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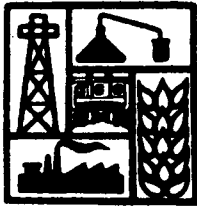
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## Cinema And Society

THE magic of cinema is virtually unfathomable. The very mention of cinema conjures up a rainbow of captivating images. Even Auguste and Louis Lumiere, the inventors of cinematograph, wouldn't have dreamt that one day their pet creation would pave the way for one of the biggest revolutions of the twentieth century. The cinema in fact owes its existence to the genius of these French brothers who had devised a working cinematograph as early as the last decade of the previous century and had also successfully organised the commercial shows of their till-then-unheard-of marvellous gadget in various countries including ours. The subsequent efforts of countless other pioneers took the cinema to the present great heights, making it an unbelievably powerful medium of art, culture and entertainment.

Casting its magical spell over the ever increasing viewing public, the cinema took the world by storm. It transcended the linguistic and geographical barriers with phenomenal ease. Its impact on human mind was enormous and its influence all-pervading. Never before mankind had witnessed the socio-cultural transformation at such a large scale caused by a medium which aimed primarily at entertainment. With the passage of time it grew into a huge industry providing livelihood to millions the world over.

The cinema opened new frontiers of creativity through three "Cs"—camera, celluloid and cinematograph, its three main ingredients. Though the director was the real creator through his vision and conception; the cinematographer captured the mood of the man and the nature on celluloid through the sensitive handling of the camera; musicians, technicians etc. provided the other essential inputs; the acclaim of the masses, however, was reserved chiefly for the lead characters who charmed the viewers with their star qualities and in turn acquired the larger-than-life images and the astonishing fan-following. For the common man, these stars are the real cinema, an aberration which seems to be perpetual.

In our country too, the cinema occupies a unique place. The Indian cinema is almost as old as the world cinema. Its history long and glorious, its hold on masses simply amazing and as an industry it has few equals in the world. We had started making silent feature films even before the First World War. Come the thirties and our talkies were ready to entertain the masses.

The trail blazed by the legendary pioneers like Dadasaheb Phalke and Ardeshir Irani was followed by a number of equally dedicated and talented filmmakers in the later years. Some of them deservingly won the acclaim even at the international level. The genius of nonpareil Satyajit Ray firmly put India on the film-map of the world. No praise is enough for this titan whose creations received unprecedented praise abroad. The great showman of Hindi cinema Raj Kapoor also created waves abroad, particularly in Russia, where he was greatly admired.

The Indian films are in great demand in several countries especially in West Asia and Africa. The documentaries produced by the Films Division of India were rated very high internationally and won a number of prestigious awards during the last 45 years.

Undoubtedly, India is a major film producing country. Every year we produce several hundred films apart from an equally large number of short-films. Nowhere in the world films are made in so many languages and dialects as in our country. No doubt we are much ahead in quantity, but the same cannot be said about quality. Unfortunately, the quality films can be counted on fingertips, while the irrelevant and purposeless films and those of dubious quality abound. A disconcerting trend of showing excessive sex and violence in the films has also been witnessed of late. This needs to be curbed firmly. Effective check is also needed for the video piracy, which has proved to be a curse for the economic health of our film industry in the recent times.

A vital aspect of the Indian cinema which merits special mention is its unifying character. The Indian films have been subtly albeit consistently promoting the ideals of national integration and communal harmony. It is indeed a positive feature.

In short, it is imperative that all encouragement be given to our film industry so that its stature as a major producer is maintained. Equally welcome will be the voluntary action on the part of the industry to shed its flabbiness so that more and more purposeful films which aim at providing wholesome entertainment are made, particularly for the children. It will surely enhance the prestige of the Indian film industry within the country and outside. □

# Cinema: A Reference Point For Society

Firoze Rangoonwalla

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*A part of the socio-economic-cultural transformation can be attributed to the cinema as films usually generate social mobility, fluidity and an overall sense of oneness among people of different backgrounds, says the author.*

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WHENEVER the topic of "Cinema And Society" comes up for discussion, the prominent question raised is whether cinema can influence or change society, if at all it tries that by coming out of its groove of escapist and fantasy-oriented entertainment. There are two schools of thought on this among serious observers of cinema, including filmmakers themselves. One is that films can never affect or reform the social body or the events taking place within it. The other is that the medium does have a direct or indirect impact on social streams, even though it may not be immediately perceptible.

The first line of thinking had its supporters in *avant-garde* film makers all over the world, including one no less than Satyajit Ray in India. The common example cited was that just after a couple of excellent anti-war films were exhibited, the Second World War engulfed humanity. Hence the

common belief among them was that cinema cannot and should not offer any solutions for the social problems raised by its writers and directors, by its content and style. The mere exposition of the problem is enough and there ends cinema's artistic obligation as well as compulsion. But the other school stretches cinema's role further to promote a thought process and line of action, whereby the viewers are provoked into trying a change for the better.



Satyajit Ray

One cannot really get to the root of it, since the magic that is worked by cinema on the human mind (male and female) mostly remains in the realm of the abstract, ambiguous and unknown. Viewership studies and other surveys—methods of probing audience reactions and impact—are not quite reliable, as the true inner responses emanating in the dark auditorium are highly subjective and so kept in the region of privacy. Reactions and conclusions gathered from surveys mainly pertain to peripheral influences, like lifestyle, outer behaviour pattern, dress, social habits (smoking, drinking, gambling) or spot and instant reactions to happenings, an area in which TV is now specialising, on a superficial level that is accepted like a norm.

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*Just after a couple of excellent anti-war films were exhibited, the Second World War engulfed humanity. Hence the common belief among them was that cinema cannot and should not offer any solutions for the social problems raised by its writers and directors, by its content and style.*

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And yet, just as cinema over the last hundred years has been holding a mirror to society, similarly the changing contours of society have been a reflection of cinema, though not so largely obvious as to be pinpointed. Without doubt, a tremendous amount of inter-action has always been going on between the screen and the individual or collective viewership. Cinema by its nature is a manipulator. Apart from visual and aural wonders it can create, its existence depends on exploiting emotions, relationships, traditions, religion, sex and most of the virtues and vices which relate to human senses and sensibilities. In a

good film this is done artistically, aesthetically, purposefully and in a bad film it is managed by market rules.

So, a strong hidden impact is bound to be there, a part of which comes out in the open in strange forms, sometimes healthy, at other times perverted. Mark, for example, the faces, limb movements, walking gait, mutual interaction etc. of those emerging from a crowded theatre just after a show. A classy or impressive film evokes a hushed, restrained, civilised manner. A crass film, like the Hindi commercialised ones, brings out a confused mass of rough reactions. If this is the immediate short-term effect, we can realise what the deep-rooted and long-term throw-back would be.

The case of a film being watched in a dark hall by an individual succumbing to it from a narrow (caged) seat is noteworthy for the one-to-one relationship generated. Though the single viewer is surrounded by several others in the auditorium, he seems to be in "public isolation", just what the method-actor tries to achieve on a crowded set or location. Constant chemistry runs between the screen and the viewing psyche, oblivious of the third party, like the theatre staff, the more vocal cinegoers and later the film critic, using the pen or voice. So, impact is assured, for better or for worse.

The origins of cinema give evidence of this. In India, religion or myth, advocating goodness, piety, moral rectitude and becoming more powerful than evil led to some highly successful films and laid the foundations of the film industry. Dadasaheb Phalke, inspired by "Life of Christ", made "Raja Harishchandra", "Lanka Dahan", "Kalia Mardan" after R.G. Torney used the saint story "Pundalik" to make the first narrative feature. Ever since, the exploitation of religion in myriad forms has continued to the present day, even

in contemporary films of the social milieu. Obviously, cinegoers of the early innocent age of cinema were influenced by the tales of honesty, sacrifice, valour and assorted virtues while the miracles coming as saviours acted as the wish-fulfilling agents.

The mass-oriented box-office film commonly dubbed as "commercial" has picked up the threads of manipulating the viewers' hopes and desires, as shaped by the changing social conditions, mores and norms down to the present times when the negative planet of evil, mostly represented by crime, has become an object of admiration, awe and even secret worship. It is sought to be

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justified by personal revenge against discontent, injustice or social ills, so as to mollify that biting conscience, and where it does get aroused. This is the root-cause of ever increasing violence in real life and cinema which is surprisingly not grasped or curbed by the social-political bodies or even the Censor Board.

Hindi cinema's golden period in the thirties and the forties did bring forth films not merely presenting but tackling burning issues. How intellectual labour fights all-mighty capital, how young girls revolt against marriage with a

old man, how life supercedes love, how inter-communal bliss is thrown asunder by the outside forces (then the British, now the ruling politician or mafia), how widows could be remarried and fallen women resurrected, how dowry could lead to tragedy and how convicts could be reformed, how the veneer of

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*Cinema by its nature is a manipulator. Apart from visual and aural wonders it can create, its existence depends on exploiting emotions, relationships, traditions, religion, sex and most of the virtues and vices which relate to human senses and sensibilities.*

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westernising would ruin marriage and friendship, how the rural economy could be freed from the clutches of landlords and money-lenders, how the untouchables and other underdogs could be given a more humane life and several such thorny problems were flashed across the country's screens. In case of fatalism and tragic end, it was a mute protest meant to arouse the collective conscience against various barriers.

Films which talked so directly and movingly about the wrongs of society went on to influence it and shape it along better lines. Of course, the winds of Independence, new Constitution, legal reforms, enlightened pressure played their part. But films prepared on the psychological-sociological ground for the change, though naively, with several box-office requirements and fantasy-like characters bringing fantasy-like solutions. It was the near total swing to the light escapist entertainment in the post-War and post-Independence decades which deprived Indian cinema of its most vital social function. Even if serious

ideas or themes were touched, they were used like a peg or a backdrop or ended up being a mockery. Leftist oriented films pleaded or rather shouted for social change. But their success was limited to the frothy initial novelty.

In sum total then, within the space orbits of the present article, what is the contribution of Indian cinema to society by way of impact? The strongest point in its favour is that by sheer usage it has grown to be a standard reference point for most kinds of questions and situations, where elementary knowledge and practice are needed. The mass mind picks up such points eagerly and stores them in some mental corner, to be reactivated while seeking or giving answers and guidance. People instinctively know that the whole of it may not be accurate. So the fantasy part is weeded out and the rest is rechecked, by experience or consultation.

This itself is a big service to society in a country having large pockets of semi-literacy. However indirect or unintentional it may be, this also becomes the educational function of the medium, in its most popular format of the feature or fiction film. There is a constant call to the industry to make educative and informative films, which is not possible due to the financial and box-office constraints.

Here is where commercial cinema throws up, though haphazardly, a large store of information about human relationships, family ties, changing social ethos and the type of people it gives birth to, new gadgets and modes, a slice of historical, geographical, cultural or patriotic background and generally about life in different places of the country and the world, which lay cinegoers can never hope to visit. It is illuminating as also amusing to see/hear people from the less privileged or literate sections quoting references

from films in different contexts.

A part of the socio-economic-cultural transformation can seemingly be attributed to cinema, if not for creating it, then for assimilating and promoting it. Films generate social mobility, fluidity and an overall sense of oneness among people attached to different languages, religions, cultures and lifestyles. The profuse use of films being made by television has further aided this process, as TV's reach has become far wider than the limitations of a public paying at the box-office.

Cinema has one more indirect achievement to its credit-creating linguistic awareness and transporting a bit of one region to another. People who constantly travel often pick up some elementary words of the lingo used in the province, from where they have to function. In a vast country, it is not feasible for anyone to grasp more than a dozen official languages. But films smoothen the primary stage.

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*The mass-oriented box-office film has picked up the threads of manipulating the viewers' hopes and desires, as shaped by the changing social conditions, mores and norms, down to the present times.*

---

Several English words have also come into common usage, even among the unlettered, thanks to films.

Hindi cinema can do it on a wider platform and it generally services a kind of surface integration among a variety of language groups. People do not use or follow the language in all its nicety and accuracy. But in a personalised distorted form, at least a communication link gets going and develops into a bridge among widely different sections of people. One has to mark the use of film titles or famous dialogue words and song lines, between

two people not knowing each other's language. It is a striving for mutual understanding which is aided by cinema. Hindi film songs are vicariously liked and played all over the country even if all the lyrics are not clearly comprehended.

Beyond this, it would be like overrating the role of cinema, especially in recent times. Most of the so-called entertainment films are stuffed with stereotypes from foreign films or old Indian ones. They operate in a vacuous world of fantasy and rootlessness. Still, some of the life patterns and conclusion propagated by them could be having social repercussions below the outer layer of everyday life. Violence, crime and sex (rape included) are made to

look easy and frivolous, without much of retribution to follow.

*Cinema has one more indirect achievement to its credit—creating linguistic awareness and transporting a bit of one region to another. Hindi Cinema can do it on a wider platform and it generally services a kind of surface integration among a variety of language groups.*

Socio-cultural responses to cinema provide a field for impact study having some veracity. Examples of crimes and criminals being emulated from the

screen have been recorded in law courts and police stations. The attitude to suicide as a way out of dejection, mostly in love, gives a pointer to imitable effects of cinema. Some passionately made love stories ending in death led to similar cases in real life. Smoking and drinking have for long been a sexist or glamour aid, inspired from heroes, villains and now female characters too. But all this is the proverbial tip of the iceberg and one knows not what adverse effects are rumbling below, in the unfathomed ocean that is the human mind, male or female, adult or juvenile, cultured or otherwise.

*The author is a distinguished film historian, writer and critic.*



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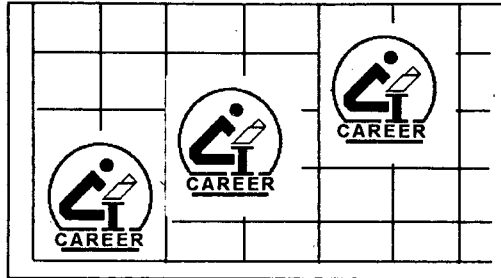
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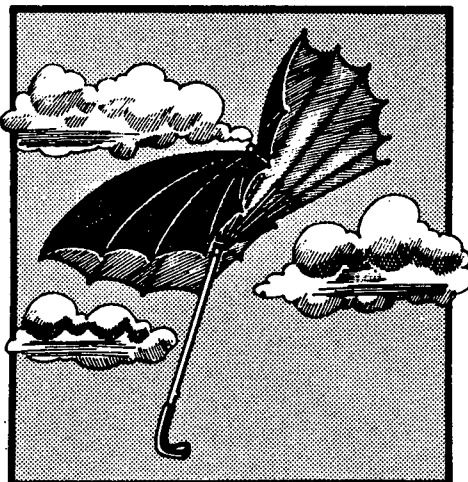
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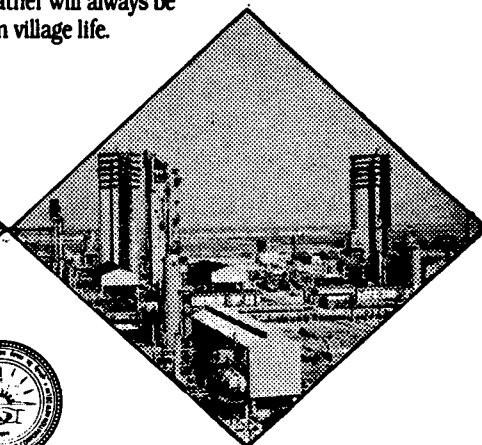


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# Indian Cinema As An Instrument Of Social Reforms

Gautam Kaul

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*In the coming days, Indian cinema would be the true guide to the social thought of Indian society as, among other things, it speaks of Indianness; speaks of human society as a whole and attempts to dissolve social prejudices through open debates, says the author.*

---

CINEMA came to India in 1986 at a time when major changes in the country were taking place in the political thinking of the people, and in society in general.

## The background

Critics have also attempted deep analysis on the awakening of modern India. In this limited work also we need to go back into history to find reasons why certain things happened at those points of time, and why not earlier, and why such forces came to surface at all.

The root of radical changes which the sub-continent came to suffer can be traced to the establishment of a small factory by Job Charnock on the mouth of river Hoogli in the marshland outside the village Kalikata, which finally turned itself into the East India Company and gave to an urban concentration of population called the port city of Calcutta.

The assault on the sub-continent by

European civilization did not begin with the arrival of the British. In fact, for that we have to go back to the 15th century with the landing by Vasco-da-Gama on the West coast. But the arrival of the Portugese followed by the Dutch and the French did not materially affect the class culture of the sub-continent.

The British when they landed, were clear in their intent of not only trading with the Indians, but also to appropriate all the instruments of trade.

Robert Clive and Warren Hastings exploited the fragmented political structure of East India to the maximum, and created an area of political influence which forced the British government in London to recognise the achievements of the East India Co. and give it official protection. Charles Cornwallis, as the succeeding Governor-General of India, moved ahead to bring in land reforms which brought about both political and social stability in the jurisdiction in which the

British administration under the shadow of the East India Co., extended its jurisdiction.

Unlike the other European civilizations and their representatives who attempted to stake their claims on the sub-continent, the British when they began to extend their imperial jurisdiction here, had acquired a unique imperial mentality which their other European counterparts were totally bereft of. The French did not bring education, the Portugese were content to be mere traders, and the Dutch decided that they could not match the vile of the British merchants in Surat, and abandoned their foothold, earlier established.

It is in India alone that when the British consolidated their gains, they expressed their concept of imperialism in the most grandiose schemes ever imagined at that time.

The British made it a cornerstone of their political administration that the knowledge of English language must

be spread to the far corners of their administered lands. It was felt that the burden of importing officials from England for the management of the imperial assets in India must be lightened and a system be created in which educated Indians may manage the day-to-day affairs of imperial assets at low cost. They were also to be assigned a

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*After Neeldarpan Indian theatre in particular assumed a socio-political colour and theatre became the platform for the expression of national pride. When cinema came to India, it was to extend the same sentiments.*

---

status in the British hierarchy to suit the local mentality of caste strata.

The events of 1857 changed the scenario. The British government in England decided to take charge of its Indian affairs and by 1860 some semblance of law and order returned. The reformative zeal of the British was again noticeable. It was now also being said that the more loyal Indian ought to be given a higher place in the administrative hierarchy and a more "meaningful" role in the running of the administration.

The forerunners of cinema can now be identified at this stage. The progress of science had been fast in Europe with new discoveries being announced practically every week, some of them related to the perception of eye vision, the discovery of electricity, the development of the first electric bulb, the development of the arc lamp, the discovery of chemicals that were sensitive to light, the making of the first photo negative plates, the manufacture of the box camera, the discovery of the process of making gelatine films to replace the glass plate picture negative, and many other scientific inventions.

Meanwhile, the curiosity of a British play staged in Calcutta, gave way to a fancyful desire by the newly educated Indians that they must also have their own theatre.

The Indian theatre was already alive and kicking by the time the political clamp down came following the events of 1857. As soon as the British administration relaxed its control on public expression, drama and drama writers sprang back into activity. Indians were particularly aghast to learn of the atrocities committed by the British soldiers on the Indian "mutineers". They now began to assess their existing relationship with the imperial government in India, and a new social consciousness arose on their economic status. Political pamphleteering saw its appearance and this also assumed a more institutional form, emerging as political comments in theatre.

### **Socio-Political Awareness**

In 1876, a theatre performance in Lucknow of the play **Neeldarpan** caught the attention of the British administration in India, following the riot by the British members of the audience who smashed the furniture of the theatre, protesting against the depiction of the British officials in very bad light. This play was written by Dinabandhu Mitra and was based on information on how the White indigo planters treated their workers in the fields. The British administration in turn created the Dramatic Performance Act to censor all public performances.

After **Neeldarpan** Indian theatre in particular assumed a socio-political colour and theatre became the platform for the expression of national pride. This is the first case in which a dramatic performance is on record to bring about a social awareness amongst its own native audience for social reforms. When cinema came to India, it was to extend the same sentiments and

role play, for an audience which far outnumbered those who sat to watch the performance in theatres.

### **The Journey Begins**

Cinema's first hesitating steps in India began in 1896 with the screening of short films in Bombay, followed by Calcutta. After the first exposure to the novelty of moving pictures, we have a gap of about two years when suddenly we discover enterprising Bengali, Gujarati and Marathi businessmen springing with local enterprise. The earliest cinema remains very experimental and a model of curiosity. In 1912, the first Indian venture, titled **Pundalik**, was screened at the Coronation Theatre on Sandhurst Road, Girgaum, Bombay. It was made by R.G. Torney. It is not until **Raja Harishchandra** made by Dadasaheb Phalke that cinema came to be noticed publicly as a new means of narration. Indian cinema immediately launched itself with a series of films based on Indian mythology.

In 1922, we hear of the first so-called comedy film, **England Return** breaking the stereotype formula of mythological cinema, directed by Dharendra Nath Ganguli. The success of this film was not only because it was

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a comedy, but also because cinema was used as a means to get the audience to think of a social situation in which Indians had been imitating their foreign rulers and creating for themselves new problems within their own society.

From here onwards there are two distinct streams of filmmaking, one following the safe path of mythological theme and the other which began to take the road to make films of social comment. The earliest of such films which today are only heard in the annals of cinema history are titles like **Step Mother** (1923), **Chandranath** (1924), **Kala Naag**, **Municipal Election** (1924) **Repentance** (1924), **Shaitan Poojari** (1924), **Chalu Zamana** (1925), **Kulin Kanta** (1925) etc. In this series of films, it is **Kala Naag** which first brought about a public protest.

But perhaps the most outstanding film of the silent era of Indian cinema was **Savkari Pash**, made by Baburao Painter in which V. Shantaram and Kamala Devi enacted the role of an oppressed farmer couple having to suffer both famine and the oppression of the Zamindari system.

Available newspapers commenting on the film (there is no cinema material surviving) indicate that for the first time the Indian farmer and his pitiable state of livelihood was brought out in a cinematic form.

The moving portrayal had something also to do with the background of Baburao Painter. He had established the Maharashtra Film Company in Kolhapur in partnership with V. Shantaram and Fatehlal and began to make films which were realistic and removed from the elements of theatre which had preceded this work.

### **Emergence Of Socio-Political Cinema**

It is around this time also that Indian cinema had begun to become more influential amongst its audience. The British Government had also established the Board of Censors and found itself embroiled in a major controversy while tackling a young Gujarati businessman Dwarkadas

Naraindas Sampat who had come up with a film **Bhakt Vidur**. The provocation was the enactment of the Cinematograph Act of 1918 which led to the formation of the Regional Boards of Censors. This organisation was created ostensibly to curb the import and circulation of American films in India, but the Board found itself tackling the creative works of Indian filmmakers and the first person to be netted was Dwarkadas N. Sampat.

One fine morning, Sampat realised he had a likeness to the physical features of Mahatma Gandhi. Sampat decided to make a film which reflected on the politics of its time, and what emerged was the '**Bharat Mata**' in splendid regalia; **Vidur** was shown supporting a Gandhi cap, clad in 'khaddar' and sitting besides a charkha to spin yarn. The film made a mention

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of the villagers not paying taxes in Kaira district in 1918 and the evacuation of Chirala town in 1921 as a protest against the government. In this film, officials in the court of Dhritarashtra were awarded the titles of 'Donkey Bahadur', an allegory to government's own award of 'Diwan Bahadur'. The government charged the film was "a thinly veiled resume of political events in India" (from Indian Cinematography Committee, 1927-28, Vol. 4, page 275).

Wherever the film was released, it led to trouble, police cane-charged,

and finally a ban on the screenings. One lasting effect of this film was the emergence of the socio-political cinema in India.

Together with **England Return** and **Savkari Pash**, the three films were the high point of the cinema of social comment in the silent era of Indian cinema. This is not to belittle the attempts in other centres of filmmaking which saw brave efforts being made to create similar thematic films commenting on the other social ills of Indian society.

In fact, by around 1927, Indian cinema had matured enough to tackle events like the cause of the freedom struggle, and individual filmmakers had taken up on themselves the task of propagating the messages of Indian leaders of their time like Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sarojini Naidu, Jawaharlal Nehru, Motilal Nehru and of course, Mahatma Gandhi, to bring about the needed social revolution in the country.

### **Golden Era**

It is the arrival of the 'talkie' film which brings to fore the contribution of Indian cinema in bringing about social awareness amongst the educated and uneducated Indians to improve their status and remove age-old taboos which young India could ill afford.

The period between 1931 and 1946 should be considered as the golden era of cinema of social comment. One is left amazed at the variety of films which Indian cinema of its time picked up for public debate. It is necessary to recall some of these films and their themes to impress upon the reader that Indian cinema even at its worst, was far better in its commitment to its audience and its society, than many other national cinemas in the world. Let us go through a sample list, for space does not allow us to list the whole filmography of important films

made in India before India proclaimed itself a Republic.

Indian cinema tackled the problems of western culture clashing with Indian culture (**Indira Ma**, 1934); protested against arranged marriages and social barriers (**Devdas**, 1935); protested against the caste barriers and religious bigotry **Achhut Kanya** (1936), **Achhut** (1940), **Unch Neech**, **Malla Pilla**, **Harijana Penn**, **Bhakt Chetan**; promoted Hindu widow re-marriage (**Balyogini**, 1936); pleaded for labour participation in industry (**President**, 1936); promoted the idea of farming and mechanism of agriculture (**Dhartimata**, 1937); fought against marriage of young girls with old person, **Duniya Na Mane** (1937) and highlighted economic and social disparity (**Adhikar**, 1938).

Indian Cinema challenged traditional ideas and morality in **Aadmi** (1939); appealed to Indian nationalism and national unity in film **Sikandar** (1940); taught ethics in journalism in **Naya Sansar** (1941); fought against rural indebtedness in **Dharti Ke Lal**, (1949); sought the creation of a social-

istic society in **Roti** (1942), **Udayer Pathy** (1944) and **Neecha Nagar** (1946). Cinema brought awareness against tuberculosis which was a killer disease of its time in **Dushman** (1938). It took the theme of nursing care and blood donation in **My Sister** (1941); it sought the boycott of foreign goods in film **Vijaya Laxmi** (1943); it sought prohibition of alcohol in **Brandi Chi Batli** (1939), **Angoori** (1943), **Pati Bhakti** (1932) and **Grihalaxmi** (1934).

Indian cinema highlighted the plight of the Indian industry in **The Mill** (1934) and **Hamrahi** (1946). It attempted to bring about an awareness of the importance of khadi cloth in film **Charkha** (1925) and highlighted the problem of communal harmony in film **Ekta**, **Padosi** and **Menaka**. The welfare of Schedule Caste was the highlight in the theme of **Malla Pilla**, while widow re-marriage was again the theme for **Sumanjali**.

The ills of the Zamindari system were highlighted in **Raitu Bidda** (1940), while the problems of the educated unemployed were best de-

scribed in **Vande Mataram** (1948). The problems of unwed mothers was described in film **Devata**. The problems of black-marketing and smuggling were described in film **Apna Desh** (1948), though the Swadeshi movement had many clones but **Velli** (1947) said it most eloquently; while the evils of dowry were best commented upon in **Raja Mani** and in film **Dahej** (1950).

The films mentioned above are films made in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Hindi, Sindhi, and Bengali. It is just to give an idea to the reader that cinema had a major contribution to make in bringing about an awareness which was being generally talked of by the intellectuals.

In a predominantly illiterate society which India had before Independence, it was not the newspaper, or books which could promote the idea of a social revolution.

In medieval India, social revolution came through the Sufi preachers, and saints from the various communities. They moved over the length and breadth of the country to propagate their ideas and enter into discussions with other protagonists. It took them a whole lifetime for their ideas to have an effect on the community. In India, when there was a great need to speed up the process of social change, cinema's arrival itself was the best thing that could have happened when the country's freedom struggle was underway.

Mahatma Gandhi had already conceded in early 1929, the need to bring about conditions for changing the thought process in the Indian society. Before him, Tilak, Vivekanand and Aurobindo had laid the foundation for the emergence of a new India.

The study of world history shows that social revolutions have preceded political revolutions. The first great



Scene from **Achhut Kanya**

social movement of modern India can be traced to Raja Rammohan Roy's efforts to uplift women, get the ban on women 'Sati', child marriage, and bringing about the spread of education in the 'native' society. The work of the Brahma Samaj in east India is significant. Nothing similar happened in the Hindi speaking part of the country, or elsewhere. Changes were taking place, but not a social revolution. In south India in particular, where the inroads by cinema was slow, the work was done by the touring dramatic performance parties.

Like any new thinking, whenever there was a film which cut across existing public thinking, it led to protests against the screenings of such films. In south India, a huge agitation developed against the screening of film **Raitu Bidda**. The protest came from the landlord communities of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu who felt the message of the film was destructive of the social order. Even film **Balyogini**,

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*At no point of time did anybody recognise the contribution of Indian cinema either in the freedom struggle or its contribution in the social uplift of the country. On both counts there is much evidence to suggest that Indian cinema had a major role to play in moulding public opinion.*

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**Malla Pilla** suffered at the hands of the traditionalists. In west India, film **Achhut** and **Achhut Kanya** both faced hostile responses from the public. **Achhut Kanya** in particular was roundly criticized in suggesting inter-caste marriages between high and low caste people. The release of the film saw public protest meetings and even shut down of cinema screenings of the film for short periods. It led to the political intervention by the Indian

National Congress party who found in such cinema, an extension of their own social thought of reforms.

### Sharp Reaction

Sometimes a film not essentially made for social protest evoked very sharp reaction as it touched a certain weakness within the social fabric of its time.

For instance, film **Ratan** when released all over the country in 1944, saw a plague of young boys eloping with young girls or committing suicides, and of clashes reported between children and their parents on the right to select their spouses and on the right to organise their own lives.

**Ratan** was a phenomenal commercial success something in the manner in which the current film **Hum Apke Hain Kaun** has gone on record, but **Ratan** was a revolution in itself, while **Hum Apke Hain Kaun** has caused no social impact except perhaps a minimum sartorial change in the wearing of sarees.

### As Educator

There are two areas which are important in bringing about the social revolution that we are talking of. The first is that Indian cinema became the educator of a whole nation on the treasure of literature and language. It was an act which had a major impact in setting into process the mass thinking that India needed changes.

The first 20 years of Indian cinema saw a mass education of Indian audience on their mythological history and once those subjects were exhausted, the national debate of social ills commenced. Writers and creative artistes associated themselves in the making of films in this period.

The second aspect was the effect of the first, namely, a wider appreciation of not only the regional languages and their literature but the generation of an

urge to learn the languages.

The first part of this century witnessed the flowering of the Urdu language. The nation gave up the study of the Persian language and adopted the more conveniently spoken Hindustani which also went by the term 'Urdu'. In the second-half of the century, we saw the decline of the Urdu language and the replacement of regional languages in a more definite manner.

Even today the illiterate person is aware of his social background and the semi-literate is now more vociferous of his rights. It is because the hero in the cinema even in the stunt films was talking of his democratic rights facing the arrogant Zamindar. He was telling his lady love of her rights also; and he was mouthing the arguments of those national leaders who had been talking of the same in terms of genders from public pulpits.

Indian cinema thus extended the limits of the audience of Indian statesman and leaders, beyond the confines of market places and made the dark closed halls huge class-rooms for the education of the masses. The inventor of cinema had never visualised this.

### No Official Support

There is however one fact to note and that is Indian cinema did not receive at any point of time any official support of the State, or of the political parties that were fighting for the freedom of the country.

The people who created Indian cinema were leaderless foot soldiers who did what they thought was correct. The British administration in India could not be expected to underwrite its own funeral by supporting those who were promoting sentiments against the ruling powers. It is however surprising that the political parties that were fighting for the country's freedom failed to underwrite the contribution of Indian cinema as part of the free-

dom struggle. At no point of time between 1896 and even today, did anybody recognise the contribution of Indian cinema either in the freedom struggle or its contribution in the social uplift of the country. On both counts there is much evidence to suggest that Indian cinema had a major role to play in moulding public opinion.

There is today grudging acceptance of the fact that Indian cinema has played a role in popularising the spread of the Hindi language in areas beyond its natural borders but as yet there is no official acceptance that cinema has also contributed in bringing about the formation of a secular Indian society.

The changes which Indian cinema has brought about are indeed deep-rooted and yet subtle.

Indian cinema still speaks of Indianness; it speaks of human society

as a whole; it speaks beyond the caste considerations and quite often it tries to speak the language of a future India; it jumps over social prejudices and attempts to dissolve them by open debate. It has started now taking up themes which were earlier taboo and which are still not being discussed in the print media.

Indian cinema is also meeting with resistance, because today it is attempting to push the traditionalist Indian too far ahead in the concept of modernity. As yet the creative mind of Indian cinema has not assessed when the time is right to apply brakes. Instead of becoming the instrument of a change for a forward motion, Indian cinema should now become the instrument to resist the change which is now coming about in Indian society due to outside influence and particularly through the medium of television.

We are aware of the strength of the

audio-visual medium. Very often, it is the Indian cinema, and not the print media, which has shown itself to be the right barometer of the Indian mass sentiments. The all India response to film **Roja** has no explanation except that the country's educated people wished to sit down and endorse a sentiment which was right-of-the-centre, which the print media never gauged. Again the print media never gauged that the country was thinking different to what its readers are talking about, when it endorsed a document-like film **Prahaar**.

It seems that in the coming days, Indian cinema will be the true guide to the social thought of Indian society, and it is to this medium that a watch should be maintained to find out the kind of social revolution it will promise in the 21st century. □

*The author is a noted film critic.*

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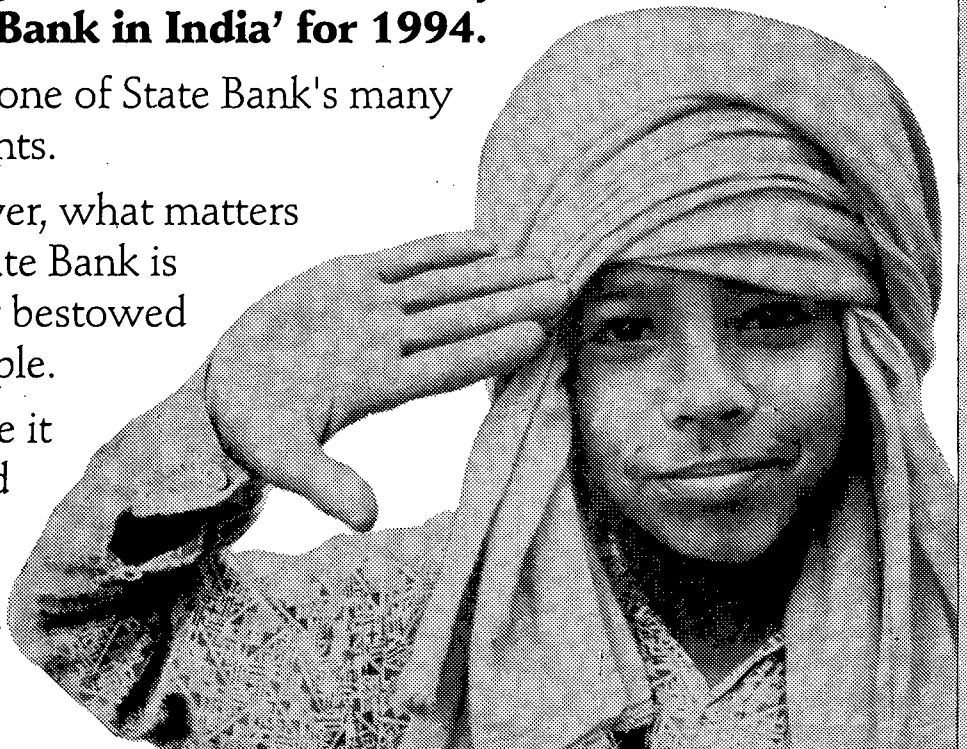


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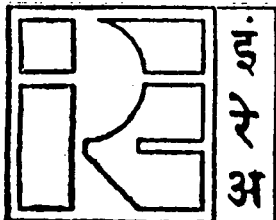
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# Films And Social Development : A Historical Overview Of The Hindi Cinema

Anil Saari

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*At its best our cinema is a fair mirror-image of what is happening in society at large. The most successful films have always been those which combine the ingredients of popular entertainment with the aspirations of social amelioration and humanistic development, says the author.*

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THE motion pictures were first imported and exhibited to India on July 7, 1896. The earliest short films to be photographed in India were by unknown foreign cameramen in 1897. An Indian ventured to make his own short film in 1899. India's first narrative feature came in 1912. And the Indian talkies film arrived in 1931.

—Firoze Rangoonwalla  
'Seventy-Five Years of Indian  
Cinema'

The record books tell us that the first short-films photographed by Indian pioneers included such titles as 'Cocoanut Fair', 'The Wrestlers', 'Splendid New Views of Bombay' and 'Taboot Procession'. Harishchandra S. Bhatvadekar (popularly known as 'Save Dada') and F.B. Thanawalla set up the first Indian documentary units. Their early projects—

as the titles indicate—manifested the entertainment-orientation and the spectacle-like inclination which is traditionally associated with Indian Cinema. However, one of these early documentaries is also said to include footage of one Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi!

In later years, Gandhiji's tragic assassination was to inspire several songs in the talkie 'Majboor'. A company called the Documentary Films at Madras made a full-length feature in 1948, titled 'Mahatma Gandhi' and Patel India compiled the long documentary 'Gandhiji' which drew on newsreel coverage of the freedom movement.

One of the earliest films to be banned by the British Indian government was the Madras National Theatres production 'Congress Girl'.

These, too, are part of the history and the heritage of Indian cinema. Their significance does often seem to get lost in the *melange* of adolescent frivolity and stereotyped vendettas which crowd the Indian silver screen, but for the filmmakers themselves the tradition of incorporating social commentaries within a raucous explosion of seemingly-unintellectual entertainment is not totally absent. The placing of a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi or Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, on the wall behind a particular character, in a wholly "commercial" film may seem to the intellectual critic to be a clichéd exploitation of the collective sentiment of the Indian people. But for the filmmaker himself this serves the purpose of using a popular iconography which reinforces his attempt to underline the moral dimension of the dramatic conflict delineated in that par-

ticular sequence. Such debates about the style—or, as some would say, the lack of style—of popular film-making belong to the area of a study on the aesthetics and the anti-aesthetics of the popular cinema and need not occupy much of our attention in attempting to trace the close interaction between modern Indian social history and the popular Indian film.

### First Realistic Film

In the Silent Film era, as far back as 1925, Baburao Painter made the film 'Savkari Pash' (with the English title 'Indian Shylock') which was one of the earliest films to feature V. Shantaram in the lead. It can be said to be our first art film. It certainly painted an extremely realistic picture of the Indian poor, in the rural vastland, focusing on rural-indebtedness, feudal oppression, the poverty of the peasantry and myriad of problems that Indian economists and social reformists had already been campaigning against.

Around the same time, P.C. Barua, who was to later achieve fame for his version of 'Devdas', made a film titled 'Farmer's Daughter'. Twelve years later, Ardeshir Irani was to use the same title for 'Kisan Kanya' (1937).

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*In the Silent Film era, as far back as 1925, Baburao Painter made the film 'Savkari Pash'. It can be said to be our first art film. It certainly painted an extremely realistic picture of the Indian poor.*

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From its very early years, the Indian feature film developed the admirable ability of focusing on both the urban and the rural facets of Indian life. It has been a lively, dynamic tradition which only very recently, in the mid-nineties, seems to have tilted somewhat in favour of wholly urban themes. The films 'Mother India',

'Ganga Jamuna', 'Mughal-e-Azam' and 'Sholay' are considered the four biggest, longest-in-demand, popular classics of the Hindi cinema. Of these four, only 'Mughal-e-Azam' is not set in rural India!

A child of modern technology, the cinema industry is a very urban enterprise. However, its market and its audience encompass both urban and rural societies and the truly popular films suggest in their contents a cultural homogeneity between the ostensibly divided worlds of urban and rural India. Even recent box-office successes like 'Hum Apke Hain Koun', 'Karan Arjun' and 'Maine Pyar Kiya' either include the rural landscape in the narrative or espouse social mores and norms common to urban and rural India.

### Portrayal Of Reformist Ideas

Yet, because of the undeniable urban sensibility and family background of a sizeable majority of directors, writers and technicians of the Indian film-industry, the popular Indian film's content has always been greatly influenced and inspired by social philosophies dominant in urban intellectual circles. As a result, many social reform movements motivated film makers to put forward reformist ideas and concepts to the so-called common man.

The films of V. Shantaram are most obvious illustrations of this process. 'Dunia Na Mane' 'Dahej', 'Padosi', 'Do Aankhen Baara Haath', to mention four of his outstanding films, were strongly reformist, even didactic in approach. So, too, the classic from Bombay Talkies, 'Achhut Kanya' (1936). A little later Ranjit Studios produced a film on the same theme 'Achoot', which starred the legendary Gohar and dealt with the struggle of the Dalit untouchables.

The amalgam of social reform and

stylised entertainment proved to be particularly heady in the nineteen-thirties and the forties. A film dealing obliquely with rural immigration, 'Street Singer', immortalised K.L. Saigal. With 'Mela', another film set

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in rural India, we saw the birth of another legend, that of Dilip Kumar. Dilip Kumar, in particular, was to consciously espouse the personage of the rural Indian. Right up to the mid-fifties, as in B.R. Chopra's 'Naya Daur', Dilip Kumar was not just the most popular (and acclaimed) star of the Hindi Film, he was also the protagonist of rural India in an increasingly urbanised world-order.

The cinema's concern with social problems faced in the modern era continued to be overtly expressed from the thirties, right through to the sixties, in a handful of most significant films—Mehboob's 'Aurat' and 'Mother India', K.A. Abbas's 'Dharti Ke Lal', a number of Bimal Roy films including 'Do Bigha Zamin' and 'Sujata', Raj Kapoor's films which highlighted the conflicts between the rich and the poor, Dilip Kumar's 'Ganga Jamuna', and Sunil Dutt's 'Mujhe Jeene Do' which are two other films that focused on the socio-economic causes of the very Indian problems.

### Changing Image Of Women

One stream of social reform came very easily to Indian feature films in the natural course of events, as it were.

Since all narrative cinema has at its core the primal relationship between man and woman, a very specific role has been played by the female characters in the Hindi feature film, reflecting the changing image of women in the twentieth-century society. In India, as in many other Asian countries, the 20th century saw the woman gradually breaking out of unwanted, archaic and burdensome orthodoxies. In many an instance, popular leading ladies in India became the protagonists of the 20th-century woman, in her varied facets through the decades. The social evils of dowry and child marriage, the cause of the education of women, the dignity of the working woman, the social reform movements that dominated the Indian scene in the early half of this century were to find their cause echoed and their arguments expounded in a continuous stream of films.

In the Silent Film era itself, we had Dhiren Ganguly's 'Lady Teacher': and other films which focused on the personality of the working-woman—'Marriage Market', 'Telephone Girl' and 'Typist Girl'. In 1935 'Dr. Madhurika' put forward an analy-

sis of a lady doctor's life. Gohar starred in 'Barrister's Wife' and Kardar's 'Sharda' and Shantaram's 'Duniya Na Mane' became extremely popular attacks on the traditional practice of child-marriage.

The nineteen-seventies are often referred to as the decade that witnessed the dominant rise of the action-film. Yet, film sociologists would be committing an intellectual misdemeanour if they were not to notice that the seventies was also the decade which unveiled new portrayals of contemporary womanhood.

In the Hindi cinema alone, this was also the decade of Shabana Azmi and Smita Patil, two great actresses whose portrayal of contemporary characters quite changed the tone of Indian films as a whole. Starting off with low-budget, so-called art-films like Shyam Benegal's 'Ankur' and 'Manthan' respectively, Shabana and Smita were soon to become cult figures on the Indian cultural scene and, in the eighties, were to greatly influence the concept of women characters in the Hindi cinema.

Shabana Azmi and Smita Patil were pathfinders whose achievements provided a new inspiration to other leading actresses of their time. The queen of showbiz, Hema Malini, broke from tradition and worked in offbeat films like 'Khushboo' and 'Kinara'. Raakhee established a new niche for women characters through films like '27

*The cinema's concern with social problems faced in the modern era continued to be overtly expressed from the thirties, right through to the sixties, in a handful of most significant films.*

Down', a national award-winner, and 'Tapasya'. Rekha, and then Sridevi, were from time to time to reveal themselves as consummate artistes capable of tackling such complex roles as 'Ghar' and 'Umrao Jann' (in Rekha's case) and 'Sadma' and 'Souten' (in Sridevi's filmography).

The seventies also saw the unique instance of a film actress working in the commercial cinema set-up, but giving it a dignity that was at once acceptable to social reformers and intellectuals. Such was the rare achievement of the actress Jaya Bhaduri Bachchan. With her roles in films such as 'Abhimaan', 'Parichay', 'Koshish' and 'Mili', Jaya Bhaduri Bachchan immediately expanded the range of characterisation and realism that would be popularly accepted by common folk. It has been a rare achievement, one that deserves an exclusive analysis of its own.

This group of talented actresses of the seventies and the eighties did, as a matter of fact, follow in the footsteps of two other generations of great actresses. First, the generation represented by Geeta Bali, Nargis, Meena Kumari, Madhubala, etc., and then, the generation represented by Nutan,



Scene from 'Do Bigha Zameen'

Waheeda Rehman and Sharmila Tagore. All these actresses are immortalised in a number of extremely significant and socially relevant films, which form the jewels in cinema's crown. Immediately after India attained Independence in 1947, actresses and women-characters were to embellish the quantum of Indian films with a contribution that is no less than that of the men. And it can be argued that these three generations of great talents are representative of three successive chapters in the history of Indian womanhood during the last sixty years or so. A mirror reflection, as it were, of the changing face of women in Indian society.

One of the interesting aspects of Indian cinema, Hindi cinema in par-

*Immediately after Independence, actresses and women-characters were to embellish the quantum of Indian films with a contribution that is no less than that of the men. A mirror reflection, as it were, of the changing face of women in Indian society.*

ticular, is that it has never espoused the cause of social evils or projected these in positive light. This, indeed, is the reason why the popular cinema has become a cultural symbol for the Indian people, who see films in a close inter-action with life as they know it outside the cinema hall, and as a reflection of their aspirations.

At the same time, when society itself seems to have lost its sense of direction, the cinema has been equally afflicted by the social confusion. At such periods of time, filmmakers have confined themselves to the limited concern of producing only entertainment of one kind or another.

Whenever the larger process of so-



Scene from 'Paar'.

cial development has been clearly defined in the body politic, and has been lucidly articulated, Indian cinema has quickly picked up the cue to propagate the ideas and concepts that direct social development in the country. On the other hand, whenever social development has slowed down to a listless pace, the popular cinema has tended to move away from real inspirations and escape into an exercise with pure meriment.

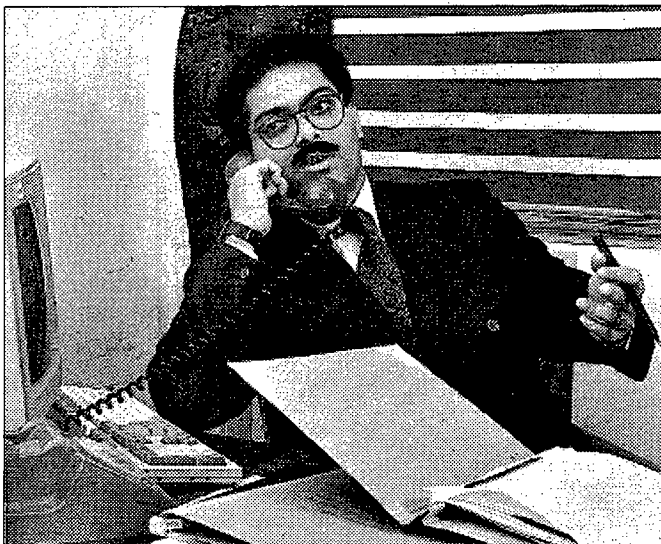
However, any list of the most popular films in Indian cinema will show us irrevocably that the most popular films have always been those which combine the ingredients of popular entertainment with the aspirations of social amelioration and humanistic development. Like the novel, the feature film 'tells a lie in order to tell the truth', as literary critics say. The popular cinema has a hybrid style, which initially evolved from folk traditions but which now also includes "pop" elements.

An explanatory analogy in this regard is that while modern development schemes seek to implant new

technologies in 'an economically backward' terrain, the popular Indian film attempts to enrobe the economically backward individual with the trappings of the new technology. In that sense, the cinema is quick to pick up the images of technological development and economic evolution and incorporate these as part of the backdrop in which the Indian emotional drama takes place.

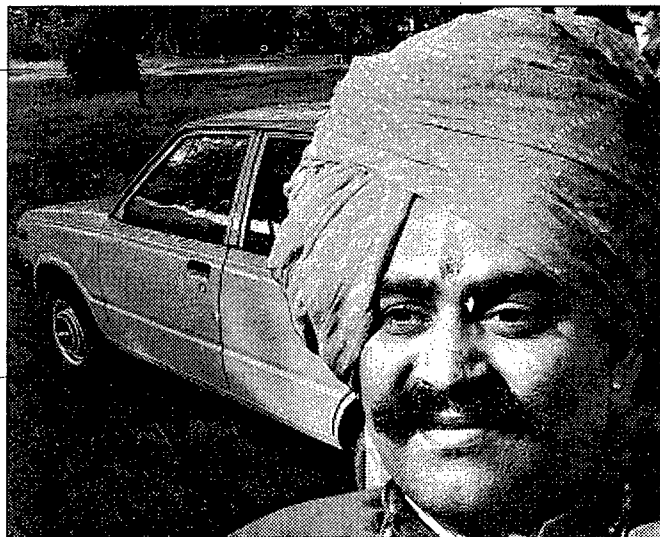
Since the cinema is itself technology's child, it has always been conscious that new technological environments cast their own shadow on human relationships and on human aspirations. To that extent, no matter how much a film may depart from the realistic facets of contemporary life, it can never sever its umbilical bond with the pace of social development. Social struggles and social achievements provide the inspiration for many a film, because at its best our cinema is a fair mirror-image of what is happening in society at large. □

*The author is a noted film critic.*



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# The Pioneers Of Indian Cinema

Jag Mohan

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*The author recalls here the achievements and contributions of such pioneering greats of Indian cinema as Sawe Dada, Dadasaheb Phalke, Ardeshir Irani, etc. How their unalloyed zeal, untiring efforts and personal sacrifices for the cause of cinema took the country to present great heights, he reminisces.*

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THIS is a celebratory occasion to mark the first century of the Indian cinema, which strictly speaking should commence on July 7, 1996. It was on that day that India's "Celluloid Connection" began in 1896, at the Watson's Hotel in Bombay, when the Lumiere Brothers launched their "Cinematographe". More about that further down.

On the occasion, one cannot resist the temptation of quoting a famous passage from Bharata Muni's "Natyashastra", the Sanskrit compendium on drama and related arts and on aesthetic theories. This was presumably written over 3000 years ago. What Bharata Muni has said about *Natya* cannot be improved upon by any PRO of the film world. Nor by any theoretician of film aesthetics. Let us pay homage to Bharata Muni by quoting what he said so long ago, because it has a bearing on "the second opium of the masses", which cinema has become today in India and elsewhere.



Sawe Dada

At the very first performance of a 'Natya' in the heavenly region, before the Devas and the Asuras, tumultuous consternation suddenly broke out. The Asuras resented that, in a particular

*The importance given to India and Bombay by the Lumiere Brothers is noteworthy. On February 20, 1896 the Londoners themselves got introduced to the "Wonder of the World". On the very day the Bombayites were seeing "The Marvel of the Century", the Czar of Russia was also seeing "Cinematographe" at St. Petersburg.*

scene, they had been depicted in an unfavourable light. They threatened to put a stop to the performance. A representation was made to Brahma by Virupaksha, with the Daityas and Vighnas by his side, thus: The "Natyaveda", which you have introduced for the first time through Natya, has put us in unfavourable light at the behest of the Devas! This ought not to have been done by you, the progenitor of the world, from whom came out the Devas and the Daityas alike."

### **Natya: Then And Now**

It was then that Brahma expounded the essence of Natya, the *raison d'etre* of drama and pacified the Asuras thus:

"In Natya, there is no exclusive representation of you or of the Devas, for, Natya is the *bhavanukirtana* (creative representation) of the three worlds.

"In it, sometimes there is reference to duty, sometimes to games, sometimes to money, sometimes to peace. And, sometimes laughter is found in it, sometimes fight, sometimes

love-making and sometimes the killing of people.

"Natya teaches duty to those bent on doing their duty, love to those eager for it. It gives courage to cowards and energy to the heroic. It enlightens men of poor intellect and gives wisdom to the learned.

"This gives diversion to the kings and firmness of mind to persons afflicted with sorrow and hints of acquiring money to those who are yearning for it and it brings composure to persons agitated in mind.

"The Natya, as I have devised it, is a mimicry of actions and conduct of people, which is rich in various emotions and which depicts different situations. This will relate to actions of men and women, good, bad and indifferent, and will give courage, amusement and happiness as well as counsel to them all.

"Natya will thus be instructive to all, through actions and states of mind (*bhava*) and through sentiments arising out of it.

"It will give relief to the unlucky persons who are afflicted with sorrow or grief or overwork and will be conducive to the observance of duty (*dharma*) as well as to fame, long life, intellectual pursuits and general good. It will educate the people.

"There is no maxim, no learning, no art nor craft, no device, no action that is not found in Natya. Hence, I have devised Natya in which meet all the departments of knowledge, different arts and various actions. stories taken out of *Vedic* works, as well as historical tales (*itihasa*), are so embellished that they are capable of giving pleasure and hence called Natya.

"A mimicry of the exploits of Devas and Asuras, kings as well as householders in this world is called Natya. And, when human nature with

its joys and sorrows is depicted through gestures and words, costumes and moods, that is also called Natya."

### **Celluloid Connection**

Bharata Muni of "Natyashastra" had to wait for aeons before his *Bharat Varsha* could be provided the "celluloid connection" through the "Cinematographe" of the Lumiere Brothers, Auguste and Lumiere, towards the end of the last century. This actually happened in 1896 at the Watson's Hotel, now known as the Army and Navy Building across the road opposite the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay, precisely on July 7 at 7 p.m. in spite of the drizzling monsoon rain before an audience that paid for its entrance at one rupee per person.

But India can derive a sort of pride that at the very moment of the debut of "Cinematographe" in Paris, the "celluloid connection" was established. The Lumiere Brothers launched "Cinematographe" in Paris, a few months earlier on December 28,

*No one can say with certainty when and where in the whole world, the first poem, the first play, the first history, etc. came to be written and by whom. For the first time in the history of the world, we can precisely fix the birth-date of cinema, be it the "Cinematographe" of the Lumieres, or the Kinetoscope and Vitascope of Thomas Alva Edison, or the earlier Praxinoscope of Emil Renaud.*

1895 at the Grand Cafe in Boulevard des Capuchines, Paris in the basement hall, named oddly enough "Salon des Indes" (the Indian Salon).

The importance given to India and

Bombay especially by the Lumiere Brothers is noteworthy. Only five months earlier on February 20, 1896, the Londoners themselves got introduced to the "Wonder of the World". And, on the very day the Bombayites were seeing "The Marvel of the Century", the Czar of Russia was also seeing "Cinematographe" at St. Petersburg.

One begins to wonder whether the Lumiere Brothers had the premonition that one day India would become the largest producer of films and continue to be so, year after year, for a decade and more, that too, in a variety of languages, unlike in most of the film-producing countries of the world.

### Sixty Fifth Art

But we can indulge with comforting thought that while cinema was hailed as the Seventh Art and the Tenth Muse in the Western World, it was just the *sixty fifth* art for us in India, since we already had *sixty four* other arts and all these had become the grist to the mill of Cinema. cinema provided to the masses here and elsewhere all those wonders explained in detail by Brahma in Bharata Muni's classic on the performing arts.

No one can say with certainty when and where in the whole world the first poem, the first play, the first history, etc. came to be written and by whom. For the first time in the history of the world, we can precisely fix the birth date of cinema, be it the "Cinematographe" of the Lumieres, or the Kinetoscope and Vitascope of Thomas Alva Edison, or the earlier Praxinoscope of Emil Renaud. Let us pay our homage to a whole lot of pioneers ranging from Athanasius Kircher to Eadward Maybridge, from Etienne Jules Marey to William Friese-Greene, from Leon Gaaumont to Charles Pathe and from Max Skladanowski to Georges Melies, not forgetting George Eastman of Kodak.



**Dadasaheb Phalke**

They were all racing with Time to protect the "moving pictures", patenting their wares, sometimes as collaborators and sometimes as rivals.

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*To Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar should go the credit of being the "Father of the Indian Factual Film" taking into consideration the fact that "factual films" and the newsreels were the ancestors of the Documentary films.*

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The oddest thing is that when Georges Melies, the fantasy filmmaker of those days, went to one of the Lumiere Brothers for advice, he

was told by their father: "Young man, this invention is not for sale and in any case it would ruin you. Perhaps, for a time it may be exploited as a scientific curiosity but apart from that it has no commercial future whatever!"

But, the French film critic turned filmmaker of the ' twenties, Louis Delluo, declared in 1919: "We are assisting at the birth of an extraordinary art, which has already found its feet and is destined for future glories—the only modern art, the offspring of the machine and the human ideal."

### Sawe Dada

A regular visitor to these Lumiere shows in Bombay was Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar, more popularly known as "Sawe Dada". He

was really spellbound by the "latest wonder of the world," to such an extent that goaded by it, he made arrangements for the screening of films on his own in a couple of months time. He became an exhibitor first. He went further deep into the matter and by the end of 1897, imported a motion picture camera from London at the cost of 21 guineas. The first real-life incidents he shot were a wrestling match and the humorous subject of training monkeys by wandering *madaris*. He sent the films to London for processing and screened them in Bombay in an open-air theatre in 1898. To this pioneering Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar should go the credit of being the "Father of the Indian Factual Film" taking into consideration the fact that "factual films" (then called "topicals") and the newsreels were the ancestors of the Documentary Films, which were films of fact and not of fiction.

Sawade Dada richly deserves the title because he did not rest content with routine and casual items. He also made the first newsreel of the public reception given to Dr. R.P. Paranjape in 1901, the first Indian to become a senior Wrangler at the Cambridge University (grandfather of Sai Paranjape, the stage, film and television producer/director). Sawade Dada also made a topical of the Durbar organised by Lord Curzon to mark the succession of Edward VII in 1901.

Sawade Dada was followed by Hiralal Sen and Amritlal Bose of Calcutta, S.N. Patankar of Bombay and others, apart from the Britishers, who owned Clifton & Co in Bombay and Bourne and Shepherd in Calcutta. All of them were involved in making and screening short "animated photographs".

### Dadasaheb Phalke

Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, to give the full name of Dadasaheb Phalke, was much more than the pioneering

*Dadasaheb Phalke was a visionary, a passionate patriot, a showman par excellence, a publicist and an utter genius, who triumphed over his circumstances and made during his life time over 40 films and died in near penurious conditions.*

maker of India's first feature film, "Raja Harishchandra", even though the ghost of a film called "Pundalik" haunts him, trying to deprive the honour bestowed on him. He was a visionary, a passionate patriot, a showman *par excellence*, a publicist and an utter genius, who triumphed over his circumstances and made during his life-time over 40 films (mythologicals, socials, historicals and biographicals) and also over a score of topical and educational films) and died in near penurious conditions.

Phalke was a Maharashtrian Brahmin, born in 1870 at Tryambakeswar, near Nasik, who had acquired "knowledge of fundamental crafts like drawing, painting, architecture, photography, theatre and magic". Besides, he was an expert colour printer having been trained in Britain and Germany. He was working as a "draughtsman-photographer" in the Archaeological Survey of India. Like all good shastries and pandits, he was well-versed in Sanskrit and Marathi literature his father being a great scholar. He was married to a devoted woman and had a small family. And, he had "won gold and silver medals for excellence in skills".

In 1917, he wrote a longish article in "Navyug", a Marathi magazine at their request to popularise the cinema. From this article, translated into English by Narmada Shahane, a long-time researcher at the Film and Television Institute, Pune, the

following snippets have been culled to provide an idea as to how his mind worked:

"In 1910, I happened to see the film "The Life of Christ" in the America-India Picture Palace in Bombay... That Saturday in Christmas marked the beginning of a revolutionary change in my life. That day also marked the foundation in India of an industry, which occupies the fifth place in the myriad of big and small professions that exist (in the country). All this has happened at the hands of a poor Brahmin... I was unconsciously clapping hands at the sight of the noble incidents in Christ's life. While the life of Christ was rolling fast before my physical eyes, I was mentally visualising the Gods, Shri Krishna and Shri Ramachandra, their Gokul and Ayodhya... The whole night passed in mental agony.

"I was constantly preoccupied with the analysis of every film which I saw and in considering whether I could make them here.

"In spite of my enthusiasm and confidence in my success, I knew very well that nobody would dare to give me the capital, unless I had something tangible in hand to attract them. So, I liquidated whatever possessions I had and directed all my efforts towards this end...

"The responsibility of maintaining the family, the contemptuous treatment I received from my relatives and above all the lurking fear of the possible failure of my plans, all these adversities resulted in complete blindness, as *both my eyes were affected by corneal ulcer*. Thanks to the timely treatment of Dr. Prabhakar, the visual world was restored to me again and I resumed my usual activities with the help of three or four spectacles.

"This was the *period of the Swadeshi movement* and there was profuse talking and lecturing on the subject.

For me personally, it led to the resignation of my comfortable government job and taking to an independent profession. I took this opportunity to *explain my ideas about cinema to my friends and to the leaders of the Swadeshi movement.*

“At last, one of my friends, who was associated with me for the last ten years and could vouch for my conduct, financial honesty, love for the profession and perseverance was willing to consider me sympathetically.

“Thus, I laid the foundation-stone of a gigantic profession with very scanty capital, sufficient only for an enterprise like a tea shop or a barber

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*The first “Talkie” was released at the Majestic cinema on March 14, 1931—a watershed year in the history of Indian cinema. The dialogues were in a hybrid language of Sanskrit-based Hindi and Persian-based Urdu; so were the seven lilting songs, backed by music, that enthralled the audiences.*

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shop because I had intense love for the job and I had self-confidence that I would definitely establish this new profession against all odds.”

### “Raja Harishchandra”

Phalke somehow managed to go to England in 1912 to learn about cameras and “cinematography”. On his return, he started producing “Raja Harishchandra” the mythological tale, keeping the story of Krishna aside for a while. With the help of his wife and children and some moneylenders, and by shifting from Bombay to Nasik, where at his own home and the backyard he made the film with “57,000 photographs” that moved for one-and-a-half hours and for which

the public paid a paltry amount of “three annas” at the Coronation Cinematograph and Variety Hall on May 3, 1913.

One important fact to note is that at that point of time, no woman would dare to act the role of Taramati, the devout wife of Raja Harishchandra. But Phalke was a great innovator. He picked up a young man, named Salunke, who was a cook at a restaurant frequented by Phalke. Salunke had a slender body and fingers, was a bit of effeminate. He was working on a monthly salary of ten rupees. Phalke offered him fifteen rupees and he became the “male heroine” of the film.

“Raja Harishchandra” became the first box-office hit and Phalke wrote, “Oh, India, I am a Karma Yogi” and he added “I am determined to do my duty even at the cost of my life... with the firm conviction that the Indian people would get an occasion to see Indian images on the screen and people abroad would get a true picture of India”. It is to be remembered that Phalke mortgaged his wife’s jewels and even sold some to make his mark.

An interesting foot-note to Phalke’s “Raja Harishchandra” is that while it is fairly well-documented and part of the film is available, there is no trace of a feature called “Pundalik” made one year earlier, in 1912, by R.G. Torney. There is only one review in the “Times of India” of the period. Till today, it is a mystery.

### “Alam Ara”

In this hurried journey through the first century of cinema in the next halt, the image of Khan Bahadur Ardeshir M. Irani materializes. He was the “pioneer who gave the tongue to the Indian screen”. And he was the man, who created an Indian style “Tower of Babel”.

“Ardeshir Irani’s “Alam Ara” was the first Indian feature film that was

“all-talking, singing and dancing”, that mesmerised the Indian masses and led to emergence of films in various Indian languages as also of the languages of neighbouring countries. This film produced under the banner of Imperial Movietone of Bombay featured Master Vithal, Miss Zubeida, Miss Sushila, Miss Jiloo Elizer, Prithviraj Kapoor and Jagdish. It was an “all-living, breathing, 100 per cent Talking Peak Drama” revealing the “essence of romance, brains and talents unheard of under one banner”.

This “talkie” was released at the Majestic cinema on March 14, 1931—a watershed year in the history of Indian cinema. The dialogues were in a hybrid language of Sanskrit-based Hindi and

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*In 1931, the year of the release of “Alam Ara”, 22 other Hindi films were released, as also three Bengali films, one Tamil and one Telugu film. Next year, eight Marathi and two Gujarati films delighted the audiences in Western India. In 1933, as many as 75 Hindi films were made.*

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Persian-based Urdu; so were the seven lilting songs, backed by music that enthralled the audiences. The very first song that was recorded was rendered by one W.M. Khan, who had come “to see merely the working of the recording machine”. His voice was good and phonogenic. When he rendered a song in Pushto language, he was given the role of a fakir. He commented that in those days, “we had to sing without allowing time for breathing and the camera also ran simultaneously. If by mistake we fumbled or spoke a wrong word, the whole process had to be repeated”. Oddly enough, the hero in the film never sang a song!

Ardeshir Irani, when he was

felicitated years later for his distinct achievement, very modestly said: "I don't think anyone should lionise me for producing the first Indian talkie. I merely did my bit for our national industry. My film career is just the career of a humble worker of filmdom".

*Khan Bahadur Ardeshir M. Irani was the "pioneer who gave the tongue to the Indian screen". And he was the man, who created an Indian style "Tower of Babel".*

Ardeshir Irani was much too modest. Born in Poona (now Pune) in 1885, he started his career as a distributor of foreign films. He became a partner of the famous pioneer exhibitor of films, Abdullally Esoofally of the Alexander Cinema in those days, said to be the most up-to-date in equipment and auditorium design. For a short while, he was the Indian representative of the Universal Pictures. But inspired by the success of Dadasaheb Phalke, he decided to become a producer-director. It was then he started the Imperial Movietone, in partnership with Esoofally and Mohamedally Rangwala, which acquired much reputation in subsequent years.

If "Life of Christ" inspired Dadasaheb, it was "Showboat" (a forty per cent foreign talkie) that inspired the Khan Bahadur. He has said in an interview: "When I witnessed "Showboat" I was inspired to make a Talkie in India. The project at first appeared too hazardous because in India we had absolutely no facilities, no equipment, no experience to start sound film. Anyhow, I decided to go ahead with the preparations as the temptation to make a picture in our own national language was simply irresistible."

As it happened in the case of Phalke,

Irani too was pooh-poohed by his friends and colleagues. His rivals even advertised that "Silence is Golden in Motion Pictures". But all of them "who came to see "Alam Ara" and to scoff at him, went to him for forgiveness".

### Films In Indian Languages

As a result of popularisation of the Talkies by Ardeshir Irani in the west and south of India and by the Madan brothers in the West, Burma and Ceylon, there was a great demand for films in various Indian languages. Enterprising producers and directors were popping up here, there and everywhere. In 1931, the year of the release of "Alam Ara", 22 other Hindi films were released, as also three Bengali films, one Tamil and one Telugu film. Next year, eight Marathi and two Gujarati films delighted the audiences in western India. In 1933, as many as 75 Hindi films were made.

However, we must pay homage to the makers of the "first sound film" in the major languages. In 1931 "Jamai Sasthi" (Bengali), "Kalidas" (Tamil), "Bhakta Prahalad" (Telugu) and in 1932, "Sant Tukaram" (Marathi) and "Narasinh Mehta" (Gujarati)" were made.

It is to be noted that the ethnicity of regional groups that constitute the vast mosaic of people called India asserted itself through films made in various languages. As a result, new centres of film production sprang up in Pune, Kolhapur, Madras, Salem, Coimbatore in the South and Lahore in the years before the Partition.

The Talkie set the special pattern of Indian films—the song-dominated films. The Hindi film, "Indra Sabha" had as many as 60 songs. A Tamil film ranked next with 40 songs. As all actors and actresses, all heroines and heroes could not be singers as well, the system of playback singing (and recording) was engendered. And, a time came when the unseen playback

singers became more important than thespians, male and female. This was inevitable in a country, where its greatest authority on dramaturge, Bharata Muni had said, "musical instruments are the rock-bed of a dramatic performance". Another Sanskrit dramatist had justified the inclusion of many songs in his play by saying that they "delight the hearts of the audience and establish the emotional continuity!"

One deleterious development that has been the bane of the cinema exhibition trade also emanated from this period—the black-marketing of cinema tickets. Such was the craze of the people to see "Alam Ara" and listen to the songs and dialogues, they did not mind paying as much as four rupees for a four-anna ticket. This has continued; so much so that today a ten rupees ticket is sometimes sold for a hundred rupees!

*Jamsetji Framji Madan, a Parsi from Bombay, laid the foundations of a vast distribution and exhibition network in Bengal, which extended to Ceylon, Burma and elsewhere. He also financed the making of short films.*

In Calcutta, there was much of film activity. Jamsedji Framji Madan, a Parsi from Bombay laid the foundations of a vast distribution and exhibition network in Bengal, which extended to Ceylon, Burma and elsewhere. He also financed the making of short films. Another commercial venture which has lasted till today is Aurora Cinema Company founded by Anadi Bose and Debi Ghosh.

Birendranath Sircar's New Theatres in Calcutta nurtured the talents of Dhiren Ganguly, P.C. Barua, K.L.

Saigal, Nitin Bose, Premankur Aorthy and many others. Even the great Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore got involved in film-making and directed "Natir Puja" under the New Theatres banner.

In Bombay, Imperial Film Company, Kohinoor Studios, Bombay Talkies, Wadia Movietone and other studio complexes provided enormous opportunities for the emergence of talents as producers, directors, actors and actresses, cameramen, audiographers etc. Among them were Devika Rani and her husband, Himanshu Rai, Gohar and Chandulal Shah, Shantaram, Fatehlal and Damle and a whole lot of others, including Nadia, the "hunterwali".

In Madras, R. Nataraja Mudaliar, R. Venkiah and his son Surya Prakash were the pioneers who blazed the trail.

The Indian Cinema industry attracted self-taught filmmakers and thespians from every caste and creed right from the beginning. Even today in the credit titles of most films, almost all communities are represented.

The Indian cinema also launched film journalism, which is a distinct genre of journalism with spice and sex, gossip and serious writing on the aesthetics of cinema. The earliest was "Bijoli", a Bengal film weekly, started by Nalinikanta Sarkar, which during the 1920s became very popular. Similarly, journals were started in other languages, including English. They all have had wide circulation.

In this article, homage could not be paid to all the pioneers but an attempt has been made to salute the memory of the few, who gave a definitive direction in the evolution of the cinema. But this chronicle would be incomplete without a mention of Satyajit Ray

(1921-92). He was a pioneer in many ways, an *auteur*, who had complete control over every aspect of his films and who evolved a style of his own. In the history of Indian cinema, spread over a century, he was the only Indian filmmaker to be honoured with a Bharat Ratna from India and an "Oscar" by Hollywood's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, for his "lifetime achievement". More than a score of books have been written about him and his films in English, Bengali and other languages. And there are half a dozen films on him with copious extracts from his 30 odd films. Ray's contribution to the Indian cinema is many-sided and he will continue to be a titan even as we march into the 21st century. □

*The author is a veteran film-writer and one of the seven founders of the Federation of Film Societies of India.*

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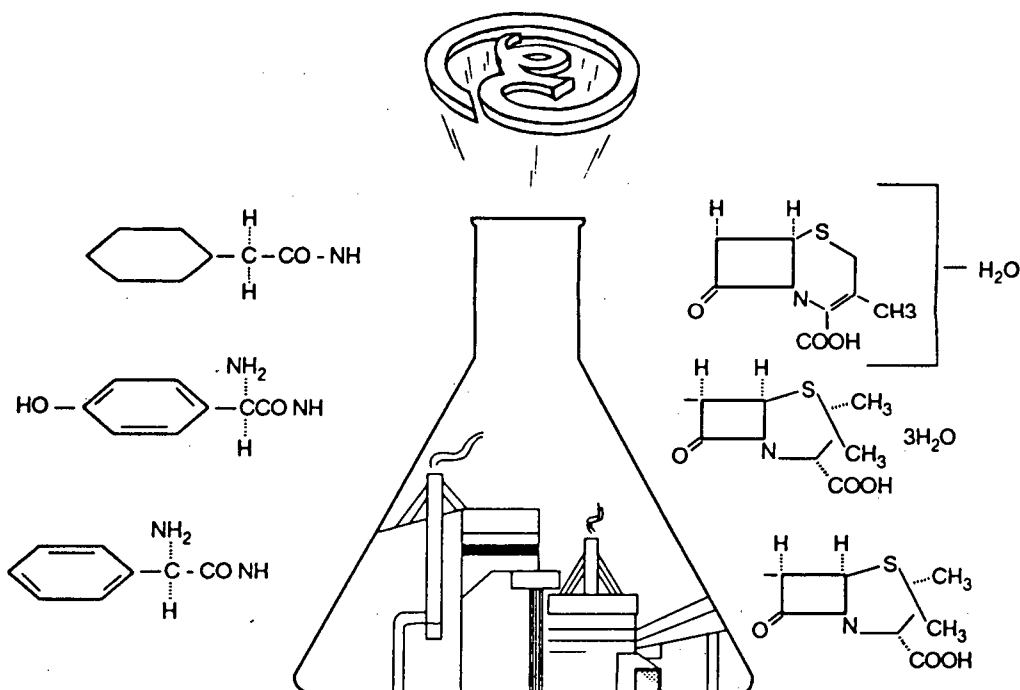


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# Documentary Films And Development

Tapan K. Bose

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*Though generally considered a useful tool for education and dissemination of information, concepts and ideals, a documentary, in author's view, is incapable of changing the people on its own. Change in people's attitudes and their acceptance of new ideas are subject to a variety of socio-political and economic impulses, he feels.*

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CINEMA was born in documentary form. The word "documentary" as we understand it today was coined in 1928 by John Grierson, the founder of the British documentary movement. Grierson described the documentary as a film form that provides "a creative treatment of actuality".

Cinema grew up as an industry—the entertainment industry. For obvious reasons, the barons of the film industry favoured the feature film. They tied the fate of this art form to the yoke of the "box office" which preferred the narrative form. Thus began the tragic story of the filmmaker's struggle for creative freedom in an art form which was destined to be controlled by big money interests and the governments.

But every industry has its internal dialectics. The contradiction between art and commerce and the experimental

and conformist cinema provided space and validity to the documentary cinema movement. Documentary filmmakers rejected the control of the studio owners and went out to make films in the fields and factories, recording the reality of life. The encounter with the rough edges of real life gave birth to the avant-garde cinema which experimented with Realism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Neo-realism and Symbolism. It challenged the existing cinematographic order.

This contradiction between the established film industry and the documentary film movement sharpened in the post-World War era. Documentary was used as a propaganda by both the Nazis as well as the protagonists of the so-called free world during the World War. This led most governments to believe that

documentary films were good for social advertisement and education. After the War, in most countries funds were made available for such "documentaries".

As the cold war intensified, Western governments wanted documentarians to make anti-communist propaganda films. In the erstwhile Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, filmmakers were forced to follow the official line. In the USA, a witch hunt was started against film-makers sympathetic to the ideas of the left. In most countries of Western Europe, Soviet films were banned. In India the Films Division was created to produce and distribute documentary films where the official line was enforced almost in the same manner.

In the fifties, the documentary movement reemerged in the West as militant films, protest films and direct cinema. The link between documentary films and the three most important movements in the history of world cinema—the Free cinema in Great Britain, the New Wave in France and the Underground Cinema in the USA can not be denied.

Unlike in the West, documentary cinema in India remained essentially a government enterprise. Not many Indian filmmakers ventured to make documentary films on their own. The high cost of production, Films Division's monopoly control over the theatrical distribution network and the Film Censor Board's known aversion to anything that was anti-establishment, were severe deterrents. They continued to make films for the Films Division. The free-lance documentary filmmakers who were called "outside producers" by the Films Division were treated as mere "order suppliers". They were made to sign iron-clad contracts that bound them to the diktats of the bureaucrats. In case of any dispute, appeal was possible only to other bureaucrats at higher

levels.

It was this relationship between the bureaucracy and the filmmakers that determined the character of Indian documentaries. The government invested money in documentary films for propagation of its ideas, plans and schemes. They looked upon documentary cinema as a useful tool for dissemination of information, education, concepts and ideas. In other words documentary films were seen as a medium for "social advertising" loaded with messages which were to bring about change in the attitude of its viewers. Documentary films started being classified as information films, educational films, motivational films and development films.

Can films change people? Do people accept everything they see on the cinema screen as truth? If that were true then why have hundreds of films giving the message of communal amity failed to change our people? I think we have always overestimated the capability of cinema because of its apparent ability to recreate "reality". Yes, films simulate reality but the audience is educated enough to know that it is only a simulation of reality. And the reality which is captured and projected in the films is framed by the values and the ideology of the film maker. In other words, it is always value loaded, if not totally propagandist. The audience can see through this and therefore is able to make up its mind. Because when the projector is switched off, the screen becomes blank and the audience returns to real world.

Like all words, "development" is a value loaded word. What is perceived as development by one need not necessarily be considered as development by others. There is no common paradigm for "development". However, there is an official view of development. This is what the

documentary films are expected to deliver to the people. But when we talk about films as "a tool for development" we are not talking about mere delivery of messages, we are actually expecting the films to convince the audience, mould its thinking and change its attitude.

There is very little evidence of documentary films or even fiction films having achieved these objectives. However, there is evidence of the ability of propaganda films in enforcing or ensuring an acceptance of dominant ideology in controlled socio-political situations like it did under Fascism and Communism. This also happened in the "free world" during the early days of the Cold War. As the governments, the church and political elites of the "free world" came down

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*Documentary was used as a tool of propaganda by both the Nazis as well as the protagonists of the so-called free world during the World War. This led most governments to believe that documentary films were good for social advertisement and education.*

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heavily on the leftists, it created an atmosphere where MacCarthyism could thrive. In those days, propaganda films identifying the leftists as "enemies of democracy" were equally successful. The revolt of the documentary film makers of the West against government sponsored films in the fifties and sixties was a reaction to this type of film.

Commercial advertising films are essentially propaganda films. They do not try to change people's attitude. They are successful because they ride on the dominant ideology of consumerism. They enhance the

popular myth of the consumer's freedom of choice and the consumer's right to good quality products. Their real objective is to make people aware of their brand names; for example, advertisement for various varieties of talcum powders while making the consumer aware of their respective brand names also strengthens the accepted popular belief that talcum powder is good, that it prevents sweating and reduces bad body odour.

But if a film tried to advertise that use of talcum powder is bad because it blocks the pores of the skin and continued use can cause skin cancer, it would be a different proposition and the chances are that its message will be rejected by most viewers. This is because it is not fashionable to sweat and have bad body odour. The dominant concept of "good life" today is "clean homes, cool people and no sweat".

In short, while a documentary may inform people, deliver a message and even be able to move its audience, it certainly is not capable of changing people on its own. Change in people's attitudes and their acceptance of new ideas are dependent on a variety of socio-political and economic impulses. Propaganda succeeds in situations of control. The more open the society, the less the chance of the success of propaganda. Commercial advertising is successful under capitalism where consumerism is promoted as the ideology of the State and society.

Documentaries therefore, can not be a tool for development but certainly they can make people aware of possibilities and potentialities. Whether the people will accept these ideas or not depends on the credibility of the State and its performance. □

*The author is a documentary filmmaker.*

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# The Film Society Movement

Vidyarthi Chatterjee

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*Underlining the uniqueness of the film society movement in promoting the good cinema, the author laments, it is sadly on the decline not only in our country but all over the world. The main reason for it, in his view, is the rapid growth of video.*

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THE film society movement in India was pioneered by none other than Satyajit Ray, the man universally credited with having brought Indian cinema to the critical notice of film aesthetes the world over. The movement started in Calcutta almost half a century ago with Ray and his friends forming themselves into a group to see European films or those from Hollywood. After the screenings, they would discuss what they had seen and sometimes write on the films. The beginnings of Chidananda Dasgupta as a film critic or of Banshi Chandragupta, the proverbial art director, or of Ray himself as a filmmaker are to be traced to those heady days of the late forties and early fifties when these young men, as they were then, were beginning to prepare themselves for the respective roles they would play in the years and decades to come. It is a matter of speculation whether these figures would have turned out the way they did if those group screenings and discussions had not taken place. Among those who led the country to political freedom, there were some who placed art and culture high on the agenda of a people sometimes looking beyond political emancipation. Jawaharlal Nehru was quick to appreciate the potential and worth of the film medium. While he took extra care to ensure that people in other countries got to see the films of Raj Kapoor, he took no less interest in the elevated human documentaries made by Ray. This was a time when the film society movement, especially in the eastern part of the country, was gaining in strength and popularity. The

support of the government was by no means negligible to the movement gradually coming into its own. But Mrs. Gandhi was even more forthright in extending governmental support to the movement. One important reason for Mrs. Gandhi's positive attitude was the great respect she had for Satyajit Ray as a filmmaker and artist. It was somehow inconceivable that a movement headed by the maestro should suffer for want of patronage with Mrs. Gandhi at the helm of affairs. Till the last day of his life, Satyajit Ray was the President of the Federation of Film Societies of India, the apex body co-ordinating and overseeing the activities of film clubs across the country. Such was the man's stature and the respect he enjoyed in all quarters that a single line from him was enough to get the knottiest problem solved for the Federation. But with his demise, things started to drift and the affairs of the Federation are no longer what they once used to be.

Even though film has since long been seriously studied in certain European cinematic strongholds such as France, Germany or the erstwhile

Soviet Union, the film society movement is largely a post-War phenomenon. Some of the most distinguished directors of our times from France or the East European countries owe not a little to the movement. In our own country, practically every important filmmaker since Ray in every part of the land has been/is a direct product of the movement or greatly influenced by it. Although Ritwik Ghatak was never a member of the elite circle that pioneered the movement in Calcutta, he was close to some of its members. As for Mrinal Sen, he has headed the international body of film clubs, a position honoured by many memorable exponents of the medium, including Francois Truffaut.

Contemporary Malayalam cinema, in particular, is deeply indebted to the film society movement. If Malayalam cinema is in the forefront of the Indian regional cinemas today, the involvement of its leading young exponents in organizing the film club movement in Kerala's backwaters goes a long way in explaining its pre-eminence. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, the

late G. Aravindan and the late John Abraham, the three *avatars* of Malayalam cinema, were all closely associated with the movement in the seventies in Thiruvananthapuram and in other cities, towns and even villages in the State. Adoor's national award-winning debut feature, *Swayamvaram* (One's Own Choice), was made possible by the efforts of the first film club that Adoor and his friends started in Thiruvananthapuram. The film co-operative that followed close on the heels of their film club financed *Swayamvaram*, which may rightly be said to have marked the re-birth of Malayalam cinema along modern, creative lines.

But it was John Abraham, an ideological, spiritual and artistic kinsman of his tutor at the Pune Film Institute, Ritwik Ghatak, who has given Kerala its most durable film club. Named as a direct tribute to Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, the Odessa movement is a joy and a marvel in many ways. Still true to the grassroots ideas of its late founder, Odessa arranges for screenings of classics and experimentals in towns and villages alike. It is a distinct departure from the film club movement as it exists in West Bengal where it is confined to Calcutta and the large towns. The example of West Bengal must necessarily be cited since it is here that the film club movement is still the most vibrant despite being handicapped in recent times by falling membership, ego fights in the ranks of the leadership, and the inability to procure films from what was once its single most important source, namely, the embassies of the Soviet Union and the East European countries.

The film society movement is on the decline all over the world; and India is no exception. Since financial, infrastructural and other constraints are increasingly causing filmmaking to be replaced by videomaking, the movement suddenly finds itself in a

situation where it has less and less films to show every year. Clubs which had been functioning vigorously for years, if not for decades, are disappearing overnight without leaving a trace of their presence. Membership is on a sharp decline, especially in the northern and western regions as long-time organisers and activists of the movement like Vijaya Muley or, Basu Bhattacharya, will testify. Another important factor is that viewing tastes have changed for the worse. The craze is for sex and violence and a profligate pace that often has nothing to do with life or art. Things have gotten to be so bad that even in the south, except for Kerala, the movement is in the doldrums. Bangalore, which Satyajit

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*Among those who led the country to political freedom, there were some who placed art and culture high on the agenda of a people. Jawaharlal Nehru was quick to appreciate the potential and worth of the film medium. Mrs. Gandhi was even more forthright in extending governmental support to the movement.*

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Ray had once hailed as an important centre of serious film appreciation, no longer cares for the films of so important a director as Girish Kasaravalli.

In West Bengal, however, the story is somewhat different. Even though the movement is not the same artistic and intellectual force it was in the fifties or the sixties, there are still enough takers to keep it going. The movement leaders are alarmed at the changing scenario but, recognising that the rot can still be stemmed, are going about their job with seriousness and a sense of commitment. Out of the seventy odd film societies in West Bengal, some time ago about

forty of them formed a new platform for collective corrective action as also to give the movement a badly-needed shot in the arm. The Study Centre for Film and Allied Arts, as the joint venture calls itself, may yet be able to consolidate the gains of the fifty-year-old movement as also devise a programme of action for the present and the future.

One remembers listening to an array of film society stalwarts at a conference organised by the Study Centre not so long ago. Promode Lahiry, the legendary film producer known to pride himself as a product of the film society movement narrated to some two hundred delegates drawn from all parts of the State his varied experiences in film production. Significantly, Lahiry came forward to produce Ritwik Ghatak's *Ajantrik* or Satyajit Ray's *Parash Pathar* at a time when the audience for meaningful experiments in cinema wasn't exactly big. Needless to emphasize, both these films turned out to be milestones in the growth and development of Bengali cinema with far-reaching influences on the country's other regional cinemas. Another important speaker was the actor Anil Chatterjee, seen to advantage in so many films by Ghatak, Ray or Mrinal Sen and known to leave his mark even in many a reasonably well-made film with commercial undertones. Chatterjee spoke not only about his experiences as a film artiste and technician (in which role he had started out) but also as a trade union activist of long standing in the studio *para* of Tollygunje. Chatterjee's observations over, an academic session on the subject of the history and development of the film society movement brought together Chidananda Dasgupta, who represented the first generation of film club organisers, and Prabodh Maitra, a spokesman for the second generation.

These facts need to be recapitulated

Some of the most distinguished directors of our times from France or the East European countries owe not a little to the movement. In our own country, practically every important filmmaker since Ray has been/is a direct product of the movement or greatly influenced by it.

if for no other reason than to reassure ourselves of the great things that the film clubs can still achieve if they have imagination and the will to make things happen. The conference's session on the aesthetics of cinema underlined the belief that it was high time that Indian filmmakers developed and pursued their own school or schools of aesthetics instead of continuing to assess their own films or those of others belonging to so-called developing societies in the light of norms and notions laid down by aesthete-pundits of the West. More than one speaker emphasized the point that if the Latin Americans can have their own distinctive aesthetics in literature or cinema in keeping with their own artistic and creative genius, there is no reason why Bengalees or Malayalees or Marathis cannot have theirs. This was followed by a session on cinema as a social force which, understandably, generated greater interest because the subject is more down-to-earth and, also, is far removed from aesthetics which, for one reason or another, is generally considered (even among many film club members of long-standing) to be obscure or elitist or both.

However, it was the ultimate session of the conference—on various technical aspects of filmmaking—that proved to be most engrossing and, in a way, entertaining as well. Speaking on film direction, Utpalendu Chakraborty (*Mukti Chai, Moyna Tadanta, Chokh,*

*Debshishu, The Music of Satyajit Ray*) dwelt on the trials that one must be prepared to face if he wishes to make "a different kind of film in keeping with different attitude and a different sensibility about life and art". Drawing on his own experiences, Chakraborty said the pitfalls were many and compromise an ever-present possibility. Ramananda Sengupta, who worked with the legendary Jean Renoir in the making of *The River* and has assisted practically every important Bengali filmmaker in a career spanning half a century, spoke on cinematography, while Satyen Chatterjee, another veteran with an experimental turn of mind, spoke with authority on his area of work, sound. All said and heard, the cumulative effect of the conference on both its organisers and the delegates was the renewed hope that there was still time to save the film society movement from extinction and wean away in at least some measure the younger generations from the lure of television.

No discussion on the present status of the film society movement in India will be complete without references to the year-round programme and activities of Cine Central, Calcutta, the largest film club in the country which holds its centrepiece, the Calcutta International Film Festival, all through the month of November. The scope and substance of the festival can be measured from the following salient features of its ninth edition, held last year: Tributes to Jean Renoir, Ingmar Bergman and Hrishikesh Mukherjee; homage to Lindsay Anderson, Zoltan Fabri and Stefen

*The destiny of the film society movement in India as indeed anywhere else will be decided by those with the capacity to dream seemingly impossible dreams.*

Contemporary Malayalam cinema, in particular, is deeply indebted to the film society movement. If Malayalam cinema is in the forefront, the involvement of its leading young exponents in organizing the film club movement goes a long way in explaining its pre-eminence.

Uher of the Slovak Republic; and 'Memory of the World' section in which fourteen classics, from *Intolerance* and *Battleship Potemkin* to *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *Eight and a Half*, were screened; Retrospectives devoted to two Swedish pioneers, Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjöström, Miklos Jancsó, Eric Rohmer and Alain Tanner; glimpses of Argentine, Canadian, Chinese, Colombian, French, Greek, Japanese, Mexican, Spanish and Yugoslav cinemas; Focus on Catalan cinema; a wide-ranging 'Panorama of World Cinema' section; and an ambitious Documedia section which included documentaries, shorts, experimentals, animation films and some works fusing different genres. Cine Central's 25-year-old success in carrying the essence and vision of the film society movement to thousands of members and its ability to hold an annual festival rivalling the one organised by the Directorate of Film Festivals—the IFFI—with one-tenth the financial resources spent on the latter event, should be enough to convince even the worst cynic around that the film society movement is far from being finished. The destiny of the film society movement in India as indeed anywhere else on this planet will be decided not by the faint-hearted or the grey-spirited, but by those with the capacity to dream seemingly impossible dreams. And a sufficiently large number of such dreamers seems to be still amongst us.

*The author is a noted film critic.*

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# Cinema On The Small Screen

Bibekananda Ray

ALTHOUGH TV started experimentally, in Delhi only, way back in 1959, cinema made a late start on the small screen. Initially, TV programmes in Delhi were educational and promotional in content and with few community sets, then in circulation, reached only a handful of rural people in and around Delhi, for a few hours in the evening. A major breakthrough came before the holding of the ninth Asian Games in Delhi in 1982. As a result of a major decision by the Government, colour television came in a big way in 1982-83 and gradually replaced black-and-white sets and technology. By the mid-eighties, colour television was well-entrenched in big cities, followed by large-scale acquisition and manufacture of video sets (VCRs and VCPs) with liberal imports from Japan and other Far Eastern countries. By the end of the decade, TV had spread to rural areas with expansion of rural electrification; even where power had not reached, the well-off middle class acquired battery-operated sets. Large-scale manufacture of portable TV sets by proliferating home companies took this media revolution a step ahead. Expansion of TV networks and transmission followed soon after, remarkably in the early nineties.

With the commissioning of a plethora of high-power and low-power transmitters (HPTs and LPTs) and booster towers, satellite TV entered India in the early nineties with dish

antennas being liberally imported, and later manufactured indigenously, bringing a fall in their prices. Simultaneously, video parlours and libraries mushroomed even in the remotest regions, giving a further boost to the circulation and exhibition of films and bringing cinema into the homes of well-to-do who could afford colour TV sets and video-decks. Cable TV added another dimension to this phenomenal spread of the audio-visual medium in big cities. For one hundred rupees or so, channels available on home sets increased from two of Doordarshan to about a half a dozen, and ran for more transmission hours.

This revolution which coincided with the economic reforms, launched by the Union government from July, 1991 had two casualties—the cinema halls and the Radio,—the first private and the second government-owned, which had begun their journeys in India in 1912 and 1927 respectively and covered a large majority of the

galloping population in the subcontinent.

As films came to be the staple fare on the small screen, either by direct telecast, or through cable TV, or on video cassettes, cinema-halls were threatened. In Bombay and Madras, a number of old reputed theatres closed down, being commercially unviable. Besides, admission rates in cinema-halls rose sharply which only the well-off could afford. To see a new film in a comfortable city-hall, one has to spend 20 to 30 rupees on a ticket only these days, compared to two to five rupees in the mid-eighties. Cinema through cable TV or video cassettes worked out much cheaper; around 50 films in a month for a hundred rupees or so on cable, and 8 to 10 rupees on hired video cassettes for 24 hours for viewing by the entire family with friends and relatives. Thus cinema became a commodity in middle-class homes, like rice, pulses and potato. In fact, urban house-holders bring home

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*Indian Society, particularly the elder generation, is worried that too many movies are available on the small screen, especially through satellite transmission, and only a few of them are really worthwhile. If makers of telefilms adhere to the ethos of this family medium, they can purvey true enjoyment, feels the author.*

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video films in the shopping bag along with vegetables and groceries, for family-viewing, making it as it were a daily necessity. In place of the eager wait for seeing a film in a nearby or distant cinemahall that characterized the earlier generation came instant appetite for entertainment, appeased almost instantly. This phenomenal change in the circulation and distribution of films and revolution in the movie and television hardware affected the content, technically called the software, of cinema also.

Broadly speaking, cinema in India used to be either good or bad, i.e. the feature films based on stories, upto 1940. The Second World War (1939-45) made a major difference. Investment in the film industries in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras went up sharply, as traders and contractors earning fabulous sums from war supplies, began to invest in film-making. The first casualty was the studio system, gradually giving way to the 'star' system. Upto the early forties, artists and technicians were salaried staff of the big studios and

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*With the commissioning of a plethora of high-power and low-power transmitters and booster towers, satellite TV entered India in the early nineties. Simultaneously, video parlours and libraries mushroomed even in the remotest regions. Cable TV added another dimension to this phenomenal spread of the audio-visual medium in big cities.*

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production houses, like the Bombay Talkies, New Theatre of Calcutta. Modern Theatre of Salem (Tamil Nadu) and Prabhat Film Company of Kolhapur, shifted to Pune in 1929; they could not work for other studios

or houses which were coming up in these five film-making centres as well as in Lahore and Madras. The 'nouveau rich' producers in these cities offered many times more than their fixed salaries, initially to the artists, and then to technicians and others who work behind the camera, luring them out of their employer companies. Entertainment values became chief attraction in feature film; previously, the more the audience wept while seeing a film the more it succeeded at the box office. The allied troops passing through or deployed in Indian cities, while fighting in the eastern theatres of war, craved comedy and music more than serious or sentimental stories. A lumpen population arose in the cities and towns, following gradual impoverishment of villages and rural migration to factories and mills; they also hankered for cheap, sensory entertainment.

Clever producers and directors took advantage of these demographic and cultural changes. Comedies, musicals and 'action' films in imitation of their Hollywood genres, began to catch up with the 'social' films that formed the bulk of the releases. In Bombay, the genre of 'stunt films' was started by Jamshed and Homi Wadia in 1931 with *Dilair Daku*, featuring Yashwant Dev emulating Zorro. In Marathi cinema 'stunt' films became popular even in the Silent Era with Master Vithal apeing Douglas Fairbanks of Hollywood. Wadia Movie-tone's series of films, featuring 'fearless Nadia' (Mary Evans in real life) in roles like *Hunterwali* (1934), became a huge draw in the thirties which continued even in the fifties in films like *Hatim Tai* (1956). With huge investments during and after the Second World War, conspicuously from 1945 onwards, when the war-time recession also began to wear off, this new trend of action, stunt, spectacle, fantasy, suspense and even

horror films (of Ramasay brothers) gathered momentum; to this was added the sharp rise of the lumpen audience in cities and industrial areas. From this, the ostentation and violence of *Sholay* (1975) were not a far cry.

When TV began to be expanded in the early and the mid-eighties, it needed programmes to sustain its increasing transmission hours and cater to a family audience, comprising people of all ages and tastes. As black and white sets,

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*As films came to be the staple fare on the small screen, either by direct telecast, or through cable TV, or on video cassettes, cinema-halls were threatened. In Bombay and Madras, a number of old reputed theatres closed down, being commercially unviable. Cinema through cable TV or video cassettes worked out much cheaper. It became a commodity in middle-class homes, like rice, pulses and potato.*

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particularly the portable models, became more affordable, even to the lower middle-class, TV programming began to shed its elite character. Large-scale programme production requires infrastructure like studios, camera units, process laboratories etc., which could not be instantly built. Trained technicians and artists were also not immediately available. Cinema came as a savior to Doordarshan in this situation, and became a crutch for its wobbling performance. In the early nineties, entered the satellite TV, offering more attractive fares of foreign films having prurient and permissive scenes and sequences.

Doordarshan started with Hindi commercial cinema two to three films a week and gradually began to telecast

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*Doordarshan started with Hindi commercial cinema—two to three films a week—and gradually began to telecast regional films also for the expatriate population in big cities. More than feature films, song-and-dance sequences from them, began to be phenomenally popular.*

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regional films also for the expatriate population in big cities. More than feature films, song and dance sequences from them, began to be phenomenally popular. Initially, two such programmes became almost a national craze—“*Chitrahaar*”, a garland’ of such sequences from Hindi films and “*Chitramala*” from regional films; expectedly, the first scored far above the second. On Sunday morning transmission came “*Rangoli*”, a string of such sequences from old and recent Hindi films of a greater variety. An eye-catching style of presentation and the lure of attractive prizes have made “*Rangoli*” immensely popular.

Many other types of cinema-quizzes came on Doordarshan and satellite TVs beamed to India, for which also quiz books began to be available in market. Cinema thus became a national craze and obsession on TV, although its largest screen is about 1/10th of that in a cinema hall and on which panoramic and long shots are nearly lost.

But has cinema been really harmed by this wider spread of TV? In the Western countries, TV sets are pejoratively called ‘idiot boxes’. This nickname came to be first used in the USA in the mid-sixties when colour TV (CTV) was still not invented but black-and-white sets had become almost ubiquitous. More than the invention of the CTV which, after all, is a difference of tint only, lending

more realism to outward appearance of the nature and man, inter-continental satellite transmission and improvement in audio-visual hardware brought a major revolution on the small screen. Previously, for example, foreign films used to be a matter of choice; generally rural viewers avoided seeing them. Even among the educated middle-class, their patronage was very limited because a film is more enjoyable when it relates to the socio-cultural milieu of its viewers. The addition of sound track in 1929 in the West, and in 1931 in India (with *AlamAra*), regionalised the cinema and as Satyajit Ray said, “took away some of its universality”. Charles Chaplin also did not welcome this technological advance. Now with cable and satellite TV spreading to even semi-urban areas, foreign films have been thrust on even the lower middle-class, and willy-nilly, they are being seen by a larger public than hitherto. India’s determined economic reforms are making some sections more well-off and bringing more leisure to them. Absorption in satellite TV is increasing in India among the well-off. The Western civilization, inspite of its incipient decay, has still a dominant influence on the rest of the world, particularly in former colonial countries like India which already had absorbed it for about two centuries.

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*Absorption in satellite TV is increasing in India among the well-off. Western films on satellite TV are more in vogue than before. The recent opening of an exclusive cinema channel on Doordarshan, ‘Movie Club’, to survive the competition from ‘Zee’ and other foreign TVs thriving on cinema, has brought a surfeit of cinema on the small screen.*

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*TV viewers go from a film to a serial, to news, or dance, or another film on a different channel. No deeper conditioning of the mind is possible by TV; hence the pejorative nickname, ‘idiot box’. As an Oriya offbeat film-maker, Mr. Manmohan Mohapatra once observed, “the identity of films is lost on TV”.*

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The new advances in the West are easily aped and assimilated in these countries. Inevitably, therefore, Western films on satellite TV are having a much greater vogue than before; sometimes seeing and mentioning them in social gatherings lend a kind of status value also. The recent opening of an exclusive cinema channel on Doordarshan, ‘Movie Club’, to survive the competition from ‘Zee’ and other foreign TVs thriving on cinema, has brought a surfeit of cinema on the small screen.

Is this surfeit of cinema on TV helping its real growth? Youngsters in cities and towns where cable/satellite TV transmissions are available, see at least four to five films in a week, and upto 20 in a month; in which period the elder generation was satisfied with one. In fact, ruminations on a good film in this writer’s boyhood went much longer. Many films seen in childhood are still fresh in the memory, sequence by sequence. Of how many films on the TV can this be said, and how many of those who see them, can remember their storylines? This is no fault of the films shown; it is the result of their frequency on TV. If *Pather Panchali* is followed on TV by, say, *Sholay*, it would have the same fate. The fault also lies with the sensory nature of TV transmissions. When one is seeing TV, one’s auditory and visual

nerves are occupied and active, as in cinema too. While one does not stay in a cinema hall, after seeing a film, to ruminate on it, TV-viewers go from a film to a serial, to news, or dance, or another film on a different channel. No deeper conditioning of the mind is possible by TV; hence the pejorative nickname, 'idiot box'. As an Oriya offbeat film-maker, Mr. Manmohan Mohapatra once observed, "the identity of films is lost on TV". The makers of tele-films and tele-serials know this too well and purvey inane sensory entertainment than anything like a Ray serial, or a Ray film, even if they had the capability to make them. The mixed family viewers of a TV would not suffer so deep an enjoyment.

A majority of the makers and advocates of formula films in Bombay and Madras justify their fare as something people want to see. Nothing can be a greater travesty of truth. They continue to make such films, because they are not capable of making anything better. Secondly, if one such formula film has brought money, another repeats the formula, hoping it will also click; thus the cycle goes on and become vicious. They allege that 'art' or 'offbeat' films bring no money but not many people know that four-fifths of the so-called mainstream films also flop. The trend of formula films

which started after the Second World War is continuing, because their makers cannot step out of formula and make a film as a vehicle of an idea, not of pure commerce. Films on TV may be inducing an addiction and goading the crime-prone to commit sensational atrocities, (a Calcutta boy murdering a family and serial-killer 'Auto' Shankar are familiar examples.) but they are also helping many offbeat film-makers who otherwise might have been financially ruined. A premiere on Doordarshan fetches the producer a few lakh rupees and a re-run a little less, which are not too insignificant, considering the fact that the film can be subsequently exploited in cinema halls also. These days, agents get upto one crore of rupees for re-exploiting old hit with advertisements on DD, out of which they pay a few lakh to the producer, which is much more than what DD pays him directly. A TV premiere of a new film does pre-empt its popularity outside but a good film even after a national telecast, bears to be seen again on the wide screen. Tele-films and tele-serials are a class apart and if made keeping in view the constraints and special characteristics of the medium, often succeed. Ray made *Sadgati* (1982) for Doordarshan and 'Pikoo' (1981) for a French TV. Episode/stories in the two-part serial,

'Satyajit Ray Presents' in 1986 were also unique tele-films for Doordarshan. If makers of tele-films adhere to the ethos of this family medium, they can purvey true enjoyment. The only thing that is now worrying the Indian society, particularly the elder generation, is that there seem to be too many movies on the small screen, specially through satellite transmission, and only a few of them are really worthwhile. With this trend continuing, the Western phenomenon of youngsters becoming 'couch potatoes' may not be far away. Elders believe, this surfeit of films on TV, particularly from the permissive and prurient Western society, poses a moral menace to the younger generation. As Western economists are predicting a great economic potential and future for India, it may emerge as a giant in the coming century. India has absorbed and assimilated diverse cultures of its own, and those brought in by its foreign rulers. Unless it can absorb and assimilate this 'new wave' coming through the TV, India can again relapse into a cultural colony of the West, of which the cinema on the small screen will be a major and unfortunate catalyst. □

*The author is a film critic.*

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# The Offbeat Cinema

Ratnottama Sengupta

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*When we talk of the offbeat cinema, we mean that particular kind of cinema which perhaps has its roots in the humanist and socially meaningful works of Indian cinema. It is distinguished by a definitive set of humanitarian values and has a concern for social issues.*

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CINEMA and society are intricately linked everywhere in the world although the link is not always perceptible. With its magnetic grip over the imagination of millions, this offspring of technology and creativity has come to rule the world as an art form that entertains even as it acts as the conscience of society. The harm it can wrought is, likewise, immense. This is why even a modern, technologically advanced society like the one in UK balks at the release of a film like *Natural Born Killers*, which exults in violence like no other film, when it hears reports—or even rumours—of the film inspiring a violent incident in France. Over-reaction? It may be, but no society would want to take a chance when it has been subjected to the gruesome incident of a little boy killing another much younger, reportedly influenced by what he had seen on television.

And if this is the extent of the influence of cinema in the land of its birth, its impact on the Indian society is easily gauged. In fact, no less a person than Jawaharlal Nehru described cinema as “one of the biggest influences

in modern world”. To quote him: “There are many other things which influence people—books, newspapers and so on. But I think it is perfectly correct to say that the influence of films in India is greater than the influence of newspapers and books combined.” And perhaps nowhere in the subcontinent is this impact so tangible as in the southern states of India, where one chief minister after another rose to the helm of public affairs riding the crest of their popularity among masses of cinegoers.

Nehru had not mentioned television, which had yet to make its entry in this country. But even in the context of the present times, when cinema itself seems to be reeling under the impact of the idiot box, his observation holds true since the programmes drawing the greatest number of viewers still stem out of celluloid creations. If Superhit *Muqabla* has to compete in popularity it does so with other film-song based programmes like *Philips Top Ten* and *BPL Oye*. And the songs, it has been firmly established by now, are but a sampling of the films they are

composed for and contribute in a large measure to the success of the films across the land. Small wonder then, we witness a hue and cry every time our values are perceived to be threatened by a *Choli ke peechhey* or a *Sarkaya liyo khatiya...*

It is in this context that I would like to talk about the ‘offbeat’ cinema, at a time when the economic reforms are reshaping every sphere of life in the country.

## What Is Offbeat?

Offbeat, going by the Concise Oxford Dictionary, is something that is unusual, eccentric or unconventional. Perhaps only the last word approximates the sense in which ‘Offbeat’ is used to categorise those films which do not resort to ‘sure success’ formulas, or conventions, that drive the hundreds of productions which have gained India the dubious distinction of being the largest film producing country in the world.

When we talk of the ‘offbeat cinema’ today, we speak of a certain kind of cinema that perhaps has its roots in the humanist and socially meaningful works of Indian cinema like *Humrahi*, *Do Bigha Zameen*, *Padosi*, *Aadmi*, *Mother India*, *Awara*, *Pyasa*, *Sujata*—films that were concerned with communalism, socialism, casteism, the position of woman. None of this was, however, offbeat; all of them were part of the existing mainstream. Each of them focussed on a social issue that was everybody’s concern in the country that had attained freedom and democracy after centuries of colonial rule, ages of feudal set-up and decades of communal bloodletting, and every one of these films was privately produced.

The movement that we term as ‘offbeat cinema’ is likewise distinguished by a definitive set of humanitarian values. They unfailingly evinced a

sensitivity to the plight of the poor and the oppressed. They uniformly expressed faith, if not in society or its established norms, than in man and his capacity to revolt, to change. They drew inspiration from the best of neo-realists and Nouvelle Vague. They defied conventions in choosing their subject as also in execution. And with discernible artistic sincerity they presented a humanist perspective that was bound to project an India that was more real than that projected by the popular cinema.

### Ensuring Healthy Growth

This parallel movement would not have been possible had not the Film Enquiry Committee, headed by S.K. Patil of Bombay, made certain recommendations "for the healthy growth of Indian cinema" after studying the conditions obtaining in the fifties, in effect, the post-partition years. Following two important recommendations of this committee, the government established an institute to train future filmmakers, and also set up an organisation to make finance available to those who were not willing to stifle their creativity and compromise with market forces. Both, the Film Institute at Pune and the Film Finance Corporation (later changed to the National Film Development Corporation) were to have far-reaching effects in changing the face of Indian cinema including the convention-bound mainstream cinema.

But, before we proceed further, why was it necessary for the government to intervene and take steps for the "healthy growth" of cinema? For, by the sixties, when these institutions were set up,

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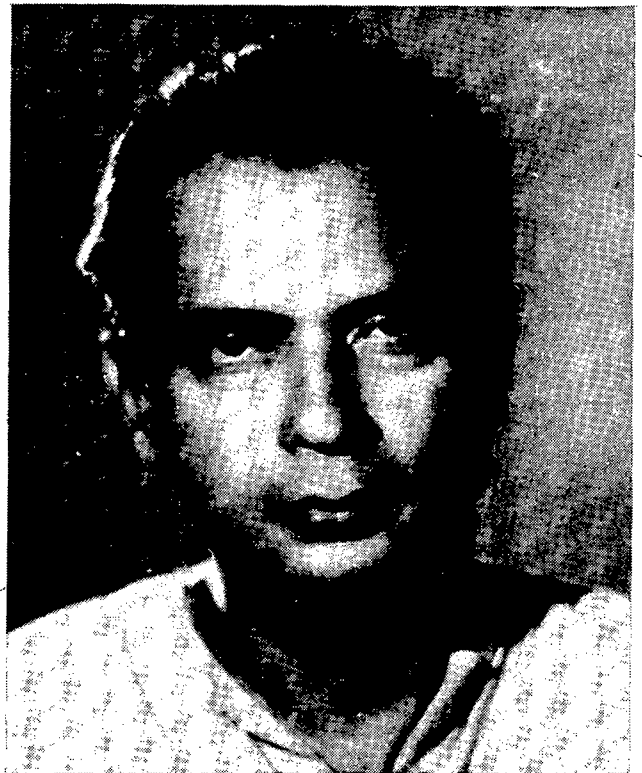
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cinema was already half a century old on the Indian soil and such luminaries as Dadasaheb Phalke, B.N. Sarkar, Pramathesh Barua, V. Shantaram, Himanshu Rai—among other distinguished names—had already canned cinematic history. Why, the very fifties, when the need was felt to set up the Film Enquiry Committee, had seen the rise of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen as prophets of the 'other' cinema even while Bimal Roy was offering the best of two worlds, followed close on his heels by Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt.

### Turning Point

The fact is that the forties was a turning point for Indian cinema, which was in full bloom in the thirties with filmmaking centres like New Theatres, Prabhat Studios and Bombay Talkies turning out professionals adept in direction, cinematography, editing and—most certainly—acting. Further, the general clime of the years when Mahatma Gandhi was articulating the aspirations of an entire nation fired the filmmakers with a certain idealism. Perhaps the viewers—the urban, educated class—also had much to do with the quality of these films.

But came the Second World War, and the world of Indian cinema—like much of the world outside—was shaken to its roots. War contracts translated into fortunes for some, who sought glamour (and social recognition) through cinema. On the other



**Bimal Roy**

hand, partition spelt crisis especially in the eastern sector of filmmaking, for Bengali films (as too books) were banned in East Pakistan where Urdu was declared the national language. Further, industrialisation of the predominantly agricultural society led to the uncontrolled growth of the metros and, as a corollary, the increase in the numbers seeking the refuge of slums and escape from their immediate reality in the technicoloured fantasies being spun by the neo-rich dream merchants. Cinema, which enjoys magnetic hold of popular imagination on account of its likeness to reality, had—ironically—come to enjoy unprecedented success only by leaving the realm of reality way behind in its flights of fancy.

Some have pinpointed 1948 as the year that marked a change in our film culture. That was the year Chandralekha was released. The film from Madras, directed by S.S. Vasan, was full of spectacle. It had naturally

cost a neat packet to make. When it became a runaway success, it inspired many of those who had some idle money to come forward with finance. Filmmaking for them was at best a business proposition if not downright speculation. With their advent, film budgets began rocketing. Demand for 'stars' like Ashok Kumar—more so after the success of *Kismet*—also in-

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jected the evil of black money. Artistes and even technicians soon started freelancing, leading to the eventual crumbling of the benevolent studio system. With none to support them, many of the talents who were striving in the belief that cinema is primarily an art of communication were left high and dry.

## Two Landmarks

A close look at the filmography of two landmarks of Indian cinema—Bimal Roy and Raj Kapoor—highlights the plight that justified the state's concern with the health of Indian cinema. Bimal Roy was the prophet of social equality and neo-realism in cinema, the former with New Theatres' *Udayer Pathey* (remade as *Humrahi*) in 1944 and the latter with *Do Bigha Zameen*—the first film by his own production in Bombay—in 1953. But though he continued to make artistically valid statements like *Parineeta* (1953), *Biraj Bahu* (1954) and *Devdas* (1955)—the first two for other producers—the film which spelt financial success for Bimal Roy Productions was *Madhumati* (1958)—a charming

tale of love and reincarnation which, by no means, was the meaningful cinema one expected from the maker of *Do Bigha Zameen*.

Sujata restored Bimal Roy to his exalted status and *Bandini* proved a swansong worthy of it. But neither of these films enjoyed the box office success of the compromise film where villains looked like villains but tribals did not look like tribals. The statement on the trends tells us more when we learn of the phenomenal success of *Udayer Pathey* in the pre-partition years, when even cigarette stalls sold paperback versions of the film's story that revolved around a millionaire's daughter who breaks class barriers to love a poor unemployed writer.

Raj Kapoor, likewise, started with bigger dreams in his eyes and spoke in leftist tones of men being moulded by society, into being what they were—the socially privileged, or the scums of the earth. In other words, a petty thief or a legal luminary. *Awara* established the legend that was Raj Kapoor—far and wide, across the country and beyond it. But the credibility of the RK Films banner was compromised by the actor-filmmaker himself, when he started banking on the nubile charms of his heroines. And the volte-face was complete when *Dharam Karam* spoke of men being the product of nothing but their genes: a son of a singer, even when brought up by a ruffian, is as noble as the notes he sings; and the villain's son remains a villain, despite his upbringing!

## Major Impact

The founding of FFC was to have a major impact on Indian cinema, although it began to be felt only towards the end of the decade. Mrinal Sen led the bandwagon of the 'offbeat' cinema, and in 1969 itself FFC bagged more than six National awards for such diverse creations as Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, Basu Chatterjee's *Sara Akash*,

Kantilal Rathod's *Kanku* in Gujarati, Adina Megha in *Oriya*, and Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti*. Over the next four years, 'quality' viewers sat up again and again to take note of Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Dastak*, Basu Bhattacharya's *Anubhav*, Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Swayamvaram*, Kumar Shahani's *Maya Darpan*, M.S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa*, Avtar Kaul's *27 Down*, Mani Kaul's *Duvidha*, Ritwik Ghatak's *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo*. True, not all of them equalled the commercial success of *Bhuvan Shome* or *Garm Hawa*, but then, not the biggest studio or best of banners can claim sustained success. On the other hand, there was no two opinion among 'critics' about the cinematic standard of these works and the relevance of the experiments in medium, even when they were charged of being "abstruse" or "self-indulgent."

Perhaps these films created a climate that was conducive to the growth of a 'healthy cinema'. Or perhaps the time was ripe for a new cinema movement. For, these same years also saw the emergence of talents like Patabhi Rama Reddy with *Samskara*, Shyam Benegal with *Ankur*, G. Aravindan with *Kanchana Sita*, Girish Karnad with *Kaadu*, B.V. Karanth with

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Chomana Dudi, Rabindra Dharmaraj with *Chakra*, Girish Kasaravalli with *Ghatashraddha*. Although these films were made possible by private pro-

*Bimal Roy was the prophet of social equality and neo-realism in cinema, the former with New Theatres' Udayer Pathey (remade as Humrahi) in 1944 and the latter with Do Bigha Zameen—the first film by his own production in Bombay in 1953.*

ducers, they were of a piece with the ethos that found expression in the FFC films. In fact, the subsequent development of many of these directors was made possible by the FFC.

Indeed, it may not be an exaggeration to say that Kannada cinema came to occupy its preeminent position in Indian cinema due to this support. It also helped the floundering Bengali cinema, in its search for young blood, to come up with names like Buddhadev Dasgupta, Goutam Ghose, Aparna Sen and Utpalendu Chakravorty. The Oriya film market, so far content with formula-bound films that offered little emotional and even less intellectual stimulation, got a breath of fresh air in the form of Nirad Mahapatra, Biplab Roy Chowdhury and later, A.K. Bir and Manmohan Mahapatra. Likewise, the North-East strode into the national scene with films by Jahnu Barua, Aribam Shyam Sharma and Bhaben Saikia. Why, even Marathi cinema—which has been among the pioneers of cinema in India—added to its stature through the works of Jabbar Patel and Amol Palekar.

### **Additional Incentives**

Finance was however only one aspect—though a major one—of the total support extended by the government. Once the films were made, their merit was recognised on a national level through the President's awards. Additional recognition came their way when the government, through the

Directorate of Film Festivals, facilitated their screening in festivals across the globe. Then, taking a cue from these, the state governments too initiated various measures in the interest of a 'healthy' cinema. If Gujarat offered tax exemption (for a stipulated period) to films shot in its studios, Andhra Pradesh subsidised any film being shot in the state. Maharashtra refunded the entertainment tax collection for the producer's subsequent venture. West Bengal took the lead in setting up a Film Development Corporation that not only produced or financed films but also set up a colour laboratory, took over studios and most significantly, set up the Nandan Film Complex, complete with a library and an auditorium. And Orissa went to the extent of declaring cinema construction and film production a small scale industry. Many of these schemes may have been lopsided, but it certainly proved that state governments—which collect half if not more of the collections at the box-office—were concerned with the health of cinema.

There was, besides, the second institution set up at the recommendation of the Film Enquiry Committee: the FTII. It trained professionals who were as competent in the technological side of filmmaking as in its aesthetics. If the directors trained at FTII were already making a mark in the early seventies (Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani), by the eighties they were everywhere: in the offbeat cinema, in television, even in commercial cinema. Syed Mirza, Ketan Mehta, Kundan Shah, Prakash Jha, Subhankar Ghosh, Anand Mahendru: they had established, in their very first films, that they knew the use of the celluloid medium. More significant is the fact that they established they also had their finger on the pulse of the viewer, as one after the other they came up with serials that changed the viewers' perception of television in India.

### **Exodus**

Perhaps the most interesting thing about all this was that the mainstream cinema, acutely alive to the commercial interest of the producer, was quick to benefit from all these developments. To begin with, it coopted the 'offbeat' cinema's concern for social issues, and the popular screen came to focus on social quality, rural migration, communalism, casteism, feminism, even criminalisation of politics. More tangible, however, was the influx of 'personnel'. First, came the actors and actresses: Jaya Bhaduri, Shabana Azmi, Shatrughan Sinha, Danny, Asrani, Naseeruddin Shah. Then came the technicians, the KK Mahajans and AK Birs, Jehangir Chowdhurys and Renu Salujas, Hiten Ghosh and David Dhawans, who spilled out of the other cinema to lend the fine lustre of technical proficiency to the popular productions. And then there were also the directors who, with their exposure to the best of world cinema, could use even fantasy and formula with a rare facility. The result is for all to see: the biggest showman in commercial Indian cinema today—Subhash Ghai—is a product of the FTII, and that too,

*Awara established the legend that was Raj Kapoor—far and wide, across the country and beyond it. But the credibility of the RK Films banner was compromised by the actor-filmmaker himself, when he started banking on the nubile charms of his heroines.*

not directly trained in direction!

This recap of the government's role in the healthy growth of Indian cinema assumes an added significance at this juncture of time. Not because it is a quarter century since Bhuvan Shome illuminated the screen. Nor because it

is the 100th year of the birth of cinema. But because the mandate of economic reforms is writ large in the air. The government machinery has been set into motion to implement the policy of economic liberalisation. One of the prime decisions has it that the public sector enterprises should not receive government support in any form. This naturally extends to the organisations that have been supporting the growth of healthy cinema. In any case, many have argued, cinema the world over has been nurtured and developed in the private sector. So why should it be any different in India, where resources are scarce? The government is therefore insisting that the NFDC should work along the commercial standards. NFDC, now committed to an acceptable level of profit, has reasons to compromise with its objectives. For originality of thought—as seen in both, the form and content of the parallel cinema—seems an impossibility in a free market environment, where the only concern is maximising returns.

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*The mainstream cinema coopted the 'offbeat' cinema's concern for social issues, and the popular screen came to focus on social equality, rural migration, communalism, casteism, feminism, even criminalisation of politics.*

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So, can the 'offbeat' cinema survive this compromise? And if it cannot, should we let an entire movement be stifled that—among other things—acted as the 'conscience' showing up lapses and warning against excesses?

It might be relevant, in this context, to refer to the experience of France, the birthplace of cinema. Cinema, it has been argued, cannot be treated as a 'consumer commodity' and thus cannot be subjected to trade tariffs at the

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*In a free market environment, the only concern is maximising returns. Can the 'offbeat' cinema survive this compromise? And if it cannot, should we let an entire movement be stifled that—among other things—acted as the 'conscience'.*

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GATT talks. But why did France—which in fact is giving voice to the feelings of other European nations as well—feel the need to take this stance? Simply to protect its own cinema from the dominance of Hollywood. A nation that cannot sing its own song, write its own song, write its own stories or screen its own films is a poor nation indeed, feel the many nations of Europe which now face the challenge of Hollywood products.

A parallel exists in our situation where the mainstream cinema—in Hindi or otherwise—thrives much like Hollywood, and more often than not, on Hollywood. It has no qualms in copying what has been successful. Thus we are religiously treated to rehashes of what has succeeded in Hollywood. And if these rehashes succeed in one of our major filmmaking centres, then we have the other centres coming up with clones. Thus one Kaadalan gives rise to many Muqablas. And one Bombay-hit spawns many Calcutta failures. And talking of failures, it is well established that even in the mainstream, barely five per cent of the films are commercially viable. And the failures here do not even have the silver lining of critical acclaim. Of experimenting with the ever-evolving language of cinema. Of earning India a place in world cinema. When we take Bhuvan Shome to be the film that flagged off the movement of quality cinema made possible by government support, we ignore the fact that FFC

also played a role in bringing to screen Charulata (1965), Ray's personal favourite among his auteur and among the handful of classics of world cinema. Years later, after recuperating from a debilitating heart attack, when Ray returned to the screen, it was NFDC which facilitated his comeback film, Ganashatru. That was a cinematic rebirth for the maker of Pather Panchali, which has a permanent place in the annals of world cinema as the best human document.

In fact, Pather Panchali itself might never had seen the light of the arclamps if the government of West Bengal had

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*Finance was however only aspect—though a major one—of the total support extended by the government. Additional recognition came their way when the government, through the Directorate of Film Festivals, facilitated their screening in festivals across the globe.*

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no channelised funds from its budget for road development. Years after the film placed India on the map of world cinema, and earned for its maker such divergent honours as the *honoris causa* from UK, the legionne of honour from France and the Oscar for lifetime achievement from the USA—albeit in addition to the highest national award of Bharat Ratna—the potholes of Calcutta roads continue to be just as legendary.

It only goes to show that sometimes, even in an economically backward society, money from the exchequer is better spent when it is harnessed to the cause of an art form, or even a luxury, like cinema. □

*The author is Arts Editor, Times of India.*

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# The Dream Merchants

Nikhil Kazmi

*Analysing the major themes and styles of the prominent filmmakers in contemporary Hindi popular cinema, the author says that it remains a colourful mirror of the times. The colours may grow loud, dramatic and sometimes unreal, but it remains the staple food of the common man.*

WITH 800 films produced annually, Indian cinema is undoubtedly one of the most important mediums of expression in the country. Partly because of its sheer magnitude and more importantly, since it mirrors the hopes, fears, aspirations and fantasies of the millions who are irresistibly lured to the magic of movies. A magic which never can die, despite the onslaught of rival media. For today, notwithstanding the proliferation of television and the satellite network, cinema is once again witnessing the emergence of long queues at the box office. Now that the initial euphoria of channels like Star, Zee and V has died down, the captive audience is again succumbing to the lure of the big screen.

## Resurgence

Behind this resurgence of popular cinema lies the improved quality of filmmaking. The era of Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt and Raj Kapoor may be over, but contemporary Hindi cinema has a host of names, new and old, to boast about. These being the filmmakers like Subhash

Ghai, Yash Chopra, Mahesh Bhatt, Sooraj Barjatya, Raj Kumar Santoshi, David Dhawan, who have brought back the viewers to the auditorium with their particular kind of cinema that is modern, larger-than-life, extremely colourful and often intensely topical too.

Who are the flag bearers of popular cinema today? What is the magic of their movie lore? In an age sans superstars, cinema obviously becomes a director's medium. For without the charismatic appeal of Dilip Kumar essaying the agony of Devdas or the impetuous rebellion of Prince Salim (Mughle Azam), Rajesh Khanna romancing death with a smile in Anand and Amitabh Bachchan adding flesh and blood to the angry young man in the '70s and the '80, the power of cinema naturally began to lie in the story and the style of narration. Hence, in the kaleidoscopic '90s, it was the filmmaker who shot centre stage once again. The recent success of films like Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak, Maine Pyar Kiya, Aankhen, Dil, Beta, Sadak, Khalnayak, Darr, Hum Aapke Hain

Koun, all bear witness to this contention.

## Magical Concoction

If Hum Aapke Hain Koun, with its tender tale of the great Indian family, is all set to become a record smasher at the box-office, it is only because Sooraj Barjatya seems to have evolved a magical concoction, one that harmoniously blends modernity with tradition, so that the end result is a redefinition of the essential Indianness of the protagonists. Both Maine Pyar Kiya (Barjatya's first film) and Hum Aapke Hain Koun (HAHK) have an urbane setting: a big city with a business family at the heart of it. The hero in both the films is an upwardly mobile youngster who joins the family business. In MPK, he returns to the fold after having completed his education in America. Nevertheless, his value system is purely Indian. When it comes to love and marriage, he looks for a girl who is domesticated and well-versed with the native rituals and customs. Hence, he is even willing to rebel against his fond father and break the rich-poor divide for the sake of Suman, his beloved in the two braids, the crumpled cotton salwar kameez and the rubber chappals.

Suman (Bhagyashree) is a prototype for the small town girl who lives in the country's heartland. She may be educated, with a first class in intermediate, yet she prefers to potter around the kitchen than to kowtow the teenage cult of mix 'n match. In fact, she is a total misfit in the booze-and-bad-girl parties where the favourite pastime of the beer guzzlers seems to be shooting white pigeons. Suman not only saves the pigeon, but also symbolically reinstates the untouched innocence of native Indian youth. One that subtly brands the hedonistic pleasures of the city dwellers as wild and wanton and seeks out the simpler, more sacrosanct pleasures of the *antakshari*, the *mehndi*

ceremony of traditional Indian festivals and family functions.

Suman finds her sibling in Nisha, the nice little girl from the temple city, Ram Tekri in HAHK. Like her venerable elder in *Maine Pyar Kiya*, Nisha (Madhuri Dixit) too has had a modern education. A graduate in computers, she loves icecreams and candies and rollerskates through the city with all the confidence and freedom of the urbane pushers. Yet, she is the traditional 'bharatiya nari' to the very core of her being. When it comes to choices, she holds the interest of the family above all else. Even above love, for, she is willing to sacrifice her relationship and her desire for happy matrimony with the man of her dreams

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*The era of Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt and Raj Kapoor may be over, but contemporary Hindi cinema has a host of names, new and old, to boast about who have brought back the viewers to the auditorium.*

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(Salman Khan) when her family wants her to marry her dead sister's husband instead.

It is due to this sacrificing spirit and unquestioning obedience to the elders that has made Madhuri Dixit's Nisha an icon for Indian womanhood today, for, both Madhuri and Salman Khan, with their particular set of priorities, emerge as the perfect members of the extended Indian family with its clear-cut hierarchies. More so in an age when rebelliousness seems to have become synonymous with independence in the lexicon of contemporary youth. Also when the joint family has been totally swallowed up by the nuclear unit where youngsters have walked out and walked over the old and the infirm.

The director's predilection for unadulterated Indianness finds expression not only in his characters but in the ambience of his films too. Both, in MPK and HAHK, the story unfolds through an encapsulation of the rituals, customs and festivities that form the core of the Indian lifestyle. The drama ensues in the familial living room, the kitchen, the dining room through a series of songs and dances. In fact, beyond its paper thin plot line, HAHK surfaces as an extended celebration of a traditional Indian wedding, punctuated with songs and dances at every juncture. The engagement, the wedding, the *bidai*, the bride's homecoming, the pregnancy, childbirth and then the beginning of the preparations of the second marriage: HAHK is essentially an anthropological study of Indian customs.

### **Grandiloquent Methodology**

Another director who sculpts his stories against a similar backdrop of Indianness is Subhash Ghai. Stylistically however, he follows a more grandiloquent methodology of cinema where the emphasis is on drama alone. The characters are several scales larger than life, the music is chosen to create an overpowering symphony of notes, the dances are both excellently choreographed and blended into the narrative, the cinematography captures the natural colours of land and sky with a poetic reverence for nuance and shade and the total effect is a mind-blowing mix of plot, characterisation, music and visual



**Guru Dutt**

imagery.

Thematically, Ghai seeks out his stories from the Ramayana. His heroes are mostly cast in the mould of the mythical heroes and the plot witnesses a similar confrontation of values between Ram and Lakshman as in *Ram Lakhan* or Ram and Ravana as in *Khalnayak*. In *Ram Lakhan*, the elder brother Ram (Jackie Shroff) is an epitome of unsullied goodness. Cast as the honest, principled policeman who is unflinchingly devoted to a well-defined value system, Ram stands out in stark contrast to his younger brother, Lakhan (Anil Kapoor). Lakhan is the more worldly, materialistic guy who believes that values can easily be moulded to further one's interests. Hence his credo of 'one two ka four' which insists that in a world ruled by Mammon, money alone is the measuring yard for success. And if the wealth is amassed through a bit of dishonesty, corruption and compromise, it really doesn't matter. For in this new world, the Ramayana is dismissed as merely

an "old-fashioned book, a television serial" and nothing more. Needless to say, Ghai uses his script to demolish Lakhan's misconstrued beliefs and bring him back to the fold of the believers.

In *Khalnayak*, the terrorist (Sanjay Dutt), who has sold his soul to the enemy of the nation, doubles up as a Ravana clone. Here again, the desperado is pitted against the god-like Inspector Rama (Jackie Shroff) who gradually purges his soul of all its evil. So that, eventually, Ballu Balram, the really bad guy emerges as the saviour of the family, the nation and the woman he loved.

### **National Interest Uppermost**

The imperilled nation, threatened by a number of forces, has increasingly emerged as one of the predominant themes of commercial cinema. And leading the bandwagon of this breed of filmmakers who hold the interest of the nation uppermost is Mani Ratnam. If Roja delved into the turbulence of the secessionist movement in Kashmir, then Bombay dared to raise a voice against religious fundamentalism and the increasing incidence of communalism in the national fabric. Rishi Kumar (Arvind Swamy), the engineer who is abducted by a group of Kashmir terrorists, is willing to lay his life for the honour of the national flag. Unmindful of the threat to his

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life, he throws himself on the burning tricolour and succeeds in dousing the flames which have been lit by the pro-Pakistan terrorists. But more importantly, he succeeds in transforming the head of the insurgents by laying down the value of patriotism and the impropriety of treachery.

Bombay repeats Ratnam's message of brotherhood and communal amity. The essential oneness of man, over and above the barriers of religion and caste is emphasised against the national turmoil. Using the post-1992 communally sensitive national firmament as a convenient backdrop for an inter-religion love story, Ratnam successfully weaves in the pleasures of love with political chicanery, opportunism and a rabid philosophy of hate. One that is tearing into the harmonious fibre of society and turning friendly neighbours into enemies. And one that rears its ugly head and intrudes into the domestic bliss of the protagonists, Shaila Bano (Manisha Koirala) and Shekhar (Arvind Swamy).

Ratnam's vignettes of the *rath yatra*, the demolition of the mosque, the rabble rousing political postulates, the communal carnage that swept through Bombay followed by his fervent cry for unity and oneness on the one hand, make Bombay a topical indictment of their times. On the other, they transform Ratnam from a technical perfectionist into an important political filmmaker who dares to venture into troubled grounds. More so, at a time when a large majority of filmmakers have opted for escapist fare in a bid to capture the box-office.

### **New Soldiers**

Mehul Kumar's *Krantiveer* and *Tiranga* too play around with patriotism, as did the films of Manoj Kumar, not so long ago. However, this time, the mode is more populist and the rancour a few shades more raw. In both his films, which did extremely

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well at the box-office, Nana Patekar emerges as the prototype for the perfect native. In *Tiranga*, he is the aggressive police officer who joins forces with the cool-headed military strategist (Raaj Kumar) in order to fight against the external forces of fission. And in *Krantiveer*, he is the cynical common man—a waster to the core—who sets aside his cynicism when the enemies of the nation begin to strike. Then, when Bombay begins to burn again with the fires of communal frenzy, he rises up from the ashes like the phoenix and aggressively tries to instill the code of 'Hindu-Muslim bhai bhai'. Naturally, he succeeds in his messianic mission and politically correct cinema acquires a commercial mould with these films that focus on the new soldiers of the land.

The fact that most of these films have been box-office successes too is ample evidence that their simplistic analysis—blame all the internal turmoil on the external enemy—does seem to have struck a chord in the sensibility of the viewer.

### **Bold And Beautiful**

For Yash Chopra, the celluloid journey seems to carry on within the frontiers of the heart and its inexplicable stirrings. *Kabhi Kabhie*, *Silsila*, *Chandni*, *Lamhe* leading into the dark interiors of *Darr*: Chopra continues to explore the myriad hues of love. His characters are always drawn from an upper middle class milieu and the love story proceeds as a colourful, melodi-

ous mirror on the affairs of the bold and the beautiful. Suppressed love, extra-marital entanglements, love-against-destiny, an emotion that transcends the barriers of age and convention and eventually, the ugly, obsessive side of an emotion that can even kill for the sake of possession: Chopra's filmology currently seems to be following the unpredictable, stormy course of that most universal human emotion. The social angst of the outsider, which found its most complete expression in his earlier film, *Deewar*, seems to have been set aside for a soft focus lens now.

Here again, however, the filmmaker tries to steer clear from stereotype and proceeds on a seemingly virgin terrain. In *Chandni*, he brings to life one of the most memorable female characters of contemporary mainstream. *Chandni* (*Sridevi*), unlike most of the other women in love, is a woman of substance with a mind of her own. She does love *Rishi Kapoor* to distraction, but is not willing to stand scorn and derision. So that, when he humiliates her, she walks out on him and tries to build her life anew. Much in contrast to the usual wimp who would immediately opt for suicide if the be-all of her life turned a blind eye towards her.

In *Lamhe*, the search for the unconventional is carried on a bit further. Here, again for the first time Hindi cinema bears witness to the flowering of a totally new relationship. *Pooja*, (*Sridevi*), the protagonist, falls in love with a man who would have almost ended up as her father. In *Darr*, Chopra moves from love into another undiscovered field: obsession. This being the more fearful side where reason is set aside and love is answerable to the callings of the heart alone. Nothing can control it, neither the law nor the lack of reciprocity. For *Rahul*, the protagonist is even willing to murder for the sake of fulfilling his desire. *Darr*, in fact ends up as one of the most

unusual love stories on the silver screen with its focus on the dark inner recesses in the psyche of a demented lover.

*Mahesh Bhatt* is the other accomplished master of mush. With films like *Arth*, *Saaransh*, *Naam*, *Janam*, *Sir*, *Aashiqui* and *Sadak*, Bhatt has also dabbled with pure emotion. His characters are strong, heady people who live by feelings alone. Theirs is a totally impetuous approach to the ubiquitous process of being. The trauma of traditional woman who is confronted with the infidelity of her husband in *Arth*, the anguish of an aging couple who must cope with the untimely death of their son in *Saaransh*, the scourge of illegitimacy in *Naam*, the humane face of the underworld kingpin in *Sir*, the unbridled passions of love in *Aashiqui*

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*For Yash Chopra, the celluloid journey seems to carry on within the frontiers of the heart and its inexplicable stirrings. His characters are always drawn from an upper middle class milieu and the love story proceeds as a colourful, melodious mirror on the affairs of the bold and the beautiful.*

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and *Sir*: Bhatt creates a red, purple and blue world, suffused with all the stronger shades of love and hate.

### **Common Man And His Problems**

Articulating the problems of the man in the street is director *N. Chandra*. His films, by and large, delve into the heartland and capture the raw kernel of discontent. One which finds the common man fighting, falling prey to gang warfare, political corruption, the strongarm tactics of the mafia and a pulverised law and order machinery.

Beginning with *Ankush*, the film which tried to highlight the motivations of a generation that has been lead astray, *Chandra* moved on to popular rebellion in *Pratighaat*, the might of the small man against the big, bad mafia in *Narsimha* and eventually to woman power in *Tejasvani*. This film, with its gritty tale of a woman police officer's war against internal corruption and external decay, has been credited with empowering hundreds of women who have reportedly joined the police force after viewing the film.

The realm of comedy serves as a playground for filmmakers like *David Dhawan* who have tried to rediscover the merry-go-round riot of colours that was painted with great care by *Manmohan Desai* in films like *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *Naseeb* and *Coolie*. *Dhawan* recreates this world in films like *Aankhen*; *Eena Meena Deeka*, *Raja Babu* and *Coolie No. 1*. Here, the emphasis is neither on story nor on characters. Just on slapstick humour and a series of chaotic episodes that are strung together in with a joyous abandon. Of course, sometimes, the humour does tend to get a raw, crude edge. Nevertheless, the magic of merry make-believe never does fail and *Dhawan* remains one of the more successful commercial filmmakers today.

Popular cinema then remains a colourful mirror of the times. One which is suffused with the hues and shades of life itself. The colours may grow loud, dramatic and sometimes unreal, but cinema nevertheless remains the staple food of the common man. □

*The author is film critic, Times of India.*

RECENTLY I had the opportunity to listen to the talk of a teacher in cinema, extolling the great beauty of films made during the end of last century which saw the birth of cinema. He was straining at great length to transmit his inspiration to the mute listeners basing his facts on the old marginally known silent films. His efforts were valiantly directed towards the great appreciation of unrecognised beauty and high aesthetic values inherent in such century old cinematic work. He was specially mentioning the works of Louis Lumiere, Edwin S. Porter and George Melies. Legitimately one cannot attribute great creative and aesthetic values to their works. Using hand-held camera, these filmmakers caught various interesting scenes on primitive emulsions. At best it was only satisfying a curiosity and a sense of adventure and very far from exercising one's creativity. No attempt can hide the crudity in the films made during the birth of cinema. George Melies's work remains as an amateurish magic but with a genuine desire to probe the unknown.

After a 100 years, we are nowhere near primitivity and amateurism. Within the span of a century, cinema grew, attained adulthood, matured and withered. Are we at the threshold of the death of cinema? Or its rebirth in a new form?

Cinema which is the cheapest form of entertainment is the most popular and effective one to all. It serves the rich and the poor alike. Being totally illusionary, cinema remains aloof from all other arts. Here is purely a synthetic art, born through technological discoveries. In the absence of science dealing with optics and photo-chemistry, cinema would never have been born. And coupled with the same are the physiological phenomena commonly known as Persistence of Image (which is wrongly referred often as Persistence of Vision) and Synthesis

# Training The Filmmakers

John T.C. Shankaramangalam

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*At every turning point in the myriad history of cinema, the exceptional impetus that it received from technological means made cinema to gain strength and beauty. As such, the future of cinema and television is in the hands of highly trained technical hands.*

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of Motion. At every turning point in the myriad history of cinema, the exceptional impetus that it received from technological means made cinema to gain strength and beauty. Within a century, cinema became a very sophisticated expression. Therefore, without understanding the technology behind it, the attempt at theoretical studies alone will never satisfy the need to understand cinema fully. All talk on cinema, analysis of cinematic work, and writing criticism and reviews on cinema would be only scratching the surface if the protagonist is not familiar with the technology-base of cinematic art.

Here comes the great need to train filmmakers. From hand-held camera to standardised speed for silent film, then the change over to 24 ft. per second to accommodate high fidelity sound, the transition from black and white to colour, advancement in photo-chemistry and optics and the need for expanding the size of the screen to vanquish the idiot box, etc., though confined mostly to technology also

demand great creative outbursts in concept, execution and creation. Television which was a threat to cinema has been amalgamated with it.

The first full-fledged training institute in cinema was established in Moscow after the Bolshevik revolution. Cinema as a powerful medium for Marxist-Leninist thought of the first communist nation demanded the need for serious consideration of cinema as an emerging art. The great innovations and experimentation in Germany during the Golden Era of Cinema in the 20s, and subsequently the impact of propaganda films during the Second World War under the War department of Hitler, gave this medium the great opportunity to appropriate the centre stage in mass entertainment. The great artistic works of Leni Reifenstahl bear ample testimony to this. It is interesting to note that the technological and aesthetic advancement which went into the war efforts had direct impact on the technological development of cinema too. From very heavy studio camera, as the filmmak-

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ing scene shifted to the outdoors, the demand grew for light weight portable cameras and lights. Emphasis on reality gained importance and the socio-economic factors in the post-world war era created what is popularly known as Neo-Realistic films.

The exploration of the efforts and also the need to record the important events during the Space-Age further sophisticated the imaging process especially in optics, photo-chemistry and electronics. Though initially these were used for recording the great strides in the space programmes, the innovations in these areas also found direct use in cinema. The experimentation done in the USA by the underground filmmakers also gave a new direction for abstract methods and synthetic sound for fulfilling the great need in the growing cinematic art.

The technological innovations in television technology also had a direct bearing on the imaging technology in cinema. During the initial phases, the electronic camera was not able to reproduce images with the perfection that we find in images shot with a film camera. The researchers worked hard and now the electronic camera is in a

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*All talk on cinema, analysis of cinematic work, and writing criticism and reviews on cinema would be only scratching the surface if the protagonist is not familiar with the technology-base of cinematic art.*

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position to compete with film cameras on image resolutions and colour reproduction. The experiments going on in High Definition Television is narrowing the gap in perfecting the imaging technology.

The great success of the science fiction films from Hollywood and the tireless efforts of scientific minds in the creative areas of special effects bear the testimony that cinema and video technology would have to exist together. The future is not very distant when both will find perfect unison in digital technology. The means for achieving the best results in picture and sound is being sorted out by the respective experts both in cinema and television. The tremendous efforts put in by industrial light and magic have become a source of inspiration for many such set-ups in the U.S.A. Now many experts are concerned with the futurist imaging technology.

With digital technology and the immense use of computer software in picture formulation, the trial and error concept in audio-visual objectives is getting remote. This is precisely the need for scientific minds with a deep concern for creativity. It is beyond question that the future of cinema and television is in the hands of highly trained technical hands.

A Lumiere, or a Porter would never have imagined the giant strides taken during the last 100 years in the entertainment industry. The first film institute which was set up in Moscow immediately after the Bolshevik revolution perhaps could never have foreseen the fact that today there are more than 98 important film and television training institutes spread over 52 countries. Most of these Institutes initially started only with film training and almost all of them have now integrated television techniques in their curriculum to send out fully trained professionals.

The Film and Television Institute of India at Pune which was started in 1961 also periodically modified its syllabi to meet the present and future challenges. New technologies are integrated, the course structures changed and at the intake point of the students, great care is exercised. The professionals who come out should have total confidence as far as modern imaging technology is concerned. One should not forget the fact that training

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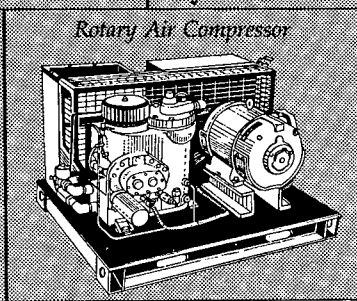
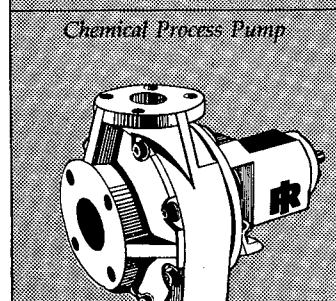
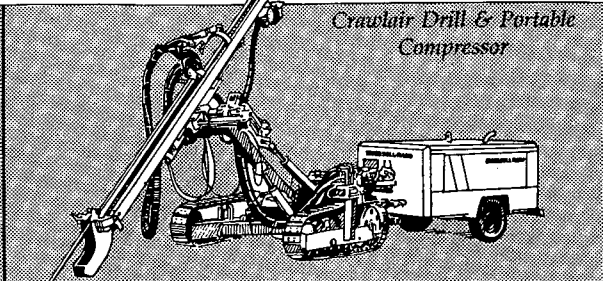
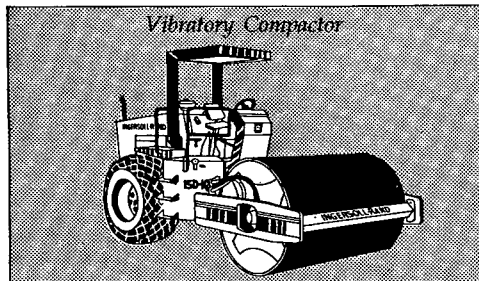
*The technological innovations in Television technology also had a direct bearing on the imaging technology in cinema. The great success of the science fiction films from Hollywood and the tireless efforts of scientific minds in the creative areas of Special Effects bear the testimony that cinema and video technology would have to exist together.*

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in these areas is a very expensive art.

There is a great demand for more and more trained technicians in the area of cinema and television. This need has been correctly understood by the various state governments and it is worthy to note that two more institutions are coming up in India—one in Bangalore and another at Calcutta to fulfill the needs of this great nation. Many years back in 1942, an institution was started in Madras. This is now a regional Institute catering to the requirements of students mostly from Tamil Nadu. In course of time to come, there will be more institutions in different states to meet the ever increasing demands for trained professionals. □

*The author is Director, Film And Television Institute of India, Pune.*



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# Preserving The Heritage Of Indian Cinema

Suresh Chabria

*Preserving the rich heritage of Indian cinema is no mean task. The National*

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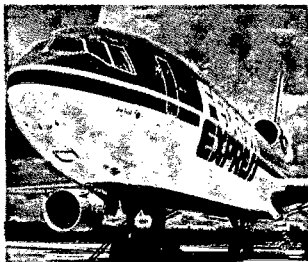
However, a combination of political, historical and economic factors prevented an indigenous film industry from emerging before 1910. In general, participation in the modern sectors of the economy by Indians at the turn of the century was no more than a couple of decades old and that, too, was limited and rather tentative. Naturally, notwithstanding numerous actualities shot by keen local amateurs, Indian entrepreneurs confronted with the new medium of film initially preferred to distribute the finished product imported from abroad.

Fascination with the imported

*(Contd. on page 67)*



—Poster for the film Pather Panchali, directed by Satyajit Ray in 1955.



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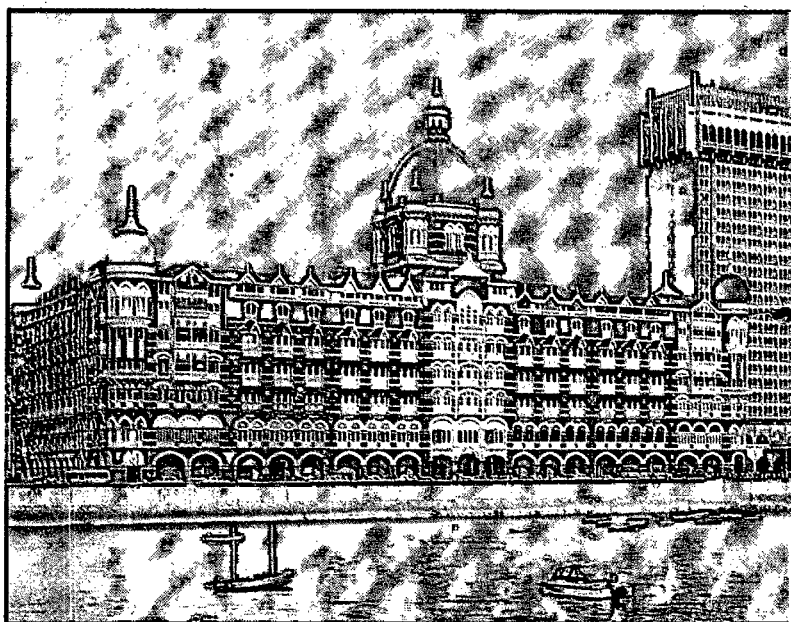
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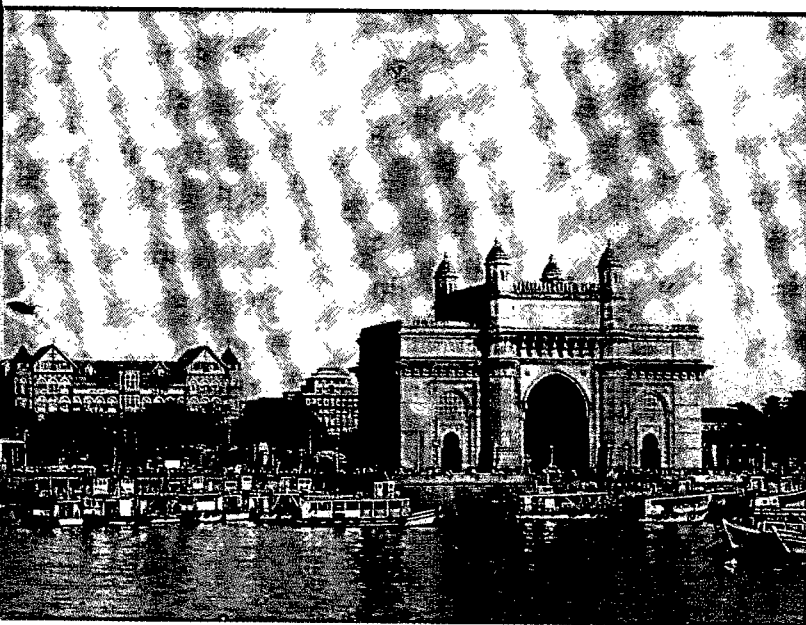
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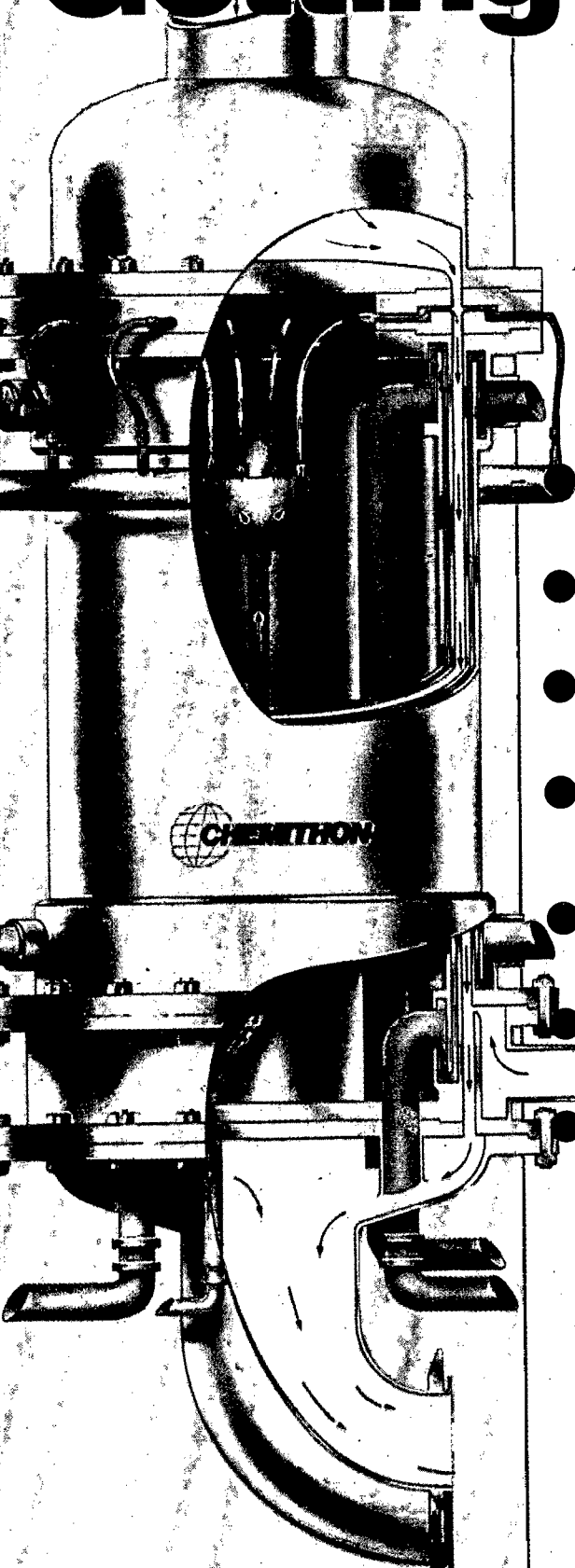
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(Contd. from page 62)

medium of film and the rising sense of nationalism and anti-colonial sentiment first fused in the mind of D.G. Phalke. He consciously and single-handedly founded the Indian film industry as part of the *swadeshi* movement (the nationalist programme of self-reliance) between 1910 and 1913. The rest is history.

While imported films dominated at the box office until the arrival of the talkies in 1931, Indian silent cinema, like its counterparts in so many other countries, successfully created its own identity and mass following. Its staple was the wholly Indian genre and form of the mythological, but the influence of Western films led in the 1920s to the rise of the hugely popular social and stunt films with their flashy male stars and glamorous heroines.

With the coming of sound and the large scale application of studio methods and economics of film-making, the Indian film industry finally came into its own. The audience showed a distinct and irresistible preference for films that spoke and sang in one of its own numerous languages. The Indian film industry was thus perhaps the first to be wrested from foreign control, albeit with the all-important exception of manufacturing film equipment and the raw stock itself.

Ever since then, film has remained an inseparable part of India's public life. In its hold over the average Indian's imagination it can only be compared with some of the traditional forms inscribed with ancient legends and myths which intermingle with the religious and folk festivals and the daily life of the people.

I have begun this article on the film archive with a short resume of the early decades of Indian film history to highlight two difficulties which affect its work to this day.

First, much of our rich film heritage has perished since it coincided with the latter part of the colonial period and in the absence of self-rule, India was not able to create the structures that were required to protect the long-term physical survival of the films.

Second, and more insidiously, while it reaped huge profits and actively participated in the creation of our national ethos, the Indian film industry was a victim of the general colonial psychology of inferiority and lack of self-esteem. For there seems to be no better explanation besides these two reasons for the fact that so much of Indian cinema upto 1950 was allowed to vanish completely.

It is true that factors like nitrate decomposition, climatic stress and the negligence of purely commercial-minded film producers and laboratories also wrecked incalculable havoc. But to our mind, the deepest causes were the lack of control over our governmental and administrative machinery before 1947 and the film industry's inferiority complex about the technical and artistic standards of our cinema.

### **Constraints And Achievements**

Thus, when a national film archive was finally set up in 1964, it had an extremely difficult task cut out for it to salvage what had survived of the foundations of Indian cinema with the meagre resources which the newly-independent Indian state could spare for this purpose and also, with the same resources, to set about acquiring and preserving contemporary and future productions of a highly popular and prolific film industry, which still acted as if it were totally oblivious to the evanescence of the film medium.

In the mid 1950s, the NFAl was first planned by the Government of India as a national film library to acquire important films for record purposes. But soon the diverse and

specialized tasks of such a film library came to be realized—that it must not only be a collection of films but also a preservation agency. Thus the concept of a national film library was extended and developed into the concept of a fully fledged film archive.

From its modest beginnings in 1964 when it was housed in small sheds with make-shift vaults in the premises of the Film Institute of India, Pune, the NFAl has today grown in stature and experience to be counted among the leading film archives of the world and has since 1969 been a full member of the International Federation of Film Archives (IFFA). More importantly, it has managed to salvage and preserve several landmark films of the first five decades of Indian cinema. This was largely due to the government's initiative in setting up the archive, the hard work and dedication of its founders and the role of a few stalwarts of the film industry such as J.B.H. Wadia, B.N. Sircar and others who believed in the need for film preservation and deposited their personal collections with the NFAl.

In its new building complex which was opened in January 1994, NFAl finally has its own film vaults designed according to international film-preservation standards, a reasonably well-equipped preservation department, a well-stocked book and periodical library and a cataloguing research and documentation centre which contains a precious collection of cinema posters, stills and other ancillary material. The archive now also has an auditorium for the public screening of films from its collection.

Amongst the treasures of the NFAl's film collection are the surviving fragments of the films of D.G. Phalke, the silent films of Himanshu Rai and Franz Osten, a representative number of films of the great film companies and studios of the 1930s and 1940s

such as the Prabhat Film Company, New Theatres, Bombay Talkies, Minerva Movietone. Wadia Movietone, Gemini and others. Equally important are the archive's holdings of the great independent banners which emerged after the collapse of the studio system in the late 1940s, such as those created by Mehboob Khan, Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, A.R. Kardar, L.V. Prasad and B. Nagi Reddi. Alongside examples of the mainstream cinema, excellent prints of major works of the *auteurs* of new Indian cinema such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Mani Kaul, G. Aravindan, Kumar Shahani, Shyam Benegal and others are also preserved by the archive.

The NFAI also has a very large collection of ancillary material such as cinema posters, stills, song booklets, folders and disc records and audio cassettes relating to every period of Indian cinema. But due to the shortage of funds and adequate staff, the archive was unable to acquire a sufficient number of artefacts such as annotated original scripts, sets, costumes, and pre-cinema and other antique film equipment. For example, the magic lantern and hand-painted slides of the Patwardhan Bros are the only major example of pre-cinema equipment available in the archive. One of the most cherished projects of the archive is to convert its former premises at the Jayakar Bungalow into a museum of Indian cinema.

### Acquisition Policy

With annual national production in India mounting to more than 850 feature films and an equally large number of shorts, newsreels and documentaries, the NFAI is compelled to be selective in its acquisition. In addition, there is no legal deposit system and there is the perennial shortage of funds. The result of these factors is that we have less than 10 per

cent of the national film production preserved at the NFAI.

The main criteria for acquisition framed by NFAI's Advisory Committee are as follows:

First, the archive should acquire all available Indian films of the pre-1955 period, since most of these films are on nitrate base and have already been destroyed. As such, there is no point in making a selection from whatever has survived from this period.

Second, as regards the post-1955 films, the NFAI must acquire the following:

- national and state award-winning films ;
- all films which have been popular at the box office;
- films shown in international film festivals and the Indian Panorama section of the International Film Festivals held in India;
- all films financed, produced by the National Film Development Corporation and the erstwhile Film Finance Corporation;
- Film adaptations of well-known literary works;
- films representing different genres of Indian cinema such as the mythological, historical, social and family dramas, stunt films, children's films and so on;
- newsreels, documentaries and short films produced by private and official agencies;
- selected foreign film classics including the works of major film-makers of different countries and representing various national styles and genres.

Also, under the Indian Cinematograph Act, censored portions of films exhibited in India are deposited with the archive by the Central Board of Film Certification. All this material

awaits zealous researchers who can catalogue it and unscramble the chequered history of Indian censorship in relation to changing Indian social mores and values. Perhaps it has been more useful to have the deposit of over 20,000 film scripts by the CBFC, since the films relating to a large number of these have vanished.

One of the special features of the NFAI is that by its constitution it has been entrusted with the task of disseminating film culture all over India. This may probably be considered a quaint notion by some but it is an article of faith with us. For this purpose, NFAI has acquired a large number of foreign films by purchase or exchange from other archives. These are regularly shown in the NFAI's own premises to researchers, film-makers and others, and are also loaned to the Film Institute for its academic programmes. We also frequently loan viewing copies from our collection—both Indian and foreign—for joint screening programmes to film societies and educational and cultural organizations all over the country. Small 16 mm distribution libraries located in Pune and the NFAI's regional offices in Calcutta, Bangalore and Thiruvananthapuram provide similar services to scores of organizations interested in showing films as a part of their regular programmes.

For almost two decades the NFAI has been conducting an annual Film Appreciation Course of five weeks duration in Pune in which participants belonging to various walk of life and professions from all over India are exposed to the best of Indian and world cinema. Some of the major topics taught during the course are the basics of the film medium, cinema as an art, film history, film theory and the relationship of cinema to other arts. The archive also conducts shorter

(Contd. on page 98)

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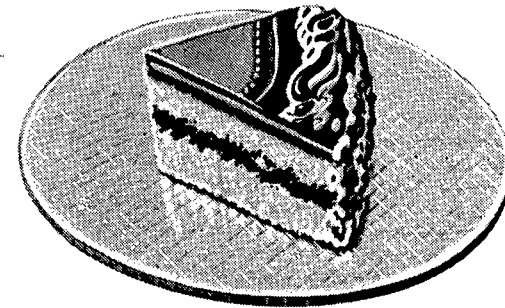
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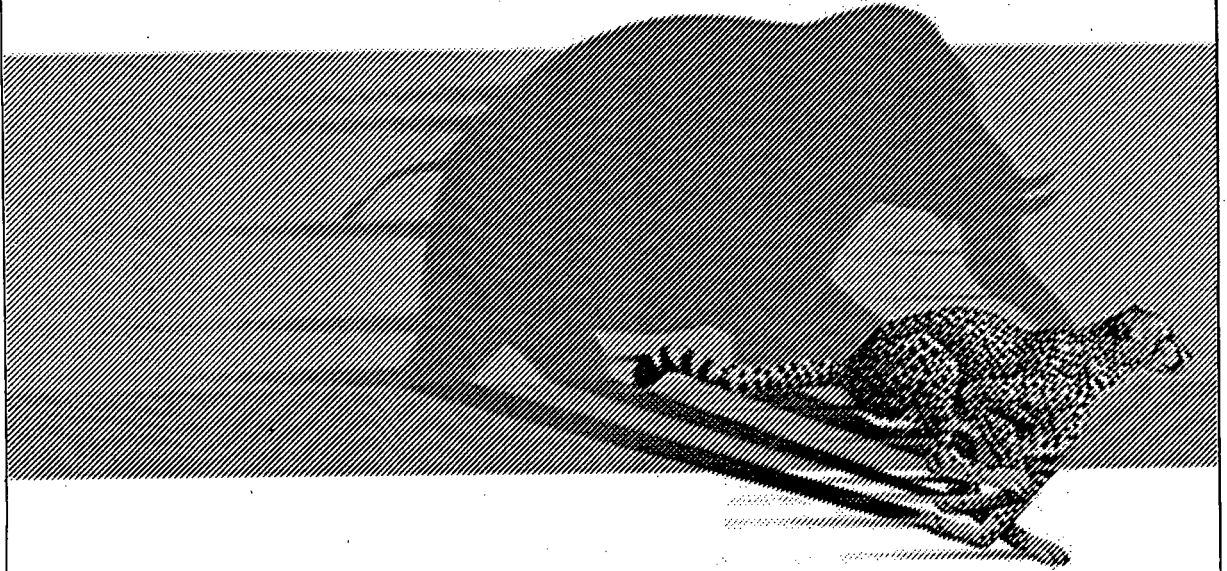


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# Social Impact Of Cinema: A Study In Delhi Metropolitan City

Dr. Savita Bhakhry

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*Cinema plays a positive role in society by offering catharsis as well as entertainment to viewers as per a study conducted in Delhi. It also provides an escape route to a dream world and plays a negative role in generating social and sexual violence and crime, analyses the author.*

---

THE cinema, as we know it today, is one of the most important and powerful social institutions of our time. So much so that it has come to occupy a unique place in our everyday social life. For almost a century of its existence of work, hope, despair, self-sacrifice and crookedness—a veritable whirlpool of all that is best and worst in human nature—have gone to the making of the film of today. Its birth was a flickering hardly noticed. Its future is still in the realms of the unknown especially in the wake of rapidly changing communications systems. Nonetheless, the very fact that what is shown and viewed maximum via these rapidly changing communications systems is nothing but films or film-based programmes and simultaneously its influences on people of wide and varied cultures throughout the whole world, it becomes a little difficult indeed to dogmatise as to its real significance.

The present paper tries to explore to

what extent Hindi cinema plays a positive role in society in terms of providing entertainment, enhancing information and knowledge, sensitizing people about urgent issues of society, in creating sociability and in offering catharsis. Similarly, it would try to examine to what extent cinema plays a negative role about the following in society—teaching wrong values, generating social and sexual violence and crime, providing escape from reality into a dream world instead of facing up to the problems of life, encouraging adoption of destructive role models and in encouraging cynicism about social institutions. Besides this, the paper would also try to analyse the manner in which cinema in general tends to influence other social aspects concerning the family, religion, secularism, women and men.

In order thereby to assess the social impact of cinema in society, quota sample survey of 300 cinema goers

was carried out to get in-depth information on the state of affairs of the cinema industry in Delhi. While selecting cinema goers due care has been taken to have equal representation of both the sexes, various age-groups and their socio-economic strata. In terms of age group the following three age groups—21-35 years, 36-50 years and 51 plus, were taken to have a representation of the entire life span, that is, young, middle age and old age. In terms of socio-economic strata, three broad categories of occupations were selected, namely the professional class, the business class and the working class. From each of them 100 respondents (50 males and 50 females) were selected in the age group of 21-35 years, 36-50 years and 51 plus. The present study posed seven set of questions to each of its respondents. We shall take each of these questions one by one and try to analyse them separately and later see as to what the general findings are.

## Positive Aspects

As already mentioned in the beginning of the paper and as would be evident from Table-1 each respondent was asked as to what extent cinema plays a positive role about the following in society, that is, in terms of providing entertainment, enhancing information and knowledge, sensitizing people about urgent issues of society, in creating sociability and in offering catharsis.

index of the tension ridden state of the Indian society which is accentuated by innumerable social changes in the patterns of the caste system, the class system, the family life, industrial relations and political structure, all of which seem to have reached a highly turbulent state nowadays.

The cinema industry deserves appreciation for the fact that 65.3 per cent of the respondents consider that it

ingly of the view that cinema plays a negative role in generating social and sexual violence and crime in society (Table-2). Here, 70 per cent of the respondents feel that this role is very high. If we add those who feel that it is only high and not very high, we get a total response of 88.7 per cent. This is perhaps the most striking finding of this particular enquiry.

## Family Relationships

Table-3 sets out the extent to which the respondents feel that cinema viewing is a factor in strengthening family relations. Here again it would be useful to combine those who say that this trend manifests very strongly or to some extent.

It will be seen that over 60 per cent think that husband and wife relationships were strengthened by cinema viewing. 65.7 per cent think that sibling relations were strengthened. However, only 55.7 per cent think that parent-children relationships were similarly strengthened and only 46.4 per cent think that mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships were strengthened.

This means that film story writers and producers should devote greater attention to parent-children relationship and mother-in-law and daughter-

Table-1

Role of cinema in society; Positive aspects

Sl. No.	Role of Cinema in Society	Very High	High	Low	Total
1.	Provides Entertainment	104 (34.7)	97 (32.3)	99 (33.0)	300 (100.0)
2.	Enhances Information and Knowledge	38 (12.7)	103 (34.3)	159 (53.0)	300 (100.0)
3.	Sensitizes About Urgent Issues of Society	67 (22.3)	129 (43.00)	104 (34.7)	300 (100.0)
4.	Creates Sociability	51 (17.0)	86 (28.7)	163 (54.3)	300 (100.0)
5.	Offers Catharsis	106 (35.3)	135 (45.0)	59 (19.7)	300 (100.0)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

The highest number of respondents (35.3 per cent) were of the view that cinema offers catharsis. That is to say, it offers a release to the tensions which people feel in their family or in their place of work. Close after this, 34.7 per cent claim that the cinema provides entertainment.

If the very high and high are combined then the opinion regarding catharsis offered by the cinema rises to over 80 per cent. The entertainment factor scores 67 per cent. The prevalence of information and knowledge attracts 47 per cent and sensitization about urgent issues reaches 65.3 per cent. The factor of sociability becomes 45.7 per cent.

Here, the factor requiring note is not the importance given to entertainment but the high importance given to catharsis. Though this may also be an

plays a role in the sensitization of the public to the urgent issues of society like the inequalities existent in caste, class and wealth.

## Negative Aspects

The respondents were overwhelm-

Table-2

Role of cinema in society: negative aspects

Sl. No.	Role of Cinema in Society	Very High	High	Low	Total
1.	Teaching Wrong Values	150 (50.0)	108 (36.0)	42 (14.0)	300 (100.0)
2.	Generating Social and Sexual Violence and Crime	210 (70.0)	56 (18.7)	34 (11.3)	300 (100.0)
3.	Providing Escape from Reality Into a Dream World Instead of Facing Up to the Problems of Life	200 (66.6)	65 (21.7)	35 (11.7)	300 (100.0)
4.	Encourages Adoption of Destructive Role Models	135 (45.0)	91 (30.0)	74 (24.7)	300 (100.0)
5.	Encourages Cynicisms About Social Institutions	177 (59.0)	90 (30.0)	93 (31.0)	300 (100.0)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

**Table-3**

**Respondents response regarding the extent to which cinema viewing strengthens family relationships**

Sl. No.	Type of Family Relationships	Very Strongly	To some extent	Not at all	No Preference	Total
1.	Husband-Wife Relationship	50 (16.7)	134 (44.6)	113 (37.7)	3 (1.0)	300 (100.0)
2.	Parent-children Relationship	50 (16.7)	117 (39.0)	132 (44.0)	1 (0.3)	300 (100.0)
3.	Sibling Relationship	76 (25.4)	121 (40.3)	103 (34.3)	0 (0.0)	300 (100.0)
4.	Mother-in-Law Daughter-in-Law Relationship	38 (12.7)	101 (33.7)	160 (53.3)	1 (0.3)	300 (100.0)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

in-law relationship which are both very important to the growth of our society. A proper and constructive investigation of parent children relationship should study the sensitive issues created by our rapidly changing society and its impact on the sensitive minds of the children.

**Family Structure**

Table-4 shows that 48.7 per cent of the respondents feel that cinema viewing strengthens the joint family. As against this, 42 per cent feel that it encourages the nuclear family. It may be conjectured that what is central to the popular Hindi film is the concern with the values of the family and the extended family. Family ties are so strong that any break in them produces psychic tension. The brothers marry and continue to live with their parents; there is a simultaneous emphasis on both filial loyalty and fraternal solidarity.

**Social Values**

From Table-5 it appears that far from following the Directives enjoined by Part IV-A of the Constitution (Fundamental Duties of Citizens), the cinema has been following an unabashedly populist life following the prejudices of the people rather than attempting to lead them in a positive direction. Thus, far from promoting

the scientific spirit as the Constitution enjoins, the cinema seeks to strengthen traditional religious feelings, perpetuate popular myths and promote and glorify ritualism. As against this, it

may be seen that 58.3 per cent believe that cinema strengthens communal harmony and 60 per cent believe that it promotes secular values.

It may be consistent with the Constitutional Directives if filmmakers were to pay more attention to the lives of great scientists like C.V. Raman, Vikram Sarabhai etc. instead of overemphasising the values of mythology.

**Attitude Towards Women**

The word "positive" has been used in Table-6 because what the public considers as a positive image for women is far removed from the image that leaders of women's society throughout the world have been up-

**Table-4**

**Respondents response regarding the type of family structure cinema viewing promotes**

Sl. No.	Types of Family Structure Promoted by Cinema Viewing	No.
1.	Strengthens Joint Family	146 (48.7)
2.	Encourages Nuclear Family	126 (42.0)
3.	Don't Know	28 (9.3)
4.	Total	300 (100.0)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

**Table-5**

**Respondents response regarding the extent to which cinema viewing promotes other social values**

Sl. No.	Other Social Values promoted by Cinema Viewing	Very High	High	Low	Total
1.	Strengthens Traditional Religious Feelings	86 (28.7)	97 (32.30)	117 (39.0)	300 (100.0)
2.	Perpetuates Popular Myths	90 (30.0)	89 (29.7)	121 (40.3)	300 (100.0)
3.	Promotes Ritualism	140 (46.7)	86 (28.7)	74 (24.6)	300 (100.0)
4.	Strengthens Communal Harmony	75 (25.0)	100 (33.3)	125 (41.7)	300 (100.0)
5.	Promotes Secular Values	82 (27.3)	98 (32.7)	120 (40.0)	300 (100.0)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

holding and campaigning. A positive image is locally considered the image of a nurturant, submissive, sacrificing, faithful, sentimental and self-effacing woman. The more 'active' and 'positive' traits like rationality, pragmatism, achievement, drive and positive aggression get associated with men. Going by the above standards, 54 per cent of the respondents were of the view that cinema affects women's positive image in society to a very high extent. Needless to mention, this stereotyped ideal of Indian womanhood reflects a predominantly male and middle class view. Following from this, 48.7 per cent and 47 per cent feel that cinema also affects very highly women's status and role in society which is secondary to men and legitimate only insofar as it can regulate the former through supportive social roles like that of mother, sister or wife.

Similarly, 55.3 per cent of the respondents feel that cinema affects very highly women's positive sexual values in society. That is to say, her value in terms of sex depends on the worth man bestows on her. In case she expresses her sexual desires from a male standard she is labelled as a "bad woman", the "vamp".

### People's Attitude

It is instructive to see the respondents response regarding the manner in which cinema affects people's attitude towards men in society. We find that if figures of very high and high are combined not less than 91.4 per cent think that man's macho image is propagated by the films. 83.7 per cent believe that man's dominant status in society is depicted. Almost the same number, that is, 82 per cent believe that man's authoritative role in society is projected and 81.3 per cent believe that men's sexual superiority in society is projected. With these figures it is difficult to argue that our cinema is

**Table-6**  
**Respondents Response regarding the manner in which cinema affects people's attitude towards women in society.**

Sl. No.	Manner in which cinema affects people's attitude towards women	Very High	High	Low	Total
1.	Their Positive Image in Society	162 (54.0)	83 (27.7)	55 (18.3)	300 (100.0)
2.	Their Positive Status in Society	146 (48.7)	87 (29.0)	67 (22.3)	300 (100.0)
3.	Their Positive Role in Society	141 (47.0)	95 (31.7)	64 (21.3)	300 (100.0)
4.	Their Positive Sexual Values in society	166 (55.3)	81 (27.0)	53 (17.7)	300 (100.0)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

**Table-7**  
**Respondents response regarding the manner in which cinema affects people's attitude towards men in society.**

Sl. No.	Manner in which cinema affects people's attitude towards men	Very High	High	Low	Total
1.	Their Macho Image in Society	209 (69.7)	65 (21.7)	26 (8.6)	300 (100.0)
2.	Their Dominant Status in Society	187 (62.3)	64 (21.4)	49 (16.3)	300 (100.0)
3.	Their Authoritative role in society	191 (63.7)	55 (18.3)	54 (18.0)	300 (100.0)
4.	Their Sexual Superiority in society	189 (63.0)	55 (18.3)	56 (18.7)	300 (100.0)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

playing a positive role in educating the public to abandon the values of male chauvinism which is deeply ingrained in the people in society like ours.

### Conclusion

A large majority of the people were of the opinion that cinema plays a positive role in society by offering catharsis. That is to say it offers release to their tensions which they experience in their daily life, be it their family or place of work. This may also be an index of the tension ridden state of the Indian society which is accentuated by innumerable social changes in the patterns of the caste system, the class system, the family life, industrial relations and political structure, all of which seem to have reached a highly turbulent state. After catharsis, enter-

tainment figures prominently in the reckoning of cinema viewers.

Similarly, a large majority of the people were of the view that cinema plays a negative role in generating social and sexual violence and crime in society. Almost an equal number of people blamed the cinema for providing an escape from reality into a dream world instead of facing up to the problems of life.

A large majority of the people were of the opinion that the first and foremost probable role of cinema in society should be entertainment. Secondly, it should play an educative role and thirdly, teach positive values. □

*The author has done her doctorate on "Sociology of Cinema".*



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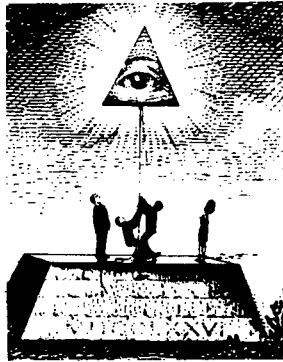
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*Engineering Mega Dreams*

CONCEPT

# Filmmaking: The Reality And The Myth

B.B. Nagpal

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*The Indian film industry is generally portrayed as something full of glamour, glitz, wealth, containing a life of ease and romance. Nothing could be farther from the truth, says the author.*

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Even as we complete a century of the birth of the cinematic medium, India has taken a lead in the production of films with a rate that staggers the mind when one considers that we are a developing country.

And although various factors have contributed to the downward trend in the past few years, the country still produces over 800 feature films every year in various languages. Indian cinema reached its peak in the mid-eighties, but then came the video cassette revolution, followed by the rapid expansion of television, the cable revolution, and the satellite channel race.

Indian cinema scaled new heights in 1985 with the production of 912 films, rising from 742 in 1980, 763 in 1982 and 833 in 1984. But thereafter, there was a gradual decline. In the nineties, just before the satellite revolution came to the country, India

saw the highest production of 948 feature films in 1990, falling to 910 in 1991 and below nine hundred to 836 in 1992. The figures for 1993 and 1994 are 812 and 755 respectively. During the current calendar year, the figures from January one to March 31 stand at 179 films only, which appears to be rather a low figure for three months.

But in spite of this, film production has not fallen to any dramatic low, primarily because most of the people involved in filmmaking have grown to love the media, and will continue to make films despite various problems including high taxation and fewer audience.

Although cinema came to India in July 1896 when the Lumiere brothers exhibited their invention at the Watson's Hotel in Bombay barely seven months after their first show in Paris, the year 1913 is generally accepted as the start of the Indian

cinema, since that was the year when the first indigenously produced Indian film was made. This film was "Raja Harishchandra" by Dadasaheb Phalke, who is now acknowledged as the father of Indian cinema.

After that, Indian cinema continued to grow, but it was after the first talkie in 1931, "Alam Ara" by Ardeshir Irani, that cinema really became the common man's entertainment medium.

Thematically, Indian cinema has seen various phases, from the mythological to the fantasy, from the family drama to the romances, and from the costume dramas to the cinema of realism. In the pre-Independence era, these themes were used to awaken the Indians against the British.

## Uniting Role

The dream merchants of the Indian film industry have come a long way, weaving dreams that have played both a uniting and a national role, transgressing boundaries of class, caste, creed or geographic delineations. There is hardly any denying the fact that Indian films are perhaps the strongest factor for binding people of all sections, states and regions together, since they bring a unique kind of oneness, by showing to the audience that wherever one may be, the toils and troubles, the joys and happiness, and the tears and sadness are the same everywhere.

The film media—the magazines and now the video or television magazines—also always portrayed the film industry as something full of glamour, glitz, wealth, not to speak of a life of ease and romance.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. For, while it is undoubtedly true that cinema portrays a fantasy world, those that are involved in it are hardly ever away from their toils and troubles.

## Huge Investment

On a very conservative estimate, the film industry employs about 600,000 people directly or indirectly, a large majority of them being involved with distribution and studios.

A conservative economic structure of the Indian film industry shows a huge investment in all sectors which includes the investment in film producing units—entertainment and documentary (Rs. 725 crore), distributors units (Rs. 450 crore),



**Ardeshir M. Irani**

cinemas—permanent and touring (Rs. 1300 crore), laboratories (Rs. 40 crore), recording studios (Rs. 40 crore), distribution (Rs. eight crore) and also some expenditures in exports, imports, equipment and so on.

The estimated tax on box-office gross collections is about Rs. 1100 crore, while on the net collections, it is just about below Rs. 600 crore. The estimated tax on entertainment by the state governments works out to about Rs. 520 crore, while other tax collections are about Rs. two crore.

Generally speaking, the annual capital investment in film production is about Rs. 300 crore and the average cost of a film is Rs. 75 lakh to one crore. A film on an average earns Rs. 15 lakh per territory, thus making film making a very difficult proposition.

## Box-office Collections

The country has about 13,000 cinema houses, which include about 9,000 permanent theatres while the

rest are touring or military cinemas. The country has a weekly cinema audience numbering over 150 lakh. However, it is learnt that about 160 theatres remained closed during 1994-95, for various reasons. The box office collections show a marginal increase over the years, but this is mainly attributable to higher rates of

tickets. The box office collections for 1980-81 excluding entertainment tax stood at Rs. 335 crore, rising gradually to Rs. 386 crore (1981-82), Rs. 401.48 crore (1982-83), and reaching the figure of Rs 651.69 crore in 1988-89.

Of the tax collected from films, the state governments earned Rs. 225 crore in 1980-81, and the state income gradually went up to a figure of Rs. 525 crore in 1987-88.

## Imports-Exports

Until a few years ago, all imports

*Indian cinema reached its peak in the mid-eighties, but then came the video cassette revolution, followed by the rapid expansion of television, the cable revolution, and the satellite channel race.*

and exports were the responsibility of the public sector National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). However, imports and exports are now open and the NFDC has to compete with private business entrepreneurs in this field.

Feature and non-feature films are exported at present to about fifty countries, including many which have no Indian populations.

The export earnings in 1979-80 had stood at just over Rs. 12 crore, but there has been a steady increase in the nineties, with the earnings going up to Rs. 75 crore and above from feature films, documentaries and also advertisement films.

India's imports are mostly through the National Film Development Corporation, and even private importers have to get themselves registered when importing films. But this makes it difficult to obtain actual figures of imports into the country and the money spent on them. However, the NFDC has been showing profits continuously for more than a decade.

Of the total films produced in a year, about two hundred or so are in Hindi, some of them produced in Madras. It is interesting that over 300 Hindi films are launched every year, but less than 200 of them get made, others either getting abandoned midway, or taking several years to make.

A survey by well-known filmologist and film maker Amit Khanna of Plus

Channel in 1987 showed that while about 300 Hindi films were launched, only 150 were completed. A total of 100 films were released, of which only five were mega-hits. Another five were average hits, ten broke even, and eighty were loss-making films.

The capital investment during the year was Rs. 150 crore, and the capital loss was of the order of Rs. fifty crore. Despite this, at the end of the year, a

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*Film production has not fallen to any dramatic low, primarily because most of the people involved in filmmaking have grown to love the media, and will continue to make films despite various problems including high taxation and fewer audience.*

---

total of 200 films were under production.

Every year, feature films are made in the country in about twentyfive languages and dialects. In 1994, a total of 755 films were made in twenty languages and dialects and certified at the nine different regional offices of the Central Board of Film Certification.

The highest number of 174 was in Telugu, with 156 in Hindi, 153 in Tamil and seventy each in Kannada and Malayalam. Bengali contributed 44 while Marathi had 22 films. There were four English films, and dialects including Tulu, Bundeli, Haryanvi and Kodava, contributing a total of six films.

Until about ten years ago, all films were certified /censored only at Bombay and Madras. However, the Central Board of Film Certification which is headquartered at Bombay has nine regional offices—Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Delhi, Bangalore, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram, Hyderabad and Cuttack.

During the year, Bombay certified 210 films, but Madras topped the tally with 280 films. In fact, the four centres in south India alone certified as many as 564 films.

Interestingly, there is also a great myth about the income of film stars. Megastar, Amitabh Bachchan, was at one time reported to be earning about Rs. fifty lakh from a film, though he has always denied this. But one thing is certain—the film industry personalities are among the highest tax-payers in the country. While no figures are available of the tax paid by them, a figure for 1993-94 shows that a total of nineteen film personalities who owed more than Rs. ten lakh had a total amount of Rs. 12.19 crore outstanding against them. And at least three of them were no longer alive at that time.

But while all this seems dismal, not everything is wrong with the Indian cinema scenario. For example, India is in the Guinness Book of World Records for various things—highest annual production of films, highest number of roles as a police officer by Jagdish

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*Indian films are perhaps the strongest factor for binding people of all sections, states and regions together, since they bring a unique kind of oneness, by showing to the audience that wherever one may be, the toils and troubles, the joys and happiness, and the tears and sadness are the same everywhere.*

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*In 1994, a total of 755 films were made in twenty languages and dialects and certified at the nine different regional offices of the Central Board of Film Certification.*

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*Indian cinema is in the Guinness Book of World Records for various things—highest annual production of films, highest number of roles as a police officer by Jagdish Raj, highest number of romantic leads (over 600 films) by the late Prem Nazir, and the highest number of songs by any single singer—the legendary Lata Mangeshkar.*

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Raj, highest number of romantic leads (over 600 films) by the late Prem Nazir, and most important of all, the highest number of songs by any single singer—the legendary Lata Mangeshkar with over 20,000 songs.

India has also other achievements to its credit. It gave to the world the master craftsman of cinema, Satyajit Ray, who went on to win the Oscar for Lifetime Achievement. India also produced Raj Kapoor, who endeared cinema to the common man all over the world, making sure that its popularity did not remain confined only amongst the elite cinema buffs.

Indian films are also unique in their song and dance. In fact, song and dance is so much a part of films (the Hindi film "Indrasabha" in the thirties had seventy two songs) that any film made without songs flops at the box-office.

The country has also produced some of the biggest box-office grossers in world cinema history like "Sholay", "Maine Pyar Kiya" and "Hum Aapke hain koun."

But for the sellers of dreams, the show must go on, and as the legendary Raj Kapoor said in his magnum opus "Mera Naam Joker": "Jeena Yahaan, marna yahan, iske siva, jaanaa kahaan" (We have to live here, die here, and there is no world outside this). □

*The author is a noted film writer.*

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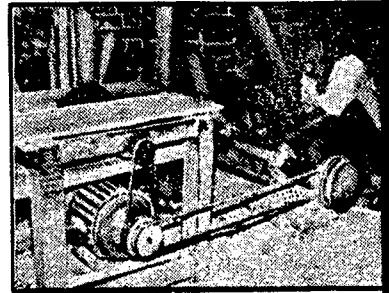
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# Assamese Cinema: Yesterday And Today

Phani Talukdar

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*From Jyoti Prasad, the pioneer to Jahnu Barua, the man with golden touch, the Assamese cinema has made significant progress during six decades of its fruitful existence. If the past is memorable and the present glorious, then the future too should be bright, feels the author.*

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SIX decades of Assamese Cinema passed through thick and thin—with occasional hopes and general despair, so far as the commercial viewpoint is concerned. On the other hand, the artistic and technical achievements of some Assamese films released during the last decade took its reputation to a lofty height. In the latest National Awards competition, Jahnu Barua was adjudged the Best Indian Director of 1994 for his Assamese Film ‘Sagoroloi Bohu Dur’ and the film got the Best Assamese film award. Moreover Bishnu Khargharia, the central character of the film, got Jury’s Special appreciation. It may be mentioned that in 1992, the same director’s Assamese film **Phiringati** brought the Best Actress Award for Malaya Goswami, while the film secured second Best Indian Film Award. In 1988, his Assamese Film **Haladhia Charaye Baodhan Khay**

based on Homen Borgohain’s novel of the same name got the Best Indian Film Award—Swarnakamal; while its leading actor Indra Bania received appreciation in India and abroad. Thus, Jahnu Barua’s continuous achievements brought glory not only for him but also for Assamese film industry as a whole. Meanwhile, his latest film **Sagoroloi Bohu Dur** (The sea is far away) is selected as Indian entry for several international festivals.

In an interview, Jahnu Barua asserted that he would continue making films in Assamese only, though there is wider market and liberal financing in Hindi film-world, because he feels, “I cannot localise my social and cultural outlook by being tied up in Hindi film formula; I have already refused several such offers since my aim in making films is not to amass wealth only and hence I will live only with Assamese films’. Such an attitude was

taken earlier also by great filmmakers like P.C. Barua, Ritwick Ghatak and Satyajit Ray.

The renowned film critic Chidananda Dasgupta remarked that “the Regional film has its roots; its sense of identity; it tends to underplay the common factors arising in the country and stresses elements of regional tradition with some pride and nostalgia’. Jahnu Barua also expects to bring out the socio-cultural background of his state through his mother tongue as there is greater sense of reality and integrity in the regional films. To quote Chidananda Dasgupta again, “It (regional film) is Indian, even when it is not cinema; its main concerns are with social problems as in literature”. With such ideas perhaps, the pioneers started making Assamese films, based on regional history and cultural heritage.

## The Beginning

In 1934-35, Jyoty Prasad Agarwala made the first Assamese film **Joymoti**, based on a historical play of renowned litterateur L.N. Bezbarua. The film was shot mostly outside studio with natural background and the rest in an improvised studio-complex temporarily built in a tea-garden ‘Bholaguri’ naming it ‘Chitraban’. (Incidentally the state government named its Studio also Jyoti-Chitraban to commemorate the pioneer in this field). **Joymoti** was released at Calcutta in a press-show on 10th March 1935 and regular show in Assam started from 20th March 1935 at Guwahati—that too in a theatre-hall—Bhaskar Natyamandir. With a few show-houses in the State at that time, the producer incurred heavy loss. He however made a low-budget social film **Indramalati** four years later and made marginal profit.

In 1941, tea-planter Rohini Barua of Dibrugarh produced the third Assamese film **Monomati**, based on a popular historical novel of Rajani Kanta Bardoloi on the Burmese inva-

sion of Assam. **Rupahi**, the fourth Assamese film with a rural backdrop, was made by tea garden owner and poet Parbati Prasad Barua, based on a short story of Kamaleswar Chaliha. The fifth Assamese film **Badan Barphukan** directed by Kamal Narayan Choudhury—a reputed actor-cum-musician—was also on a historical character of Assam. During the pre-Independence period, only these five Assamese films were produced; while it may be noted that within four years of production of talkie on Indian soil, viz **Alam Ara** in Hindi (1931, 14th March), Assamese talkie **Joymoti** was released (1935, 10th March). Though **Joymoti** made by a trained

tween stage-acting and film-acting”.

It is interesting to note that another son of Assam, P.C. Barua, who shifted his venue of filmmaking to Calcutta and made several outstanding Bengali and Hindi films including **Devdas**, also brought natural type of acting in almost all his films. Both Jyoti Prasad and Pramathesh Barua were born in Assam in the same year 1903 and died in 1951. Barua's **Devdas** released in 1935 ushered a new era in Indian cinema giving depth of emotion and brought films closer to life and literature. He introduced flashback technique in his first film of New Theatres, viz **Ruplekha** as well as successfully experimented use of artificial lighting with effective advantages. Jyoti Prasad also in his film **Joymoti** experimented on shooting mostly outside studio and successfully presented historical and cultural background of Assamese Society. Assam is proud of these daring filmmakers.

### After Independence

In the post-Independence days, Assam had its first own University, the High Court and Radio centre in 1948. In the film arena also, several popular productions were made. **Siraj**, a film on Hindu-Muslim unity based on a powerful story by Lakshindhar Sarma was directed by Bishnu Rava and Phani Sarma. Rava, a freedom-fighter and singer, while Sarma, a renowned stage-actor made this film outstanding. Other two successful pictures were **Parghat** with a social theme and rural background by Prabin Phukan and **Biplabi**, social film with patriotic flavour acted by reputed artist Chandra Phukan and directed by Asit Sen, who became a famous director of Hindi and Bengali films later.

In 1955 **Nimila Anka** based on poverty and hardship among the Assamese lower middle-class was made by Lakshyadhar Chowdhury by collecting small loans and donations

with music director Purushottam Das. **Pioli Phukan** on the other hand was a successful film on freedom struggle and won all-India recognition. Nip Barua who was State films Officer for a long time made seven Assamese Films mostly on middle-class life of Assam and he followed the form and content of the then Bengali social films. He secured state level awards twice as well as the first All India Certificate of Merit and President's Silver medal for Ronga Police.

In 1959, **Puberun** directed by veteran Bengali director Prabhat Mukherji brought Assamese films to international level; as that was an Indian entry in Berlin Film Festival and the heroine Jnanda Kakati's acting in the film propagating 'Universal Motherhood' was appreciated much in India and abroad.

*Jyoti Prasad introduced aesthetic style and ideals of patriotism with cultural background of the Assamese society in his very first venture.*

*In 1934-35, Jyoti Prasad made the first Assamese film **Joymoti**, based on a historical play. The film was shot mostly outside studio with natural background and the rest in an improvised studio-complex temporarily built in a tea-garden.*

director like Jyoti Prasad who studied music at Trinity College and learnt filmcraft in Germany for sometime was a laudable attempt with certain artistic achievements, still it could not reach the expected high standard for financial and other constraints faced by the pioneer. Moreover, due to technical failure of the sound system, Jyoti Prasad had to dub almost all dialogues alone at Lahore. On the other hand when Hindi films started with overacting and romantic melodrama, Jyoti Prasad dared to introduce aesthetic style and ideals of patriotism with cultural background of the Assamese society in his very first venture. He said: "I tried to make the film in the tradition of English and Russian films. It is a pity that even some of the leading directors of Bengali and Hindi films failed to observe the difference be-

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, a lyricist and famous singer, entered the film scene, leaving university lecturership and made his first and most successful musical film **Era Batar sur** in 1956. He engaged Bombay actor Balraj Sahni also in a role and introduced Lata Mangeshkar's voice in Assamese films. He made several films including **Sakuntala** and **Pratidhwani** winning President's Silver Medal. He was adjudged Best Indian Music Director of 1995 for music in Assamese film **Chameli Memsahab** of Abdul Mazid based on Nirode Chowdhury's story. He was also a recipient of the most coveted Dada Saheb Phalke Award in 1993, which naturally brought glory to Assamese cinema.

Mention may be made of a successful historical film **Maniran Dewan**

Both *Jyoti Prasad* and *Pramathesh Barua* were born in Assam in the same year 1903 and died in 1951. Barua's *Devdas* ushered a new era in Indian cinema giving depth of emotion and brought films closer to life and literature. He introduced flash-back technique in his first film *Ruplekha*.

directed by Sarbeswar Chakravarty in 1963, which won President's Silver Medal. As for artistic offbeat films, a powerful story with human appeal based on regional Satriya culture and boat-race depicting integration of refugees after country's partition—titled *Aparajeya* was released in 1970. Phani Talukdar, the story-writer along with three youthful associates Atul Bordoloi, Gouri Barman and Munin Bayan made the film, wherein Raakhee (then Biswas, now Gulzar) acted the leading female role while songs were rendered by Lata, Manna Dey, Sabita Chowdhury along with regional folk-artists like Dr. Biren Dutta, Khagen Mahanta, Rameswar Pathak, Prahlad Das, Apurba Das and Prabhat Sarma. Salil Chowdhury was the music director. It was the first honest attempt of making a good Assamese art-film, though it was a failure at box-office. So was the fate of another memorable attempt for offbeat film viz, Padum Barua's *Ganga Chilonir Pakhi* based on Lakshminandan Bora's novel of the same name and released in 1976. In this context, mention may also be made of some films appreciated by viewers like Samarendra Narayan Dev's *Aranya* (1970) on Assam's forest life; first Assamese colour film *Bhaiti* (1972) directed by Kamal Narayan Chowdhury; serio-comic film *Bibhrat* (1972) by Phani Talukdar; Monoranjan Sur's *Uttaran*. (1973); Pulak Gogoi's *Khoj* (1974); Deuty

Barua's *Brishti* (1974); Atul Bordoloi's *Kallol* (1978) on revolt against feudalism and the NFDC-financed jungle story *Manaskanya* (1985) based on Ganesh Das' story and directed by Phani Talukdar.

### Box Office Success

On the other hand, Dr. Bhaben Saikia with his very first film *Sandhyarag* was successful in box-office as well as he was appreciated by cine-critics for artistic presentation of Assamese society. Actually most of the earlier productions failed in box-office except a few like *Era Batar Sur*, *Siraj*, *Ronga Police*, *Pioli Phukan*, *Sakuntala* and *Puberun* which made some marginal profits. It was Brajen Barua—though basically a singer and music-director—who could be successful as box-office director with his first humorous film *Ito Sito Bahuto* and specially for *Dr. Bezbarua*, which introduced Hindi formula type of crime and melodrama in Assamese film scenario in 1970. He and his brother and one-time state government's Films Officer Nip Barua as well as another brother Dibon Barua could make several films with box-office success, viz. *Mukuta*, *Yog-Biyog-Toramal*, *Ajali Nobou*, *Kakadeuta Nati Aru Hati*, *Ajalakokai* etc. Films depicting Assam's village life with Bihu dances and folk-songs were generally popular. Amid this trend, Dr. Bhaben Saikia could bring freshness by his *Sandhyarag*, an artistic film with technical success and his other creations like *Anirban*.

While several new directors like Dara Ahmed, Dhiru Bhuyan, Goutam Bora, Sanjib Hazarika, Prafulla Saikia, Charu Kamal Hazarika are coming up with seriousness. It was left to Jahnu Barua a trained youth of Film Institute to glorify Assamese film industry by making a number of good films like *Aparooopa*, *Haladhiya Charaye Bao*

*Dhan Khay*, *Phiringati* and *Sagoroloi Bohu Dur*—each one bringing him up on the ladder of success.

### Commercial Aspect

During these six decades starting from *Jyoti* to *Jahnu*, Assamese films definitely made significant advance at the national and even international level.

But as for the commercial aspect, we have to depend on inclusion in panel of prize-winners so that Doordarshan could telecast and thereby give some financial relief. Otherwise the producers can hardly think of making feature films with a tight budget for a limited market. Actually, the number of cine-goers is also dwindling even for cheap Hindi films of sex and violence in the North East region for various reasons. Moreover expansion of TV channels no doubt keeps the middle-class Assamese viewers tied to small screen. On the other hand, the protection given by the state government in this regard is not secured and to some extent not practical.

However, considering a memorable past and a glorious present, Assamese films should get sympathetic encouragement both from the government and the cine-goers. For exhibitions of such films, special care has to be taken by the distributors and hall-owners. Producers should be helped by making easy loans available from the NFDC and State Film Finance Corporation. After all cinema in India will remain for long as most important

*Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, a lyricist and famous singer, entered the film scene, leaving university lecturership and made his first and most successful musical film, Era Batar Sur in 1956. He was also recipient of in 1993.*

mass medium, as we find TV and Radio are dependent on film songs even now. On the other hand, due to distorted urbanisation, vulgarity and violence are intruding upon Indian cinema, with viewers consisting of illiterate, half-literate and a new-rich class of low taste. Regional films with themes of our cultural heritage and age-long ideals depicted properly with technical perfection will no doubt attract new generations also by its inherent freshness. Imitation of Hindi or South Indian formula-films can hardly

be successful in regional language due to very heavy investment they need. Low-budget films by some enthusiastic young directors also fail to attract cinegoers. So only a compromise formula with consideration of Assam's Socio-economic situations can save the future filmmakers by way of possible recovery of money invested and with some marginal profit at least. The state government should help by offering the usual subsidy (first year's Amusement Tax) immediately after one year's exhibition so that the pro-

ducer is encouraged to make another film. Distributors should offer liberal terms and regional films should get preference in screening. Such special measures as well as Doordarshan's liberal policy of screening regional films with sub-titles in national hook-up may help Assamese film industry which has a memorable past, a glorious present, to make its future brighter. □

*The author is a noted playwright and filmmaker.*

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THE Gujaratis were involved financially in the production of films in Hindi right from the beginning. They produced the first Gujarati silent film "Shri Krishna Sudama" after Phalke's "Raja Harishchandra". Jayshankar Dwivedi brought out India's first film weekly in Gujarati "Mauj Majah" in 1924. They also produced first full-length Gujarati "talkie" called "Gunsundari" in 1934 just three years after "Alam Ara". However, in 1931 itself, Maneklal Patel had tried two short "talkie" films—"Mumbai in Shethani" and "Chav Chavno Murabbo"—in three languages: Hindi, Gujarati, and Marathi. Innumerable entrepreneurs from Gujarat have since contributed to the development of Indian cinema technically also in, "special effects", providing costumes etc. apart from actors and directors.

During the silent era, it must be noted, that five out of seven film companies were managed and financed by Gujaratis. Between 1919 and 1932, there were about 20 Gujarati film companies controlling film production in Bombay. They, however, wanted to reach out to wider audiences, and hence invested their finances and talents in the production of Hindi films. The attitude continues even today.

The first full-length talkie film in Gujarati was "Narsimh Mehta" (1932) directed by Manubhai Vakil. "Gunsundari" and "Sansar Lila" followed successfully in next two years. In 1948, the remake of "Gunsundari" ran for 25 weeks in Bombay. That year 26 films in Gujarati were produced, when there was neither tax-holiday nor encouraging government awards. Most of them were "socials".

The first Indian film to be prohibited by the colonial British government was "Bhakta Vidur" (1921), a Gujarati film produced by Kanjibhai Rathod. It was a hard-hitting commentary on the contemporary political

# Gujarati Cinema: Yesterday And Today

Hasmukh Baradi

*Though the Gujaratis were associated with the filmmaking in the country from the very beginning, barring a few, Gujarati films generally failed to make any lasting impression. Pre-occupied mainly with history, epics and legends, Gujarati filmmakers found themselves tied down to stereotyped dramaturgy and narrative far removed from the realities of life.*

scene; actor D. Sampat appeared in it as Vidur in the Gandhi cap! His film company produced about a dozen documentaries on Tilak, Gandhi, the procession of Ali Brothers, the Congress Party meetings etc.

The introduction of sound in the films created language, and then geographical boundaries, calling them 'regional films', expecting also the typical flavour of its culture—like French, Polish, Czech—which are smaller in population and area than some of our own regions. Many French or Swedish films are classics with universal themes, a treasure of human aesthetics; but even today we can hardly boast of such films except for a few in Indian regional cinema.

## Notable Films

The Gujarati cinema has produced some notable films: "Gunsundari" ("Sardar" Chandulal Shah, actress

Nirupa Roy, Music—Avinash Vyas); "Mangal Fera" (1949) and "Gada no Bel" (1959), Ratibhai Punatar; "Mahendi Rang Lagyo" (1960, Manhar Raskapur); "Zer Pidhan..." (Upendre Trivedi) etc. The objective of this essay is not to make a list of all films produced in last nine decades; but a few of them based on well-known works of literature must be remembered: "Malela Jiv" (Pannalal Patel), 'Janam Tip' (Petalikar); "Gunsundarino Ghar Sansar" (Goverdhanram); "Liludi Dharati" (Madia); "Kanku", "Kashino Dikaro" (Vinodini Nilkanth); "Jigar—Ami" (Chunilal V. Shah) etc.

Neither the early exposure to the medium, nor the 25-year old tax-concession scheme (since 1971) of the Gujarat Government has helped to make any mark whatsoever, except for a very few early films like "Gunsundari" and the recent ones like

"Kashino Dikaro", "Bhavni Bhavai" and "Hunshilal". The pre-occupation of the Gujarati film producers with history, epics and legends tie them down to such dramaturgy 'film narrative' which are not consistent with the "reality" in Gujarat. May be they keep in view the rural and semi-urban illiterate audiences of small towns, where life now has changed. The recent divorce of literature and Gujarati films, an all-India phenomenon, is also noticed by the urban cinemagoer who does not find his life reflected on the silver screen as in some of the other Indian languages.

What is the recent "Gujarati formula" for a film? The "turbaned folk hero", stereotyped characterization, role based portrayal, comic parallel, stage compositions, emphasis on overdramatic dialogue delivery, amateurish visual treatment, songs and Rasgarbas.

The village scene, this is still romantic, the "outlaws" there still ride the horses, the women wait for their singing and dancing hero-lovers, and praying to the Goddesses for their welfare. It is a poor copy of Hindi commercial cinema, poorer script from the Meghani stories, poorest effort aesthetically.

### **Stereotyped Trend**

A study was conducted of the thirty three Gujarati films (telecast on the regional network of Ahmedabad DD) produced between 1970 and 1987, many of whom were granted tax-holiday. Out of 33 films, 22 were "socials", 11 were based on epics, history and legends whose stories were generally known to the audiences and non-stop turns and twists of the plots imaginable. Certified by the Central Board of Film Certification—Censor Board and approved by the preview committee of the DDK, the film "Shravni Satam" narrated the story of a patient getting help from the goddess of small-

pox (Shitala Mata); the film "Mahasati Ansuva" had the magical sensational scenes created by the 'sati'; the film "Son Kansari" showed the woman climbing the burning pyre of her dead husband, etc.

The 33 films, the study states, had about 102 women characters, out of which only 12 did some sort of "economic activity" (like child care, household work etc.), while the rest of 87 women did not contribute anything to the family budget. Only 20 per cent of them were educated. A total of 85 per cent of them were negatively portrayed characters who are either laughed at or are sexually exploited. The villainous

*During the silent era, five out of seven film companies were managed and financed by Gujaratis. Between 1919 and 1932, there were about 20 Gujarati film companies controlling film production in Bombay.*

characters, portrayed by women, are also routine and role-based.

The "positive" ones? There are ideal mothers, women who worship their husbands, sacrificing harlots, worship of gods and goddesses, crying in the lonely corners of homes which belong to their all-powerful male providers!

The above observations are reproduced here without any comments.

The Kheda (PIJ) TV unit of ISRO devoted to development communication did reflect rural reality and semi-urban life on the small screen in villages of the Kheda district, evolving many socially relevant dramatic and journalistic formats for 17 years (1975-1989), an hour daily. It also produced a few telefilms "Sundhel" (Baradi), "Ansu Bhino Ujas". (A. Vyas), "Vachalun Faliyun" (B. Dave) etc.,

but its producers-directors hardly tried working on celluloid except Ketan Mehta, A. Khopkar and Jahnu Barua.

### **A Landmark**

After "Kanku" and "Kashino Dikaro", the refreshingly welcome change was witnessed in 1981 with "Bhavni Bhavai." As a part of the "parallel cinema" wave seen all over the country, Ketan Mehta set out to apply what he had learnt at the Film Institute and Kheda Communication Laboratory, as it was fondly called by TV enthusiasts in those days, when DD transmitters were still terrestrial.

The film "Bhavni Bhavai" by Ketan Mehta is a landmark of the last decade; whatever it explored in terms of visual language flowered in his two other films "Holi" and "Mirch Masala", both in Hindi. Nasiruddin, Gokhale, Om Puri and Smita excelled in acting as also camerawork by Krishnakant "Pummy". But it is a director's film, folk story finding its idioms on the screen, Brechtian theories applied in the editing and two 'ends' of the film goading the audience to think of the plight of untouchables.

The following storyline will illustrate how it was done: In a society afflicted by gross humiliating discrimination on the basis of caste, people belonging to lower castes have now and then to face death and destruction at the hands of the upper castes. After eruption of caste hatred, a group of 'untouchables' find themselves homeless, their huts having been burnt down. On their way to a new refuge they rest for the night, and one of them tries to soothe the crying children by singing a song. The song tells a story about an earlier time, much worse and more cruel than the present, when all 'untouchables' were forced to wear a ludicrous attire which proclaimed from a distance their identity and thus warned the others to ensure that they were not defiled by an untouchable's

touch. The place was ruled by a king who was both a buffoon and a tyrant. Falling prey to palace intrigues and his own superstitions, the king ends up ordering his own new-born child to be killed. A stroke of ironical fate saves the child who eventually grows into a handsome untouchable youth. The king and repressed subject, father and son, had another confrontation. Jivo, the prince-turned-untouchable, agrees to sacrifice his life in return for restoration of some dignity to the untouchables. In a way, he wins. But the battle continues even today, off-screen in many Gujarat villages.

"Hun Hunshi Hunshilal" (1991) is a satirical fable of symbolic characters and locations. It is a story of the rulers and the ruled providing opportunity to comment on the manner of governance and administration in visual narrative of neo-realism. The 'reality' here is transformed into dreams, fantasies and utopia. The first Gujarati film about which one can write that it has elements of German expressionism and cinema variete.

In the fictitious country of 'Khojpur', the kings one after another ascending the throne, are harassed by the mosquito-menace even in dreams. These are some of the elements which are innovative not only in Gujarati but also in the Indian cinema. The visual language evolved to express the dream like atmosphere is simply enchanting; the sound-track leaves an echo of unheard sounds, both natural and manipulated. Sanjiv Shah is a new hope, to be watched and encouraged.

Of course, "Kashino Dikaro", "Kanku", "Zerto Pidhan", "Bhavani Bhavai" etc. are some of the films based on known works of Gujarati literature; however the latest "Manavni Bhavai" proved an utter disillusionment, when such a humane narrative of drought and famine by Pannalal Patel ended with propagandist mate-

rial on Narmada Dam!

It is sad to note that except for "Hun Hunshi Hunshilal" (1991), the Gujarati films of this decade are unaffected by the techno-cultural revolution of the medium, and the change in the socio-economic life in Gujarat.

The production of Gujarati films, thus, is a business of a few people who have not much to do with visual aesthetics. We have Gujarati Film Development Corporation, three or four film studios, technicians, tax-concession facility; but sadly no cultural policy. It requires a director to produce a film, who can interpret life in pictorial language. The knowledge of the "public taste" claimed by the run-of-the-mill film producers is also not based on any survey or study, and their hunches are preconceived and misguided. Small wonder that hardly a Gujarati film gets any recognition at the national level.

It is a factory, that too a small one, dealing with stereotyped storyline, as if happenings are on a small island, totally insulated from the vibrant and inspired film production scene in many parts of the country. It is a unidimensional, dimly-lighted, unartistic, single-tracked, dully-narrated, depressing affair.

Today who is not aware of poverty, or the inferior, unequal position of women in society and the violence done by the powerful? Films and creative persons may not be interested in social message but if they violate the rights given to people by propagating their own right to expression, they stand to be questioned. Depiction of women as sex objects nothing but degrades them. Stereotyped roles of "Pativrata", "mother goddess", "project a misleading picture which further suppresses woman's potential to be a normal, productive and equally useful individual in the family and society.

The policy of tax-concession to a film produced and exhibited in the state is a help in running the film longer (if the lower rates of tickets is accepted as an incentive to the viewer), but it is the help after the film has been produced. Actually the production of good films needs encouragement. Equally important is nurturing of talent. Also, helping the director is vital, it is a director's medium. The GFDC can take a cue from the NFDC.

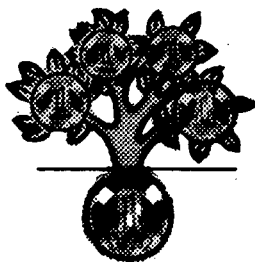
The short films in Gujarati are produced only to propagate the so-called development schemes. A review of this policy and diversion of resources to good short films is urgently required. Until the state government launches its own film training centre, it can finance the study of a couple of talented young persons at the FTII, Pune. Holding of film festivals in various parts of state and film appreciation workshops would also prove useful. Similarly, GFDC film magazine to help increase "visual literacy" is also needed. A totally autonomous GFDC, with enough corpus fund, and induction of visionary people on its Board of Directors may go a long way. Today it is a case of "losing opportunity". Soon it will be facing a 24-hour-multi-channel-satellite TV onslaught, as also competition from the commercial Hindi films.

But I see here also an opportunity. The regional language films may have smaller audiences, but it will be so only initially. Satyajit Ray produced only in Bengali, depicting Bengali life and culture, which put Indian cinema on the world map. He and others-like Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak or Shyam Benegal—provided an insight on the Indian life. Let the camera help us to visually explore the life in Gujarat. □

*The author is a playwright and a media expert.*

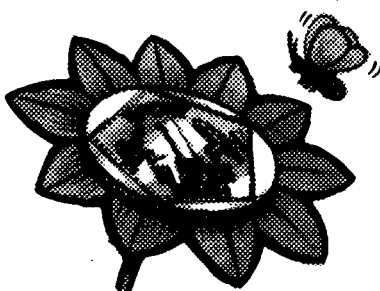
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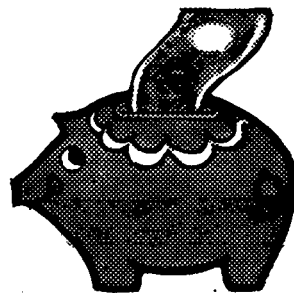
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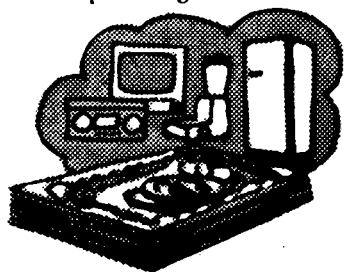
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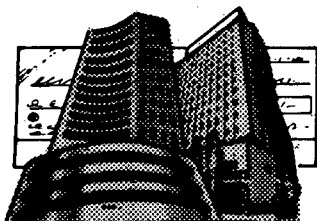
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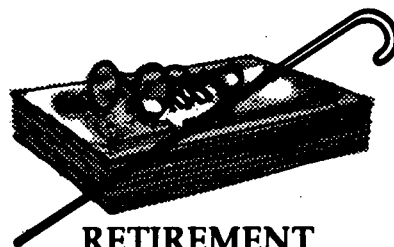
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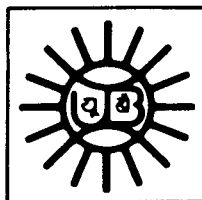
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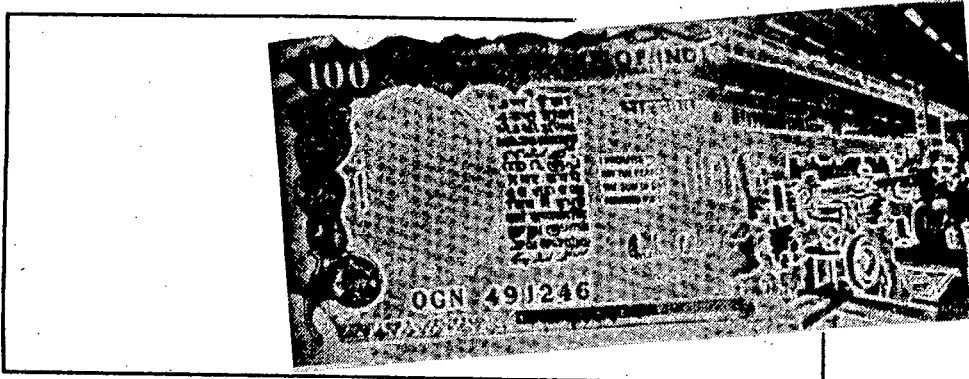
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# Kannada Cinema: Yesterday And Today

V.N. Subba Rao

*Kannada cinema received a welcome boost from the offbeat film movement. Most of the films of this genre were based on important literary works by socially conscious writers, some of whom even turned into filmmakers. Kannada offbeat cinema, however, could not sustain itself for long.*

CINEMA came to Karnataka much later than it came to India. If Dadasaheb Phalke made the first silent film of the country in 1913, it was not until 1926 that the Kannada land woke up to the new medium.

It is also worth noting that the pioneers of the silent films in Karnataka were not Kannadigas at all. Both the first silent film made in this state and the first talkie film in Kannada were produced by non-Kannadigas.

It was only in 1928 that an inveterate Kannadiga, Gubbi Veeranna, made bold to enter the film world—the first son of the soil to do so—with his first silent movie, “Harimaya”. But outsiders continued to rule the field for a long time, with most of the local people who came into it showing themselves to be more amateur enthusiasts than serious entrepreneurs.

This background is very necessary before one takes a close look at the

growth of Kannada cinema, because in some of these facts lie many of its endemic ills. A spirit of adventure and enterprise has always eluded the average Kannadiga, and the exceptions have been few and far between. It is also true at the same time that but for the spirit of daring shown by a handful of Kannadigas, who had to work against great odds, Kannada cinema would not have struck firm roots both as an art and industry today.

The situation changed somewhat towards the mid-eighties and today's Kannadiga is happily more alive to his own identity and individuality, but there is no doubt whatever that the course of Kannada cinema would have been entirely different if only a strong pride in his own cultural roots had been ingrained in the psyche of the Kannadiga from the beginning.

## Role Of Offbeat Cinema

The task of boosting Kannada cin-

ema came to the lot of offbeat cinema after Pattabhirama Reddy's “Samskara” broke new ground in 1970. Most of the films of this genre were based on significant literary works by socially conscious writers, some of whom even turned filmmakers themselves. But, unfortunately, Kannada offbeat cinema could not sustain itself long, not only because of the extremely limited exposure it got, but also because of some of its own structural and technical drawbacks.

Many of the offbeat films had an obsession for form, but lacked the expertise to blend form harmoniously with content. They ended up with serious communication problems. Even the few intrepid filmmakers who could keep their heads above water preferred to migrate to greener pastures, and this stymied the movement further. It is virtually moribund now, with hardly one or two determined filmmakers sticking their necks out once in a while. Yet another reason why the much hailed offbeat cinema movement in Kannada has become effete is because it failed to get a proper critical back-up.

Critics and cinema writers outside Karnataka and the country, however, got exposed only to the better Kannada films in this genre—films which got a slot in either the Indian Panorama section of Indian international film festivals or other global festivals or won national and international awards. They thought the cream of such films they saw was true of the entire movement. It is no surprise that the very complimentary and warm references made by some respected foreign critics to these films tempted many aspirants back home in Karnataka to plunge into the field, sans either the wherewithal or the competence to sustain the gamble. The net result was that the movement all but collapsed under its own weight.

It is against this background that

*Many of the offbeat films had an obsession for form, but lacked the expertise to blend form harmoniously with content. They ended up with serious communication problems.*

one takes a quick look at the various phases through which Kannada cinema has passed in its 62 years of existence. It is interesting to note that the conflict between good films and piffle existed even in the formative days of cinema, including the silent era. As many doyens would testify, most of the silent films were either stunt films or devotionals and fantasies, whose crudeness was self-evident.

### **A Unique Assemblage**

It was only when a person with an aesthetic bent of mind like Mohan Bhavnani came into the field, at the instance of the celebrated playwright and writer, T.P. Kailasam, to film Shudraka's classic play, "Mricchakatika", that some outstanding intellectuals of the day were also inspired to join the distinguished duo.

One of them was the eminent art critic, Venkatachalam, who was an expert on the art of Ajanta caves. A set was erected by him in the sprawling compound of a stately bungalow on Richmond Road in Bangalore as an exact replica of the Ajanta caves. Venkatachalam also designed the authentic costumes for this period film, which stood out for its meticulousness. Well-known personalities like Prof. V. Sitaramiah, a literary giant and B. Venkoba Rao were consultants to the project. Jetty Thayamma, the most eminent Bharatanatyam dancer of the day, directed the dances. A German technician handled the camera and an oriental scholar and an Irish poet wrote the commentary for the film, whose cast comprised such

celebrities as Kailasam himself, Enakshi Rama Rao, daughter of Benegal Rama Rao, J.H. Nanda, Dr. N.S. Narayana Sastry, a Professor of Psychology, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Nalini Tarkhad, B.S. Rama Rao, A. Sitaram (who later became the famous writer, Ananda), Dr. D.K. Bharadwaj, B. Krishna and many others—easily the pick of the intellectual world of that era.

The film was both a financial and artistic success, but the same galaxy could never get together again to make another film, thanks to the fact that Mohan Bhavnani went back to Bombay to join the Films Division, where he soared to the topmost position years later. Kannada cinema has not known another unique assemblage like the "Vasantasena" team in the silent era. It was the redoubtable Gubbi Veeranna who was the pioneer of silent film in Karnataka. He switched over to talkies after making three silent movies.

### **First Karnataka Studio**

The first studio to be established in Karnataka was the Surya Film Studio on Cunningham Road in Bangalore. The saga of inter-action between Kannadigas and the outsiders, which has been the most distinguishing feature of Kannada cinema, started right in the silent days. Two Bombay-based producers, Haribhai R. Desai and Bogila C. Dave, who came to the princely state of Mysore in search of picturesque locations for their films, fell in love with Bangalore and instantly decided to set up a film production company and also a studio and laboratory here. Hand-operated cameras, topless hutments passing off as studio floors, and direct sunlight were the order of the day. Trick photography was a speciality of the company and stunts, the staple food of the films, they made. The artistes were expected to be acrobats as well.

Roundabout 50 silent films—40 of them by the Surya Film Company alone and two by the literary colossus of Karnataka, Shivaram Karanth—were made in the erstwhile state of Mysore before the moving pictures began to talk.

### **Kannada Talkies**

The first Kannada talkie, "Sati Sulochana", was released in 1934, three years after the first Hindi talkie "Alam Ara" saw the light of the day. It is a mystery why Surya Film Company and other outfits which existed in Bangalore during the silent era folded up quietly without adapting themselves to the change. It is also significant that while the first Kannada talkie to go on the floors, "Bhakta Dhruva" was made by Kannadigas, the first Kannada talkie to be released, "Sati Sulochana" was made by Chamanlal Dongaji, a Marwari. It was directed by a Telugu, Y.V. Rao. Both the films were shot outside Karnataka, one in Kolhapur and another in Bombay since there were no facilities to shoot talkies in Bangalore. Though both the films fared well at the box-office, there was no sign of more Kannada films being made, even as films in Telugu, Tamil and Hindi started flooding the local market. Bangalore, however, established itself as the hub of film distribution activity in the whole of south India.

The third Kannada talkie took another three years to materialise. But the credit for making the first social

*It is interesting to note that the conflict between good films and piffle existed even in the formative days of cinema, including the silent era. Most of the silent films were either stunt films or devotionals and fantasies, whose crudeness was self-evident.*

film ever in Kannada, "Samsara Nowka", went to Kannada. This was the film which brought into the field many artistes and filmmakers who were destined to shape up as the leaders of tomorrow, including H.L.N. Simha, B.R. Panthulu and M.V. Rajamma. It was Rajagopala Chettiar, a Coimbatore-based Kannadiga, who made this film in Salem. The film took not only the Kannada market, but also Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh by storm. Director H.L.N. Simha became a celebrity overnight.

### Notable Features

The first talkie studio in the state, however, was purely a local effort. It was built by V.R. Thimmiah, a

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transport operator, in 1936, but proved to be a shortlived venture since the studio owner's attempt to make a second film after his first venture, "Rajasuya Yaga", turned into a disaster. The studio, however, was not born in vain. It contributed to Kannada cinema a gifted technician, T. Dwarakanath, and accomplished music director, Padmanabha Sastry.

Only one film, "Purandaradasa", a flop, was made in 1937, and Kannada cinema went to sleep again till 1941, when the enterprising Gubbi Veeranna once again stepped in to break the ice with a big-scale production, "Subhadra," with P. Pulliah, already a big name in Telugu, as the director. While this Poona-made film bombed

at the box-office, another film made during the year, "Vasanthasena," with the famous trio of R. Nagendra Rao, M.V. Subbiah Naidu and Lakshmi Bai in the main roles, turned out to be a significant contribution and also went on to win commercial laurels. With this film also came the Kannada screen's first music disc.

"Jeevana Nataka", a social film made in 1942, was another landmark since it had a big cast led by Kemparaj Urs, Shanta Hublikar, Gubbi Veeranna and B. Jayamma. The literary celebrity, A.N. Krishna Rao, was its dialogue writer, but it was once again a non-Kannadiga, Wahab Kashmiri, who directed the film.

It was in 1943 that the first woman producer in Kannada came on the scene. It was M.V. Rajamma, already an established actress, who produced "Radha Ramana".

The most significant feature of this period was that several theatre personalities came to cinema, enriching both the fields. Also interesting was the fact that many Kannada film artistes of those days acted in Tamil and Telugu films as well on a regular basis and that Kannada films continued to be made in places like Poona, Kolhapur, Coimbatore, Salem and Madras.

The forties were marked by two major developments—the establishment of Navajyothi Studios in Mysore in 1944 and that of Mahatma Pictures in 1947, also in Mysore. Navajyothi came up in a coconut grove in a quiet residential colony, Saraswathipuram, which breathed an academic air since many professors and lecturers of the Mysore University lived there. The emergence of a film studio in their midst was not to their liking, but they could do nothing beyond grunting. This was purely a Kannadiga effort, with G.R. Ramiah, a prosperous transport contractor, as the head of the

company which had nine partners, and hence the name Navajyothi. The studio began shakily, gained momentum before it started wilting again, and finally folded up in 1963.

"Krishnaleela", the first film to be shot at the studio, took three years for completion and D. Shankar Singh and B. Vittal Acharya, partners of Mahatma Pictures, were roped in as producers well after the film had gone on the floor. But thanks to this film, Navajyothi became a full-fledged studio. The irony of it, however, was that while it attracted the attention of many artistes and producers from Madras, many Mysore-based producers continued to make their films in Coimbatore. The apathy of the local producers was the main reason for Navajyothi to close shop. Its position became untenable when even Kannada artistes and technicians started migrating to Madras, where many top entrepreneurs had by then set up not only huge studios but also other infrastructural facilities.

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*The fifties showed just the initial stirrings of social consciousness in Kannada cinema. The fifties were also noted for the advent of the star system with the three evergreen Kumars—Raj Kumar, Kalyan Kumar and Udaya Kumar—dominating the next decade.*

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### The Remarkable Fifties

One goes into the fifties on that sombre note, though the silver lining was that the intrepid Mahatma Pictures decided to stick to Mysore itself, though Vittalacharya, one of the partners, joined the other migrants to Madras. Shankar Singh, however, swore by Mysore itself and made all his films there till his death, regardless of

whether he made money on them or not. Most of the time, he didn't.

Production of Kannada films went up steadily, more in Madras than in Mysore, and during the fifties another 70 films were added to the kitty. But the decade became remarkable for many reasons, like the advent of Raj Kumar into the field through his landmark film "Bedara Kannappa" in 1954, setting up of the second studio in Mysore—Premier, starting of their own production concerns by frontliners like R. Nagendra Rao, B.R. Panthulu, Kemparaj Urs and B.S. Ranga, entry of eminent directors like K.R. Seetharama Sastry, Y.R. Swamy, T.V. Singh Thakore and others into the field, and so on. That was also the decade when some of the most discussed films in the language like "Jaganmohini", "Jathakaphala", "Gunasagari", "Bedara Kannappa", "Raja Vikrama", "Jaladurga", "Adarsha Sathi", "Modala Thedi", "Mahakavi Kalidasa", "Sadarama", "Ratnagiri Rahasya", "Schoolmaster", "Anna Thangi" and "Jagajyothi Basaveshwara" were made.

It could be seen from this list that most of these films were either mythologicals, historicals or devotionals, with just a sprinkling of socials. But the period was also noteworthy for the extraordinary spirit of enterprise shown by born showmen like Panthulu and Kemparaj Urs, who never believed in cutting their coats according to their pockets. While both the films made by Urs were spectacles, Panthulu's "Ratnagiri Rahasya" was also one, but

*The growing tendency of dubbing films of other languages into Kannada had played havoc with the job opportunities for Kannada artistes and technicians. Many of them found themselves jobless.*

his "Modala Thedi" and "Schoolmaster" (a classic) were intensely moving human documents. Nagendra Rao's "Jathakaphala" was an effective take-off on astrology and "Premada Puthri" was a lovable sentimental movie based on human relationships. K.R. Seetharama Sastry's "Mahakavi Kalidasa" was an intelligent recreation of a famous legend, while his "Anna Thangi" honed his talents further, this time in a social milieu. It remains one of the most delightful rural-based Kannada films even to this day.

The fifties showed just the initial stirrings of social consciousness in Kannada cinema, though this consciousness did not get consolidated even in the succeeding decade, which started off a new trend of literature-based films. The fifties were also noted for the advent of the star system, with the three evergreen Kumars—Raj Kumar, Kalyan Kumar and Udaya Kumar—dominating the next decade. This was also the decade which saw top heroines like B. Saroja Devi, Harini, Leelavathi, Mynavathi and Sandhya (Jayalalitha's mother) enter Kannada cinema. All of them turned out to be big hits even in the sixties and beyond.

It was in 1956 that the integrated state of Karnataka was formed. With this, the aspirations of Kannadigas in various fields also soared and the Kannada film industry did not lag behind in asking for its share of the cake. This desire was first articulated by M.N. Basavarajiah, the man who dared to establish the Premier Studio, who was the first person in the industry to present a memorandum to the state government urging it to introduce a subsidy scheme for Kannada films made within the state, so that the industry could shift entirely to its home soil.

### **No Dubbed Films**

The sixties turned out to be mo-

*The year 1961 was significant since it was in that year that "Karuneye Kutumbada Kannu", the first ever Kannada film based on a novel, was made. But it was not until "Sandhyaraga" was made in 1966 that the trend really caught on.*

mentous for more than one reason. The beginnings of the pro-Kannada movement in the late fifties crystallised into a mighty stir in the sixties.

There was also a sharp increase in the number of films dubbed from other languages flooding the Kannada market; this was seen as a positive danger to indigenous Kannada cinema, which could not, obviously, match the resources and richness of dubbed films, most of which were lavishly mounted mythologicals and action films. Highly respected men of letters like A.N. Krishna Rao and M. Ramamurthy took over the leadership of the movement, which soon took wings all over the state. The first target was dubbed Kannada films, which were soon shown the door. No dubbed film is allowed to be shown in Kannada even to this day.

The growing tendency of dubbing films of other languages into Kannada had played havoc with the job opportunities for Kannada artistes and technicians. Many of them found themselves jobless. They were thus forced to form an association of their own and start staging plays throughout Karnataka, exploiting their screen image to rake in the crowds. The experiment succeeded to such an extent that the association thought it fit to produce a film of its own on a cooperative basis. It tried its hands at a historical film "Ranadheera Kanteerava" with the hope of making a lot of money, but

the gamble did not pay off, and further ventures were hastily abandoned. They also did not feel the need to keep the association going any more since production activity picked up quite a bit after the banning of dubbed films was complete. As many as 200 films came to be made in this decade.

### **Subsidy Scheme**

It was also in this decade that the state government introduced not only the subsidy scheme for all Kannada films shot within the state, but also a scheme for presenting annual awards for outstanding achievements in various branches of film making. These two schemes brought about quite a dramatic change in the environment for making films within the state.

The subsidy scheme, however, did not commend itself universally to all sections of the industry. There were still some producers, particularly those who had settled down in Madras, who could not resist the lure of Madras and did not consider the facilities in Bangalore and Mysore good enough for them. To them, the subsidy of Rs. 50,000 for a black and white film and Rs. one lakh for a colour film was not all that attractive. There was a clear cleavage of views on this.

It was not as if the facilities in Karnataka were all that bad. The Premier Studios in Mysore was in top gear, complete with a black and white laboratory, while in Bangalore efforts were on to build new studios in response to the introduction of the subsidy scheme. But what was not understood was that the development of a whole industry within the state could neither be instantaneous nor spectacular.

It was in the sixties that colour came to Kannada cinema, with B.S. Ranga's mammoth historical, "Amarashilpi Jakanacharya," being released in 1964. But it was not for

*The seventies brought into the industry outstanding artistes like Vishnuvardhan, Anant Nag, Lokesh and the late Shankar Nag, apart from Aarati. The decade has an extraordinary significance for the Kannada screen since it gave birth to the offbeat film movement, which has remained Kannada cinema's pride even to this day.*

another six years that the second colour film was made in the language. In the meantime, the enterprising director duo, Dorai-Bhagwan, had introduced the James Bond genre of films to the Kannada screen with "Jedara Bale", to be followed up by "Operation Jackpot", this time in colour. Earlier to that, a couple of hand-coloured movies had also hit the market, but without making any waves.

It was in the sixties that a whole generation of committed and creative filmmakers like Puttanna Kanagal, N. Lakshminarayan, Dorai-Bhagwan, M.R. Vittal, K.S.L. Swami (Ravee) and A.C. Narasimha Murthy, burst into the Kannada screen, with their maiden films generating extraordinary interest. Puttanna's "Belli Moda", Lakshminarayan's "Naandi", Vittal's "Nandadeepa", Dorai-Bhagwan's, "Jedara Bale", Ravee's, "Thoogudeepa", and Narasimhamurthy's "Sandhyaraga", all socials, were lily-fresh in their approach to filmmaking and went a long way in consolidating the social content of Kannada cinema.

The year 1961 was significant since it was in that year that "Karuney Kutumbada Kannu", the first ever Kannada film based on a novel, was made. But it was not until "Sandhyaraga" was made in 1966 that

the trend really caught on. It got firmed up after Puttanna came out with his sensational film, "Belli Moda", based on a widely read Triveni novel, and made a great success of it. A spate of literature-based films then followed—"Chandavalliya Thota", "Miss Leelavathi", "Chakratheertha", "Sarvamangala", "Hannele Chiguridaga", "Uyyale" and "Eradu Mukha", to name the more outstanding ones. They carved out a niche for themselves in the hearts of "family audience", thanks to their proximity to real life. But there were also other significant films made during the decade—"Bhakta Kanakadasa", "Kittur Rani Channamma", "Vijayanagarada Veeraputhra", "Santha Tukaram" among historicals and devotionals, and "Beretha Jeeva", "Bettada Huli", "Subba Sastry," "Thoogudeepa," "Nakkare Ade Swarga", "Bangarada Hoovu", "Premakku Parmitte", "Mannina Maga", "Namma Makkalu" and "Mayor Mutthanna", among socials, some of whom were trend-setters in their own right. This was another decade in which the first celluloid anthology on the life and films of Raj Kumar, was made. The film, "Natarvabhawma", derived its title from the title which the megastar's fans had conferred on him when his 100th film was completed.

### **The Seventies**

The seventies were also significant for a variety of reasons. The number of productions shot up by 346 and three more studios came up in Bangalore—Chamundeswari, which was carved out of the Pakshiraja Studios of yore in Coimbatore, Kanteerava, which was built in the joint sector by a group of film entrepreneurs and Abhiman, a unique studio built by thespian T.N. Balakrishna from small contributions—even as little as one rupee per person—collected from his fans. But today, Chamundeswari has closed down its shooting stages, following

two ghastly fire accidents, and retains only its state-of-the-art computerised recording, dubbing and editing facilities, Kanteerava has been taken over by the State Government as a major share holder and Abhiman, the languishing studio founded by Balakrishna who died recently of cancer, is likely to be supported and strengthened by the State Government as a tribute to the departed artist whose only ambition was to make Abhiman the pride of Kannada cinema.

The seventies brought into the industry outstanding artistes like Vishnuvardhan, Anant Nag, Lokesh and the late Shankar Nag, apart from Aarati. They have essayed a wide variety of roles and repeatedly shown that they would have risen to dizzy heights if only the Kannada screen had projected better directors. But the decade has an extraordinary significance for the Kannada screen since it gave birth to the offbeat film movement, which has remained Kannada cinema's pride even to this day, despite many of its cobwebs. The year 1970 brought in "Samskara", which was truly epoch-making. It was followed by landmark films like "Vanshavruksha", "Sankalpa" (which introduced Anant Nag), "Kaadu", "Kankana", "Chomana Dudi", "Hamsageethe", "Mukti", "Pallavi", "Kakanakote", "Rishya Shruna", "Thabbaliyu Neenade Magane", "Ghatashraddha", "Chitegoo Chinte", "Abachoorina Post Office", "Kadu Kudure", "Spandana", "Arivu", "Savithri" and "Ondu Oorina Kathe", most of which stirred the art film scene in the entire country, won several awards, made national and international rounds and placed Kannada cinema on a high pedestal. Brilliant filmmakers like Girish Karnad, B.V. Karanth, Pattabhirama Reddy, G.V. Iyer, Girish Kasaravalli, N. Lakshminarayan, M.S. Sathyu, Chandrasekhar Kambar, T.S. Ranga, V.R.K. Prasad, Baragur

Ramachandrappa and P. Lankesh surfaced in this decade.

At the same time, some very interesting commercial films also came to be made, like Puttanna's "Gejje Pooje", "Sharapanjara", "Nagara Haavu", "Edakallu Guddada Mele", "Upasane", "Bilee Hendthi" and "Katha Sangama", Siddalingiah's "Bangarada Manushya" and "Bhootaiyana Maga Ayyu", Dorai-Bhagwan's "Bayalu Dari", "Kasturi Nivasa" and "Chandanada Gombe", B.R. Panthulu's "Krishnadevaraya", R.N. Krishnaprasad's "Naguva Hoovu", Y.R. Swamy's "Sepoy Ramu", Vijay's "Gandhada Gudi", "Mayura" and "Sanadi Appanna", Hunsur Krishnamurthy's "Bhakta Kumbara" and "Babruvahana", M.R. Vittal's "Professor Hucchuraya", Ravee's "Bhagya Jyothi", Kashinath's "Aparoopada Athithigalu" and "Aparichita", S.V. Rajendra Singh Babu's "Nagarahole", Balu Mahendra's "Kokila", Geethapriya's "Hombisilu", V. Somasekhar's "Shankar Guru", Maruthi Shivaram's "Parasangada Gende Thimma", Vadhiraaj's "Dangeyedda Makkalu", Vijay's "Huliya Halina Mevu" and Geethapriya's "Putani Agent 1-2-3" registered themselves as the more important films of the decade. They were free from all box-office frills and gimmicks and went a long way in developing in the Kannada filmgoers a rich taste for decent cinema.

It was also during this decade that

*The eighties, weren't as exciting, though production activity picked up enormously following the state government's generous policy. Remakes from other languages—sometimes mindless remakes—became the order of the day.*

the first Cinemascope Kannada film, "Sose Thanda Sowbhagya", a major hit directed by A.V. Seshagiri Rao, was made, followed by another Cinemascope film in black and white, "Ondu, Premada Kathe", which, however, turned out to be a box-office lame duck.

The eighties, however, weren't as exciting, though production activity picked up enormously following the State Government's generous policy of granting a blanket 50 per cent tax exemption to all Kannada films made within the State. Chaff overtook grain in the process, though the decade was significant for the entire gamut of film production activities shifting at last to Karnataka itself.

The system of area-wise distribution of Kannada films also came into being, along with all its benefits and drawbacks. Filmmaking became more of a commercial than artistic activity, since the area distributors played for high stakes and backed only what they regarded as "safe" ventures, meaning films filled to the brim with sex and violence, vulgarity and *double entendre*. More and more creative filmmakers were left out in the cold because the trade channels decided that they wouldn't sell any more.

This excessive dependence of lucre drove Kannada film producers into the arms of their counterparts in other languages, throwing originality totally out of gear. Remakes from other languages—sometimes mindless remakes—became the order of the day. At the same time, the State Government also enhanced the subsidy for Kannada films to Rs. 2.5 lakh, spurring more producers with an eye on the box-office to plunge into this field. The thematic content of Kannada cinema underwent a sea change overnight, as it were, even as the infrastructural development of the industry picked up remarkably.

## Rise And Fall

The offbeat film movement continued to flourish in the first half of the decade, and declined sharply in the second half, sinking into a coma by the end of the decade. The new generation of producers and directors resorted to wholesale import of stars from Bombay to pack more sex and glamour into their films. Budgets went on soaring. A super showman like Ravichandran, who made his debut both as actor and director in the eighties came out with two stunning spectacles, "Premaloka" and "Ranadheera", both of which turned the entire concept of commercial filmmaking upside down.

But before the onslaught of the super dupers came, offbeat Kannada cinema managed to add some more films to the distinguished list of the seventies—Girish Kasaravalli's "Akaramana" and "Mooru Daarigalu", P.Lankesh's "Ellindalo Bandavaru", T.S. Ranga's "Savithri", Nagabharana's "Grahana", "Anveshane", "Banker Margayya" and "Asphota", Prema Karanth's "Phaniyamma", Shanker Nag's "Nodi Swamy Naavirodu Heedge" and "Accident", Pattabhirama Reddy's

"Shrungara Massa", N. Lakshminarayan's "Bettada Hoovu", Umesh Kulkarni's "Shankanda", Krishna Masadi's "Avasthe", Singeetham Srinivasa Rao's "Pushpaka Vimana", Baragur Ramachandrappa's "Surya", Gowrishankar's "Yelu Suttina Kote", and "Benkiya Male", Suresh Heblikar's "Kaadina Benki", Sunil Kumar Desai's "Tharka", Nanjunde Gowda's "Sankranthi", Narayanaswamy's "Madhumasa" and Dinesh Babu's "Idu Saadhya". All of them were not raging artistic successes and most of them were indeed financial disasters, but the soul of Kannada cinema continued to tick through them.

The decade, at the same time, contributed some major box-office triumphs and also saw megastar Raj Kumar's two sons, Shivaraj Kumar and Raghavendra Raj Kumar, emerging as top heroes, with a chain of hits which made them stars in their own right.

It was also in this decade that a dialogueless film, "Pushpaka Vimana", was made. A whole crop of bright young artistes also hit the screen, while the sensational addition on the

music side was composer Hamsalekha. The decade saw some highly rated and well made films, "Ranganayaki", "Malaya Marutha", "Pallavi Anupallavi" (Famed director Manirathnam's first film) and "Sharadegada Saradara", the first 70mm film in the language, falling by the wayside and sending shock waves in the industry. And so did super duper like "Shanthi Kranthi", "Mutthina Haara", "Bannada Gejje" and "Teja", in the early nineties. On the offbeat side, films like "Mane", "Bhujangayyana Dashavathara" and "Nakkala Rajakumari", which dared to rise out of the ashes of the movement, fell flat on their faces.

There was, in the meantime, further hike in Government subsidy, which now stands at Rs. 4 lakhs for all films and one lakh more for films adjudged artistic by a committee of critics and experts. But the decline in quality of films is steady and seemingly irreversible. It looks as if Kannada cinema has to start a fresh search for its own identity. The present crisis is not to anybody's liking. □

*The author is a well-known film critic.*

*(Contd. from page 68)*

courses on similar lines at various other centres in the country. These courses have evoked a tremendous popular response and contributed in a genuine sense to the spread of awareness of the need to have an analytic framework in which to view and study films in our cinema-saturated culture.

## Celebrating The Centenary

As far as the celebration of the

cinema centenary is concerned, film-heritage screening programmes and retrospectives, exhibitions on the history of cinema, several publications and a seminar on Indian film studies and theory are planned over the next two years to stimulate and renew thinking about the importance of film preservation and studying the role and influence of the moving image on contemporary society.

To sum up our mood in the year of the cinema centennial, we have achieved a lot so far, but there is much more to be done and we look forward to facing all the challenges of the next century of cinema. □

*(Courtesy: "Museum International", UNESCO).*

*The author is Director, National Film Archive of India, Pune.*

# JAMMU AND KASHMIR

## Development endeavours at a glance

The Jammu and Kashmir State continued its march towards progress and prosperity inspite of disturbed conditions due to militancy. The pace of development in all sectors was maintained to an appreciable level.

Given below are some indicators of development in the State:-

- \* Food production increased to 18.88 lakh tonnes during 1993-94 while as fruit production touched a new high of 8.73 lakh tonnes.
- \* Installed capacity of power increased to 365.26 MWS during the period against 285.16 MWS in 192-93.
- \* The number of villages electrified so far has risen to 6138.
- \* During 1993-94 handicrafts worth Rs. 240 crores were exported and it is expected that during 1994-95 the handicraft export will touch Rs. 245 crores.
- \* Production of Cocoons reached to 6.50 lakh Kgs. during 1993-94 and it is expected that it will touch a new high of 9.50 lakh Kgs. during 1994-95.
- \* Road length in the State stood at 10250 Kms. during 1993-94 and during 1994-95 additional 195 Kms. are being added to this.
- \* Irrigation potential available under both medium and minor irrigation schemes has reached to 2400 hectares.
- \* Over 96% of the rural population has been covered under the drinking water supply schemes and additional 66 villages are being provided this facility during 1994-95.
- \* A record number of 40 lakhs pilgrims-cum-tourists visited Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine during 1993.
- \* 20 more Primary Community Centres were being set up during this year, raising the number of such centres to 284.

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# Marathi Cinema: Yesterday And Today

Sudhir Nandgaonkar

*The Marathi cinema is at the crossroads today, says the author. The sixties saw the trend of tamasha-based films, the seventies were replete with burlesque rural comedies, while the eighties and the early nineties witnessed the emergence of farcical comedies. However, the last three decades failed to maintain the class of the earlier filmmakers.*

EVEN as the Indian cinema completes a triumphant run of 100 years, it would be both interesting and educative to delve into the graph of Marathi cinema, which with its pioneering and unflinching efforts had watered the little seed of cinema to grow.

The metropolis of Bombay has become synonymous with the word 'cinema'. This British colony has truly been the cine-capital of the country. Though cities like Madras, Calcutta, Thiruvananthapuram, Bangalore, Cuttack, and Baroda have also become major film centres today, Bombay continues to remain what it has been for more than a century.

Why did Bombay become a cine-capital though Calcutta also had major British presence in 1890's? The answer to this question largely lies in the social circumstances prevalent in

Maharashtra and it dates back to the 17th century when a Portuguese king gifted Bombay to the British. The Queen in turn gave this tiny island city to the East India Company to set up its business. Thus, Bombay automatically became a window to the world and opened the country's gates to the dynamic changes occurring all over the world.

To facilitate their trade with the country, the East India Company did not hesitate to introduce the products of the Industrial Revolution to Bombay. The movement of spices, textiles and so many other items which were exported to England obviously needed faster transport facilities. Thus, by 1852, Bombay has the nation's first railway, telegraph, textile mills, and the Bombay university followed in 1857 and so did the J.J. School of Art

in 1865. Due to these modern facilities, the common Bombayite had a more open mind towards the new age.

## Shambarik Kharolika

Therefore, when British agents brought the 'Magic Lantern' from Europe around 1880, the new-rich of Bombay were the first audiences of these novel slide shows. Private shows were organised at the houses of prosperous Bombayites. Madanrao Madhavrao Pitale purchased the 'Magic Lantern' equipment and began organising private shows. Taking inspiration from Pitale, Mahadeo Gopal Patwardhan of Kalyan developed an indigenous 'Magic Lantern' show. Patwardhan's son Vinayak, who had learnt painting at the JJ School of Art, assisted his father in preparing these slides. It was Patwardhans who first attempted to weave a story realistically and through their experiments evolved the technique which created an illusion of movement in these slides. Patwardhans gave a Sanskrit title to their experiment and 'Magic Lantern' became 'Shambarik Kharolika'. According to archival records, the first show of 'Shambarik Kharolika' was organised at the bungalow of Justice Telang in 1892. Inspired by the success of the show, Patwardhans innovated the equipment and added a further touch of realism to the movement of slides by using three magic lanterns at a time.

The shows of 'Shambarik Kharolika' continued to be popular even when cinema arrived in Bombay four years later. Mahadeo Patwardhan died in 1902. After his father's death, Vinayak Patwardhan continued to create new mythological stories like 'Seeta Swayamwar' etc. and perform the 'Kharolika' shows till 1911. Thanks to Pune's National Films Archive of India, the creation of Patwardhans has been carefully preserved till today. The 'Shambarik Kharolika' show, ac-

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*Madanrao Madhavrao Pitale purchased the 'Magic Lantern' equipment and began organising private shows. It was Patwardhans who first attempted to weave a story realistically and through their experiments evolved the technique which created an illusion of movement in these slides.*

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accompanied by live music and commentary, was performed at the 26th International Film Festival of India in Bombay in January this year.

As cinema arrived in Bombay, the 'Shambarik Kharolika' faded into the past. On July 7, 1896, Lumiere brothers organised the first ever screening of six one-shot films at Bombay's Watson Hotel. Though this first screening was organised exclusively for the British officials, the Lumiere package was thrown open to the Indians on July 14 at Novelty cinema. After this show, Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar, who owned a shop selling photographic material, decided to venture into film-making. He purchased a camera manufactured by Raleigh brothers and shot a film titled 'The Wrestlers'. 'The Wrestlers' was the coverage of a wrestling match between popular wrestlers and was shot at Malabar Hill.

Dadasaheb Torne became the second Maharashtrian to attempt film-production. He produced a story-based silent film 'Pundalik' in 1912. The processing and printing of this film was done in London.

Dadasaheb Phalke's 'Raja Harishchandra' which was released in 1913 was the first Indian film to be completely shot, and processed indigenously. Therefore, Phalke is regarded as the 'Father of Indian cinema'.

Phalke's film-making had undaunting social commitment. He used cinema to free his society from the clutches of feudalism and courageously steer it towards the modern age. It was not surprising that Phalke sacrificed a fat-salaried job offered by the Warner Brothers, who wanted him to direct films for their company.

Phalke worked tirelessly for the betterment of cinema. He personally carried the film cans to various small towns of Maharashtra and explained to the villagers the significance of cinema. He even performed simple magic shows to attract the cinema-illiterate villagers and after a sizeable crowd gathered at the local hall, he screened his silent films.

Kolhapur-based Baburao Painter was the fourth Maharashtrian to join the movement of establishing cinema in this country. Baburao was a many-splendoured personality. He was not only a painter in his own right but also had keen interest in engineering, carpentry, and sculpture. Painter was attracted towards the scientific age and its creations. He instinctively opened and examined the working of a clock, motor, or a camera the moment he had it in hand. Coming from a poor family, he decided to make indigenous camera when he did not possess the money to buy one. It took him eight prime years to assemble a film camera. With this camera, Painter shot his first silent film 'Sairandhri' in 1920.

With 'Sairandhri' Painter brought the visual realism in Indian cinema. Five years later, Painter made 'Savakari Paash' (1925) which is regarded as the first art film in the annals of Indian cinema. Visual realism and socially conscious cinema were not the only gifts offered by Painter to Indian cinema. A number of talented artistes and technicians who later became the pillars of Marathi cinema were his disciples. The names included

V. Shantaram, Damle, Fatehal, Keshavrao Dhaiber, Bhalji Pendharkar, Baburao Pendharkar, Chandrakant, Nanasaheb Sarpotdar, K.P. Bhavne and many more.

Although Marathi cinema narrowly missed the honour of making the first Indian talkie film, these gifted performers came together to make the first Marathi talkie. Prabhat Film Company, made the first Marathi talkie, 'Raja Harishchandra' (1932). It was also made in Hindi and became the first bilingual film in the country.

The talkies became popular within no time. Bhalji Pendharkar's 'Shyamsunder' (1933) based on Lord Krishna and his antics celebrated the first ever silver jubilee. Veteran Shahu Modak had performed the role of Krishna in this film which was also bilingual.

Though there were many other film companies, the thirties largely belonged to Prabhat Film Company. They churned out classics like 'Amrit Manthan', 'Manoos', 'Sant Tukaram', 'Dynaneshwar', 'Kunku' which created new box-office records. The films made by Prabhat Film Company were thematically and cinematically more superior to Calcutta-based New Theatres, and Bombay-based Bombay Talkies.

The quintessential enterprise and constant experimentation and innovation which was the highlight of the

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*On July 7, 1896, Lumiere brothers organised the first ever screening of six one-shot films at Bombay's Watson Hotel. After this show, Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar decided to venture into filmmaking. He shot a film titled 'The Wrestlers'.*

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Marathi film-makers during the silent era continued in the talkie era too. V. Shantaram's 'Sairandhri' released in 1933, was the first colour film. The film was processed in Germany. Ironically, the film flopped miserably at the box-office despite this innovation to its credit. It was Shantaram again who first picturised a 'close-up' in 'Amrit Manthan'.

Marathi cinema also had the tradition of social films. These films projected the prevalent social problems and criticised the social evils. For instance, 'Kunku' ('Duniya Na Mane' in Hindi) depicted the practice of child marriage, while 'Shejari' ('Padosi' in Hindi) dramatically propounded Hindu-Muslim unity. Prabhat's 'Manoos' ('Aadmi' in Hindi) was an answer to 'Devdas' made by New Theatres. 'Devdas' showed a pessimist hero who becomes an alcoholic

when his beloved deserts, while the English title of 'Manoos' —'Life Is For Living'— indicates the contrast between the two films. The fact that Marathi cinema fared better than its Bengali counterpart has been acknowledged even by Bengali maestro Satyajit Ray, who has written about the first decade of Indian talkies: "Maharashtra was much ahead than Bengal in films".

Comedy has been another highlight of the first decade of talkies in Marathi cinema. The tradition of humour-based plots continues in Marathi cinema even today. No other regional cinema has as many comedy films as Marathi cinema. Master Vinayak's 'Premveer', 'Brahmachari', 'Brandichi Baatli' were penned by distinguished humourist and editor of Marathi newspaper 'Maratha', P.K. Atre. The first decade of talkies was truly a golden age for 'Marathi cinema'.

Though the Second World War began in 1939, it was not until 1940 that it had a direct impact on the Marathi cinema. During the World War, prices of the raw stocks soared and the government completely stopped the import of raw stocks. During 1940-47, a number of leading film companies like Hans, Prabhat, Navyug sunk into depression. Besides, the Marathi film-makers had just begun to feel the heat of cut throat competition with the Hindi film industry. The production of Marathi films went down drastically. The economic condition of the Marathi film industry further worsened and 1945, the year which marked the end of World War, did not record the production of even a single film. Barring exceptions like Prabhat's 'Ramshastri', Bhalji Pendharkar's 'Soonbai', Prakash's 'Ramrajya', Marathi cinema had forgotten the taste of box-office success.



Part of the historic Prabhat Studio

The World War had drastically altered the taste of Marathi audience. Realising the dual need for fighting the competition with Hindi and providing a refreshing film formula to Marathi audience, V. Shantaram first introduced the rural folk-art—tamasha—in his 'Shahir Ramjoshi'. Hansa Wadkar immortalised the tamasha girl. The lavanis in 'Shahir Ramjoshi' combined an artistic appeal with an eye on the box-office counters. The film was a roaring success. Around the same time, Baburao Pandharkar's 'Jai Malhar' was released. 'Ramjoshi' was set in the Peshwa age while 'Jai Malhar' had a rural but contemporary setting. The latter also succeeded at the box-office due to the tamasha appeal and the trend for the next decade was set.

Raja Paranjpe, Datta Dharmadhikari, Dinakar Patil, and Anant Mane were the prominent filmmakers of the post-war Marathi cinema. Paranjpe had made his debut as an actor in Baburao Painter's 'Savakari Paash' in 1937. He made his directorial debut in 'Balidan', in 1948. But it was with his second film 'Jivacha Sakha' that Paranjpe became a successful director. He went on to make highly successful films like 'Pudhache Paool', 'Oon-paoo's', 'Lakhachi Goshta'. His films were tragi-comic in nature. Datta Dharmadhikari made his film debut as an assistant director with Prabhat Film Company. After Prabhat split, Dharmadhikari established

*Phalke's filmmaking had undaunting social commitment. He worked tirelessly for the betterment of cinema. He personally carried the film cans to various small towns of Maharashtra and explained to the villagers the significance of cinema.*

'Alhad Chitra', his independent film company. He produced and directed greatly successful family dramas like 'Stree Janma Hi Tujhi Kahani', 'Chimani Pakhare', 'Bala Jo Jo Re'.

By the early fifties, the competition between the Hindi and Marathi films hotted up. Though Paranjpe, Dharmadhikari, P.L. Deshpande, Ram Gabale continued to churn out excellent films, the competition from Hindi made the Marathi cinema struggle for existence.

It was during this second struggle for its existence that tamasha once again came to the help of Marathi cine industry in 1958. The chief architect of the revival of Marathi films was Anant Mane, who made 'Sangtya Aika', which broke all the previous box-office records. This film wooed back the rural audience. The producers got a boon in the form of this tamasha formula since it could easily penetrate the rural market, which were comparatively unaffected by the influence of Hindi cinema. Thus, tamasha became synonymous with Marathi films for another decade.

In 1960, the Maharashtra state was formed. Following this, the state government decided to give a new lease of life to Marathi drama by lifting all the entertainment taxes. The Marathi theatre groups, which had been completely stonewalled after the arrival of Marathi cinema, performed with renewed enthusiasm. More and more middle-class people were attracted towards Marathi drama and this saw a drastic reduction in audience catering to the Marathi films. Meanwhile, Shammi Kapoor's 'Jungle' added colour to Hindi cinema and attracted the suave, urban Marathi audience. These changes left Marathi cinema alone with its loyal rural audience. Undeterred by this, Anant Mane continued to make films like 'Ek Gaon Bara Bhangadi', 'Kela Ishara Jata Jata'—the quintessential

*Visual realism and socially conscious cinema were not the only gift offered by Painter to Indian cinema. A number of talented artistes and technicians who later became the pillars of Marathi cinema were his disciples.*

tamasha films. He also made family dramas like 'Manini', and comedies like 'Avghachi Sansar' and 'Dona Ghadicha Dav'. Most of these films were successful at the box-office. These years saw the debut of three other important directors, namely Rajdutt, Madhukar Pathak and Raja Thakur.

Left with a limited budget, a limited audience and a tough competition with Hindi cinema on the one hand and Marathi dramas on the other, the experimentation of Marathi filmmakers had almost stopped. Though the Eastman colour had arrived in Hindi, none dared to bring the trend in Marathi, until veteran V. Shantaram himself produced and directed 'Pinjra' (1972). 'Pinjra' which combined tamasha with the contemporary rural politics became a hit and gradually colour entered the Marathi cinema.

The comedy wave came just in time for Marathi films. Dada Kondke with his double-meaning dialogues and hilarious antics tickled the audience. Kondke achieved the distinction of giving nine consecutive silver jubilee hits, starting with 'Songadya' released in 1971. However, he failed to win the admiration of the urban audience.

After the formation of the state, the government in Maharashtra initiated the cooperative movement. With this prospered the sugar lobby which received several benefits from the government and as a result wielded tremendous muscle as well as money power. Dr. Jabbar Patel's 'Saamna'

(1975) depicted the beginning of the degeneration of these neo-rich sugar barons and the audience enjoyed a hard hitting film on contemporary reality.

'Saamna' was the official Indian entry for the Berlin International Film Festival. It was a time that the Marathi filmmakers realised that their last bastion—the rural audience—had also fallen to the lure of Hindi cinema. By now Hindi films were so popular with the exhibitors that they refused to give cinema halls for Marathi films.

With the competition from Hindi becoming increasingly stiffer, the existence of Marathi cinema was threatened for the third time. The state government came to its rescue and started the tax refund scheme to encourage new film directors to make quality films. Under the scheme the producers who had managed to collect a particular amount of entertainment tax were refunded upto Rs 8 lakh to start their second film. However, the scheme could not do much and Marathi filmmakers continued to ape the Hindi formula films.

The mid-eighties saw the arrival of colour television and video cassette recorders. It was the Hindi cine industry which suffered a debacle this time. These new products of technology began eating into the profits of Hindi film industry. Meanwhile, Mahesh Kothare and Sachin Pilgaonkar, both

of whom had been performing in Hindi films, turned their attention towards Marathi and made their debut. Kothare gave a string of comedy films like 'Dhumdhaka', 'Tharatharat', 'De Danadan', while Sachin made 'Navri Mile Navryala', 'Ashi Hi Banvabnavi', 'Eka Paksha Ek', which created new records. These films had urban setting but appealed universally.

With trend-worship a characteristic feature of Marathi cinema, Kothare and Pilgaonkar's comedies brought the comedy wave which lasted from

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*The quintessential enterprise and constant experimentation and innovation which was the highlight of the Marathi film makers during the silent era continued in the talkie era too.*

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1984 to 94. This trend was punctuated by the astounding success of Vijay Kondke's tear-jerker 'Maherchi Saadi' (1991). Women audience in rural and urban areas identified so much with the tragic story of Alka Kubal that the film had a massive repeat audience.

Trends are an unavoidable aspect of the cine industry. Marathi cinema was not an exception either. The sixties saw the trend of tamasha-based films, while the seventies were replete with the burlesque, rural comedies cre-

ated by Dada Kondke, and the eighties and the early nineties witnessed the emergence of farcical comedies.

The last three decades failed to maintain the class of the earlier filmmakers and the artistic quality of the films degenerated. Even brilliant films like Dr. Jabbar Patel's 'Umbartha' (1981), Amol Palekar's 'Aakriet' (1982), and Sachin's 'Atmavishwas' (1989) failed to prevent this downslide in quality. These directors proved to be a minority.

This degeneration of Marathi cinema has now created a disturbing situation. The Marathi audience has literally deserted the Marathi films in the age of cable and satellite revolution. As a consequence, Mahesh Kothare's 'Majhe Chhakula', Ramadas Phutane's 'Surwanta', and Dr. Jabbar Patel's 'Ek Hota Vidushak', failed to sustain at the box-office.

Marathi cinema is at the crossroads today. The producers and directors do not know what hit them. The production of Marathi films has gone down drastically and in thickly populated Maharashtra there does not seem to be any audience for them. On the other hand, the production costs have escalated beyond Rs. 30 lakh. The fight seems to have gone out of the Marathi Films.

*The author is a well known film critic and feature writer.*

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# Oriya Cinema : Yesterday And Today

Bibhuti Mishra

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*No film industry can survive without the support of the people. If Oriya cinema is to flourish, then the Oriya film makers would have to tackle the identity crisis effectively to win back the disenchanted audience, feels the author.*

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AFTER six decades of Oriya cinema when one looks back on its yesterday one cannot but be overcome by nostalgia and disappointment; nostalgia for what was and disappointment over what could have been.

Oriya cinema made its astonishing debut barely four years after the talkie era came to India. There was no silent film in Oriya; its maiden attempt in 1934 was a talkie. The film was, understandably, a mythological 'Sitabibaha'. This was the result of the effort and courage of one person, Shri Mohan Sunder Dev Goswami who translated his long cherished dream into reality against heavy odds, not the least of which was financial. He was supported by the members of 'Jagannath Club' in Puri. All of them were inspired by the advent of talkie in Bengali cinema barely a couple of years ago.

## Slow Progress

'Sitabibaha' was shot in Kali Films Studio in Calcutta at a cost of about forty rupees and finally came to the viewers through the touring cinema. But unfortunately, the maiden Oriya film was a commercial failure and

viewers did not exactly lap it up as expected. This was depressing for the scenario as none else came forward to try hand at film making for the next fourteen years. Then in 1948 'Rupa Bharati', a public limited company, unique in those times, came up with a novel idea of solving the finance problem by collecting shares varying from Rs. 10 to Rs. 1000 from the general public. Everything was going smoothly and 'Rupa Bharati's 'Sri Jagannath' bringing the interesting legend of Lord Jagannath of Puri to celluloid, was slated to be the second Oriya film. But another company, 'Great Eastern Movietone Pvt. Ltd.' hijacked the story and to beat the release of 'Sri Jagannath' released 'Lalita' in 1949. It bit the dust whereas 'Sri Jagannath' in 1950 became the first Oriya hit; was remade in Telugu and became a bigger hit down South. This kind of rivalry has, strangely, bugged Oriya cinema since then and even today producers fight with one another to release their film at the same time. Strange because the number of Oriya films produced is quite low. This type of unhealthy competition seals the fate of many not-too-bad films. More of that later.

The first social in Oriya was a peculiarly named film 'Rolls 2-8' made by "Great Movietone Pvt. Ltd." in 1951 and it bombed. In fact, after 'Sri Jagannath' there was a lapse of almost a decade before a socio-mythological 'Sri Lokanath' (1960) tasted commercial success again. In the fifties, about eight films saw the light of the day but none could set the Box-office afire. By then cinema houses had come up and producers, no longer required to depend on touring cinema houses, could recover the cost of production, although the profit margin remained slender. Without much bothering for profit some people got involved with Oriya cinema during its fledgling period and one name that deserves fond mention is the late Goura Prasad Ghosh, producer-actor, who made three gripping socials 'Bhai Bhai', 'Maa' and 'Lakshmi' over a period of six years from 1956 to 1962.

## The Glorious Sixties.

While the sixties saw the release of twenty-odd films, the seventies broke the half a century barrier and the eighties crossed the century. But there has been a tapering off in the nineties, primarily because more and more films

are getting rejected by the audience. While the sixties was the glorious period in Oriya cinema in terms of quality, the eighties saw an unprecedented spurt in the production of films. In 1978 the number of annual release crossed double digits, for the first time.

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But why is it that the upbeat feeling in the eighties has slumped in the nineties? Why has the glory of Oriya cinema been so short-lived? The reasons are not far to seek. No film industry can survive without the support of the people and it can be said in all fairness that Oriya cinema has failed to come up to the exceptions of the Oriya people. That is why while the neighbouring state Bengal took long strides producing nearly thirty films a year and throwing up many talents in cinematic arena, Orissa went on gasping for breath but for one decade of healthy life.

### **Changing Scenario**

After the initial hiccups things were changing for the better in the sixties and seventies. The snags in film distribution were getting removed. Earlier the cinema halls were controlled by Calcutta's film distributors who used to harrass producers of Oriya film regarding release, for, they had an eye on the box-office. But in 1970 a branch of 'Eastern India Motion Pictures Association', a company of producers, hall-owners, distributors covering Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Nagaland and Manipur, opened in

Cuttack (Orissa). If films were produced, there was not much problem in releasing them. Besides the government, though rather belatedly, woke up to its responsibilities. Orissa film industry was declared small-scale industry in 1967 and construction of cinema halls was included under this category in 1970. Things began to look up a bit. Later at the demand of the Eastern India Motion Pictures Association the state government instituted Orissa Film Development Corporation in 1976. The first Oriya colour picture 'Gapa Hele Bi Sata' was released the same year. However, some of the much-touted schemes of OFDC like low-cost Janata cinema halls in semi-urban areas, low-cost rural cinema halls are not much heard nowadays. In providing term-loan and soft loans for film production, it has also run into rough weather, because of various reasons like non-recovery, favouritism, bureaucratic hassles and above all an amateurish approach.

Be that as it may, the release of Oriya films in the sixties right through the seventies to eighties, used to bring in cartloads of viewers even from the nearby rural areas. What really appealed to them was the package of good story rooted in Orissan milieu, moving music, uproarious comedy and a fair amount of tugging at tear-glands. In fact, it needs to be mentioned that a number of films used to be based on famous and popular Oriya novels, plays and stories and such films won over the audience. Theatre was very popular those days and it supplied not only good actors and actresses to filmdom but also good stories which were already well-received by the theatre-going public. This trend continued from the fifties to the early seventies. But since the late seventies directors and producers have chosen to ignore the rich storehouse of Oriya literature in attempting a crude imitation of the Bombay masala films; thus they have

moved away from the epicentre of Orissan culture and the nerve-centre of Oriya audience.

### **Kalinga Studio**

Kalinga studio on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar was inaugurated in 1982, though the foundation stone of this studio was laid way back in 1960. All these years for editing, dubbing, recording and other technical works, Oriya filmmakers had to depend on the studios and laboratories of Madras and Calcutta. With Kalinga studio coming up to provide technical facilities for production as well as post-production work of 16mm, 35mm and cinemascope format, there was an increase in the number of films produced and it did act as a boost to the Oriya film industry. Various promotional incentives from the government like subsidy and compulsory screening of Oriya films also helped and the number of Oriya films produced went beyond twenty in some years.

### **Crisis Of Identity**

But the eighties were also a watershed decade in Oriya films. The

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audience was getting slowly tired of the 'masala' doled out in the films, though arguably the films were better-produced technically and black and white films had become history. In the name of catering to audience demands more and more modern directors packed in formula of sex, violence and other crudities. A crisis of identity had

While the mainline commercial cinema has been in the throes of an identity crisis, the parallel cinema in Orissa has spawned many a talent like Manmohan Mohapatra, Nirad Mohapatra and Sabyasachi Mohapatra etc.

set in and oblivious of this the film makers were desperately leaning more and more on the formula. A number of films were remade from Bombay or the South hits, thus deepening the crisis further.

Ironically in the initial three decades of Oriya films, it was the Bengali directors who wielded the megaphone and they were very careful in retaining the essential socio-cultural identity of Orissa. Many films like 'Amadabata', 'Manikjodi', 'Abhinetri', 'Malajanha', 'Kaa' cornered national and state awards. In fact it was the ace director Mrinal Sen who made a Oriya film 'Maatira Manisha' on a masterpiece by the celebrated writer, the late Kalindi Charan Panigrahi. But when more Oriya directors came on the scene it was a blind aping of Bollywood.

### From Comedy To Crudity

Comedy in Oriya films was a pillar of strength and the film industry had produced comedians who could hold their own against anybody in those days. But slowly comedy came to mean crude and vulgar gestures, slapstick and double entendre. In some films the dialogues, supposedly funny, bordered on rank obscenity. The front benchers might have been regaled; but the discerning ones kept away.

### From Melody To Noise

The same blotch was very much noticeable in Oriya film music too. There was a time when Oriya films lived long after their departure from

the screen in their music. The songs of films like 'Sri Lokanath', 'Arundhati', 'Suryamukhi', 'Kie Kahara' in the sixties were unforgettable. The old guard of music directors comprised such maestros like Balakrushna Das, Bhubaneswar Mishra etc.; their good work was carried further by Akshaya Mohanty, Prafulla Kar, Shanatanu Mohapatra, Radhakrushna Bhanja, Rakhil Mohanty etc. Lyrics were carefully chosen, song situations carefully planned and picturisation sensitively done. Songs were deftly woven into the narrative pattern and were essential links in development of the plot.

All that is bygone today. Melody has given way to cacophony and poetry has yielded place to rimer. Music has become noise. Here too the impact of hips wiggling pattern of Hindi film songs is visible. Unfortunately, though some kind of melody has come back to the Bollywood products and today the films stand or fall because of their songs, the situation in Oriya films refuses to improve. Anybody and everybody tries hand at music composition which has become nothing but rhythmic sound patterns. Lyrics, too, have got vulgarised. There are a number of jacks of all trades in the filmdom and some directors love to project themselves in everything right from writing the sceneyplay to writing lyrics and composing music; no wonder it has a telling effect on the music. Moreover there is a singular lack of understanding for background score.

All this has militated against the sensibility of Oriya audience who would rather go a Hindi masala movie than see a Oriya film which is a poor copy of that. I have already talked about the illtiming of release of whatever films are made in a year. Everybody waits for festive occasions like *Durga Puja*, *Raja*, *Ganesh* or *Saraswati puja* with the result that

While the sixties was the glorious period in Oriya cinema in terms of quality, the eighties saw an unprecedented spurt in the production of films.

business suffers.

### Meeting New Faces

Absence of good actors and actresses has been a problem in Oriya films of late. In the fifties and sixties since theatre was on the upswing many artistes came thence; but now the theatre movement is dead and Oriya a *jatra* which is getting increasingly vulgarised to pander to baser tastes and keep the cashbox jingling is certainly not helping the cause of the Oriya films. The audience, has come to a point where it is bound to reject the actors and actresses who have been overexposed. With Prashanta Nanda getting no younger and Sriram Panda retired there appears to be only one hero in business-Uttam Mohanty. Some others like Mihir Das, Nihar Samal etc. have not yet arrived though they have been hanging around for sometime. So far as actresses are concerned with Mahasweta ageing and Aparajita not very youthful, there is a vacuum. Many directors have gone for non-Oriya heroines, but not with any spectacular success. There is urgent need of new faces.

While the mainline commercial cinema has been in the throes of an identity crisis, the parallel cinema in Orissa has spawned many a talent like Manmohan Mohapatra, Nirad Mohapatra and Sabyasachi Mohapatra etc. Nirad Mohapatra's 'Maya Miriga' (1983) won national and international acclaim, but it has remained his only effort as yet. Manmohan Mohapatra, an FTII graduate in film direction has been making films regularly since 1981

and has won the national award an unprecedented eight times so far. His films like 'Neeraba jhada', 'Klanta Aparahna', 'Kichhi Smruti Kichhi Anubhuti', 'Andha Diganta' and 'Vinna Samaya' have won unstinted plaudits from all quarters and he has established himself as a powerful trendsetter in the Oriya art film movement. Sabyasachi Mohapatra came up with 'Bhukha' in 1989. It was in Sambalpuri dialect and was based on the trials and tribulation of the 'Bajaniya' tribe.

Though some others have also got involved with art films, the movement has all but tapered off, thanks to the

problems these films have faced in getting released in cinema halls. "The awards help in getting these films shown on TV and we recover cost. Obviously we have to work on shoestring budget" says Manmohan

*Sri Jagannath' in 1950 became the first Oriya hit, was remade in Telugu and became a bigger hit down South.*

Mohapatra who has been gamely fighting on. Others have shown sparks, got lauded and remained silent

thereafter. Some of these art films have taken to typical Oriya cultural ethos; but lack of exposure has done them in.

Thus the six decades of Oriya films have been decades of missed chances and its today gives us little cause for cheer. But in this age of explosion of electronic entertainment if Oriya cinema is to survive and grow it is imperative for the Oriya filmmakers to understand the crisis of identity. Regionalism needs to be furthered not scrapped. □

*The author is a noted film critic based in Bhubaneswar.*

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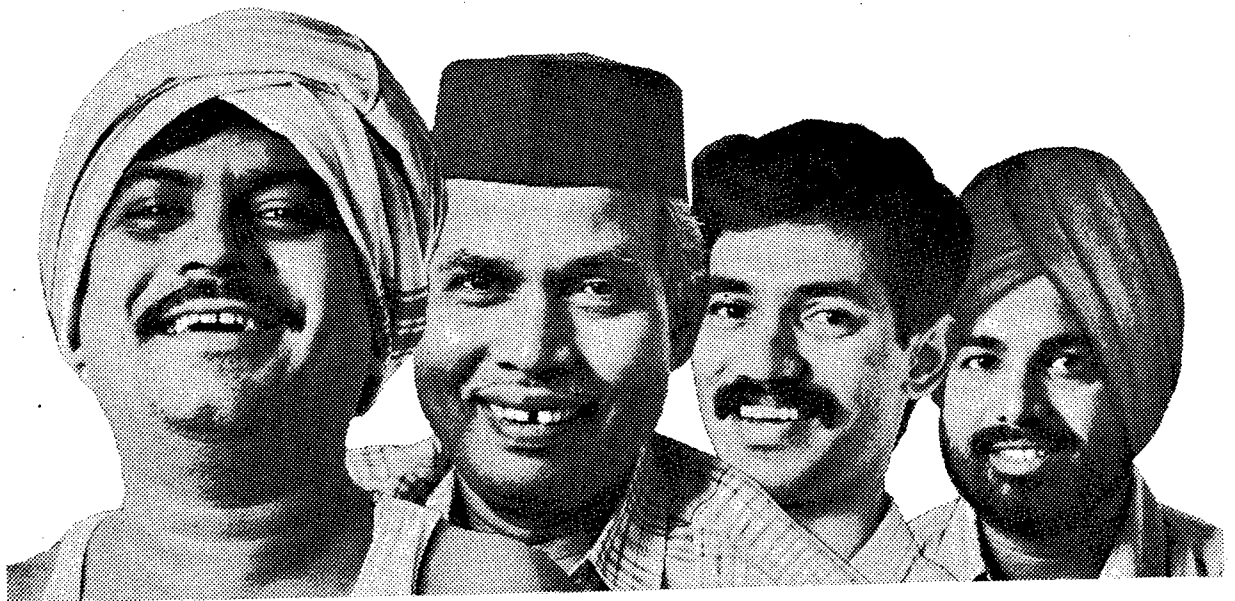
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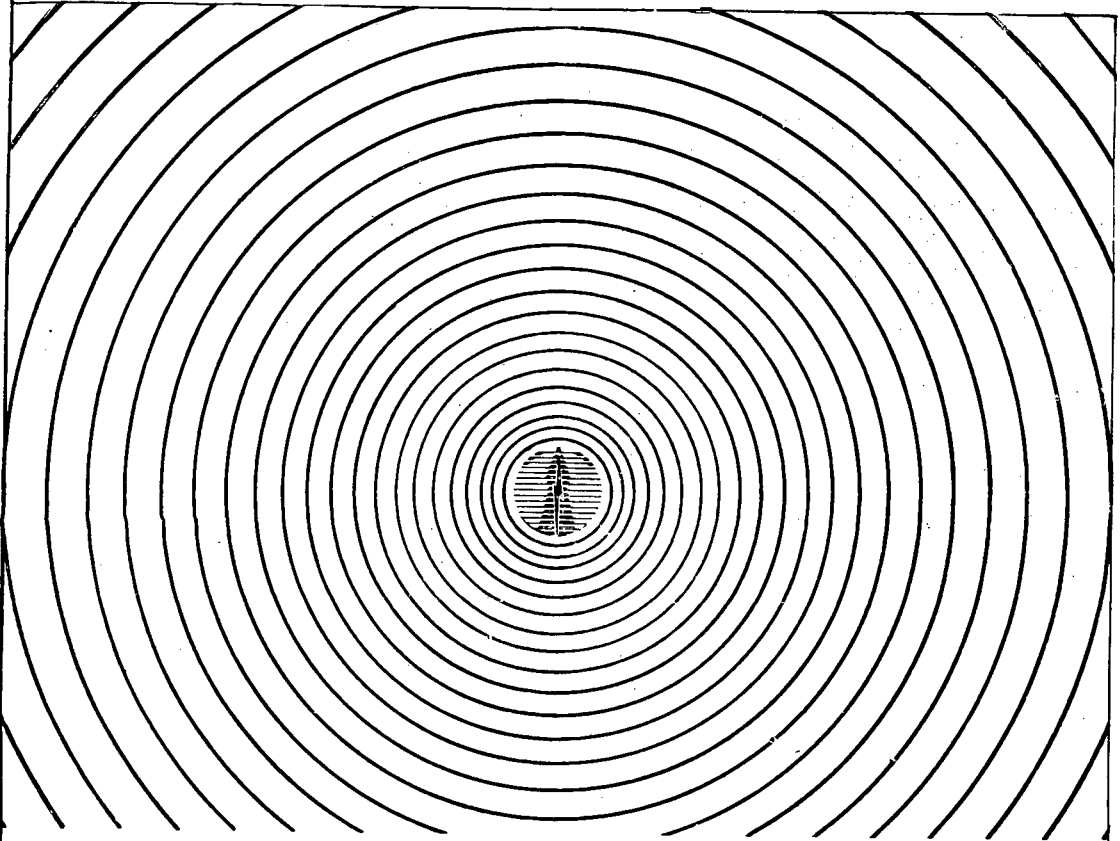
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**POWERGRID : The Power Beyond**

# Tamil Cinema : Yesterday And Today

A.V. Rajagopal

*The Tamil cinema too had its ups and downs. Undoubtedly, its golden age was when a trio of superstars—Sivaji Ganesan, MGR and Gemini Ganesan—dominated the scene in the fifties, sixties and a part of the*

*seventies. This was the period when the silver jubilee celebrations were a common feature and hit Tamil films were remade in other languages, says the author.*

CINEMA came to the South in 1916 when Nataraja Mudaliar, the pioneer made "Keechaka Vadham", a silent film closely following the pattern of 'Raja Harishchandra' of Dadasaheb Phalke.

Tamil had its first talkie as such in 1931 when Ardeshir Irani made 'Kalidas', the same year in which he made 'Alam Ara'. T.P. Rajalakshmi, the first heroine of the Tamil Cinema by virtue of her acting in 'Kalidas' directed a film titled 'Miss Kamala' in 1936 and thus became the first woman director of the country.

There are a few interesting features

that are to be taken note of in respect of the first Tamil talkies. The film was released in 'Kinema Central' theatre on the 31st October, 1931 but had its review in 'The Swadesamitran', a popular daily of those times, on the 29th October itself which would go to

show that the practice of screening films for the Press for purposes of review before its release to the public came to be there even from the first film. Being the first 'talkie', the advertisements for the film invited people to 'listen' to the film, totally

ignoring the fact that a film is basically a visual medium. Further, while the spoken word in the film was Tamil, all the songs were in Telugu.

The Tamil talkies which had such a beginning never looked back. As a matter of fact, in the first five years, as many as 100 films were made.



**Mani Rathnam: Creativity at the box office**

## Distinct Trend

Even here, a distinct trend is discernible in respect of the Tamil Cinema. To begin with, the producers preferred to dish out mythological subjects as they considered them to be quite safe as regards marketability. Out of 100 films that were made upto the end of 1936, only 8 had social themes and the rest mythologies. The competitive element amongst film producers of the period to make a fast buck by churning out such films is evidenced by the fact that the same mythological stories were made by two producers and released in the same year. Two 'Prahaldas', two 'Vallis' (1933) two 'Draupadi Vastrapaharanams' (1934), two 'Dhruvas' two 'Nalla-Thangals' (1933) and two 'Nalayanis' (1936) are some such instances.

As in Hindi Cinema, music came to be the main forte of the early films. While the Hindi 'Indra Sabha' (1932) had about seventy songs, Tamil films too had a large number of songs. Due to non-existence of the playback system, singers became stars in the films and reigned supreme. M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, P.U. Chinnappa, T.R. Mahalingam, M.M. Dandapani Desigar, M.S. Subbulakshmi, K.B. Sundarambal were some who with their golden voices drew audiences to cinema and lent respectability to it.

*Tamil had its first talkie in 1931 when Ardeshir Irani made 'Kalidas'. The advertisements for the film invited people to 'listen' to the film ignoring the fact that a film is basically a visual medium. While the spoken word in the film was Tamil all the songs were in Telugu.*

'Haridas', a film of Thyagaraja Bhagavathar created a sensation and a record of sorts in 1944 when it ran for 110 weeks in the Broadway theatre in Madras City. Meera (1945) which had M.S. Subbulakshmi in it conquered the entire country with her melodious voice and enchanting music. 'Chandralekha', a magnum opus of S.S. Vasani (Gemini) produced in 1948, made people in the North sit up and take notice of the Southern Film industry. The film was made in Tamil and in Hindi and had the distinction of getting subtitled for release in foreign countries. It is said that as many as 609 prints were taken of this film. Similarly, A.V. Meyyappan (A.V.M.) made many meaningful films and the A.V.M. banner became synonymous with entertainment.

## Contribution To Freedom Movement

The Tamil films made their own contribution to the freedom struggle and the Independence movement. 'Iru Sakodhararkal' and 'Chandramohan' (1936) and 'Thyagaboomi' (1939) were some of the significant films that need to be mentioned in this regard. There were a number of other films in which the lead character had something to do with the 'Charkha' or wore the 'Gandhi Cap' or uttered lines linkable to the Civil Disobedience Movement whether it had relevance to the story or not. 'Maya Mayavan' (1938) 'Bombay Mail' and 'Jayakodi' (1939) were some of these films. The potential of this powerful medium to deliver message to the people on the freedom movement was understood and appreciated by the nationalist leaders like Satyamurthi, Srinivasa Sastri, Rajaji, K. Santhanam, who were making use of this medium for the purpose.

The politicians who followed the nationalist leaders after independence took their cue from them. Such of

*To begin with, the producers preferred to dish out mythological subjects as they considered them safe as regards marketability. Out of 100 films that were made upto the end of 1936, only 8 had social themes and the rest mythologies.*

those belonged to the Dravidian parties started fully exploiting films for their political propaganda and from that time onwards films and politics became inseparable in Tamil Nadu. This however did not do any good to the Tamil Cinema as dialogue came to be the dominant factor in cinema.

This resulted in a qualitative decline of Cinema as an art. As a visual medium it lost all its importance. It became wholly dialogue-oriented and most often the dialogues were much closer to politics than to the story. The dialogues mostly fiery and delivered in style drew applause from the audience. People from the stage *en masse* moved into cinema and films became just photographed plays.

## Regaining Glory

Cinema which thus suffered by way of loss of form however regained it when stalwarts like B.R. Pantalu, P. Bhimsingh, K. Balachander and C.V. Sridhar arrived on the scene. 'Veerapandiya Kattabomman' (1959) directed by B.R. Pantalu depicted the story of a feudal lord who valiantly fought the British, won Sivaji Ganesan the Best Actor Award in the Afro-Asian Film Festival at Cairo. Another outstanding film made by him was 'Kappalottiya Thamizhan' (1961) which portrayed the life of Chidambaranar, a nationalist leader who operated a parallel shipping line during the British regime. P. Bhimsingh gave Tamil Cinema

number of social themes which had tremendous appeal. K. Balachander's films were made on the middle class people, their aspirations and ambitions. However, as Balachander was from the stage, the influence of the stage was vastly visible in his films. C.V. Sridhar was a master of a different kind. His forte was romance and comedy and the credit for luring youngsters should wholly go to him. His mastery on the medium was perfect. He also made a fine tragedy 'Sumai Thangi' which was an absolute tearjerker. This film had no villain as such in it, but the friends and relatives of the protagonist himself caused the maximum hurt to him unwittingly.

### Best Period

The fifties, sixties and partly the seventies can be said to be the best period of Tamil Cinema. Sivaji Ganesan ruled the Tamil screen for over three decades with his character acting. M.G. Ramachandran outshone everybody as a Star in his tailor-made roles and Gemini Ganesan outdid everybody else in his romantic roles.

This period witnessed the spectacle of Tamil films running for 15 to 20 weeks at a stretch. Silver Jubilee celebrations were a common feature. Films were acclaimed and applauded for their story content. More and more

*'Haridas' a film of Thyagaraja Bhagavathar created a sensation and a record of sorts in 1944 when it ran for 110 weeks in the Broadway theatre in Madras city.*

studies came to be established. Successful Tamil films were remade into Telugu and other languages. Tamil film producers also took a fling at the Hindi Cinema and turned successful. That truly was the golden period of Tamil Cinema. Suddenly thereafter it all ended as it began. Individual story

writers came to be replaced by a story department. There came to be a sudden dearth of ideas and an element of artificiality came to dominate Tamil Cinema. Successful Hindi action-films came to be made into Tamil and film after film fell into a formula of hero, heroine and a villain, the villain invariably engaged in smuggling and trying to flee the country by a helicopter in the climax scene. The Hero in a well-tailored western suit, would cut the cake for a birthday and sing with the piano. Neither the subject nor the treatment was Indian. The Tamil films seemed to suffer from an affliction and as a result they had fewer audiences.

### Peak And Trough

Then in the mid 70s, arrived on the scene Bharati Raja and his likes. They took the story to villages and walked out of studios. Nativity came to be the mainstay. There was a revival of the Tamil film industry and it was hoped that Tamil films would reach great heights. But unfortunately that was not to be. These film-makers again paid very little attention to the story outline. The urban background was substituted by the rural and the city villain who indulged in smuggling was substituted by the drunk village headman. The novelty of the backdrop soon wore off and Tamil films as a whole touched a new low from the beginning of the mid-80s barring exceptions that could be counted on one's fingers. A six-week runner came to be hailed as a superhit and posters came to be stuck, pathetically announcing a successful ten-day run of a film.

Mention has to be made of some of the outstanding films that were made during the interim period. J. Mahendra made 'Nenjathai Killathe' and 'Udhiripookkal'. While 'Nenjathai Killathe' as a fine romance tugged at the hearts of youngsters, 'Udhiripookkal' was a masterpiece and

can be considered as a classic. It is unfortunate that this film did not receive the national attention which it richly deserved. Durai made an extraordinary film titled 'Pasi' which highlighted the pathetic life of a poor hapless girl. Balu Mahendra made 'Veedu' which vividly portrayed the trials and tribulations of a working girl in the planning and construction of a dwelling. His other film 'Sandhya Ragam', which was financed jointly by the National Film Development Corporation and the Doordarshan, made an excellent statement on old age and its accompanying problems. K.S. Sethumadhavan made 'Marupakkam' which earned for a Tamil Cinema the 'Swarnakamal' for the first time after thirty-seven years of the institution of the Award.

*'Veerapandiya Kattabomman' (1959) directed by B.R. Pantalu depicted the story of a feudal lord who valiantly fought the British, won Sivaji Ganesan the best Actor Award in the Afro-Asian Film Festival at Cairo.*

Special mention has also to be made of the two Kamal Hasan films that were made during this period for which direct credit should go to Kamal Hasan. One is 'Pesum Padam' ('Pushpak' in Hindi), a silent film boldly made after six decades of the advent of talkie and the other one 'Apoorva Sagodararkal' ('Appu Raja' in Hindi) wherein Kamal Hasan gave a memorable performance as a midget. Both these films were acclaimed by the critics as well as the audience. Rajanikant, the superstar of Tamil screen has been and continues to be the biggest box-office draw providing the much wanted entertainment to the masses.

This period also witnessed the commencement of a change of trend in



**Sivaji Ganesan and Kuttu Padmini (1961)**

the matter of heroines of the Tamil screen. While previously it was the case of the heroines of Tamil screen migrating to the Hindi screen and occupying top spots there like Vyjayantimala, Hemamalini and Sridevi, a change in trend took place reversing the flow of heroines from South to the North beginning with Rupini. Kushboo, Heera, Nagma and now Monisha are the ones who have come from North and are dominating the Tamil screen at present.

The 90s have not augured well for the Tamil film industry. There has been gradual decline in the number of films that are made year after year. The percentage of failure has been going up steadily with the success rate plummeting to a paltry 10 per cent or even less a year. Fear of failure has driven out the drive and initiative of film-makers to introduce novelty in presentation and has forced them to submit themselves to the familiar

formula themes with the eternal triangle, with fire-walking becoming a part of the climax in a good number of films. The sickness of the Tamil Film industry does presently look severe.

One redeeming feature in all this depressing scenario, however, is the emergence of Manirathnam as one of the great directors of our times. Unlike many other of his clan who have earned a name and a fame in the Tamil film industry and ended just there, Manirathnam's works have transcended all barriers of language and territory. He has proved his mastery over the medium with such fine works as 'Mouna Ragam', 'Nayakan', 'Anjali', 'Roja' and quite recently the block-buster 'Bombay'. He has not only cornered national glory but also earned international notice.

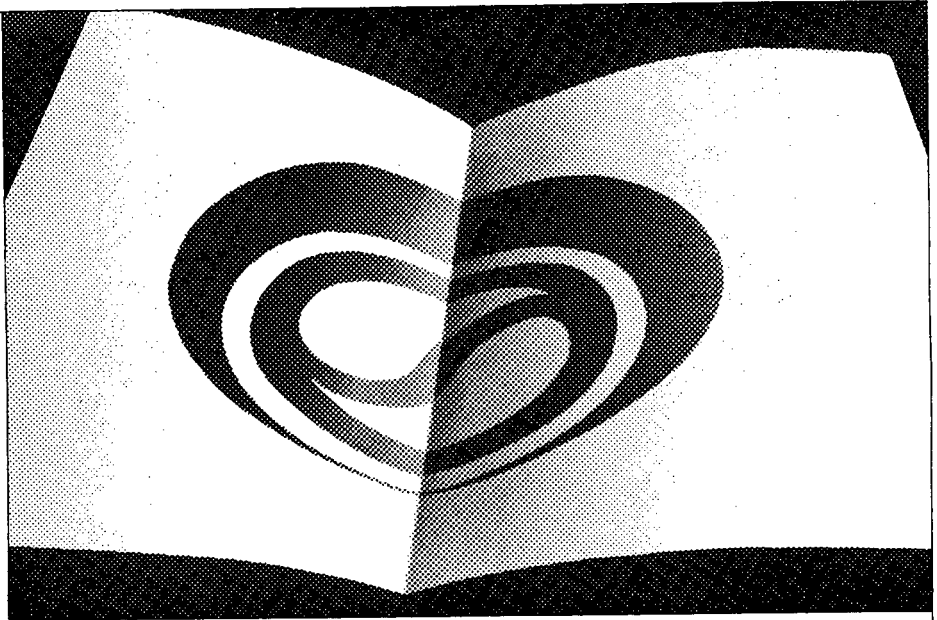
Another outstanding personality to hit the headlines at the National level is A.R. Rehman, the music director.

Never before a music director from the South has attained such great heights. That a single song of his could be copied in seven different Hindi films proves once again the oft-made statement that copying is one way of paying tribute to a master.

It is a matter of pride to Tamil film industry that its stalwart Sivaji Ganesan was honoured by the French Government with the coveted Chevalier award, a first of its kind to any Indian actor.

However, as the individual fortunes or achievements of one or two individuals cannot change the path and direction of the Tamil film industry which appears to be in wilderness, the position as of date of the industry can be said to be anything but good. □

*The author is a film critic & Central Council Member, Federation of Film Societies of India.*



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# The National Film Awards

K.L. Arora

*The National Film Awards have influenced the making of serious, cinematic and socially relevant films in all languages of the country, says the author.*



Devika Rani

CINEMA, the powerful medium of expression, is celebrating its birth centenary this year, while India will be celebrating a hundred years of the first exhibition of films.

For the masses, cinema is a means of entertainment, for an educationist and socially conscious, it is a classroom for educating the people, and for the specialists, a potent medium to impart information and training in specific fields of human activity. It also plays a crucial role in promotion of goodwill and understanding at national and international levels.

In 1954, the Government of India instituted the State Awards for Films, on the recommendation of the Film Enquiry Committee, to encourage and promote the making of artistic, aesthetic and meaningful films. Every year since then, the best of works as well as individual achievements are awarded, after they are adjudged at the highest national level. It is a recognised fact that State Awards for films have influenced the making of serious, cinematic and socially relevant films in all languages of the country.

The beginning was modest. There were only two President's Gold

Medals—one each for the best feature film and the best documentary film—and the Prime Minister's Gold Medal for the best children's film and a certificate of merit. A year later, President's Silver Medals for the best

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*The method of evaluation of films has also undergone changes. For some years there used to be regional committees at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Their recommendations were considered by the Central Committee in Delhi. But later the system was dropped and now only the National Film Festival Jury decides the awards by consensus or majority vote.*

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films in regional languages were added.

In their aims and objectives, the Awards have undergone several changes since their inception. In 1966, they were renamed as the National Film Awards. Separate awards were instituted for artistes and technicians in 1968. The two acting awards were called "Urvashi" (the best actress) and "Bharat" (the best actor) but later on the terms Urvashi and Bharat were dropped. It may be mentioned here that Nargis Dutt and Uttam Kumar were the first winners of the best actress and best actor awards.

The method of evaluation of films has also undergone changes. For some years, there used to be regional committees at Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Their recommendations were considered by the Central Committee in Delhi. But later, the system was dropped and now only the National Film Festival Jury watches over 100 feature films, at a go, and decides the awards by consensus or majority vote. The number of awards have multiplied

since. From three in 1954, it has now gone up to over 40.

From 1975, the scope of the awards was widened. The President's Gold Medal was changed to Swarna Kamal (Golden Lotus) and Silver Medal to Rajat Kamal (Silver Lotus).

Some more changes were made in 1985. These included: i) increase in the cash components for some of the important awards; ii) institution of new awards; and iii) changes in the procedure of selection. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting announced new regulations also. The cash prizes now total to over Rs. 13 lakh for all the 40 awards or so.

In the fifties and the sixties, Marathi and Hindi films were dominant among the award winners. In the next decade, Bengali films held sway. And in the eighties, the filmmakers from the south walked away with the major awards. However, during the last few years, it has been a mixed bag.

Only once the best feature film award was held over. That was in 1978, when Mr. Chetan Anand, the veteran filmmaker, was the Feature Film Jury Chairman.

Mr. Chetan Anand summed up the characteristics of an inspiring film worthy of the award as:

i) It should have a good theme; (ii) a good exposition of it in the shape of an effective screenplay; and iii) a good transference of this screenplay to the screen.

When the theme is inspiring, Mr. Chetan Anand, affirmed, and the director has used his tools—actors, dialogue, visuals, sound track, editing, colours, sets, location, music and special effects, etc—in an inspired way, it makes an inspiring film, a film that touches the fringe of greatness, a film that communicates itself to its audiences in an effective way, a film

with a powerful impact, a film satisfying in its totality.

Without an iota of doubt, when such a film comes along, it will automatically claim the highest award.

### **Dadasaheb Phalke Award**

Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the most prestigious national decoration for the Indian film personalities, is in fact a lifetime achievement award. The Award was instituted by the Government of India to commemorate the contribution of Dadasaheb Phalke to Indian cinema in 1969, his birth centenary year. Consisting of a cash prize, a shawl and a plaque, the award is given annually to a film personality whose contribution to the film industry in general or to a specific discipline of Indian cinema, is outstanding. The cash prize, when the award was instituted, was Rs. 11,000 only but it was enhanced to Rs. 20,000 in 1973; to Rs. 40,000 in 1977 and to Rs. one lakh in 1984.

Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, the great pioneer of Indian cinema, established the basic norms of filmmaking in India in almost every department of the Seventh Art. He was his own

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*With a view to promoting the spirit of national integration through the medium of cinema, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting introduced in 1965 an award for the best feature film on the theme of national integration.*

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screenplay writer, cameraman, art director, editor, costume designer, processor, printer, developer, projectionist and even distributor. This one-man institution in filmmaking gave India the fundamentals of filmmaking and established the motion

picture arts as a form of entertainment and an extension of the Indian culture.

The award is presented annually for distinguished contribution to the medium of cinema, its growth, promotion and innovation. The following are the recipients of the Dadasaheb Phalke Award:

Devika Rani (1969)  
 Birendra Nath Sircar (1970)  
 Prithviraj Kapoor (1971-posthumous)  
 Pankaj Mullick (1972)  
 Sulochana—Ruby Meyers (1973)  
 B.N. Reddy (1974)  
 Dhiren Ganguly (1975)  
 Kanan Devi (1976)  
 Nitin Bose (1977)  
 Rai Chand Boral (1978)  
 Sohrab Modi (1979)  
 P. Jairaj (1980)  
 Naushad Ali (1981)  
 L.V. Prasad (1982)  
 Durga Khote (1983)  
 Satyajit Ray (1984)  
 V. Shantaram (1985)  
 B. Nagi Reddy (1986)  
 Raj Kapoor (1987)  
 Ashok Kumar (1988)  
 Lata Mangeshkar (1989)  
 Akkineni Nageswara Rao (1990)  
 Balchandra Pendharkar (1991)  
 Bhupen Hazarika (1992)  
 Majrooh Sultanpuri (1993)  
 Dilip Kumar (1994)

Discipline-wise the recipients come from the fields of acting, direction, production, singing, music composition and lyric writing.

### National Integration Awards

In a country as vast as ours and as varied in cultural pursuits and linguistic and caste interests, the need for national integration is the uppermost. With a view to promoting the spirit of national integration through the medium of cinema, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting introduced in 1965 an award for the best feature film on the theme of national integration.

At present it is named as the Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration and comprises Rajat Kamal and a cash prize of Rs. 30,000 to the producer and Rs. 15,000 to the director.

So far, 24 feature films have been given the unique award. Language-wise break-up is: Hindi-9; Malayalam-5; Marathi, Kannada and Telugu-two each; and Tamil, Bengali, Oriya and Gujarati-one each.

### The award-winning films in the category are listed below:

1. Shaheed (Hindi) 1965 Produced by Kewal P. Kashyap, Directed by S. Ram Sharma
2. Subhash Chandra (Bengali) 1966 Produced by A.K. Banerjee, Directed by Pyush Bose
- No Award in 1967
3. Janmabhoomi (Malayalam) 1968 Produced by Roopa Rekha (Madras). Directed by J. Shankaramangalam
4. Saat Hindustani (Hindi) 1969 Produced and directed by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas
5. Thurakkatha Vathil (Malayalam) 1970 Produced by A. Raghunath, Directed by P. Bhaskaran
6. Do Boond Pani (Hindi) 1971 Produced and directed by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas
7. Achhanum Bappayum (Malayalam) 1972 Produced by C.C. Baby, Directed by K.S. Sethumadhavan
8. Garam Hawa (Hindi) 1973 Produced by Unit 3 MM, Directed by M.S. Sathyu
9. Parinay (Hindi) 1974 Produced by Samantar Chitra, Directed by Kantilal Rathod
- No award in 1975, 1976 and 1977.
10. Grahana (Kannada) 1978 Produced by Harsha Pictures, Directed by T.S. Nagabharana

The film got the Award "for an honest and bold depiction of caste conflict in rural India. The film starkly brings out the traditional beliefs which grip the entire rural society including the downtrodden—putting an extra chain on the poor in addition to their economic helplessness. Cinematically a very powerful film."

11. 22 June 1897 (Marathi) 1980 Produced by Nachiket Patwardhan, Directed by Nachiket Patwardhan and Jayoo Patwardhan,  
 The film got the Award "for a brilliantly analytical reconstruction of the assassination of Walter Rand by the Chapekar Brothers on 22nd 1897 in Poona, for combining an eye for colour, locale, customs and lifelike characters, for powerfully communicating the patriotic-revivalist fervour of the Chapekar Brothers who laid down their lives for the country, for using silence in the film as significantly as the few spoken words."
12. Bhavni Bhavai (Gujarati) 1981 Produced by Sanchar Film Cooperative Society, Directed by Ketan Mehta  
 The film received the Award "for tracing the history of the social evil of untouchability through popular folk drama forms, for synthesizing diverse performing arts into socially relevant communication, for depicting the untouchables' fight for their rights."
13. Saptapadi (Telugu) 1982 Produced by Bheemavarapu, Directed by Kasinathuri Viswanath  
 The film was chosen "for focussing on the problems of society whose orthodoxy inflicts grave injustice on the underprivileged, for the dilemma faced by a Brahmin disciplinarian in confronting his granddaughter's love for a Harijan, for resolving the problem in a rational manner, worthy of the country's best secular traditions."
14. Aroodam (Malayalam) 1983 Produced by Rosamma George, Directed by I.V. Sasi  
 The film got the Award "for its compassionate treatment of the plight of the underprivileged."

15. Admi Aur Aurat (Hindi) 1984 Produced by Doordarshan, Directed by Tapan Sinha  
The Award was given "for its simplicity of approach in commenting upon the need for love and harmony between communities."
16. Sookha (Hindi) 1985 Produced and directed by M.S. Sathyu  
The Award was given "for its sincerity in the portrayal of basic human values that unify mankind."
17. Shri Narayana Guru (Malayalam) 1986 Produced by A. Jaffer, Directed by P.A. Backer  
The film got the Award "for a film which preaches, through the life of a great reformer, the universal values of 'One caste, one religion and one God for Man'".  
Award not given in 1987.
18. Tamas (Hindi) 1988 Produced by Blaze Entertainment Private Ltd., Directed by Govind Nihalani  
The film received the Award "for recreating without compromise the tragic events leading to the communal holocaust on the eve of Partition in a Punjab village."
19. Rudra Veena (Telugu) 1989 Produced by K. Nagendra Babu, Directed by K. Balachander  
The Award was "for presenting vertical as well as horizontal social integration on a musical plane and thus offering a cultural revolution as solution to maladies of the rural population."
20. Santha Shishunala Sharif (Kannada) 1990 Produced by Yajaman Enterprise, Directed by T.S. Nagabharana  
The Award was "for its depiction of unity of religions at the popular-mystical level illustrated by the life and lyrics of a famous Muslim saint who had a Hindu guru."  
No Award given in 1991.
21. Adi Mimansa (Oriya) 1992 Produced and directed by A.K. Bir  
The film got the Award "for its strong appeal for integration and upholding of human values brought about through a remarkably understated treatment of incidents from everyday life."
22. Roja (Tamil) 1993 Produced by Kavithalayaa Productions(P) Ltd., Directed by Mani Ratnam  
The Award was "for presenting a thrilling drama of the abduction of an Indian scientist by a self-proclaimed liberation army which later realises the futility of its anti-social activities."
23. Sardar (Hindi) 1994 Produced by H.M. Patel, Directed by Ketan Mehta  
The Award was "for presenting a panoramic view of India in a period of transition to reveal the goals of nationalism by the integration of a mass of disparate materials and shaping them into a coherent saga of Indian nationalism in an epic style."
24. Mukta (Marathi) 1995 Produced by Ashok Mhatre, Directed by Jabbar Patel  
The Award was "for mapping a sharply defined dramatic style on to a canvas of national caste oppression and for universalising the alliances of the Indian Dalit people." □

*The author is a veteran filmwriter.*

## HOMAGE

**Yojana pays homage to Syed Zafirul Hassan, its Chief Editor from July, 1986 to April, 1990, who passed away on July 28, 1995.**

# Telugu Cinema: Yesterday And Today

Gudipoodi Srihari

AS we move back into the moorings of the Telugu cinema, we feel proud of its achievements as some of them are real pioneering. Today the state government has instituted an award naming it after the late Raghupati Venkaiah, who is regarded as the 'Telugu Chalanachitra Pithamaha'. At the age of 17 he took to photography in Madras in 1886. In 1910 he got an imported Chrono Megaphone and also some films around 4000 ft in length and began exhibiting them to the wonder stricken audience. It is said that he even entertained King George V with a movie to which he tried to add some sound too. He equipped himself even with a touring tent. Encouraged by the response, Venkaiah constructed a theatre in 1921 and named it Gaiety Theatre. He also constructed later two more theatres Crown and Globe. But his greater contribution was sending his son Prakash to England to learn cinematography. After Prakash's return from abroad, Venkaiah constructed a studio too and named it 'Star of East' and made films titled 'Gajendra Moksham', 'Bhishma Pratijna', 'Nandanar' and 'Matayavataram'. He died at the age of 69 handing over his responsibilities as well as a lot of knowledge and excellence in the art of cinematography to his son Prakash.

Prakash went a step further. He became an actor too in the film 'Bhishma Pratijna' made by his father, thus becoming the forerunner of Telugu film heroes, and even directors. And he had two good students of cinema under him—C. Pullaiah and

Y.V. Rao, who later became legends themselves. C. Pullaiah's era was most experimental one, himself doing unbelievable things with camera. He was the man who projected the film on a wall and called it 'Godameedi Bomma'. And that name stands even today. There is a theatre too in Kakinada which has a wall as its screen, cherishing C. Pullaiah's memory. He made a film 'Markendeya' in the vicinity of Kakinada featuring Kakinada Rajaratnam in an important role, the first actress of Telugu Cinema.

The talkie era began in 1931 and H.M. Reddi made 'Bhakta Prahlada' around the same time. Subbaiah who played Hiranyakasipa and Surabhi Kamala appearing opposite him as Leelavathi are supposed to be the first hero and heroine of the Telugu Cinema. L.V. Prasad and Chitrapu Narasimha Rao played small comic roles in the same film, made in Bombay. Credit goes to P.V. Das of Machilipatnam for shifting the Telugu Cinema production to Madras from the northern parts where the South Indian films were being made. He made 'Sitakalyanam' with Kalyani and Bezavada Rajarathnam appearing in lead roles. The film was directed by Chitrapu Narasimha Rao. Most of the mythologicals were made in these days drawing talent from the stage like Madhavapeddi Venkatramayya, Kocharlakota, Kannamba, GSR, and so on. Those were the the days when the patriotic fervour inspired the directors to make films on social themes. The first social was 'Prema Vijayam'

made by Kritiventi Nageswara Rao in 1936, with Prabhala Krishnamurthy taking the credit of being the first hero of a social film. Next year appeared 'Bala Yogini' (K. Subrahmanyam). H.M. Reddi made a film on prohibition with the title 'Gruhalakshmi' under his own banner Rohini Pictures. This film introduced the highly regarded actor Chittori V. Nagaiah. Gudavalli Ramabrahmam, another reputed film maker of the early years of the talkie era made 'Malapilla' featuring Kanchanamala, Nagaraja Rao and introducing Govindarajula Subba Rao.

Meanwhile in the heart of Telugu land, efforts were going on to build studios. In 1936 Nidamarthi Surayya constructed Durga Cinetone Studios and made the mythological 'Sampoorna Ramayanam', featuring Koderu Raju and Pushpavalli. This is regarded as the first film shot on Telugu land. Next we saw the erection of another studio—Andhra Cinetone—at Visakhapatnam, by C. Pullaiah, who made 'Bhakti Jayadeva' featuring Rentachintala and Surabhi Kamalabai.

Raja of Mirjapur took interest in film production in 1938 and constructed a studio in Madras (Alwarpet) and made a film 'Jarasandha' under his banner Jaya Pictures. After Vel Pictures, this was the second studio constructed by Telugus in Madras. The subsequent film made in Jaya Studios was 'Jeevana Jyothi' that introduced another memorable name of Telugu Cinema Ch. Narayana Rao. Jaya Studios was later renamed as Sobhana Studios.

The Second World War had its effect on the film industry too because of all-round rise in the prices. The Producers who were making very long films cut down the length. However, the quality of the films improved. The Gudavalli Ramabrahmam's Panthulamma (1943) and B.N. Reddi's 'Swarga Seema' (1945) are examples

of the new artistic trend.

Around this time another star was born. His name is Akkineni Nageswara Rao and it was Ghantasala Balaramaiah who picked him up literally from a railway platform and put him on the silver screen that too as a hero in the film 'Sitarama Jananam'. Thus, a star who has contributed a lot to the golden era of Telugu Cinema was born. This was in 1944 and exactly after five years, another new actor was introduced to the screen and his name is N.T. Rama Rao. L.V. Prasad takes the credit of featuring him in 'Manadesam' in a brief role of a Sub-Inspector of Police. Among those actors who really brought glory to the Telugu Screen stood out the names of Chitoori V. Nagaiah, Ch. Narayana Rao, Akkineni Nageswara Rao, and N.T. Rama Rao. But the era of the latter two continued for a long period and of the two Nageswara Rao continues to play the role of a hero even today after nearly forty years of his film career.

Almost synchronizing with the entry of Nageswara Rao and N.T. Rama Rao was construction of Vauhini-Vijaya Studios, which gave many memorable films under Vijaya banner. It was the creation of B.N. Reddi, who planned and Moola Narayana Swamy who financed. Guna Sundari Katha (1948) earned great profits for the studio, as its first venture. Shavukaru was its next film (1949). If Guna Sundari Katha was made under Vauhini banner, the latter film was made under Vijaya banner. It gave real break to another great stalwart of Telugu cinema S.V. Ranga Rao. Janaki was introduced in this film, and she continues to be called as Shaocar Janaki after the film's name. The studio Vauhini acquired the name of Vijaya-Vauhini with the addition of one more studio, Revathi, which was purchased by B.N. Reddi (who took Vauhini on lease by that time) and combined the two. This continues to be one of the

best studios in Asia.

Ghantasala, the immortal singer and ANR made their entry in the films almost in the same year. M.S. Rama Rao was the first playback singer of the Telugu Cinema in true sense. Ghantasala got a chance to sing in the film 'Balaraju', an ANR Starrer. With the success of 'Balaraju', Ghantasala rose to phenomenal heights and made history in Telugu cine music. Later as a composer too he achieved great success. Today, it is the era of S.P. Balasubrahmanyam. In 1950, two versions of a single story - 'Lakshamma' and 'Sri Lakshamma Katha' appeared. The former featuring Ch. Narayana Rao and the latter ANR in the lead. In 1951 came the memorable 'Malleeswari', a great musical that mirrored not only the genius of composer S. Rajeswara Rao, but also the lyrical strength of Devulapalli, the harbinger of modern era of Telugu poetry, NTR got a break with 'Patala Bhairavi' as hero in the same year. ANR and NTR were featured in 'Palletooripilla' and 'Samsaram' together in the same year.

Akkineni Nageswara Rao, was given a challenging role in 'Samsaram' (1950) by L.V. Prasad, which wiped out the talk that ANR was fit only for folklores. ANR brilliantly played the role of a simpleton. Savitiri, a celebrity among heroines made her appearance in the same film playing a minor role. Till then Bhanumati, G. Varalakshmi and Anjali dominated the scene.

Thus the fifties heralded the golden era of Telugu cinema and most memorable films were made during the fifties and sixties. NTR's own NAT banner also added lustre to this period. 'Stree Sahasam' (1951), 'Pellicheshi Shoodu' (1952), 'Pakkinti Ammayi', 'Devadasu' and 'Kannatallai' in 1953; 'Peddamushulu', 'Parivarthana', 'Raju-Paeda' and 'Vipranarayana' in

1954; 'Anarkali', 'Bangarupapa', 'Ardhangi', 'Donga Ramudu', 'Rojulu Marayi', 'Missamma' in 1955; 'Tenali Ramakrishna' in 1956; 'Kutumba Gourvam', 'Mayabazar', 'MLA', 'Pandu Ranga Mahatyam' and 'Thodu Kodalu' in 1957; 'Badi Panthulu', 'Mangalya Balam', 'Pellinati Pramenalu', 'Inti Guttu', 'Sri Venkateswara Mahatyam' and 'Sampoorna Ramayanam' in 1958; 'Illarikam' 'Jayabheri' and 'Maa Inti Mahalakshmi', in 1959, 'Bhakta Sabari' 'Mahakavi Kalidasu' in 1960 are some of the films that marked the golden decade of Telugu cinema.

The era of Telugu comedians began with Chitrapu Narasimha Rao playing Chandarkulu in H.M. Reddi's Bhakta Prahlada. Later Vangara Venkata Subbaiah, Dr. Sivaramakrishnaiah, Lanka Satyam, Kasturi Siva Rao, B. Sitaram, Nalla Rama Murthy, Ramana Reddi, Chadalvada Kutumba Rao, Relangi Venkatramayya, Padmanabham, Balakrishna and Rajababu made good impression. But it was Relangi who brought real flavour to the Telugu comedy and he remained a comedy king throughout his career.

The Seventies augured the era of speed as the number of productions began mounting up. The song picturisation also began changing its colour. The film producers fill back on the bygone era for ideas and even for titles. As the quantity increased, the quality suffered. Western influence via Hindi Cinema increased. The black and white films slowly yielded to colour and the general sentimental family subjects were replaced with so-called action themes.

'Adavi Ramudu' (1977) marked a change in the approach of many directors. It was a big budget film totally entertainment-oriented. K. Raghavendra Rao, a second generation director (Son of noted director

K.S. Prakasa Rao) steered the film into a box office success breaking earlier records. After Nageswara Rao, who is classified as class hero and NTR as mass hero, the other actors who came on to the screen with promise are Sobhanbabu, with Bhakta Sabari (1960) and Krishna. They struggled quite for sometime to come on to the top. There also appeared two other action heroes Krishnamraju and Chiranjeevi (Chilka Gorinka-1966). Now stories were written for the heroes to keep up their image. All this is recent history that went from bad to worse. Amidst this chaos appeared, like a brilliant musical star 'Sankarabharanam' created by K. Viswanath.

Among directors it was L.V. Prasad

who has a new outlook. Tatineni Prakasa Rao, Pratyagatmaa, T. Rama Rao, also made significant contribution.

K. Viswanath, Dasari Narayana Rao, Jandhyala, K. Bapu, Relangi Narasimha Rao, T. Krishna, Kodi Ramakrishna are trying to lend freshness.

Like Adurthi in the past Viswanath today continues to display artistic excellence in filmmaking, T. Krishna's five successive hits starting with 'Neti Bharatam' and B. Narasimha Rao's 'Rangulakala' have added their own distinct flavour to Telugu Cinema.

Sarathi Studios established in 1960 became busy in 1962 because of raw film problems in Madras. This led

producers like Dukkipati Madhusudhana Rao to move to Hyderabad. Soon we found a beeline of great banners making films in Hyderabad, with base activity in Sarathi Studios. Then came Annapoorna Studios, Bhagyanagar Studios, Ramakrishna Cine Studios, besides the old Southern Movietone (now closed). Padmalaya is a recent addition.

Good days are again round the corner, with directors becoming independent. 'Pratighatana' made by Usha Kiran movies smashed all earlier records of the box-office collections and also brought cinema nearer to life.

*The author is a noted journalist.*

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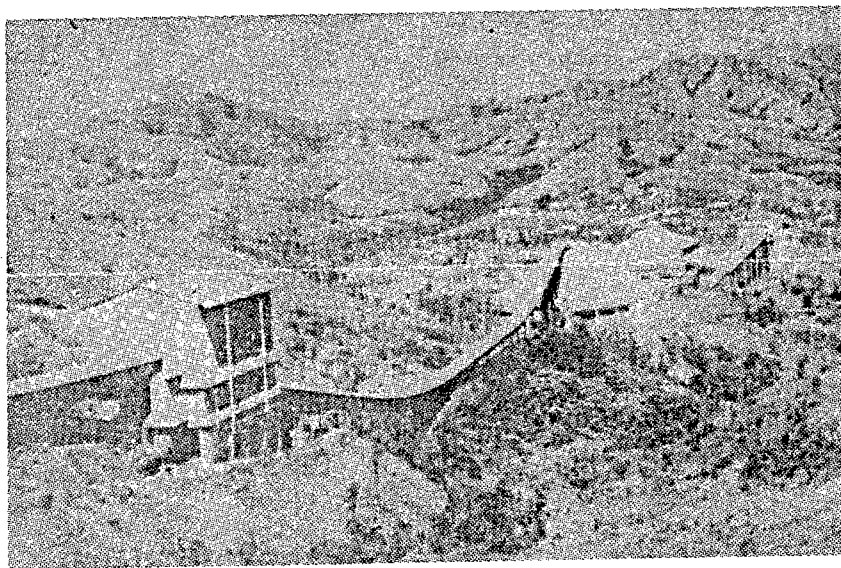
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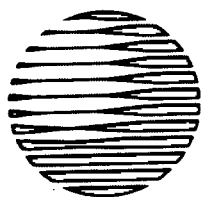
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