

Piratical Encounters:

The Pirate and Mass Mobilisation in the Popular Tamil Imagination

Bhargavi Narayanan

Abstract

This paper attempts to formulate the beginnings of a piratical paradigm that is attuned to particular local, and political contexts. It traces the figure of the pirate through popular Tamil magazines and movies from the mid-1950s and 60s to the present and highlights the changing nature of representation of the pirate. Each figuration of the pirate corresponds to and offers a nuanced insight into socio-economic and cultural anxieties of the time: of post-independent, modern India, the Dravidian politics of the 60s and the precarity of labour in a globalised world.

Through a close reading of local articulations of the figure of the pirate, this paper generates a non-western understanding of the pirate, not as a common enemy of all, as argued by Cicero, but as a mutable, plastic figure that can negotiate local contingencies. Piratical practices, by extension, lose their villainous connotation and become complex acts of negotiation that can help navigate the penumbra of the global.

Key Words: Piracy, Political Society, Subaltern-Popular.

The unique feature of a pirate culture, Ravi Sundaram argues, is its ability to “disrupt existing technologies of control” and mediate a parasitical relationship between media technologies and infrastructures (2009:12). As a result, pirate media forms have a life, even a second life, of their own (ibid: 2). More importantly, it fosters an urban everyday that no longer can be characterised as strictly modern. The strategies of negotiation this pirate culture enables depend on fluid movements

between visibility and invisibility, between provincialism and cosmopolitanism, and between legitimacy and illegitimacy. These instances of legitimate extra-legal practices are what Partha Chatterjee defines as characteristic of “Political Society” – the realm that can effectively encompass the agential practices of the subaltern (2011: 14).

My interest in Sundaram’s theorisation of pirate modernity is in its ability to locate the piratical as a set of practices that a/effect complex exchanges, circulations, and experiences of media assemblages. It expands the idea of media piracy from the use and circulation of media texts without legal permission of the ‘owner’ to think about a set of practices that animate urban life-worlds. In doing so, his work re-orientates the idea of piracy from thinking about media use(r) to media publics, where models of social totality, questions of agency, and politics of the subaltern find no easy answers. While this is a compelling theorisation of the piratical and what it (the piratical) has become (and is becoming) in urban India, there is little exploration of what or who exactly is a pirate. Adrain Johns’ seminal text *Piracy* is perhaps one of the few comprehensive texts that provide a historical engagement with the idea of piracy as it emerged in the western world. Until the seventeenth century, he argues, that “the misappropriation of intellectual creations were not deemed as acts of piracy as the combination of commercial and cultural ingredients that would produce a concept of piracy did not yet exist” (2009:19). It was not until the emergence of printing and literate publics who claimed a powerful position in the discussion of ‘common good’ that authorial transgressions were seen as consistent with acts of piracy (ibid:19,21,22); acts which were not in the interest of the common good – acts that in Daniel Heller-Roazan’s words made them ‘the enemy of all’. Johns’ historical account is relevant because it establishes a) the emergence (or recognition) of piracy as seamlessly related to the emergence of a publics - their formation, mutation and mobilisation and b) the relationship between the acts of piracy and the dawn of modernity heralded by the technological innovations and cultural use (ibid: 2009:329). His argument is a *tour de force* in developing a piratical paradigm that can be attuned to the popular and their engagement with modernity. However, in focusing largely on the evolution and coming into being of piracy in the western world, his account enables a theorisation of Modernity (and a popular) that does not take into account the different experiences of modernities across the globe. This paper seeks to expand Jones’ theorisation of a piratical paradigm by tailoring it to particular experiences of modernity and its becoming in urban centres of the third world, or in Sundaram’s words, of pirate modernities. It begins by asking what or who the pirate was in a particular local context; in this case the Tamil context. In other words,

what is the relationship between the Tamil popular imagination of the sea faring pirate and the range of practices that we identify as piratical today? Is there a way to unentangle this seamless transition from pirates at sea to the piratical of our urban everyday that Sundaram theorises? At stake in such a question is the potential for the formulation of a modernity that is rooted in the local while also aware of larger global exchanges.

Thus, this paper begins a re-mapping of the piratical paradigm by focussing on the figure of the pirate. While this is by no means as exhaustive an approach undertaken by Adrian Jones in his text, this paper, in highlighting the sheer potentiality that is invested in the figure of the pirate in the popular Tamil imagination, makes a convincing case for more expansive work that would delve into the historical becoming of piracy in situated cultural and geo-political contexts. These particular accounts of the piratical, when taken together, would make for a much more nuanced paradigm that can account for unique experiences of modernities.

The project of repurposing the pirate to make legible complex socio-political interactions, is however, first and foremost, a problem of translation. In the Tamil context for example, the pirate translates to sea bandits (*kadal kollaiakararga*), who are in the same class as any other bandits. They do not quite fit Cicero's description of the pirate as the 'common enemy of all'. Media piracy automatically translates to theft, leaving no room to exploit the potentialities of the piratical. The repurposing of the pirate then, must begin with local representations and narratives of the piratical.

Therefore, I begin by tracing the ways in which the Tamil popular imagination has framed and fantasised about the pirate, and how these reflect particular socio-cultural anxieties of the time. My enquiries range from popular Tamil texts that deploy the figure of the pirate from mid 1950s and 1960s to the present. The first piratical figure I engage features in the serialised story of the Sea Queen (*Kadal Rani*) by Sandilyan. Here, the pirate is crucial in the fight against white colonisers in the western coast of India. Next, I discuss M.G. Ramachandran's portrayal of the pirate in the movie *Aayirathil Oruvan* (One in Thousand, B.R. Panthulu, 1965) wherein his brief stint aboard a pirate ship enables him to mobilise a small army against the dictatorial regime. Finally, I analyse *Maryan* (The Immortal, Bharat Bala, 2013) and its preoccupations with the piratical. These mutating images of the pirate, I will show, are a far cry from Cicero's definition of the pirate as "the common enemy of all". The pirate of the Tamil imagination can be used to expel white colonisers from India (as in the first instance), a mass mobiliser (as in the second instance) or can make precarious livelihood of migrant

labourers (as in the third instance). S/he is a malleable, plastic force, full of potential and fecund possibilities.

The relationship between Sundaram's theorisation of piratical practices and a local piratical imagination is precisely this idea of mutability that emerges as central to the idea of the pirate. The contingency that is afforded to the figure of the pirate is key to the formulation of a piratical paradigm that is invested in engaging the chaos of modern, everyday life in the city; it can be useful to think about two seemingly contradictory ideas – the subaltern and the popular. In particular, it can be useful to think about the nature of engagement between the subaltern and mass media – what are sites and conditions of these engagements? In what manner do they affect the urban everyday? What kinds of mobilisation do they enable and what are the politics of those mobilisations? Using the piratical as a crucial node in this discussion, I argue that a theorisation of the subaltern-popular is in order. I show that a piratical paradigm can draw these two seemingly disparate analytical categories into a generative discourse on the global, or more importantly, on the penumbra of the global.

The Pirate and Robin Hood

Before I launch into an in-depth analysis of the texts, I want to caution against a confusion between the figure of the pirate and Robin Hood. Each of these texts in the vigilante and emancipatory qualities they ascribe to the figure of the pirate make her/him closely resemble the characteristics of Robin Hood and his penchant to help the common people suffering from the reign of a ruthless dictator. G. Dhananjayan notes the frequent occurrence of this trope in Tamil cinema, sometimes within the Tamil nationalist context beginning with *Malaiikkallan* (Thief of the Hills, S.M. Sriramulu Naidu, 1954). Based on a popular novel by the same name, penned by Nammakkal Ramalingam Pillai, a nationalist poet, this film starred M.G. Ramachandran (former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, MGR henceforth) and was a huge success. He identifies films even as recently as 2007 that feature protagonists who would steal from the rich to help the poor and further a particular social cause (2014:112). Each of the three protagonists however, while similar to this general trope, have striking differences that mark them as a pirate rather than Robin Hood. In the case of Sandilyan's *Kadal Rani*, the key piratical figure Ratna while working for a larger social cause of keeping the English off the Malwa waters (and plunders and loots to help her people), is granted legitimacy by

the State during this time; a strategic alliance with the Maratha administration that pardons her vigilante acts thus far. Interestingly, while she works with the Marathas for a brief period of time, once the alliance is over, she becomes the independent Sea Queen, once again plundering and looting and getting on the wrong side of the realm. This mutability of her relationship with the crown wherein she can sometimes be a valuable ally and at others be a wanted vigilante, makes her very unlike the Robin Hood narrative of always being at odds with the State/authority/dictator. In this she fulfills one of Daniel Heller-Roazen's key descriptions of the pirate – as a figure who is in a region beyond territorial jurisdiction (of the Maratha king in this case), who may not be identified with an established state and who collapses criminal and political categories (2009:10,11). Similarly, in *Aayirathil Oruvan* MGR as a pirate is outside the territorial administration of the *Neidhal Naadu* and its dictatorial leader, does not identify himself with a particular state (even till the very end when he is offered the crown!), and as an independent doctor, slave, and a pirate, defies being categorised in any one political category. These protagonists operate on a moral legitimacy that is quite different from the legal limitations and in doing so, fulfill the fourth and most important condition in Heller-Roazen's description of the pirate – they transform the concept of a war (ibid: 11); the battle in each of these cases is as much a moral struggle as it is an external conflict for power and supremacy.

Thus, while there are superficial similarities between the piratical figures I discuss and the general Robin Hood trope in that they all ultimately want to serve a social cause, it is counter productive to collapse the distinctions between the two. The confusion the pirate figure engenders, in its ability to transform and rise to the contingency of the socio-politics of the time, and its reliance on legitimacy rather than legality are precisely the strengths that heighten its potential to enable an intimate and nuanced encounter with the popular.

The Pirate and Colonial Threats

The first text I will discuss is the historical romance 'Sea Queen' (*Kadal Rani*) by Sandilyan. Serialised in the popular Tamil magazine *Kalki*, Sea Queen must have first been printed in the late 1950s to early 1960s¹. Set in the early 18th Century, the story revolves around the historic Arabian sea wars

¹ It is hard to arrive at an exact time frame for the story at this point because I was unable to access the original magazines they were serialized in. The 1983 edition of the complete text I read for this paper contained a preface where Sandilyan thanks editor and friend *Kalki* Rajendran, who took over from *Kalki* Krishnamurthy, the founder and

between the Marathas and the English under the Maratha general Kanhoji Angre. General Peshwa Bajirao is determined to rid the seas of both English Pirates and English Governors who raid and seek to establish political control over Maratha. He devises a complex plot wherein the Pirates and Governors are led to believe that they are each betrayed by the other and fight against each other. Our hero is Indrajit Ananth who, acting under Peshwa Bajirao's orders, convinces English pirates England and Taylor to participate in a battle between Captain Macrae (English Governor) and the Marathas. They are aided in these efforts by La Bouche the French Pirate and the legendary Long John Silver. The one complication in this elaborate plot is that the Malwa king does not necessarily control the Arabian sea waters. He is king in name only. The true control of the waters lies with Ratna, head of the Sindudurg and Vizayadurg forts. Her fleet controls all movement around the waters and since she is already successful in protecting her people against raids and foreign political control, she is hesitant to aid Ananth in his quest. The plot focuses on how Ananth seduces/convince Ratna to aid his quest and successfully executes the General's plan.

Although the story is of questionable literary merit and is known more for its titillating seductions than historical accuracy, my interest in using it to map the trajectory of a piratical paradigm in the popular imagination lies in the range of piratical figures it introduces. Indeed, a lot of Sandilyan's historical romances feature the Arabian Sea wars and include a pirate or two in the narrative. This is however, one of those unique stories where Sandilyan features Long John Silver, the legendary pirate of R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* with his large parrot and wooden leg to boot. In the preface to the edition I use for analysis, Sandilyan acknowledges his fascination with *Treasure Island* and his debt to Stevenson for enabling such a provocative piratical imagination. One of the key reasons why I chose this text for analysis over other novels, such as 'Lamp Lit with Water' (*Jala Deepam*) which also feature pirates, is this seamless import of Long John Silver into the popular Tamil imagination. The swashbuckling pirate with his romantic nature and dangerous lifestyle is made accessible. Because of his ability to speak many tongues (he switches between English and Marathi, all of which is written in Tamil) the white, English pirate, befitting Cicero's description as the 'common enemy of all' is brought to life in all his glory. Here, his ambiguous morality and unpredictability in interpersonal

editor of *Kalki* magazine after 1954. Since most people I interviewed who had read Sandilyan said they remembered reading his novels in early 1960s, it is safe to assume the time period between mid 1950s and mid 1960s as the possible period of first print.

relationships have political consequences beyond sea faring adventures and treasure hunts. They play a crucial role in setting up the Pirates England and Taylor against the English Governors.

The first time we meet Long John Silver is at the Sailors' Inn at Sindudurg. Indrajit Ananth trounces Captain England in a skirmish and convinces him to accompany him to meet a 'mutual friend', who is of course Long John Silver. It is Ananth's relationship with Silver that eventually convinces Captain England to join his fight against the English Governors and Marathas (it is later revealed that Ananth's treason is a deliberate tactic to turn the Pirates against the Governors).

At this secret meeting at Sailors' Inn, we are introduced to yet another and arguably the most interesting pirate figure – Ratna herself. Until this meeting, Ratna is a sensual, attractive heroine who captures the interest of Ananth right away. Here however, Captain England introduces her as a pirate “of the same class as their Anne Bonny and Mary Read”². The key characters and the alliances that they will eventually forge/betray are conditioned by Silver's presence. He lends credibility to Ananth's cover and adds intrigue to the budding romance between Ratna and Ananth.

The most fascinating part of this meeting at Sailors' Inn is however, the unveiling of Ratna's source of authority and leadership in Sindudurg and Vizayadurg. When England introduces her as a formidable pirate, she angrily denounces this description and declares that she “is not the same class as you (Silver and England) and does not plunder or raid for pleasure or gain”. Her motive is to “prevent foreign ships from entering the waters of Sindudurg, Vizayadurg and other coastal towns so that they don't have the opportunity to raid the land or the resources”³. No ship shall pass by the coastal region or even approach the coast of Malwa without her permission. Even the mighty Cassandra led by dangerous pirates like England and Taylor is anchored 30 miles away from the coast, awaiting permission to enter.

Ratna's part in the larger scheme of the story becomes clear. Ananth clearly needs her co-operation to let Cassandra and other English ships enter the Malwa waters to execute his set up. What is interesting though, is the part where he tries to convince her to co-operate. Formulated with Sindudurg as the centre of action, the battle plan is definitely authorised by royal decree. Ratna however, hesitates because like she says, she is already doing a fine job of keeping the English off

² My translation from text.

³ Ibid

the waters of Malwa and does not see the need to be part of this plan. Ananth convinces her by saying that this is for the larger good of the entire territory and that if they take care of the English on water, General Peshwa Bajirao with his land army, is more than capable of vanquishing the English. Hailed thus to be part of the greater cause and because she is already half in love with Ananth, Ratna agrees.

What is evident from this interaction though, is that Ratna is the ‘Queen’ not by royal decree. She is not royalty nor waiting in line to ascend the throne. Her status is self made, based on the organic resistance she organised against the foreigners for self-preservation. The crown, recognising her clout, instead of flouting her authority in the waters, seek her help in establishing an ‘English free’ Malwa. Although what she does are piratical acts, as plainly described by England, they are granted legitimacy by the State. The rhetoric of self-preservation adds credence to this legitimacy, setting her actions above the invisible, shifting line of morality.

The female piratical figure, along with Ananth, is one of the principal protagonists of the story. Although debatable whether the story allows for a truly feminist piratical imagination, it is definitely more exciting in the spectrum of piratical figures it introduces⁴ and its discussions of what or who a pirate is. England, Taylor and Silver are clearly on one end of the spectrum: white, male and philandering. Ratna, is at the other end: brown, female and driven by a cause. Right in the middle is Ananth: brown, male but of questionable allegiance.

In late 1950s, coming in the wake of other historical novels which spoke of the rich heritage of the country⁵, it is not surprising that this novel chose to build on the glory of the nation and her triumphs against the English. But what is surprising is the heroic role the rogue/pirate played in restoring national honour. Not only were Ratna’s vigilante acts seen as heroic and desirable (both morally and sexually) but were also crucial in defeating the English. The figure of the pirate was not

⁴ As opposed to *Jala Deepam* which revolves around one male protagonist and his trials at sea.

⁵ I refer here to writer Kalki’s novels, all of which were hugely popular historicals that revolved around the ancient kingdoms of South India, notably the Cholas. As a freedom fighter he was hugely nationalistic and his works evoked a Tamil Nationalistic sentiment in their retelling of the glorious days of Cholas. These novels were also published in the 1950s, serialized in the Tamil magazine *Kalki*. Sandilyan worked for *Kumudam* the rival magazine to *Kalki* and it was inevitable that he would also write historicals (though he did write other short stories, a biography and a book on the development of cinema).

equal to being amoral. As long as they served a common good, or prioritised the welfare of the people, they were even granted legitimacy by the State.

The pirate as a mass mobiliser

The role of the rogue brown pirate, who acts for the good of the smaller communities the State has no time to care for, without challenging the king's authority undergoes a radical change in the 1960s film *Aayirathil Oruvan* (One in a Thousand). Here, the pirate is not just a hero – but a mass mobiliser. Not only does he mobilise the subaltern (at the level of the story) into an organised revolution against the dictator of the State, but also literally mobilises the people of Tamil Nadu to vote for his political party during the state and central elections. In this film the pirate is imagined as part of the subaltern movement, as in fact, crucial to the liberation of the Dalits. And because the film was one of the important hits of MGR that mobilised fans as electoral publics, it is here that the idea of the subaltern-popular finds most purchase.

Released in 1965, *One in a Thousand* starred MGR and J. Jayalalitha (also formerly the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu). MGR is a humble doctor who spends his time helping the poor and underprivileged. He lives in *Neidhal Naadu* – a land ruled with an iron fist by a heartless dictator. One evening a grievously wounded rebel seeks his help and MGR helps him recover, knowing that the act can get him imprisoned. On cue, he is imprisoned and with the entire contingent of rebels, sold into slavery to the owner of a Virgin Island (*Kanni Theevu*). The rest of the film is about how he emancipates the slaves, mobilises an army, and rids *Neidhal Naadu* of its dictator.

This story of liberation from slavery and dictatorship is facilitated by a pirate ship. As MGR and his fellow rebels are working on Virgin Island, they are attacked by pirates and taken prisoners by them. MGR wins over the pirate leader and his crew and convinces them to fight against the dictator. The figurations of the pirate are drastically different from the earlier text. Although portrayed as sly and conniving, the pirates have their own code of conduct which is infinitely less selfish than that of the dictator. All treasure and loot are to be divided equally and the leader is shown to follow the law of the land, even when it is inconvenient to him⁶. But most importantly, it shows that the pirate does

⁶ This is shown in one of the many confrontations between the pirate leader and MGR. The pirate leader falls in love with the princess of Virgin Islands who is under MGR's protection. When he tries to take her to his palace, a sword fight ensues. The princess, to avoid anyone getting hurt admits that they are living as man and wife and by the law

not necessarily have to act without morals. Once MGR joins the pirates, he raids only other pirate ships, stating that that would provide them with the most bounty. The manoeuvre serves a dual purpose. Not only does it keep his hands clean (from the perspective of the viewer who knows MGR is being forced into piracy), but also wins over his pirate comrades. This pirate with morals uses the booty from his treasure hunts to fund the rebellion back home. Such a manoeuvre not only furthers the potentialities of the piratical, but embraces it and approves of it wholeheartedly. Nowhere is it clearer than in the last song sequence of the film aboard the pirate ship. Sung after the pirate chief is turned to benefit MGR's crusade against the dictator, during their voyage to meet the dictator at sea for the final showdown, the song is almost a victory march. The lyrics call for liberation and freedom for subalterns everywhere, that liberation is a right and entitlement. The visuals communicate this message. Everyone is singing happily, with all work equally distributed, without discrimination. It is important that this egalitarian life is made possible first aboard the pirate ship. The pirates with their community of brotherhood and non-tyrannical, non-discriminatory practices are the perfect champions. The revolution would begin here in this manner.

Although the entire song is iconic in the way it is visually and lyrically constructed, one of the most poignant scenes is when MGR is swinging from the ropes of the ship calling for liberation. In the background, you can see the pirate flag (red with skulls) billowing in the wind. This iconic image occurs more than once in the song and each time it appears, it pushes the idea that liberation and the piratical are not antithetical. In fact, the pirate can be an essential part of the liberation, perhaps even central to it. The entire song is thus also a celebration of the piratical possibilities. The pirate is no longer a philanderer, a common enemy. He is the hope of the subaltern, their salvation, their saving grace. In that brief moment aboard the pirate ship, the pirate is the ultimate aspiration. He is a mass mobiliser – one who can unite the subaltern into revolution.

As one of the long line of films that espoused the values of the Dravidian movement and served as propaganda for one of the most prominent political parties of South India (DMK), the film was also speaking to the electoral publics. The mobilisation that the film achieves is two fold – the pirate rallying his mates into battle and MGR charming his fans to vote for the DMK. The iconic pirate flag he appears against from time to time in the last song sequence discussed earlier is black and red

of the land should be considered married. This admission though false, and clearly unwelcome for the pirate lord, makes him leave her alone.

– the official colours of the DMK party. If in the earlier text Ratna was granted legitimacy for her piratical acts by the State, in this, MGR, by virtue of this juxtaposition, becomes the State. The pirate leader, the mobiliser, and the icon of the DMK all merge and become identifiable with each other, and piracy and its potentiality are seen as central to the well being and functioning of the State. Indeed, in the final scene, MGR reinstates the now reformed dictator as head of the State and the pirate who held them prisoners as his right hand man. The entire film is thus an ode to revolution and mobilisation – and the potential of the pirate to aid in liberation.

Pirate and the Penumbra of the Global

Although the nature of the piratical engagement with the State is different in both these texts it is significant that the National is the dominant frame of reference in both. In ‘Sea Queen’ although the white pirates and governors invoke the global imbalances of power, it is still within the framework of the National. The victory of Ratna and Ananth reflect the victory of Marathas over the English, symbolising a victory of the National over the Imperial. Written in Tamil, with flagrant Sanskrit quotes from Kalidas and embedded in the context of historical romance, couched in lengthy prefaces that attest to the veracity of the historical facts by the author, these novels evoked in the mind of the readers, an image of India engaged in glorious battles with the West. In the MGR film, the global is barely hailed. Except perhaps in one line of the last song sequence discussed where MGR sings, “In all lands where there are slaves, we need freedom”.⁷ The piratical figure however fits within this national imagination in different ways. The differences are in who and what constitutes piratical practices and their place in the national imaginary. From aiding in national wars against the English, the pirate can now be relied on to fight local wars of liberation. He is truly now (from the ‘national’ framework) the inside outsider, flitting between legitimacy and illicit-ness.

Both these imaginations of the pirate are starkly different from the recent renditions. The film *Maryaan* (The Immortal), directed by Bharath Bala, starring Dhanush and Parvathy released in 2013. Set in a small fishing hamlet, the first half of the story is all about how Maryaan (Dhanush) and Panimalar (Parvathy) fall in love. However, because of the immense amount of money Panimalar’s father owes a loan shark, Maryaan decides to work as a contract labourer in Sudan, Africa. After two

⁷ My translation.

years of hard work when he is on his way back, he and his friends are kidnapped by Sudanese mercenaries. The rest of the story is about if and how Maryaan makes it back to India. Although the only reference to pirates is the Somali pirates in passing, the Sudanese terrorists are projected as piratical. With ransom demands to the company Maryaan and his friends work for, an uninhibited life style and a pendant of skull and bones to mark the leader, these Sudanese mercenaries could well be the modern figuration of the pirate.

In one brief conversation with the hero, they even mention the Somali pirates and justify their cause saying what they do is not terrorism, but piracy – an act of survival in the face of exploitation by powerful first world countries. And their ‘justification’ or legitimising rhetoric for piracy is similar to that espoused by Ratna in ‘Sea Queen’. The difference is that in Sea Queen, she is granted the legitimacy of the State. That such legitimacy is not granted to these “terrorists” exposes how and why, and in whose interests it is that they remain illegitimate. The frame of reference, first the Imperial and then the National, is now finally the Global. And the fantasy of the pirate is explicitly racial. The piratical practices, in the case of the Somali pirates, or in that of such “terrorists” emerge as the penumbral, as partially legible infra politics (to use a James Scottian term) that highlight the unequal processes of globalisation and their exploitation of a global subaltern.

The piratical is thus the hyphen holding the subaltern-popular together. The figure of the pirate is a plastic, malleable force who can engage reading publics and fans alike to convey particular political concerns. Understanding these figurations in the popular imagination is important to building a piratical paradigm – a paradigm that can be comfortable with ambiguity, liminality, and tenuous visibility. Investigating piratical practices to theorise urban circulations and publics could benefit with an examination of such textual encounters of the piratical – encounters that capture popular imaginations and circulate potentialities of the pirate.

Bhargavi Narayanan is a Ph.D. candidate in the Film and Media Studies Department at UC Santa Barbara. She has an M.A. in Media and Cultural Studies from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India. Her dissertation rethinks the process of mediation using ephemeral infrastructures that emerge around particular media events as apertures to understanding media publics.

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