

Imagining Sound through the *Pharmaish*: Radios and Request-postcards in North India, c. 1955–1975

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Abstract

In this essay, I look at the practice of writing requests for Hindi film songs to the radio, particularly during the first two decades after Independence. I attempt to reconstruct this radio-listening practice from narrative accounts of listeners, radio personnel and fan magazines produced during this period. The article argues that the *pharmaish* indicated practices of listening and publicity that provided the contours for (a) a mediated form that emerges in a distinct manner on the radio, (b) a sonic map and (c) an act of 'recognition'. It is in these ways that the *pharmaish* may illuminate the elusive terrain of cinematic reception, through the film song as metonym, away from the physical site and time of the cinema hall.

Keywords

Hindi film song, radio, listener, fandom, affect, requests

In the October of 2014, I went to the sorting room at the Vividh Bharati station, Borivli, Mumbai. Along the whole length of this room, the walls were covered with empty wooden pigeon-hole racks with long tables below them. These racks were for all the mail and postcards that used to come in every day, station personnel told me. The tables below would be used to sort the mail by the programme and/or radio announcer it was addressed to. There were not many to sort now—between 1,500 and 2,000 postcards a day—because there were e-mails, phone calls and SMS-es as well.¹ The room looked a little lonely, no longer in use for the few postcards/letters that still came. But in Vividh Bharati's heyday, until at least the early 1990s, anywhere between four and five sacks filled with postcards and letters would be dropped off every day and a single sack could contain between one and three thousand items. What happened to all that mail? I asked. We threw it away.

Similar to this vignette of Vividh Bharati's sorting room tales were stories of letters that arrived at Radio Ceylon, Colombo (the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation

[SLBC]) and the Urdu Service, All India Radio (AIR) in Delhi. For instance, Ameen Sayani said that the *Geet Mala* programme received 9,000 letters in the first week of its broadcast, in December 1952.² Danish Iqbal of the Urdu Service said that it would receive over 20,000 letters a week from Pakistan alone, at the height of its popularity from the late 1960s onwards. The high volume of fan-mail or letters from listeners is not unique to these programmes or radio stations. This was common in other contexts too.³ The mythic numbers of these letters indicate the intensity and excess associated with the life of the radio, cutting across state-run and privately owned radio stations in India. This was, then, not the strange, wonder-inducing, engineering-experiment-heavy, technologically sublime object of public discourse of the late colonial period (1920s–1940s); it was instead part of the everyday infrastructures and technologies that structured listening experiences.⁴ This transformation in the mode of experiencing the radio belonged partly to the arrival and circulation of the transistor radio from the late 1950s onwards.⁵ Of the several kinds of letters that came through, perhaps the highest volume belonged to the *pharmaish* or the listeners' request. Usually sent in on a postcard, almost all of these would be for the Hindi film song.

This excessive number and repetitive format of requests for the film song also ensured that the postcards were not retained as records by the radio stations, particularly the various AIR ones. Sometimes, individual radio announcers might hold on to some of the letters that they received or aired if there was an unusual component or compliment attached to them. For the most part, however, these postcards were consigned to waste, akin to the fate of letters sent to radio stations in Indonesia (Arps, 2003) and unlike instances of radio listener letters in America between the 1920s and 1940s (McCusker, 1998) or Eastern Europe during the cold war (Kind-Kovács, 2013) that have been stored. This radio-listening practice has to be reconstructed, then, from narrative accounts of listeners, radio personnel and fan magazines produced during this period. In considering the *pharmaish*, I do not mark out different modes of listening based on in/attention as Susan Douglas (2004, pp. 26–39) does or think of solely the embodied act of hearing the radio (music, news, cricket commentary, drama, static and sounds). Through the mailed song request, the event of listening appears as a trace. Using ethnographic evidence from the contemporary, criss-crossed with memories of the past, this article tries to understand what the *pharmaish* on air performs and affords in the first two decades after Indian independence.

The *pharmaish's* scale is sufficient to compel us to consider this ephemera as deeply embedded in the enmeshed and intermedial histories of cinema, radio and audition. This constellation of film, radio and listening has been brought to the fore in discussions around the ban on film music on state radio between 1952 and 1957, during B. V. Keskar's tenure as the Minister for Information and Broadcasting. During this period in the 1950s, most listeners moved away from AIR to Radio Ceylon (hereafter, RC) for their desired listening: the Hindi film song. For Keskar, the Hindi film song represented the worst kind of music. 'Un-Indian' because the songs were derived from Western tunes, obscene because of innuendo-laden lyrics. The film song was not to be promoted by state radio, the AIR. The ban is part of popular memories of the moment and has featured in scholarship on the film song and radio. For David Lelyveld (1994), the moment of the ban is part of the struggle by the government to establish a 'national cultural hegemony' (p. 123). Three other essays highlight the moment of the ban of film songs on AIR through different lenses. Aswin Punathambekar (2009, 2010), for instance, uses the ban to enter

into memories of RC through an interview with Ameen Sayani and argues for the creation of 'nation-as-audience'. Shikha Jhingan (2011) begins with the ban to re-examine the relationship between the 'classical' and the 'popular' in music, and Sharma and Ravikant (2012) finds Ravikant translating an old article by Narendra Sharma from *Madhuri* to probe the relationship between the listener and the film song on radio. Ravikant, in another chapter (2015b, pp. 259–313), focuses on Indian broadcasting history and its relationship with cinema and probes the period of the ban in greater detail. He locates the announcers of RC (Ameen Sayani, Manohar Mahajan and Gopal Sharma, among others) as aural stars and draws attention to methods of on-air and off-air interactions practiced by them, which helped to consolidate their fan base, and along with this, RC's. Drawing on a wide range of sources, he locates a conflict central to this moment: that between the desire to hear the film song by the average listener and AIR's broadcast policy. He says (p. 305),

... the force exercised by popular listening practices [was] pitted against the official-national aesthetic imagination. A popular force that would go down to create the epithet of the golden age for contemporary film music in most if not all film music histories.

Central to the force exercised by popular practice, I would like to suggest, was its expression through the sending of the *pharmaish*, the listener's request for the film song. Of course, over time, across the two decades, AIR's various channels, especially Vividh Bharati, were able to regain the audience they had lost because of the ban on the film song.

Apart from focusing on the ban on radio, the *pharmaish* allows us to continue with a perspective on fandom that Aswin Punathambekar (2007) provides us with, while turning to the realm of film music and the music director, away from the cinema hall and individual star-figures. He argues for placing fans on a continuum of practices rather than setting up two oppositional positions, either the 'fan-as-rowdy' (male, participating in political-party-oriented fan clubs, and often, lower-class) or the 'fan-as-rasika' (male or female, a connoisseur, not part of fan clubs, and at least middle-class, if not upper-class). In trying to open up listening and fan practices surrounding film music such as those of the *pharmaish*-writers, I follow Punathambekar's lead in not thinking of fans as either 'rowdy' or 'rasikas' but as in between the two extremes (2008). In focusing my attention on the film song, radio and listening, from the perspective of fan-letters, I ask, what was at stake in the production and reception of these requests made to the radio, through the technology of paper, pen or stamps and post? In this essay, I argue the *pharmaish* indicated practices of listening and publicity that provided the contours for (a) a mediated form that emerges in a distinct manner on the radio, (b) a sonic map and (c) an act of 'recognition' that was contingent upon media and sensory infrastructures.⁶ It is through these ways that the *pharmaish* may illuminate the elusive terrain of cinematic reception, through the film song as metonym, away from the physical site and time of the cinema hall.⁷

The Mediatized *Pharmaish*

Pharmaish is an Urdu word, and has been translated variously as request, demand or order.⁸ In India and parts of South Asia, the *pharmaish* has a long history within

the cultures of listening; it has been a traditional part of *kavi sammelans/mushairas* (symposia/gatherings organised for poetry-reading), performances of classical music/dance, etc. The *pharmaish*, here, would be oral in nature and part of a live interaction between the audience and the performer(s). In these more traditional forms, especially performances located in more feudal contexts, a *pharmaish* would often be considered a sign of patronage. It was, nevertheless, a sign of the mutual recognition of the request between the audience and the performer. Often, the performance that followed the *pharmaish* would carry the name of or be dedicated to the audience member(s) who had made the request. It was encoded, thus, in the imagination of collective listening.

Through the radio and the postcard, the *pharmaish* is rendered into a textualised and mediated phenomenon. On the one hand, it seems to encapsulate, in the space of the little 5.5×3.5-inch postcard, a constellation of paper, ink, post, the radio and stamps or the writing hand. Running through these technologies of writing, the postcard and the radio were the film song and sound. Sound here, we must note, included the music of the song in question, the announcer's voice via the microphone and the radio receiver, the crackling of the static, in addition to the ambient noise of the radio set. On the other hand, the *pharmaish* also became a mode that allowed the Hindi film song and the radio, together, to become an object which promised the hope of being recognised for the *pharmaish* writers. In this sense, the *pharmaish* becomes an act through which the radio and its centre, sound, help in producing a daily aural media event. We shall return later to this promise and performance of recognition.

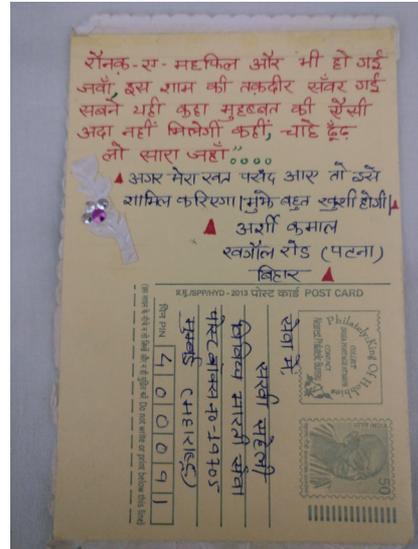
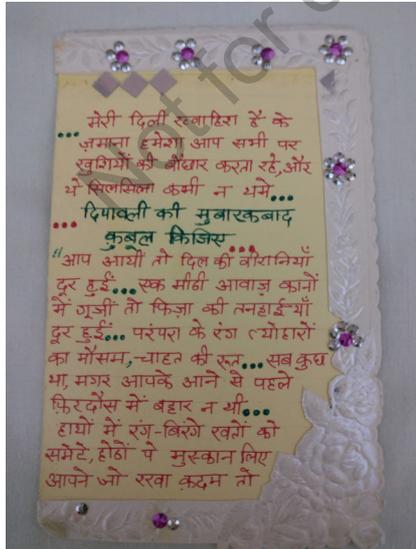
Like quizzes on radio or music-countdown-based programmes, the *pharmaish*-based programmes forged a particular form and genre of radio programming. Radio programmes such as *aap hi ke geet* (your songs), *behnnon ki pasand* (women's choice), *hamesha jawan geet: aapke anurodh par* (evergreen songs: your requests) on RC and similar ones like *aap ki pharmaish* (your request) and *manchahe geet* (songs on demand) on Vividh Bharati, it may be said, shared similarities with 'talk' radio or call-in/dial-in radio programmes elsewhere in the world. In Susan Douglas's work (2004, pp. 284–327) on 'talk radio', she locates its popularity with the rise of right-wing populism during the Reagan era and a crisis in masculinity among the lower-middle-class and working-class white American. With *pharmaish*-based programmes, we do not yet know enough to make similar or differing assertions. However, in their ability to offer intimacy, shape public discourse, play with anonymity and allow contact with others, 'talk radio' and the *pharmaish*-based programmes converge. The listeners would anticipate or sit waiting for their names and, of course, the film song, on air. Further, since these programmes were serially broadcast (fixed days and times, even if sometimes the frequency to be tuned into would fluctuate), they helped to produce a regularity and rhythm in the listener's expectations of sending and hearing, on air, their *pharmaish*-es.

The *pharmaish*, as it played out on air, was significant in the creation and sustenance of the relationship between the radio and the person listening, especially as mediated by the announcer. It is this fashioning of the *pharmaish* that becomes significant for the configuration of the film song, announcer and listener that it produces. The head of commercial broadcasting, AIR, told me of his memories of being a radio announcer at a local AIR station in Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh.⁹ He recalled local radio stations receiving at least 50–60 postcards a day from people requesting a song. Often, he said, the postcard would only carry the first line of the film song and the name of the person.

The film's title and the singer's name might sometimes also appear. The music director or lyricist would almost never be mentioned on the postcard with the *pharmaish*. In that regard, this practice of placing on the *pharmaish* only the title of the film song is part of knowing the song *sans* the metadata from its publicity including the aural stars associated with it. Interestingly, this kind of *pharmaish* was made possible only in an economy where the first lines of film songs had, through constant radio-play and other allied media forms, become adequate currency for the exchange between announcer and listener/request-writer to be transacted. For the film song to become this currency, it is necessary for it to also be heard, known and remembered.

Such a postcard could be found in the present, *albeit* rarely. Consider, for instance, the example of the following postcard, which I fished out from the dustbin at the Vividh Bharati station, Mumbai. The postcard that I recovered was from Patna and caught my eye for its laborious decoration. It was otherwise an ordinary, light yellow 50 *paise* postcard addressed to a programme called *Sakhi Saheli* (friends), but it had been brightened with the use of sequins, cut-outs of flowers and writing in three different inks (red, green and blue). The postcard spoke of the time that had gone into producing it and of the effort of transforming the ordinary. The scraps of other cards that had been recycled to produce this card told of the economy that it came from (Figures 1 and 2). The writer desired that the card's text be a part of the programme and had not requested for a particular song to be played. It read:

Aap aayin to dil ki viraniyan dūr huin ... ek mithi si aawaz kanon main gūnji to phiza ki tanhaaiyan dūr huin [...] aap ke aane se pehle phirdaus main bahaar na thi.... (When you entered, the heart's loneliness went away ... a sweet voice resonated in my ears and the atmosphere's loneliness vanished [...] before you even heaven didn't have spring....)



Figures 1 and 2. Postcards for the radio programme 'Sakhi Saheli (friends)' from the Vividh Bharati station, Borivli, October 2014.

Source: Author's collection.

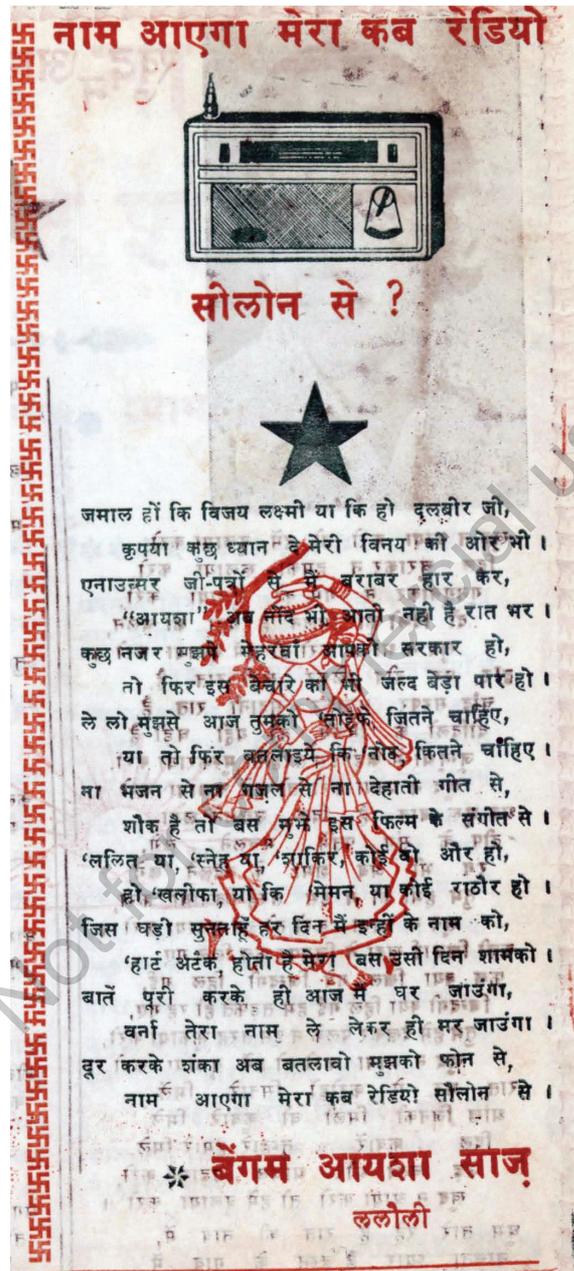


Figure 3. 'Naam aayega mera kab Radio Ceylon se?' (When will my name air on Radio Ceylon)' in Anamika, the Kashyap Radio Shrota Club, Kora Jahanabad magazine, 1975 issue.

Source: Author's collection (provided by Jagdish Nigam, Kanpur).

This paean to the radio and the voice of the announcer spoke of the emotive bond that it forged with its listeners; in this case, the *pharmaish* was only that the card be read out and whatever song the announcer wished to play with it was acceptable. In the act of the *pharmaish*, on the one hand, the mystifying voice of the radio announcer became even more personalised because one was hailed by their name on air; on the other hand, the *pharmaish* served as a means of making this mystifying voice on radio perform the listener's desire by playing the song of their choice. The *pharmaish* arguably might also be able to help people in further connecting Hindi film songs with the quotidian event because of its ability to make the simple act of airing names, messages and songs as an event that must be remembered by the listeners.

It is interesting to note that the aforementioned postcard's text thinks of the announcer's voice as sweet and dispelling loneliness. The lines indicate that the text of the postcard followed an idiom wherein an expression of affection for the announcer on air was an acceptable part of what constituted the *pharmaish*. That the writer shares an intimacy with the announcer or the radio is something that seems to be constitutive of the radio. As Jody Berland (2012) says, 'It both joins people together and reaches them where they are lonely ...' (p. 41). This idiom of intimacy seems to have a longer trajectory if one is to look at the listeners' clubs' bulletins; the *pharmaish* and the desire to be heard on air also takes on the idiom of a lover pleading with the announcers on air. Indeed, it might be suggested that the intimacy that is intrinsic to the radio is, in this case, rendered through the *pharmaish* or the letter and not merely through the sound of the announcer's voice.

An instance comes from a poem called 'Naam aayega mera kab Radio Ceylon se? (When will my name air on Radio Ceylon?)' (Figure 3). This featured in the 1975 issue of *Anamika*, the Kashyap Radio Shrota Club, Korā Jahanabad magazine. The poem, written by Begum Ayesha Saaz (who hails from Lalaulī, according to the text),¹⁰ says,

Jamal ho ki Vijaylakshmi ya ki ho Dalvirji / Kripya kuch dhyān de meri vinay ki aur bhi/
Announcer jī—patron se main barabar haar kar, / 'Ayesha' ko ab neend bhi aati nahi hai raat
bhar/ Kuch nazar bhi mujhpe mehraban aapki sarkar ho, / toh phir is bechare ka bhi jald
beda paar ho./ Le lo mujhse aaj tumko taufe jitney chahiye/ Ya toh phir batlae ki note kitne
chahiye/ Na bhajan se na ghazal se na dehati geet se/ shauk hai toh mujhe is film ke sangeet
se/ Lalit ya Sneh ya Shakir koi do aur ho/ Ho Khalifa ya ki Memon ya koi Rathore ho./ Jis
ghadi har din sunti hun main inhi ke naam ko [...] naam aayega mera kab Radio Ceylon se?

(Whether it is Jamal or Vijaylakshmi or Dalvir/ Please pay attention to my plea/ Dear
announcer, I have lost the battle of the letters/ 'Ayesha' no longer sleeps at night/ Only if
your grace is bestowed on me, / Will this hapless (faceless) person receive quick redemption.
/ Take as many gifts as you need/ Or tell me how much money you need/ Neither a hymn
nor a ghazal nor a folk song, / What I desire is a film song/ Whether it is Lalit or Sneh or
Shakir/ Khalifa or Memon or Rathore/ The moment I hear their names every day [...] When
will my name air on Radio Ceylon?)

While beginning with the names of different RC announcers during the 1970s, the poem abstracts the figure of the announcer as the one with the power to mediate the listener's desire, for the film song and his/her name. S/he becomes the addressee of the request to play a pre-recorded song, rather than the singer/musician. The poem, even as it may be read as being tongue in cheek, betrays the idiom of being a

supplicant to the announcer. Simultaneously, it deploys, in its address to the announcer, the terms of the relationship between the voice on air and the listener. And it does so using the terms of the relationship between lover/devotee and beloved/God. Of course, in this poem, the idiom carries with it a playfulness, which may be read as irony and prevent an entirely earnest reading of the poem. Indeed, the listener offers to bribe and cajole in turn as she hankers after her name and a song.

Regardless of earnest or ironic reading, however, the *pharmaish* is foregrounded not merely through the desire for the listener's name to be heard on air, but also through the quick succession of names that the listener says she hears each evening. The lines mimic, through cadence and content, the rush of names reeled off by the announcer on air. Indeed, the speed at which announcers read the name on air would often be a cause of complaint by listeners (as evidenced in the bulletins) because they felt that names were indecipherable and did not give due credit to the effort of the listener. Thus, in spite of naming herself in the poem, Ayesha Saaz seems to stand in as easily for any listener who may have had the same set of sentiments. It must be noted that Begum Saaz was not alone in expressing her relationship with the radio and the film song through a poem published in a listeners' club magazine. It was a frequently recurring motif that was to be found in listeners' club magazines. Through the poem about the *pharmaish*, we may note the intensity of the desire for the name-on-the-radio, a desire heightened perhaps by the uncertainty of the time of announcement and the length of the wait.

Another listener called Magadhiya (quoted in Ahmed, 1992) says, '*Mana ki farmaish bachpana barbad karti hai, Magar yeh kam hai ki duniya yaad karti hai.* (Admittedly, requests ruin childhood, but is it not enough that we will be remembered by the world?)'. Woven into the fabric of Magadhiya's statement is the sentiment of the film song it borrows from (the famous qawwali, '*Teri mehfil main kismet aazmakar* [in your court, we will try our destiny...]' from *Mughal-e-Azam* [The Emperor of the Mughals, dir. K. Asif, 1960]), as well as the structure of feeling that is embedded in the *pharmaish*. This structure of feeling includes among other things the desire to be remembered and, interestingly, the world's memory may not necessarily be a written memory or history. For Rameshwar Prasad Bharnwal, another listener from Jhumri Telaiya, *Mughal-e-Azam*'s songs became key, as well. Aswin Punathambekar (2007, p. 205) writes that Bharnwal sent nearly 100 requests for the song *Pyar Kiya to Darna Kya* from *Mughal-e-Azam*. In another article, Punathambekar (2008) argued that through the written body of Bharnwal it is possible to locate not merely fandom but also a moment of media transition, given the ban that Keskar imposed.

One of the possible attractions of sending a *pharmaish* and hearing one's name on air, in other words, being recognised, was the association of his or her (the listener's) name with the announcer's name. It is possible to think of the attraction of the name on air because it placed the listening person's name in the same plane (or airwave in this case) as that of the radio star, the announcer. In that sense, it was a way in which the announcer and the listener were brought closer together and, hence, the attraction of listening to one's name on the radio enhanced. In both Magadhiya's and Saaz's cases, it is tied in with the film song, in the latter case, directly, and in the former, indirectly. In other words, the *pharmaish* may be seen as a point that gathers

one of the potentialities of the assemblage of listening–radio–music–post-writing–language–emotion–voice. But, it was not as if all the listeners were writing in requests. Across the listeners' bulletins there were frequent debates over what would constitute a listener and at what moment s/he would become listener and, in most cases, the idea of being listener was tied to the *pharmaish*. Indeed, from stories found in listeners' bulletins during this period, there were many who constructed themselves as listeners through the *pharmaish* alone.

Sounding Out the Terrain

Practices of listening and publicity that comprise the *pharmaish* are also a part of the formation of imaginations of place and geography, through the sonic. Before considering the listener's imaginary of this relationship in detail, let us look at the planner's through a report by Kirke in 1936 on the proposed development of broadcasting stations in India. His description of the 'service area of a station' (p. 3) lays bare the connections between sound and land topology:

The 'service area' of a station on medium or long waves is usually the area covered by what is known as the 'direct' or 'ground ray'. This ray becomes rapidly attenuated through loss of energy absorbed by the ground itself and by obstacles. The attenuation of the ground wave varies with wave length and the type of ground. *Flat land of good electrical conductivity* has the least attenuation. *Hills cause a certain amount of attenuation and local screening*, but attenuation can and does become very serious on ground of low conductivity and therefore *attenuation will even vary according to the nature of the rock and the thickness and nature of the soil covering the rock*. Whatever be the absorption due to the ground, the attenuation is less for long wave lengths than for short, but atmospherics are more pronounced on the long waves than on the short. Thus we have the condition that while with the longer wave lengths the signal strength increases, the strength of atmospheric interference also increases. There will, therefore, be an optimum wavelength depending on the power of the transmitter, the type of aerial employed and the conductivity of the soil. (Emphasis added)

Let us attend to the 'flat land', 'hills' and the differences between rock and soil that Kirke lays out, which produce variances in the transmission's strength. We note a carving out of the relationship between sound, its transmission and geographical terrain as central to Kirke's understanding of the radio. In other words, the radio, with or without the postcard, or local radio station transmissions (vernacular languages, local times and so on), began to produce a map in relationship to sound. That is, the relationship between sound and geography was afforded by the radio in its design and infrastructure, which found expression in the planner's imagination. This imagination of the infrastructure-driven, material-geographic through sound waves laid out here forms the basis for and is in contrast to the one I will now jump-cut to, in returning to the discussion of the *pharmaish*-laden postcard and the idea of 'place' that was invoked by listeners.

Much of the writing of postcards and publishing of listeners' clubs' magazines does not come from the metropolitan cities of India; in fact, it is sent from those towns and tehsils that metropolitan India has never quite cared about. This disdain and disavowal of the *pharmaish* is evidenced in an article in the English-language press by

Girja Rajendran called '*Quality: The First Casualty*' (1979) in which *pharmaish*-es were disparaged as being an artificial, manipulated mode of increasing the popularity of a film song. The article read:

It was common knowledge that every song featuring in the 'farmaish' programme had to be paid for. No sooner was a particular song played on this radio station [Radio Ceylon] than the 'agent' in Bombay would contact the composer of that song and collect what was known of his 'hafta' for the song being featured on air!

The modus operandi for this was most interesting. There was a 'club' operating in Bombay with supposed 'branches' all over India. If a music director wanted his song played over the radio, he contacted this 'club' which for a price ranging from ₹500 to ₹750 a 'farmaish', arranged for listener's requests to be posted from all over India through its various 'branches'. All it did was import telephone directories to Bombay from cities all over India and prepare fake 'farmaishes' under names lifted from these directories! Thus did you find no end of 'farmaishes' emerging from a little-known place like Jhumri talayya.

Contrary to the general impression, there is such a place on the map of India. In fact, there were no fake towns in the 'farmaishes' sent out by the 'club'. The listeners making a 'request' for a song were all bona-fide names in some telephone directory or other somewhere in the country.

But it was not as though the radio station did not know that these 'farmaishes' were faked. It knew full well that the names were only so genuine and no more. It therefore hit upon a novel idea to implement the 'farmaish'. Since the 'farmaish' letters of the 'club' invariably came in bulk, these were kept aside.

After keeping them aside, the 'club' was told that they would be considered for inclusion on the radio station's 'farmaish' list only on condition that a 'cut' from the sum the 'club' received for each song was passed on to the cartel of announcers at the radio station! 'Only when this "cut" is made over to us will we consider your "bulk" letters for "farmaish"', was the burden of the announcer's song.

This had the effect of the 'club' raising its charge for each song on the pleas that it now had to pay a 'cut' to the announcers' cartel! How much black money was thus poured into the radio station by our composers is nobody's business. If a composer could pay anything up to Rs 750 for a single 'farmaish', you san [sic] imagine what astronomical fees he must have been getting for the films for which scored music.

The article itself was neither about radio-listening, nor about the *pharmaish*. It was actually an article looking at some noted film music composers (C. Ramchandra, Shankar-Jaikishen and Laxmikant-Pyarelal) and was an assessment of the 'quality' and 'quantity' of their work. Among other things that it commented upon was the role of the radio and the *pharmaish* in popularising the work of the composer. But in the act of speaking about the club and the *pharmaish*, they were constructed as an exercise that brought together black money, fake requests and 'clubs', and names picked out of telephone directories. One of the article's sentences is particularly revealing, 'Contrary to the general impression, there is such a place on the map of India. In fact, there were no fake towns in the "farmaishes" sent out by the "club"'. It is sufficient to say that the lines acutely indicate a metropolitan urban response to the *pharmaish*. The towns, since they were not part of the horizon of experience or even the awareness of big-city dwellers, were assumed to be non-existent and, hence, fake. The writer tries to alter that by saying that the towns were real but the requests fake. The manner in

which the *pharmaish* is perceived makes it a practice that is declared as untruthful, hence belying the intense affective engagement of several listeners with the radio and the film song. Noteworthy here is the tussle over the place. The fact that the town's name flashed on the airwaves, several times, forced its presence into the imagination of a nation that had not taken any cognisance of it. It is important to note that such derision was noted not only in English, but also in Hindi in magazines such as *Madhuri* (see Ravikant, 2015a, 2016), which aimed at the middle-class reader, and had literary aspirations.

Take the case of Jhumri Telaiya, aforementioned, a mining town from Jharkhand (earlier in Bihar) that acquired mythic proportions by making itself famous through the radio by constantly sending in song-requests and writing in to radio programmes; so much so that it featured in the lyrics of different film songs from the mid-1970s onwards.¹¹ That Jhumri Telaiya occupies this mythic space is a point that Ravikant (2016) makes in his recent work. Drawing attention to what he calls the 'sound/sonic map of India (*Hindustan ka dhvani-naksha*)' (p. xxxiv), he speaks of the continuity of such spaces, where listeners gather, write, publish, forging their own networks with one another and the announcers of their radio-world through praise, criticism and, often, love. Residents of Jhumri Telaiya or Rajnandgaon were not alone in sending requests to radio. Often, listeners' clubs or radio listeners' associations would work to send listeners' requests, organise competitions and bring out magazines to talk about the radio, music and films. Ravikant elaborates his argument by pointing out that the sonic map is not one contained by national or state boundaries. The idea of the sonic map not being contained by state boundaries may be further expatiated by the head of commercial broadcasting, AIR, in a personal interview (2014). While speaking about his experience as an announcer at Ambikapur, he said that the letters would come from within a 100–200-km radius of Ambikapur, since the station was transmitted on medium-wave and hence the sounds would carry all the way up to areas of Nepal, especially areas on the Nepal–India border. The *pharmaish*, he stressed, was more important to the people since they strongly desired to hear their name on air. According to him, it was the on-air association with the song and the fame and recognition that went with it that attracted most people to the *pharmaish*. The phenomenon, he added, was far stronger in the small town, where both people and places gained fame.

Let us consider this through the writing found in the early 1970s in listeners' clubs' magazines. There was a debate in these magazines, year after year, as to how the anger against announcers for not reading out listeners' requests and postcards should be treated. Would it be denounced or justified? Such articles ranged across magazines coming from towns/small cities such as Bhilai, Bilaspur and Chittorgarh, and ran almost predictably along two lines: either a rant against different announcers for not reading out letters/postcards with requests or an attempt to justify the reasons why announcers could not read more than a stipulated number of such *pharmaish*-es. Within this range, there was an article in *Darpan*, the magazine brought out by the Auraiya Radio Shrota Sangh, in its first issue (1976) that stood out for the cleverness with which it addressed this debate. Eschewing blaming either the radio station or the listeners, the article laid out strategies to be used in order to write letters or postcards laden with requests. The title of the article was '*Radio Phmaris [sic] sambandhi shrotaon se do baaten* (A few words to listeners about radio requests)'. The author was Sriram Shukla, the

head of the Anamika Radio Shrota Sangh, from Jafarganj, Fatehpur. The subtitle of the article had a greeting from the writer, which was, 'Radio Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation ke Hindi vibhag main bhag lene wale sabhi shrotaon ko Jafarganj (U. P.) ke Sriram Shukla ka namskar! (Jafarganj's Sriram Shukla greets all who participate in the Hindi division of Radio SLBC)'.

Fascinating in this article is the manner in which the appropriate format of a request is given. It lays out what is important for a listener to keep in mind '*nimm likhat baton ka dhyan rakhiye* (keep the following things in mind)'—the song, the film and the singers must be part of the format of the request. It is followed by '*aap kis sthan se phmaris [sic] bhejen. Us sthan ka naam cards ke sabse upar likhen* (please write the name of your place at the top of the card)'. This was followed by the complete address of the Hindi division, RC, in English, in contrast to the rest of the article, because as Shuklaji reminded the readers, the mail has to travel to Colombo, and therefore, the envelope containing the postcards must be addressed in English. He also said that one such envelope must not have more than six postcards at a time, unlike the hundreds (100–100) of cards that people would send.¹² In the later part of the article, he provides a breakdown of how much each letter (depending on weight) would cost to send; the price varies between ₹1.10 and ₹2. The article is filled with little nuggets on how to save on time, effort and, crucially, expenditure while sending postcards and mail to RC.

A few points in this article are worthy of attention. One, the mode of address by the writer should include, at two different points of the essay, his name and more importantly, the place he belongs to. Place takes precedence over name in his address to the readers and the instructions that he gives to write a request-laden postcard. Write the name of the place you write in from at the top of the card. In a sense then, even more important than the fact of the song being requested was the announcement on air of the name of the person and his town. Two, we note the training of one listener by another in the act of writing a *pharmaish*. This *pharmaish* then is no ordinary thing for the woman/man listening in Jafarganj. It is something that s/he participates in excessively and this requires, judging by the article, a degree of tempering, for matters of economy. Three, the practice of listening was constantly contested even in locations that were similar. And these listeners' clubs' magazines, as much as they were derided, were an occasion to put across different models of 'listeners' or ideal listeners, even if not different models of listening.¹³ Through the circuit and infrastructures of the Hindi film song, radio and the postal system, a small town in Uttar Pradesh, which may or may not have several other necessary infrastructures, is able to simultaneously enter and tap into one of several configurations of the modern, the sonic, the urban and the transnational.

The following is an appeal that was published by the Auraiya Radio Shrota Sangh in the same magazine and issue as the aforementioned article, addressed to the authorities of RC. It read:

Radio Ceylon ke adhikariyon se appeal

Auraiya Nagar ke shrotaon ki badhotri din par din hoti ja rahi hai. Magar pharmaishon main Auraiya ko uचित sthan nahi diya jaa raha. Adhikanshtya aisa mehsus hota hai, ki ek pharmaish shamil karlene par, Auraiya ke dusre shrota-bhai ki pharmaish shamil nahi ki jaati hai.

Atah radio Ceylon ke adharigan shri Mohammad Jamaluddin ji v shri Dharamdas ji se nivedan hai, ki Auraiya ko bhi anya shehron ke saman prathamika pradan kar sabhi shrotaon ke patron ko rojana shamil kiya jaye.

(An appeal to the Radio Ceylon authorities

Auraiya's listeners are growing in number every day. However, Auraiya's requests *are not being given due recognition* (literally, They [the town's requests] have not received the correct place). The dominant feeling is that if one request from the city is read out, then others are not included.

Hence, we request the heads of Radio Ceylon, Shri Mohammad Jamaluddin ji and Shri Dharamdas ji *to please give Auraiya the same status as other towns* and include listeners' requests every day.) (Emphasis added)

This appeal speaks very directly to the importance of the place of the town of Auraiya. The appeal tells us that there was an aspiration to be known and recognised that was embedded in the act of sending a *pharmaish*. Thus, much as the *pharmaish* would function in the manner of producing a supplicant in the form of the listener, it would also give us a clue to his aspirations. And in this case, it is not the aspiration merely of an individual, but rather the aspiration of a small town to be considered at par with other towns. In other words, it is an attempt to narrate oneself or one's place into the history of broadcasting. This appeal may be read together with another article in the same issue. The article is called '*Auraiya nagar ki sair* (Rambling around Auraiya)'.¹⁴ The article speaks about some key features of the town: educational institutions, the availability of transport and even tourist attractions, which it admits are few and even those few are to be found outside the town, some kilometres away. The article describes Etawah as an under-developed district in the state of Uttar Pradesh and Auraiya as its biggest tehsil, with an estimated population of about 45,000. The case of Auraiya and these two articles becomes a specific example of the manner in which the desire to map a place seeps into the coding of the *pharmaish* and listeners' clubs.

One more example is a poem called '*Mahoba ki Sair* (A trip to Mahoba)' written by Pandit Mewalal 'Pardeshi' from Mahoba.¹⁵ This poem was also, interestingly, part of the same issue. The poem deserves to be quoted in full:

Shaher Mahoba dekh le, man main uthi uchang, / Ajab yahan ke rang hain, ajab yahan ke dhang. / Ajab yahan ke dhang, ladkiyan mili nirali, / Kuch visheshta dekhi, kavita yūn kar dali, / Mahoba main 'm' shabd par naam yahan bharpūr. / Makhi, mandir, maulvi, machar hai mashūr. / Machar hai mashūr, miyan, mistri, maulana. / Mahtvanapura hai yahaan ka bahut pūrana. / Mahoba ke musaphir khana se musaphir bhag rahe the / *Pandit Mewalal Pardeshi transistor liye tehal rahe the.*

(View the city of Mahoba, the mind desired, / Strange are the colours here, strange are the customs, / Strange are the customs, the women here unique, / Something special beckoned, and became the poem's occasion, / Mahoba's words have much 'M', / Famous flies, temples, priests, mosquitoes / Famous mosquitoes, man, mason, priest. / Mahatvanapura is an old place, / The wanderers were running from Mahoba's lodge, / *Strolling with a transistor was Pandit Mewalal Pardeshi* [Emphasis added]).¹⁶

The poem co-locates for us the importance of the figure of the ardent listener with place. Taking a tour around Mahoba is not only to encounter the space of Mahoba, which in itself is cast as an exciting space where insects (mosquitoes, flies) jostle for space and fame along with temples, Muslim priests and masons. The poem sets up the unique things that should be witnessed in the town and among them is the listener, strolling with the transistor radio. In other words, Pardeshi sets himself up as one of

the several things to be seen in Mahoba, writing himself into the history of the town, like the place Mahatvanapura. And he as a figure becomes important not only because he leaves the oral signature of the poet, but, tellingly, because he, the poet, is a radio-listener. Now, Pandit Mewalal 'Pardeshi' was the name of a resident of Mahoba, whose name was frequently announced on the airwaves through his several requests.¹⁷ He was also a frequent writer and respondent in many of the listeners' club magazines and headed the Mahoba radio listeners' club, which was called the *Akhil Bharatiya Radio Shrota Sangh*, Mahoba (the All India Radio Listeners' Club, Mahoba). He was also the editor of the listeners' club bulletin that this club brought out. However, his poem in the issue of *Darpan*, along with the other articles that have been discussed earlier, allow us to note this telling of the idea of place as being embedded in the history of cultures and practices of listening. Then the sounding out of place in the context of the *pharmaish* and the radio listener becomes a marker of local identity, and a mode of community formation and publicity at three levels: through the airwaves, through the radio listeners' clubs and the town in question.

Consider the stories laid out thus far. If they form a sonic map, as Ravikant suggests, it is first, a map of affective intensity. This affective intensity is one that is rendered through the sonic (including the musical) and the medial in the coming together of the film song on radio. It is also one which takes on the intensity of 'place' as not merely signification, but an intensity produced through the affective labour for the sounding out of the *pharmaish* (whether through the three lakh postcards sent by Barnwal of Jhumri Telaiya or the fame of different places like Rajnanadgaon and Jhumri Telaiya or the desire to be as famous as other towns that Auraiya residents register). It is an intensity that finds register through both the perspectives of media and the sound-map discussed earlier, which are, it may be said, inextricably woven together when we consider this public form of the *pharmaish*. This sonic map cannot exist outside of the material-infrastructure affordances of the radio, for instance, the limits of propagation.

Beyond being a sonic, technological media map of affective intensity, it also helps to produce a shared geographical imaginary for the listeners, from Bombay to Rajnandgaon and Jhumri Telaiya, through the aforementioned contours, even when the metropolitan repudiates the small town/village. This sonic-spatial imaginary functions at different levels: the local (Pardeshi strolls with a transistor radio, well known to his community in Mahoba) and the linguistic-regional (this world is structured by Hindi-Urdu; others would be structured by other languages). This sonic map folds itself into the transnational: many of the people from these small towns are writing to the commercially run RC, in Colombo, Sri Lanka and not only to state-owned AIR stations across India.

We note, then, through this sonic map, a popular-film-music-driven order, which forms linguistic and affective musical communities, a listener's sonic-geographic imaginary, but one which could not exist without the planner's imagination of the sonic map.¹⁸ Crucially, this sonic map, which is part of the listener's imaginary and which the *pharmaish* aids in re/producing, is one that is performed and repeated day after day in a routine manner. Further, a 'national' imaginary and 'national space' (Goswami, 2004) is formed, contested by the *pharmaish* writers—these are small towns which have radio receivers and, thus, the ability to receive sound-waves but often they

lack other infrastructures including broad-gauge railway stations.¹⁹ The production of this national space, structured as it is here by sound, affect and media, is mediated by the local, the regional and the transnational.²⁰ In these co-constituted and co-mediated mediated spaces, even as the radio and the *pharmaish* writers' emphasis on place might produce the 'nation', it is not a direct address to a 'national public' and nor is the imagined national community produced within the geographic-territorial bounds of the nation-state.²¹

'Unko Toh Bas Apna Naam Sunana Tha (They Just Wanted to Hear Their Name)': Desiring Recognition, Recognising Desires

Listeners, a former radio announcer with AIR remarked to me, were of two kinds. Out of all, 90 per cent were those who would not listen very carefully and were only interested in sending in *pharmaish*-es (requests) and in listening to their names. They were also the ones who would be usually carpenters, tailors, small-shop owners or lower-middle class/working-class tradesmen. Only 10 per cent of the listeners, he continued, were ones who would pay attention, who would be really interested in the music and not just in hearing their names. In 2012, he was among the first to indicate what I would hear repeated by various people—radio announcers, creators of *Geet Kosh*-es (compendiums of songs) and others who had been part of the world of radio—that listeners would listen out for their name very carefully on air. The phrase 'they [the listeners] just wanted to hear their name' is a statement that was repeated by almost everyone I spoke to. Echoing through the phrase was the act of recognition that was central to the *pharmaish*, hearing one's name on air, spoken by the announcer. The announcer's reading out of the name would constitute this act wherein one heard one's name on air, and hence, gained recognition—for both people and place, as evidenced in the cases of Jhumri Telaiya and Ambikapur.

Also present through the phrase was a strange dismissal in the tone and words of both those talking about the act of sending a *pharmaish* as well as those listeners who once sent such requests. Some respondents in Kanpur, who had not only been avid listeners to the radio but would also send in dozens of request-laden postcards a week, felt awkward about narrating tales of their participation in such a culture in the past. They referred to themselves as knowing little about film music or not being very useful to a researcher. They would constantly refer to and defer to the knowledge of other friends and listeners in their circle about films and film songs. Other listeners too, who went on to write about music and produce *geet kosh*-es and listeners' club magazines, claimed a distance from sending in postcards and writing in to the radio. Ironically, this distance that they claimed, both temporal and personal, was negated by radio announcers like Manohar Mahajan and Vijaylakshmi Deseram (both of RC), who remembered them writing in very well. What lay in this desire to hear their name on the radio? Why did it prompt such a response of embarrassment?²²

In beginning at the point of the embarrassment, one may begin at one part of a two-pronged probe that Herzfeld (2005) lays out for practices that signify cultural intimacy. The two parts of the probe are, according to him, '... to explore the embarrassing practices of a marginal population, but also to investigate the elite values whereby that

embarrassment and that marginality are constituted' (p. 36). While the contexts in which and about which Herzfeld speaks are remarkably different, his words seem to have particular resonance here and may be deployed profitably.²³ In this sense, one must take the comments about listeners at the beginning of this section more seriously. In the context of those listening, there seems to be an implicit but nevertheless clear hierarchy between those who merely send in requests to hear their name and those who, even if they begin in this manner, 'evolve' into greater connoisseurs of music or archivists of Hindi film songs. The 'elite values' in this case find a register that is two-fold, one of class and the other of the act of listening and knowing, in other words, of cultural capital.²⁴ The *pharmaish* itself, it may be proposed, seems to be one of the 'embarrassing practices' that is hard to own up to in the present, regardless of how deeply involved one may have been in the past.

Thus, while not participating and the mode of participating (song selection, correctly writing the postcard or letter) in the practice of the *pharmaish* becomes a practice of distinction, I would like to suggest that during the first two decades after Independence, the *pharmaish* performed, for some listeners at least, the role of recognition. This argument about recognition stems from considering the evidence posited in the last two sections. The intensity of the desire to hear one's name on air was a desire for recognition. I suggest that the recognition afforded by the *pharmaish* was not 'political' in the sense of a rights-bearing body.²⁵ In this sense, I draw upon the work of S. V. Srinivas (2013), where he argues for film-viewing in general and fan activity in particular as a fundamentally political activity. A second argument that he makes, that is pertinent for our purpose, is the 'history of publicness' (original emphasis, p. 247) of cinema as an institution in India. My difference with Srinivas lies in the site of the political-cinematic. For him, it is the dovetailing of cinematic fan club members and political party cadres. In this case, I look at the *pharmaish* as part of the history of the publicness of cinema, especially as it is tied to the circulating film song and the airwaves. A second difference lies in the nature of the political. The listeners/*pharmaish*-writers are not necessarily transformed into or imbricated with the political party; rather, here, it is another order of the political we engage with. For example, let us recall the listeners' intervention in state cultural policy about film songs in the 1950s by tuning out of state radio, as discussed earlier in the essay.

Here, it would be beneficial to further distinguish between the listening public and the cinematic one.²⁶ At the outset, we must understand that the two overlap, for the most part. Usually, the assumption is that cinema or television only addresses the spectator or the viewer. Simultaneously, the radio is always seen as addressing only the listener. This assumes a separation of the senses that is not maintained by the film song airing on radio. Thus, the cinema is addressing a public that listens to the film song on the radio, just as the radio plays the film song for an audience that may have already seen the film. However, even if they have not seen the film, listeners would carry a broader filmic-visual order with them through film posters and cut-outs of film stars scattered through the landscape.²⁷ In other words, each public body (whether cinema or radio) always already has the sense memory of the other working alongside. This overlap becomes even more important in relation to the film song, compared to any other musical genre aired on radio. Thus, interestingly, one might even suggest that the *pharmaish*-writer is one that straddles both publics, performing the work of the lover of cinema.

The work of recognition then depends upon a relationship crafted between listener and announcer. For the *pharmaish*-based programmes to work, the announcer and the listener calibrate their relationship with each other through the announcer's address on a daily basis. It is through this daily performance and labour, on both the listener's as well as the announcer's part, that we may note how the *pharmaish* becomes a moment at which recognition has meaning. Thus, the announcers would use familiar terms of address '*bhaiyon aur behnon* (brothers and sisters)', '*doston* (friends)' and pay attention to the 'mood' of the programme that they wished to create. The mood of the programme, former RC announcers told me, would come from the choice of words they used as well as the manner in which they selected film songs (for their lyrics, tempo, musical quality). The relationship between the two should be seamless. Thus, in the *pharmaish*-based programmes, the announcers' acts of selection and arrangement of requests segue from phrases to songs. Moreover, the songs themselves must form a coherent whole, which would prompt the listener to have a seamless listening experience and become the prompt to be inserted as a *pharmaish*-writer within the programme. Thus, it is through this creation of a 'mood', one might argue, that the desire to write in with a request is produced. Further, it is this movement between individual and collective, which the mood-creation of the programme and the address of the announcer allow, that performs the act of recognition.

This recognition was also not one which was being charted through a rational-communicable order. It was one that found register through the affective excess of the *pharmaish* and came into being only through the affective labour of the *pharmaish*-writer-listener. In both cases, critical to this act of recognition was sonic, musical affect. The recognition of the name on air of individual and place-driven identity ensured that through the *pharmaish*, the listener-request writer was brought within the authorising sounds of radio and the song, usually a film song. The *pharmaish*-writer's yearning for attachment and recognition indicates his/her negotiation of the otherwise anonymous listening public formed through the radio. However, in the first two decades after Independence, it might be seen as signifying a sonic-political act of recognition by the radio apparatus, mediated through the song and post combined. Radio enables certain collective affects, even while addressing the individual. It allows, then, the *pharmaish* to become a way of performing the work of recognition through the sonic, the infrastructural and the affective. In the context of radio stations outside the Indian nation-state but within erstwhile colonial circuits of radio (from Goa, Lahore and Colombo, among others), this recognition afforded small towns and villages an entry into transnational circuits. This recognition, it must be noted, was most often produced by linguistic affective communities or film song-driven affective communities. In both cases, the nature of the recognition was sonic, whether driven by cadence, a language-identity complex or a fan-like relationship with the song. The recognition of the person writing in was at stake through the *pharmaish*. This recognition was multi-fold, helping to produce the modern fan-listener-subject in this act of reading out. The recognition belonged to different orders: one, the order of the nation-state and the authorising presence of the radio and the film song; two, the order of the transnational commercial broadcasting, thus capital, and other sovereignties that came into being through the radio; three, the order of the *pharmaish* establishing the listener (the *pharmaish*-writer whose name was aired was the privileged listener); four, the

recognition was established through a closeness to the aural star—whether announcer, singer and/or music director. This act of recognition through the *pharmaish*, then, was inter-medial (flowing through it was the film song/cinema, the radio, the postcard) and firmly ensconced in the sonic. In other words, the act of ‘hailing’ by the announcer on air, while it may have been a way of ‘interpellating’ the subject, was not only sought by the subject but it was also a mediated, affective, sound event.

Conclusion

To conclude, then, I return to the three strands set up at the outset, and elaborated through the article, about the *pharmaish*: medial form, sonic map and recognition. These three are, it may be argued, fundamentally intertwined, especially because running through all three is the film song. Through these strands, we are firstly able to think of the history of the affective transaction, the *pharmaish* and how it helps us to populate the lives of the film song beyond the screen, in its movement through different media and everyday life, which in turn, has implications for reception and other cinema and media histories. Second, various elements of the *pharmaish* (the speeds at which it was read, the sounding of the announcer’s voice, how it becomes radio, how one becomes listener) are all part of the localised histories of media, sound and sound technologies within India. Finally, the fulfilled *pharmaish*’s performance of recognition is crucial to our understanding of the relationship between state and non-state entities, the radio and the subject, through the sonic (encompassing the cinematic and the musical) and the affective.

Notes

1. The Vividh Bharati station at Borivli has maintained, for the last few years, a register which makes note of the total number of postcards, phone calls, e-mails and SMS-es received every day, as per the show that they have been addressed to. Unfortunately, in the early period of Vividh Bharati, there were no such records maintained so the total number of letters/postcards received is a number exaggerated or shrunk by the memory of those who have been involved with the station. This is also true of numbers quoted by individual radio announcers, across radio channels. Vividh Bharati began at a station at Churchgate in Mumbai before moving to its current location at Borivli. The number 1,500–2,000 is thus the average figure I noted for the month October 2014, because on a daily basis the number would fluctuate, sometimes dipping to a low of 1,550 and sometimes rising to 2,200. It is also the estimated average that the announcers and programme executives of Vividh Bharati shared with me.
2. *Geet Mala* was a weekly countdown-format programme on Radio Ceylon. This aired every Wednesday evening at 8 p.m. Ameen Sayani was the programme’s host and one of the most famous aural stars.
3. In the American context on listeners’ letters, see Douglas (2004, p. 134). She notes hundreds of thousands of letters arriving at the radio stations and to announcers from small-town and rural America during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly. For more detailed accounts of listeners’ letters in America, see McCusker (1998); Valliant (2002). Simmons (2009) argues that listeners’ letters form part of media content and not media technology. In the Indian context, particularly Bengal presidency and the state of West Bengal, post-Independence,

see Biswas (2012, pp. 296–314). She notes that in 1958, with relaxations in government policy, there was a programme called *anurodher asar* (request programme) of Bengali modern songs. Further, she notes the total number of listeners' letters was 15,000 in 1958, which she says doubled in a year.

4. Biswas (2012, pp. 337–366) discusses at length the wonder-laden discourse around the radio in the 1930s, charting its movement towards the familiar. Biswas' evidence may be corroborated through newspaper articles devoted to the technological device that the radio was, from the mid-1920s to 1940s. If one examines the *Times of India's* engineering supplement pages and radio-related pages ('Wireless News', 'Broadcasting in India') during this period, we note the wonder revealed through a desire to learn the object in all its technological splendor.
5. Relevant to this discussion would be evidence of the radio industry in India and Pakistan during the late 1950s and early 1960s. For instance, *India News* (May 19, 1962) said that 'there has been substantial demand for transistor sets' and similarly, Pakistan was to set up a factory in Dhaka for the manufacture of both radios and transistors in 1962. See MSS Eur F 158/299 and MSS Eur F 158/638, respectively.
6. To elaborate, the symbolism inherent in/invested in through the practice of the *pharmaish* was an appreciation of some of the media infrastructures made available to the populace in the face of other deprivations (infrastructures of electricity, water etc.).
7. At this point, it is also notable that there has been very little writing on the reception of film songs; Morcom (2007, pp. 207–238) and Gopal and Sen (2008) are exceptions. Recent literature on the film song (e.g., Beaster-Jones & Sarazzin, 2017; Kothari & Shah, 2017; Sunya, 2017) for the most part works with the audio-visual or lyric texts in order to study it.
8. The translation of *pharmaish* (also spelled *farmaish*) as 'order' comes from Whitworth's *An Anglo-Indian Dictionary* (1885, p. viii). He notes this word in his preface as one that is not in the dictionary, because there is a ready equivalent in the form of the word 'order' for it.
9. The state of Chhattisgarh was carved out of Madhya Pradesh in 2000.
10. Lalauli is a village in the district of Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh.
11. See 'Main toh aayi hoon Jhumri Telaiya se... (I have come from Jhumri Telaiya)' from the film *Mounto* (dir. Jambu, 1975).
12. '100–100' would indicate hundreds of cards. I have retained the quote from the original text because it corresponds to the '*sau-sau* (hundred-hundred/hundreds)' of spoken Hindi.
13. As we shall see the two are distinct even though they are inter-related. Listening as a practice (times, attitudes, attention, physical location, bodily responses, etc.) is not really the focus, but the notion of how a listener should be, in terms of forming radio *shrota sanghs* (listeners' clubs), in terms of writing in to the radio, knowing addresses of radio stations, etc., were definitely part of the standard repertoire of these magazines.
14. *Sair* is literally to take a trip, ramble and jaunt or even to go for a stroll. It covers, depending on context, a vast number of verbs associated with moving around.
15. Mahoba is a district in Uttar Pradesh. It used to fall under the district of Hamirpur up to 1995. There is a municipality also called Mahoba which serves as the district headquarters. Thus, in the 1970s, Mahoba would have been a small town, with a population not exceeding 50,000 people.
16. Mahatvanapura seems to be a place within Mahoba. It is most likely to be a place in the town, Mahoba, given the title of the poem itself.
17. Pandit Mewalal Tiwari was his name and 'Pardeshi' was a name that he adopted at the end of his name, as many listeners of the time did. The reasons for adopting nicknames or names as suffixes may have been several. Hamraaz, another avid radio-listener and creator of the *Hindi Film Geet Kosh* (Hindi film song encyclopaedia), for instance, said that usually these nicknames would come about as a result of embedded personal histories, often of

- love stories whether fulfilled or unfulfilled. The names would then be added either by the listener or by his friends (again, usually those friends who were also avid listeners of the radio). To a large extent, it was men that inhabited this world. In fact, even the listeners' clubs' magazines are dominated by the presence of men. However, there are some women to be found there, and in fact there was an all-girls radio listeners club as well: the Sneh girls radio listeners' club from Bilaspur.
18. The planner's imaginary of the sonic map is something to be elaborated in a separate article at several levels. This conception of the sonic map would include radio's relationship with atmospherics and land topologies at one level. At another, it would include the administration (colonial/nation-state) and their carving out of urban maps based on the governance of sound and so on. Thus, the sonic map or a sonic geography in all its fullness is a concept that cannot be explored within the confines of this article. Further, such a sonic map would not be limited in the drawing of its contours to India.
 19. Shahid Amin (2001, pp. 47–52) in his description of Deoria, a small town in Uttar Pradesh, recalls Deoria's residents in the 1950s dealing with an inadequately lit city, in spite of electrification in 1949. However, electricity was not available all the time, especially in public places, although they had access to radio-sets and films songs because of Radio Ceylon.
 20. I follow Manu Goswami (2004) in her understanding of the constitution of nation-space and include media, sound and affect to her formulation. She argues that the idea of a bounded, differential nation is produced through a nation-space. This is produced through striations of multi-scalar, multi-temporal historical geography of institutions and everyday practices which are local, regional and global. Thus, nation-space is an understanding of social space and practice that is not merely representational.
 21. Much scholarship, particularly in the context of studies on American radio, has argued that the radio addressed and was well suited to address '... a national public in an immediate and intimate manner' (Loviglio, 2002, p. 90). Others to have argued on similar lines include Michele Hilmes (1997), who draws upon Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' to make a case for radio as a technology more than print to produce the nation. Also see Douglas (2004, pp. 5–25) for the early American context and Scannell and Cardiff (1991, pp. 277–303) for a national culture developed over the BBC.
 22. In the context of Britain, Peter M. Lewis (2000) makes a similar point. He speaks about the difference between the private experience of radio and the status accorded to it publically. He says, '... we listen to the radio. Yet this habit and the intimate things it does for us as a friend, trusted informant and soundtrack for living, are almost literally unmentionable in public' (p. 161). I draw upon Peter Lewis to suggest that the embarrassment that surrounds radio-listening practices is not limited to the Indian context; however, this is not to say that the manner in which the embarrassment is produced is in the same register or that it offers the same meanings or interpretation as allied experiences in certain areas.
 23. Herzfeld (2005) and Andrew Shyrock (2004) are both using cultural intimacy in the context of the nation-state and modes of ethnographic inquiry. Shyrock raises a pertinent point that cultural intimacy matters only when there is an imagined opinion and that is '... *imagined to matter*' (p. 11, original emphasis). In this context, I think it useful to deploy this idea because of the reluctance of most of my respondents to speak about the *pharmaish*. The other reason I think it useful is that Shyrock and others in the volume discuss it specifically with regard to public culture.
 24. In the past, the sending of the *pharmaish* to the radio station performed 'elite values' also through the content of the songs that were requested for, on air, that is whether the lyrics were 'vulgar' (overtly sexualised, for example) or not and how one requested for the song (the listeners' bulletins would contain discussions of how to correctly send requests, for instance).

25. Colburn (2015) argues that, within fandom, the act of cultural recognition is a specific iteration of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. He uses it particularly to refer to fans' practices of recording and uploading of concerts to platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. Here, I would also like to add that there is a long-standing debate within political theory on the idea of social-political recognition, with one of the earliest writers being Hegel, who focuses on the importance of mutual recognition in differing forms, which is best achieved through an institutionalised order of rights. See Markell (2003) for an elaboration of the debates. He lays out, contra-recognition, an allied understanding, that of 'acknowledgement'.
26. For a discussion of the modernisation of the listening public, which includes the relationship with the audio-visual public (predominantly cinema, including silent cinema) in the early twentieth century, see Kate Lacey (2013, pp. 37–47).
27. Roos Gerritsen (2012) analyses urban visual culture in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry arguing that it forms a point for the concatenation of film stardom, vernacular fan worlds, politics and publicity. She examines this through the presence of billboard advertisements, wall painting, etc., in the city space as well as looking at how the figure of the fan emerges. In this case, I use her work strategically to indicate what is a commonplace of the everyday Indian space.

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