participation, such that the passerby or potential customer is tempted and lured in by partial, veiled visuals and resounding sounds. The act of spectating and watching, which is enjoyed by the Umrao's male patrons, is also momentarily granted to the viewer in a cinematographic composition where a dancing Umrao is framed by the three arches (Fig 4). Just as a commodity displayed in a shop-window, she is now also displayed and presented to the audience viewing the film.
Initially, one can easily assume that Umrao's performance is exclusive to the elite gentry. Yet, the semi-veiled nature of the *kotha* indicates otherwise. Was it truly intended to be exclusive and private? If this was the case, why then, was the *tawaif* forbidden from performing in the private homes and courts of these men? Why then was there a dedicated spatial condition for such performances?

It is ironic that in its architecture and configuration, the *kotha* overtly dedicates itself to its primary elite patrons - seemingly enveloping a private performance, but with a more keen observation, the architectural layers hint at a semi-public nature of the space that teases broader encounters, continuing to advertise itself to a larger public audience.

This semi-public and somewhat consumerist nature of the *kotha* can perhaps be understood better from a socio-political standpoint. In the context of India's gradually shifting economy during colonial rule, from agrarian to metropolitan, cities were densifying. With this densification came the perils of consumerism, and this consumerism soon began to plague not only material goods but also human and societal domains. Therefore, the commodification of the female body emerged as a direct result of the technologies of urban life, mass consumption and commodified entertainments which restructured perceptual and experiential contexts (Swanson, 1995, p.81).

Case 2 : Chandramukhi's kotha

This consumerist nature of the *kotha* and its commodified enterprise is reiterated in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Devdas (2001) and his commentary and portrayal of the courtesan culture in late nineteenth century Bengal. The film is an adaptation of Sarat Chandra Upadhyay's romance novel by the same name, written in 1917. Devdas narrates the story of the titular character (played by Shah Rukh Khan) belonging to an elite *zamindar* (Land owners and tax collectors) family in British Calcutta (Now Kolkata) and his childhood sweetheart Paro (played by Aishwarya Rai), who belongs to a lower caste. On being unable to marry Paro owing to his father's disapproval, Devdas leaves home and

gives in to a life of alcoholism and *tawaif* culture, following his friend Chunni Babu (Jackie Shroff) to a *kotha*. It is then, that he meets the dynamic *tawaif* Chandramukhi (Madhuri Dixit), and their worlds collide. Chandamukhi is shown to be popular, not only in her craft of dance and music, but also in her unparalleled beauty. Yet, similar to Umrao, she craves the purity and divinity of true love, which she begins to witness in her growing fondness for Devdas.

At the time, Calcutta was flourishing as another epicentre of tawaif culture, owing to the bourgeoisie feudal lords who embodied the materialistic culture of the consumerist economy. With money at their disposal, patrons indulged in being entertained at the *kotha* by *mujrewalis* (mujra dancers), often showering the *kotha* with extravagant gifts. As a result, the *kotha*'s aesthetic and opulence reflected this incoming wealth, which is substantiated effectively in Devdas.
As discussed by Neelam Shridhar Wright in *Bollywood and Postmodernism: Popular Indian Cinema in the 21st Century (2005),* the aesthetic quality of Devdas as a film, bears resemblance to the ornamental detail of miniature paintings where there is a layering of far-off views and objects in the foreground - both appearing at focal point (Wright, 2015, p.158) and in detail, which is noticeably visible in Chandramukhi's *kotha* shots.

Chandramukhi's *kotha* is of palatial virtue - several fountains line its entrance, as it appears to be a hexagonal pavilion floating in the middle of a lake. As visible in Fig. 8, the *kotha* forms a segment of the multitudinous brothels that stretch along the water body, lighting up the nocturnal Calcutta.The interiors are visually striking, with a similar vocabulary of aesthetic elements as in the case of Umrao Jaan - gargantuan crystal chandeliers and candelabra, heavily ornamented columns in what appears to be sandstone and instead of a carpet, a *rangoli*[5] patterned floor that demarcates the performance space (Fig. 7 & 9). Around the patterned floor line the carpets and cushions for the spectators on five sides, while the sixth houses the musicians and the madam of the brothel (Fig. 7). What is particularly distinctive about this set up is its explicit openness to the surroundings in terms of the facade (Fig.10). The facade does not exist, it instead manifests itself in a series of columns that hold the structure, with silk curtains as the only thresholds of privacy. These curtains however, remain open during Chandramukhi's performance sequences, reiterating the idea of an advertised and fetishised view to the public realm. As argued before, here, there is an evident ambiguity in the nature of the *kotha* as exclusively private or public. Instead, it oscillates within the public-private realm where the *tawaif* is marginalised to a commodity on display.

The roof of the *kotha* in this case is a dome, possibly an employment of acoustic techniques and to simultaneously lend a sense of grandeur. Many such domes seem to line the background of the *kotha* as seen in Fig. 8, which are reminiscent of hybrid forms of british and *bangaldar*[6] roof typologies.
In another shot, it is clearly visible that there is a deliberate attempt to blur the boundary between the inside and the outside where small water bodies and fountains dot the interior spaces (Fig.11). The *kotha* in its organisation is hypocritical - the public may enter the private domain of the *tawaif*, both

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[5] *Rangoli*: A traditional Indian intricate geometrical pattern art often made with powdered colours during festivities.
[6] *Bangaldar* roof: A curved roof form, resembling the Bengali thatched roof (Sachdeva & Tillotson, 2002, p.187)

visually and physically, but if and when the tawaif enters the city space, she threatens it with her "dangerous sexuality" (Doane 1991: 263 in Swanson, 1995, p. 83) The essence of this argument is echoed in Swanson's description of the feminine in the city as -

.. a conception that the feminine and public life are antipathetic. Women are perceived as intruding in the public spaces of city life when they use them as a domain of social presence.

Thus, coming back to Iyer's arguments, the *kotha* is as public as it is private or as encapsulated in the title of her essay, *kothas* are "Dance architectures of public intimacy" (Iyer, 2020, p. 68)

Fig. 7 - Top view of Chandramukhi's *kotha* (Screen capture)

Fig. 8 - Exterior view of the *kotha* (Screen capture)

Fig. 9 - Chandramukhi performs in the *mehfil* (Screen capture)

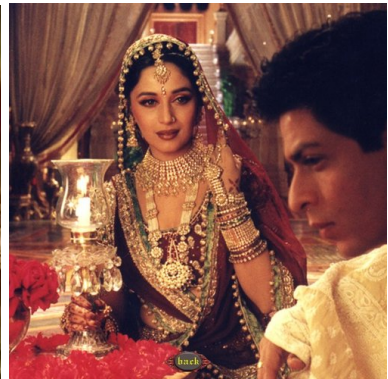Fig. 10a - A layering of facades & the public realm beyond (capture)

Fig. 10b - Chandramukhi & Devdas (Source: HT)

Fig. 11 - Imagery of the *kotha* interior (Screen capture)

Chapter 2

The kotha of new India

The post colonial period, starting from 1947 and until the 1980's saw a reunification of scattered princely states and a dissolution of autonomous feudal (*zamindari*) systems, which were now reinstated under the common political and legislative framework of a constitution. India was now positioning itself as a democratic power in the global sphere which also meant that there was a shift in attitude towards modernity and the modern metropolis, now liberated from the behest of colonial domination. However, it is important to clarify that the condition of post-coloniality was not a harbinger of modernity in the newly formed nation, instead "a modern consciousness" (Chatterjee, 1993, p.135) was already brewing within the middle and upper class societies during the late nineteenth century (colonial period), particularly with regard to the positioning of women in society. The post colonial condition therefore brought with itself, a *fruition* of this effervescent modern consciousness.

Modernity is often associated with progress, with positive change and a sense of liberation. Yet, in the context of an independent, "new" Indian woman, modernity's progressive influence proved to be rather problematic. Citing an essay written by Bankimchandra - the most eminent literary figure in Bengal in the late nineteenth century - Partha Chatterjee highlights this problem of the "modern, liberated woman", who ironically, was still expected to operate within a framework of rules laid down by the modern man -

…..wrote in the early 1870s an essay comparing the virtues and faults of women of an older age with those of women of modern times. Bankim began the essay by declaring that in all societies it was men who always laid down the ways in which women must behave. If the modern woman differed from her predecessors, she did so as the result of social policies pursued by men. (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 135-136)

Chatterjee then goes on to discuss Bankim's comparison of the virtues and defects of the "new" woman and the "traditional" woman - traditional women as per him were uneducated, and therefore coarse, vulgar and quarrelsome as opposed to a more refined and poised modern woman, also referred to as the *bhadramahila* when speaking of the upper middle class (cite Bharati Ray (Ray, 2005, p. xxxiii). Traditional women were however, hardworking, faithful to their husbands, hospitable to guests and charitable to the needy whereas the new woman was lazy, fond of luxury and unmindful of housework (Chatterjee, 1993, p.136). Thus, an inherent hypocrisy emerges amidst these claims, where the modern woman is expected to stay poised, refined and educated but within the limits and boundations of a deep-rooted patriarchal order. She must be educated, but not educated enough to overshadow her male counterparts. She must be polished in demeanour, but must stay connected to her roots and traditions. She must be sociable, but not to the extent that she becomes negligent of her domestic duties.

Dissecting this fabricated imagery of women by Bankim, Chatterjee then reveals the hegemonic discourse that framed these writings - the discourse of anti-colonial nationalism - which at its core, was a male discourse. The nationalist thinking represented by the male was in fact, an attempt to create a national leadership in the image of ideal masculinity - strong, proud, just, wise and a protector of the righteous, and a terror to the mischievous (Chatterjee, 1993, pp.136-137). The result? Sheer irony - the image of the modern woman as a symbol of independence, bound by societal constructs of male domination.

How then, did this modern positioning of women impact the social and physical realm of the *tawaif*, the salon lady, the *mujrewali*?

The above question and the previous discussions concerning a hypocritical fabrication of the modern woman by nationalist men, relate to Griselda Pollock's arguments emphasising the necessity to enquire why the territory of modernism so often is a way to deal with masculine sexuality and its sign, the bodies of women. The nude, the brothels, the bars, become territories across which men claim their modernity (Pollock, 2000, p.156). In all likeliness, this territorial marking was exactly what constituted the core of post-colonial gender norms in India. Thus, the modern condition of the city found its most potent breeding ground in the realm of the salon and *kotha*, where men were free to roam, free to consume, free to indulge and to be entertained. As Benjamin mentioned, the (male) flaneur seeks pleasure, takes time, wanders and strolls, unbothered (Benjamin, 2005, pp. 262-263).

The case of Gangubai Kathiawadi

Gangubai Kathiawadi (2002) directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali is a fitting study to further substantiate these arguments in the spatial and architectural domain of the *kotha*, which during the 1960s and 1970s had slowly transformed into the likes of a brothel - its performative aspect obscured under an augmented modernist and consumerist reality, the signs of which were already visible during the late colonial period.

The film is loosely based on the life of Ganga Jagjivandas Kathiawadi or better known as Gangubai *kothewali*, an influential madame of the Kamathipura brothels in Mumbai (Erstwhile Bombay), who used her growing power and influence in fighting for the rights of - and against the injustices on - sex workers and women during the late 1950s, 60s and 70s. The storyline is also based on S. Hussain Zaidi's novel *Mafia Queens of Mumbai: Stories of Women from the Ganglands (2011)*, wherein he describes detailed accounts of Gangubai's life.

The film follows the character of Ganga (Played by Alia Bhatt), who is a young middle-class girl from Kathiawad, Gujarat - with dreams of becoming an actress and re-inventing her life in metropolitan Bombay. However, her life takes an unforeseen turn when she is sold off by her deceiving lover Ramnik, to a brothel in the red light district of Kamathipura as he falsely promises her marriage and a role in an upcoming film, only to leave her stranded and at the behest of the madame of the brothel, Sheila. Unwillingly and helplessly accepting her fate, she gives in to the profession of prostitution, but eventually rises to prominence within the district as the succeeding madame of the brothel, owing to her fearless and outspoken demeanour. As a mafia queen and distinguished political figure, she then dedicates her life to serving the women and children of Kamathipura, ensuring their rights to education, safety and a stable means of livelihood.

Fig. 12 - Undertones of magenta in Gangubai's quarters(Screen capture)

Fig. 13 - Gangu gets dressed (Source :Horam, 2022)

Fig. 14 - Hues of pink against teal backdrops (Screen capture)

Moods & Tones

The sets of Gangubai, having been created partly from Bhansali's childhood memories of the real Kamathipura, and partly as images of a possible 1960's Kamathipura, do not strive to achieve an absolute architectural and historical accuracy of the district in their realisation. That is not to say that the sets steer away from addressing critical architectural detailing and elementalism, but it is to rather emphasise that although great attention has been paid to paint an accurate depiction of the 60's gangland bombay, what truly elevates the architectural setting of Gangubai is its ability to invoke the viewer's imagination, to conjure up a parallel reality - where the real-life gritty and murky

neighbourhood is transformed into a moody, sensual visual, drenched in the vibrancy of nocturnal red lights against sharply contrasting pale green and aquamarine backdrops of buildings. The red and sometimes magenta undertones lend a duality to the moodiness of Bhansali's Kamapthipura. On one hand, they entice and lure in the spectator, invoking a sense of eroticism and intrigue. On the other, they signify, in their deeper undertones of red, a looming danger and a sense of foreboding - lending Kamathipura its character of a forbidden and perilous underbelly. Among the subdued tonalities exists also, an inherent maximalism that manifests itself stylistically through Art Deco detailing, especially noticeable in the shots of the neighbourhood cinema (Fig.15). At the time, hand painted posters of films with exaggerated brush strokes, images of vixen red lips and lurid colours were kitschy, quintessential marketing methods to attract crowds (Horam, 2022) where the attempt and intention lay in grabbing as many eyeballs as possible, in the otherwise bustling street (Fig 16).

Fig. 15 - View of the neighbourhood cinema (Horam, 2022)
Fig. 16 - A hand painted poster from the late 50s (Lalwani, n.d.)

Spatial Layering

Looking closely at the configuration of Gangubai's *kotha,* a spatial layering similar to the cases of Umrao Jaan and Devdas is apparent at first glance. However, the *kotha*'s configuration is now more nuanced and complex as opposed to a former pavilion-like performative space (Fig.17) The very first point of distinction lies in the context itself, which may be the driving factor behind the difference in the internal arrangement. Punctured among a series of three storied brothels which dot and line the streetscape, Gangu's *kotha* grapples for air and appears to be compressed, rather than being leisurely sprawled across the thoroughfare. There are no markers of a lavish entrance, nor a substantial setback from the street, as the building hovers above it while being completely adjoined to the road (Fig 17 & 18). Owing to Bombay's rapid development during the post-colonial era, the constricted nature of Kamathipura makes absolute sense where a shortage of space had already plagued the neighbourhood due to an unprecedented inflow of working class population from rural areas.
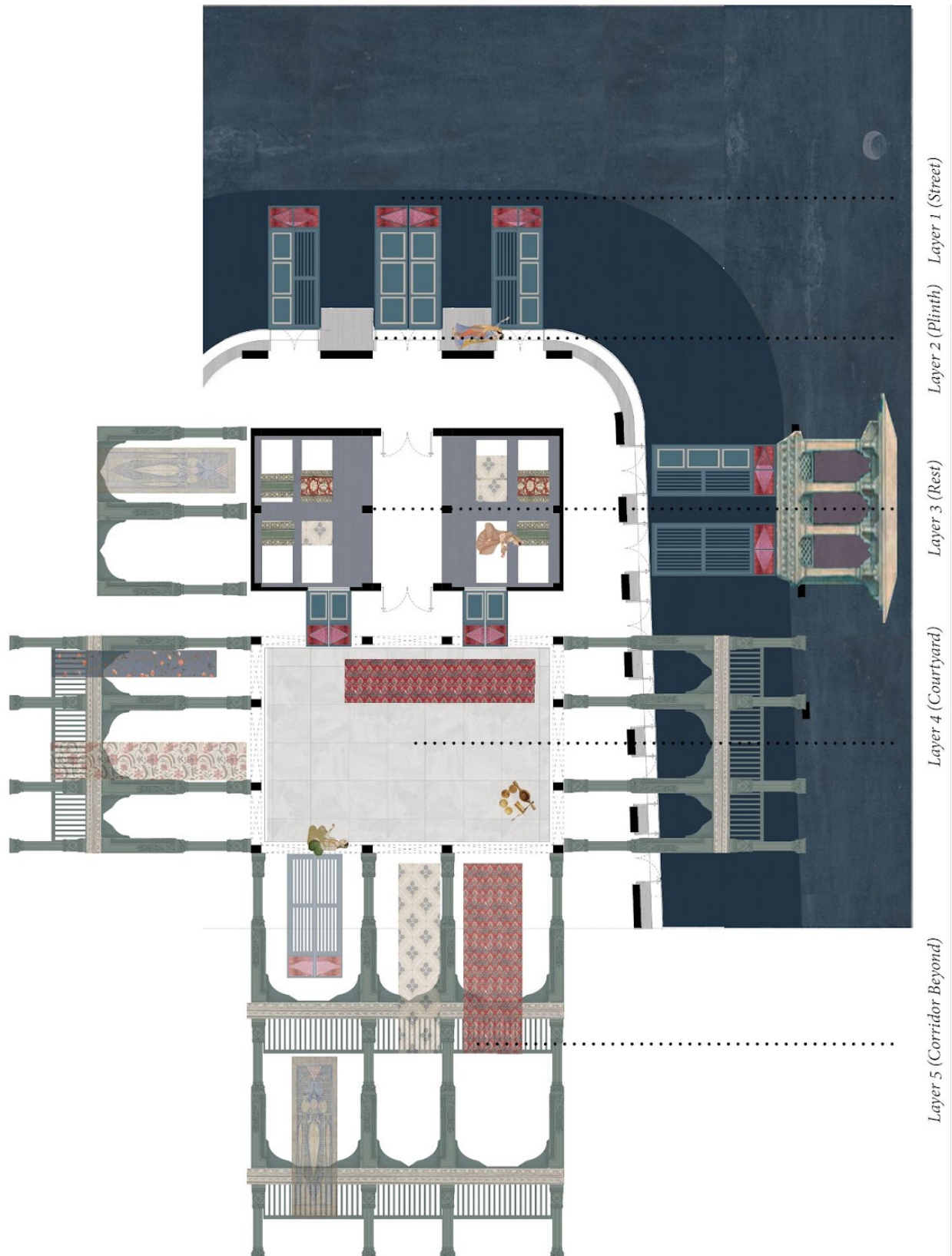
Fig. 17 - Representative montage of Gangu's *kotha* (Credits: Author.)

Layer 1 (Street)
Layer 2 (Plinth)
Layer 3 (Rest)
Layer 4 (Courtyard)
Layer 5 (Corridor Beyond)

The first layer of the *kotha* begins with the verandah, lined by grilled and shuttered wooden windows and opening directly into the street. The width of the plinth is barely visible, yet parts of it protrude out, forming stage-like platforms for the women to stand as they strike sensual poses for prospective customers (Fig 17 & 18). The verandah, which wraps around the building, becomes the shop-front, where the windows become portals inviting passersby to gaze and indulge in the sights and cacophonies of posing women. Lining the verandah is the secondary spatial layer - a more private, yet still partially public domain where the women can rest and sleep. The absence of separate chambers for sleeping reveals a sense of communal living, which may not have been an intentional design decision but rather a byproduct of lacking space. Further inside, the central courtyard constitutes the third and final layer of the *kotha* (Fig 17 & 21), open to the sky and forming the communal heart of the building. The courtyard features in several important scenes of the film - initially, as an intimidating and labyrinthian space where Gangu finds herself trapped as Ramnik sells her off to the brothel and later, as a sanctuary and safe haven for her and the other women of the brothel. The design of the building possibly draws inspiration from the *Pol* houses [7] of Ahmedabad , where each residential unit consisted of a central courtyard forming the core of the house and around which all other functions would be arranged. The courtyard was meant to be the communal space of the home, where the entire family would come together for daily meals and festivities (Desai, 2019).

In a way, the courtyard is not merely a physical enclosure, but also a metaphorical one, protecting and nourishing its inhabitants from the dreary and relentless outside world while simultaneously representing a space of togetherness and camaraderie.

Fig. 18 - Exterior view of the *kotha* (Horam, 2022)

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[7] *Pol* houses are traditional residential quarters typical to Ahmedabad in Gujarat. A *Pol* is a residential street with well defined boundaries demarcated through a main gateway, subgates and a cluster of houses, tied together under a common jurisdiction (Doshi, 1991,p. 180)

Fig. 19 - Living quarters 1 (Horam, 2022)

Fig. 20 - Living quarters 2 (Horam, 2022)

Fig. 21 - Top view of the courtyard (Horam, 2022)

Streetscape encounters: Veiling & Gazing

Although the spatial organisation of the *kotha* appears simple where the level of privacy gradually increases on moving inwards, none of its spaces are truly private. The *kotha* in its premise is never meant to function as a private home where the boundaries of privacy are clearly defined. As a result, a certain degree of publicness is omnipresent, where the male flaneur or pleasure seeker can wander without inhibition, rupturing the delicate frontiers of privacy, similar to the *kothas* of Umrao and Chandramukhi. This problem, however, finds its solution in a unique way - on one hand, the thresholds between any two layers of privacy are by default, the architectonic elements of the

building, i.e the walls, partitions, window frames, arched walkways. On the other hand, these thresholds also manifest themselves as veils of translucent fabric. The hanging *saris* (traditional Indian attire for women*)* and drying *dhotis* of soft cotton and linen become screens (Fig.21), adding an additional layer of latency wherever required and sheltering the interior from the elements of the street. Similarly, the wedding mujra sequence (Fig.22) showcases a delicate fabric enclosure as an urban insert, embedded in the middle of the street where a public-private duality is emphasised through the sheer and translucent net facade. The mujra, itself being a sensual and intimate dance form is ironically performed in the midst of a busy street, but it is veiled, signifying still that it is a private affair. Yet again, one is reminded of Iyer's "dance architectures of public intimacy".

Fig. 22 - *Mujra* performance for a wedding in the middle of the street (Screen capture)

The *kotha* is distinct in its typology with regard to its encounters with the street, where a dichotomy comes into play. While the interior strives to veil itself from the outside, the *kotha* does not obscure opportunities for its inhabitants to encounter the streetscape. Instead, it allows the women to gaze and experience the street without fear while still being sheltered from spectatorship when needed. This is especially rendered visible through the *Jharokha*[8] balcony that protrudes into the street from the first floor, where Gangu stands and gazes at her beloved Afsaan (Fig. 23, 24 & 25). Traditionally, the Jharokha was one of the distinctive characteristics of the facade in mediaeval Indian architecture down to the nineteenth century A.D (Nath, 1995, p.64) where the patriarch or ruler would stand and address his subjects, overlooking his court. On the other hand, the *jharokhas* of the royal women were either completely covered with jalis (perforated facades) or curtains as a social protocol. It is interesting how the open *jharokha* in the shot undergoes a role reversal, now becoming a symbol of Gangu's reclaimed ownership of the street.

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[8] *Jharokha* : A *jalied* (perforated) stone window projecting from the wall face of a building, in an upper story, overlooking a street, market, court or any other open space;it is supported on two or four brackets or corbelling, has two pillars and/pr pilasters,balustrade and a cupola or pyramidal roof; technically closed by jalis (perforated facades) but generally partly open for the inmates to peep out to see passing processions; it is more formal and ornamental than the English or French 'oriel' (Nath, 1995, p.64)

She now rules Kamathipura and its streets (Fig. 26), free to gaze, wander, smoke a cigarette. She is now the flaneur, uninhibited and untamed.

Fig. 23 - Gangu's *jharokha* overlooking the street (Screen capture)

Fig. 24 - Gangu gazes at her beloved, Afsaan (Screen capture)   Fig. 25 - Afsaan returns her gaze from the street (Capture)

Fig. 26 - Reclaiming the streetscape: A passerby man touches Gangu's feet as a sign of respect and submission (Capture)

Revisiting the discussion on Bankim's descriptions of the "new, independent woman" in the 1870's, it was only a matter of time that the modern woman would emerge as a powerful socio-political force

in revolt and refusal of this normative patriarchal mindset. The post- colonial periods of the 1960s and 1970s in particular, saw a surge of women's movements to assert political autonomy and to fight against gender disparity and injustice (Heuer, 2015, p.25), the first of their kind after a democratic state was asserted.[9] Gangubai's example thus, reveals a shifting trend of women's, and particularly the *tawaif's* ownership of the street and public realm, where even within the undercurrents of oppressive patriarchal order, the female flaneur strived for justice - both for her rights and for her space in the city.

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[9] Notwithstanding the mobilisation of women in India's struggle for independence, examples of which can be dated back to the mutiny of 1857, the Satyagraha movement led by Gandhi and various other scattered and cohesive uprisings against the colonial rule.

Chapter 3

The non-space of the contemporary kotha

In the advanced Indian metropolis today, there exists an inherent crisis of an unprecedented urban proliferation, which grows at a dangerously rapid pace. Gyan Prakash, in *Noir Urbanisms : Dystopic Images of the Modern City (2010)*, describes this urban crisis, particularly addressing the global south as follows -

As the world becomes increasingly urban, dire predictions of an impending crisis have reached a feverish pitch. Alarming statistics on the huge and unsustainable gap between the rates of urbanisation and economic growth in the global South is seen to spell disaster. (Prakash, 2010, p.1)

This unsustainable gap manifests itself not only in the consumption patterns and visual culture of the city but also embeds itself within the urban and architectural fabric, making itself conspicuous through infrastructural decline and agglomerated urbanscapes. How then, do these factors shape the urban realm of the new Indian city? What are the physical signs of this urban crisis?
As articulated by Ravi Sundaram, these physical signs occur as images of dystopian, post-industrial landscapes - a clutter of "non-places" that has emerged in airports, malls, and transit points. The old modernist models of the productive industrial city have long disappeared; their debris now clutters the landscapes of rust as dystopian afterlives (Sundaram, 2010, p.241). Here, the term "non-space" becomes a paradox. Just like an array of fleeting images, the built environment of the Indian city has multiplied so excessively and rapidly, that it has lost its physicality, appearing only as "an empire of the blurr" (Jameson, 2003). As Sundaram goes on to describe the signs of the new city, drawing from Koolhaas' description of Lagos, he writes -

These included new "unauthorized" neighborhoods, informal and non-legal settlements, working-class migrations, and a vast network of small markets, neighborhood factories, and small shops. Horizontal networks of production and circulation, new work patterns, and a dizzyingly complex world of infrastructure support, tenure, and occupation emerged: a dynamic, productively chaotic mix. Vast traffic, new smells of plastic garbage, industrial waste, food shops, and fumes from buses and auto rickshaws all transformed and inflamed the sense of everydayness and produced a hyper stimuli of urbanism.

Within these relentless hyper stimuli, where then is the *kotha* lost or found? What is the *tawaif's* occupied space if the *kotha* is altogether lost?

As Juhani Pallasma describes, today, the contemporary city is the city of the eye which passivates the other senses and alienates the body from experiencing the city with its entire consciousness. The visual city, through its glaring lights and neon sign boards, curates frenetic forms of expression and communication (Pallasmaa, 2005, pp. 142-143) and leaves us as spectators. Perhaps, we are in an age of image transfer (Avermaete et al., 2009, p. 116), where visual and media culture dominate the metropolis, constantly seeking the human gaze of consumption and desire.

Is it therefore possible that the physical *kotha*, along with the physical city, is obscured behind these neon signs and freneticism? There is a possibility that the *kotha*'s physical space has been diminished amidst the "hyperstimuli of expanded media" (Sundaram, 2010, p.248). Consequently, It may be that the female flaneur, as a *tawaif*, no longer occupies *one* space in

the metropolis. Rather, she occupies the "non-space"- a space that is multitudinous and placeless. How is this space quantified? What are her encounters with the public realm?

The case of Talaash

In order to corroborate the above discussions and delve into the questions posed, the case of Reema Kagti's Talaash (2010) is considered. The film, though its narrative and cinematographic approach deals with the allegories of urban proliferation and its impact on the domain of the brothel.

A neo-noir suspense thriller set in a dystopic, nocturnal Bombay, Talaash (Translating to "search"), follows the story of inspector Surjan 'Suri' Shekhawat, a young cop (played by Aamir Khan), struggling with his marriage after the sudden death of his son. Suri is assigned to investigate a high profile case involving a car accident, which at first appears to be a straightforward ordeal but slowly begins to reveal mysterious occurrences and findings which he unfolds with the help of Rosie (Played by Kareena Kapoor), a prostitute from the local red light area. In search of the truth, Suri's visits to the brothel are recurring where each time, he encounters Rosie and unearths a new link to the case. Finding solace in his meetings with her, Suri delves deeper into the case, eventually finding the truth - about the case, as well as Rosie, both of which are interconnected.

The spatial Realm of Rosie's brothel : Diminished spaces & fleeting images

Fig. 27 - Neon signs & blinding lights in the red light district (screen capture)

As Ranjini Mazumdar argues in the context of the contemporary,dystopian city -

The twentieth-century legacy of wars, conflicts, and accelerating violence has given birth to imagined worlds where ethical imperatives and moral stability appear to have collapsed. (Mazumdar, 2010, p.150)

This argument sets the tone of the plot as well as its architectural presence wherein Bombay as a "maximum city" is plagued with unprecedented immigration, exerting tremendous pressure on a space that is rapidly crumbling from within. It is a city of two worlds where the rich and poor live cheek by jowl (Mazumdar, 2010, pp.150-151). Therefore, it is no surprise that the *kotha*, which is now being referred to as the brothel, appears to be a diminutive insert within the urban fabric (Fig 28).
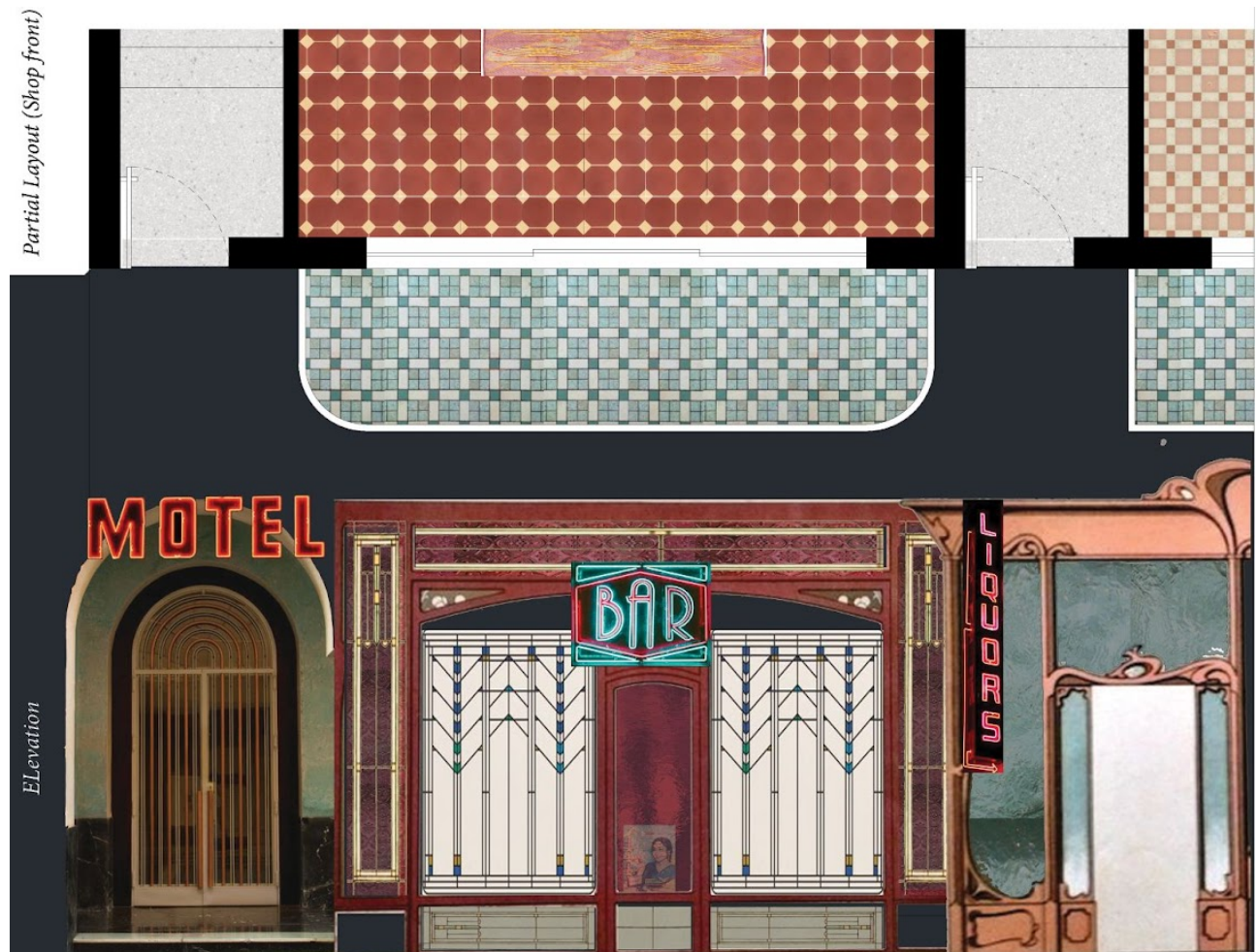

Fig. 28 - *The nocturnal red light district & Rosie's brothel front (Credits: Author)*

In fact, it barely makes a detailed appearance in the film, barring a select few times. Instead, small shop-like fronts of brothels line the streetscape, so inconspicuous that they may be missed or misinterpreted as a regular store by the passerby. How then are these brothels running their daily business and engaging with interested customers? Possibly in two capacities - the first being through the employment of dizzying and blinding neon signages which illuminate the street, arresting the passerby's visual domain (Fig. 27 & 28). The second, more significant

method employed is the brothel's absence altogether. Instead of the passerby seeking the brothel, the brothel seeks him. Women go about their business, pushing the space of the brothel quite literally onto the street, where they engage with potential customers as they drive by in their cars (Fig. 24 & 25).Therefore, the very first spatial layer of the brothel begins in the space of the car. The brothel is dispersed amidst the vehicular street, asserting its "non-space" within the moving city. Rosie eventually leads Suri to a hotel room, which further emphasises this placeness, almost as though the brothel too, has been bifurcated into multitudinous tiny spatial realms that move within the city, just as the fleeting images of neon signs. As a result, can it be said that the female flaneur is now, more than ever, present completely in the urban realm? Possibly so, but within dangerous capacity - where, a sexually charged woman would symbolise commodification and mass production in the words of Baudelaire and Benjamin (Benjamin 1985 in Wilson,1995, p. 71).
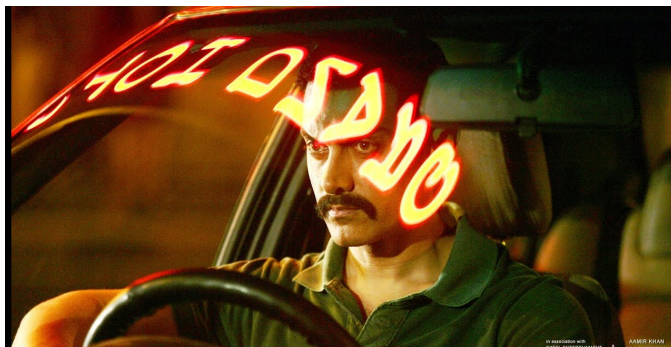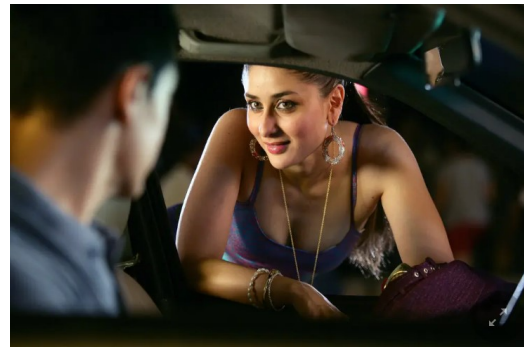

Fig. 29 - Suri as the spectator (Screen capture)

Fig. 30 - Rosie and Suri's first encounter (Saltz, 2012)

The multi-interior : proliferated motifs & detailing

Mazumdar describes the urban crisis of Bombay as an implosion, where the chaos and urban decay linked to an overwhelming visual culture and urban transformation are often expressed in a maximalist way (Mazumdar, 2010, p.151). This maximalist expression however, is not only limited to an urban and spatial realm, but also transcends to the stylistic expression of the interior, particularly in the case of Talaash. It appears as though there is also an implosion of motifs, of colour and of patterns, similar to the multifarious and blinding city lights. The interior, therefore, whether it is of the brothel (Fig. 28, 32 & 34), the hotel room (Fig. 31) or the hotel lobby (Fig. 33) appears to be a kaleidoscope of images which confuse and perplex. The floral motifs, bejewelled curtains and multiple mirrors form a labyrinthian parallel universe within the three dimensions of the interior, where the tawaif embeds herself. The interior style is a kind of kitsch owing to its bold red colourscape and randomised pattern language. No two things match, each object fighting for its own limelight, which perhaps, heightens the feeling of existing in a fantasy world where anything becomes possible and nothing necessarily makes sense, yet exists for the sole purpose of pleasure. Going back to Benjamin's case of the Berlin flaneur, this interior-scape too, forms a space that caters to the fancies of a loitering spectator, seeking new sights without necessary purpose or intent. Another striking feature in the aestheticism of the film is the reference to 1970's Art Deco Bombay, similar to Gangubai's Kamathipura. However,

here, the elements appear more dazzling, in accents of gold and mirror work, coupled with curved geometries(Fig. 35). The light incident on these motifs makes them appear even more dizzying (Fig.33), possibly employed as a cinematographic tool to disorient the viewer and increase conjecture.

Unlike the cases of Umrao Jaan, Devdas and even Gangubai, the space of the female flaneur in the neo-noir Bombay is not defined, nor demarcated. She becomes one with the space she occupies and camouflages herself in the visual domain of this maximalist expressionism. Hence, there is a sense of fluidity and transcendence in her aura, yet not to be confused with freedom. As discussed earlier, she occupies the "non-space" of the metropolis, but within this non-space still exist spatial and societal boundations which draw imaginary lines that she cannot cross.

Fig. 31 - Interior of the hotel room (Screen capture) Fig. 32 - Dressing room framed by bejewelled curtains (Screen Capture)

Fig. 33 - Rosie enters the hotel lift (Screen capture)   Fig. 34 - Interior shot of the brothel (Screen capture)

Fig. 35 - The hotel at the street corner (Screen capture)

Discussion/Post-script

The spatial realm of the *kotha* seems to have diminished, where it initially began as a grand expression of royalty, nobility and patronage. The colonial *kotha* was designed to specificity, where its purpose was solely to function as a space of performance and artistry. In both the cases of Umrao Jaan and Devdas, the *kotha*'s form and spatial organisation form a distinctive architectural language - a large central performance zone and a subsequent layering of spaces. On the other hand, the *kotha* of post-colonial India as seen in Gangubai's precedent seems to have lost its grandeur and opulence. With the modernisation of the metropolis, its space is constricted in the urban fabric, where it grapples for greater frontage but eventually settles for grilled windows and a stage-like narrow plinth projection. Finally, the *kotha* becomes a moving image in the contemporary city, losing its physical space and form and transcending into multiplicity - sometimes in the space of the street, the seat of the passing car, the elevator of a hotel or a motel room. However, what remains common across time is the *kotha's* peculiar presence in the city as neither completely public, nor exclusively private. In each case, the *kotha* almost mimics the city street or bazaar (marketplace) where women are treated as commodities, available as indulgent experiences for Benjamin's male flaneur. It can be argued that the flaneur has become free in the contemporary discourse of the *kotha*, since it is now formless, a "non-space". She is evidently more physically present in the metropolis now, as opposed to before. Yet, be it the case of the late nineteenth century or today's contemporary world, the tawaif's space is yet to be freely embedded in the social realm of the city, where she is accepted and acknowledged by society. With the growing metropolis, progress on this front is visible, yet still far.

Regardless of the woman's caste, creed, religion or professional disposition, her space in the public street is a constitutional right which allows her equal proprietorship of the city, and an equal opportunity at holistic citizenship. Thus, flanerie is unjustly deemed a phenomenon or a niche indulgence. Instead, It is an opportunity for equality, for freedom and for justice. Perhaps, even with increasing progress on the global front, there still remain the shackles of gendered norms which are yet to be broken in order to facilitate a city where flanerie exists only as a simple, cognitive act of walking the street aimlessly and enjoying its offerings and indulgences on a beautiful sunny day.

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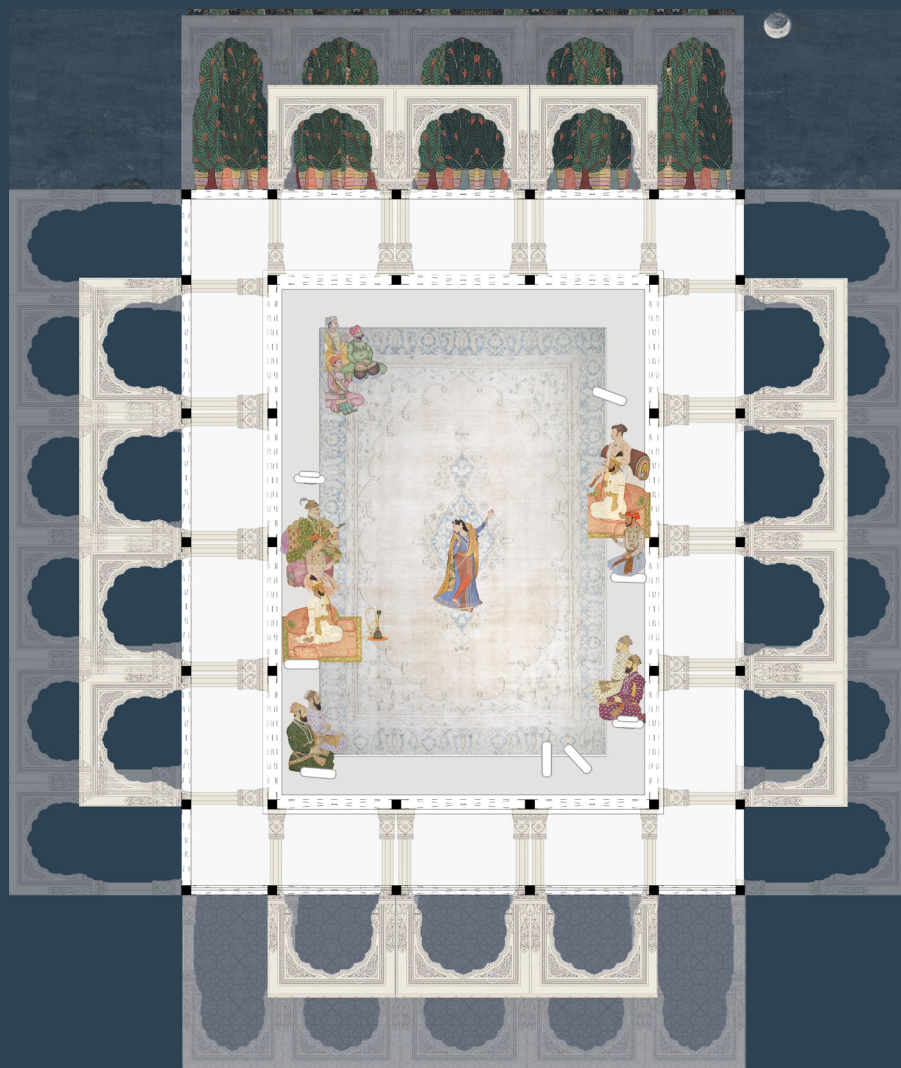Lalwani, R. (n.d.). *Kagaz Ke Phool | Here are posters of some old classic movies…*. Flickr. Retrieved

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