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Public Lecture

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Seminar Room 1
of the Department of South Asian,
Tibetan and Buddhist Studies,
University Campus,
Spitalgasse 2, Hof 2.7, 1090 Vienna

THE ENCHANTED WORLD OF BOMBAY FILM

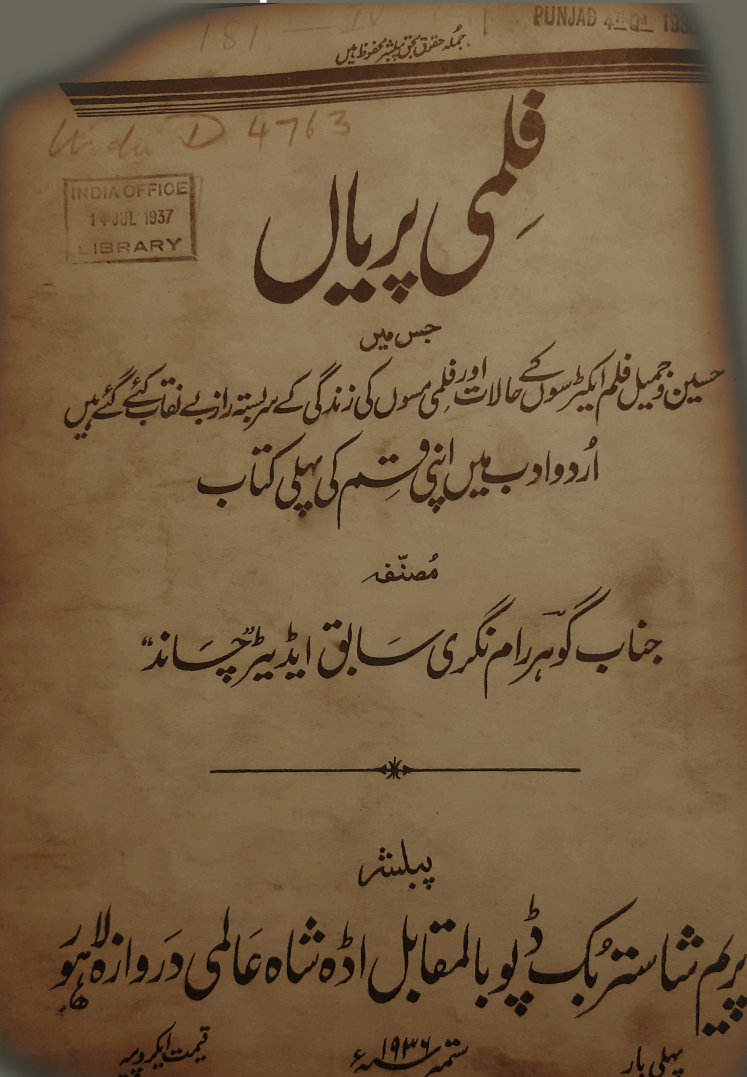
Anglo-Indian women and the discourses of stardom through archival ephemera from the Urdu public sphere in India (1930-50)

In the period between the 1920s and 1940s, many Anglo-Indian women worked in Bombay films and were among the first group to join the workforce of the cine-industry. Besides individual transformations, cinema allowed the larger Anglo-Indian community to reclaim the public sphere in new and radical ways. In this lecture, I will map the transformations in public discourse on Anglo-Indian actresses and their stardom. Through the examination of two rare Urdu texts, *Filmi Pariyan* (Film Fairies, 1936) and *Filmi Titliyan* (Film Butterflies, 1945), I explore the ways in which star bodies, specifically Anglo-Indian star profiles were constructed through playful metaphors and romantic Urdu poetry. These fascinating texts provided not only sketchy biographical details and filmography but also included a section describing the actresses' bodies through appropriate vocabularies of prevailing decorum. I argue that these texts expand the potential film archive and help us in understanding the ways in which star discourses were shaped by print material in India.



Violet
Patience
Pearl

A bunch of beautiful blossoms. Three of the Cooper sisters —Violet, Patience and Pearl— a rare picture of the sort. Patience Cooper is in the middle



Sarah Niazi is a film historian and media studies scholar. Her work maps the entangled history of cinema's relationship to the Urdu public sphere in India and explores questions of language, literary culture, performance, and gender. Currently, she is working on her book manuscript tentatively titled *A Language for cinema*. She is an Assistant Professor at FLAME University, India and a Fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies at the University of Leiden (2024- 2025).