

## SVABHĀVA FLOWING INTO STREAMS: IN CONTINUUM Interrogating Avant-garde. And the Wave.

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भीमसेन गाते हैं तो उनका स्वभाव प्रकट होता है। भीमसेन पन्द्रह साल से वैसे ही गाते हैं। उन्होंने अलग-अलग राग गाये हैं। आप अलग-अलग पात्र कर सकते हैं। लेकिन स्वभाव बदल रहा है मतलब यह आपके करीब आ रहा है जैसा कि कहते हैं कि बीस साल पहले आप जो गाते थे उससे आज आप बहुत अच्छा गा रहे हैं तो ऐसा क्यों हो गया है; आप अपने नज़दीक आ गये। ऐसा तब होता है जब आप अपने स्वभाव के पास रहते हैं, तब सब चीज़ें ठीक हो जाती हैं, तकनीक वगैरह, लय, ताल वगैरह सब ठीक हो जाते हैं अपने आप, अनुशासन अतः यही है कि संगीत आपको अपने स्वभाव के करीब लाता है। [अभेद आकाश: मणि कौल से उदयन वाजपेयी की बातचीत]

When Bhimsen (Joshi) sings, his *svabhāva* [own state of intuition] is manifested<sup>1</sup>. He has been singing like this since the last fifteen years. He has sung different *ragas*. You can enact different roles. But the *svabhāva* is being transfigured, which means that it is getting closer to you. As they say, your singing is more expressive today than it was twenty years ago, why is it so? You have come into close contact with your self. This happens when you realize your *svabhāva*, then everything falls into place naturally, the technique, the rhythm, the discipline etc. Thus, music draws you nearer to your *svabhāva*. [Abhed Akāsh: Mani Kaul in conversation with Udayan Vajpeyi; parantheses added.]<sup>2</sup>

**स्वभाव, समय और सातत्य।**

**One's own state. Time. Continuum.**

स्व, *sva* as a pronoun would mean one's own, belonging to oneself. It has the quality of being. It often serves as a reflexive pronoun; स्वनियोगमशून्यं कुरु। स्वभावः *svabhāva* would mean one's own state, an essential or inherent property, natural constitution or innate disposition; I would like to include it within अन्तःप्रज्ञा, intuition. भावः is being or existing, नासतो विद्यते भावः It also signifies a sense of contemplation.<sup>3</sup> The word सातत्य *sātatya* has a sense of continuity or continuum. समयः *samaya* suggests time in general, it could also mean 'coming together'. I believe that both *svabhāva* and *samaya* flow in continuum and that *samaya* also has its *sva-bhāva*, its own state and *pra-bhāva*, impression or impact.

It would perhaps be interesting to very briefly see how *samaya* has impacted human thoughts and culture across the world. There was perhaps a certain element of provocation embedded in time.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhimsen Joshi [b. 1922] is an exponent of the Kirana *gharānā* [stylistic school] of *kbayāl* vocalism. In 2008, he was awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor.

<sup>2</sup> *Abhed Akāsh: Mani Kaul se Udayan Vajpeyi ki bātchit*, in Hindi [Undivided Space: Udayan Vajpeyi's conversation with Mani Kaul], a publication of the Madhya Pradesh Film Development Corporation, Bhopal, undated.

<sup>3</sup> *Bhāvas* are either स्थायिन primary, or व्यभिचारिन subordinate. The former are eight or nine, in accordance with the *rasas*; each *rasa* having its own स्थायिभाव *sthāyibhāva*. I would like to embed 'intuition' within the overall *bhāva* of *sva*. This would mean that intuitive cinema eliminates the creator's own temperament. Ordinarily, temperament would include one's own memories and desires, impeding intuition and eventually leading to didacticism.

**विश्व मानव-संस्कृति और समय स्व-भाव प्र-भाव!**  
**World Human-Culture and Impression of Time!**

Perhaps the 1960s was a different time across geographies and cultures. It is often specifically referred to as The Sixties, denoting the complex of inter-related cultural and political trends in many countries of Europe, Asia and Africa among others. In the United States, “The Sixties”, as known in popular culture, is a term used by historians, journalists, and other objective academics; in some cases, nostalgically, to describe the counterculture and social revolution near the end of the decade; and, pejoratively, to describe the era as one of irresponsible excess and flamboyance. The decade was also labeled the Swinging Sixties because of the libertine attitudes that emerged during this time. The 1960s have become synonymous with all the new, exciting, radical, and subversive events and trends of the period, which continued to develop in the following decades. In Africa, the 1960s was a period of radical political change as thirty-two countries gained independence from their European colonial rulers. Several governments turned to the Left in the early 1960s. In China, Mao Zedong launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

In 1958, the Nouvelle Vague burst on the French film scene. And as Peter Graham, editor of one of the early books on the French New Wave, states, “like the British Angry Young Man movement it was less a movement than a useful journalistic catchphrase; under it, a very heterogenous bunch of filmmakers were lumped together, some of them readily, but most of them willy-nilly.”<sup>4</sup> The students’ protests in Paris / France in May 1968 had an enormous social impact. It is considered to be the watershed moment when a conservative moral ideal shifted towards a more liberal moral ideal, which today better describes French society, in theory if not in practice. Written above the entrance of the occupied Odeon Theater in Paris, a slogan announced, “When the National Assembly becomes a bourgeois theater, all the bourgeois theaters should be turned into national assemblies.”

India also witnessed several radical developments in her social, political and cultural spheres, including cinematography, around this time. It was the ripening time of Nehruvian dreams. The *samaya-prabhāva* was pervasive. Of all the places in India, Bengal had become the intensive center of cultural upheavals. Radical students’ politics in Bengal, as Moinak Biswas mentions, coincided almost exactly with the Prague-Spring, May 68, the student movements in USA, West Germany, Italy and England.<sup>5</sup> A new (avant-garde) cultural movement called the Hungry Generation was launched during the 1960s in Kolkata.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The New Wave: Critical landmarks*, Peter Graham [ed.], Secker & Warburg, London, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> *Introduction: Critical Returns*, in *Apu and after: Re-visiting Ray’s cinema*, Moinak Biswas [ed.], Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> The approach of the Hungry Generation was to confront and disturb the prospective reader’s preconceived colonial canons. Ginsberg visited one of the leaders, Malay Roy Choudhury in April 1963, when he went to Patna in Bihar. During the Sixties, Octavio Paz also came into contact with the Hungry Generation writers. Although the movement originated in Patna and was initially based in Kolkata, it had participants spread over North Bengal, Tripura and Benaras.

Time even impacted Hollywood. The sixties saw the beginning of the New Hollywood era that dominated the next decade. Films such as Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* [1967], Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968], and Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* [1968]. And one of the Hollywood blockbusters included Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* [1960]. Hitchcock was the hero of François Truffaut, a leading member of the French New Wave, among others. What was more important in the sixties was the explosion of light-weight and affordable cameras and that boosted the underground movement, which was also later dubbed as avant-garde. Artists such as Michael Snow, Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage et al. emerged on the scene. Basically, the Sixties were the time of counter- and anti-establishment thoughts; counter-cultures.

**समय-प्रभाव । भारतीय सिनेमा और तरंग । अन्यत्र ।**

**Impression of Time. Indian Cinema and a Wave. Elsewhere.**

Early 1960s. "Soon after, the New Wave from France made a dent in our country," said Mrinal Sen, whose "saccharine sweet film with happy ending" - *Bhuvan Shome* - is said to have launched the Indian New Wave in 1969.<sup>7</sup>

And as Sen himself described, he smelt a certain madness in the air. Madness and freshness. He felt an irresistible urge for a change. He thought it was a good enough time for him to playfully and meaningfully defy the existing barriers that the mainstream would seldom cross. And in 1965, he made a film called *Akash Kusum*. Broadly a comedy, which was dubbed by Satyajit Ray as a "crow film," as its self-proclaimed topicality of the theme stretched well back into antiquity.<sup>8</sup>

When Satyajit Ray won an Oscar for lifetime achievement before his death in 1992, critic Gowri Ramnarayan described Ray as, "a traditionalist in approach, a classicist in control, a humanist in attitude." In the same text, she also described Ray as "the avant-garde path-breaker" who had come to be seen as an established traditionalist."<sup>9</sup> Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, the author of the first elaborate book on Mrinal Sen, describes Ray as a "pucca Hollywoodian."<sup>10</sup> For Mukhopadhyay, who was also once the Managing Director of the National Film Development Corporation [NFDC, erstwhile Film Finance Corporation], the leading Indian New Wave filmmakers are Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihalani. The book has no single reference to either Mani Kaul or Kumar Shahani, leave alone Robert Bresson whose influence we can see in Sen's later works, when he began to search for an enemy within. In an interview at his Beltala home in 1992, Sen told me about his meeting with Bresson in Cannes, where his film *L'Argent* was shown. Sen had liked the film and he personally expressed his feelings to Bresson. When the latter asked him the reason for his liking, Sen told him about its inner dynamism underneath its cool surface.<sup>11</sup> Among Sen's ten best films of the world, Bresson's *Four Nights of a Dreamer* finds place.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This is how Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, the author of *Mrinal Sen: Sixty Years in Search of Cinema*, describes *Bhuvan Shome*, the so-called harbinger of the Indian New Wave!

<sup>8</sup> Paper read at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, 12 July 1994, in *Mrinal Sen: Sixty Years in Search of Cinema*, Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009. Between July and September 1965, *The Statesman*, a Kolkata-based newspaper, carried a long correspondence on the film involving Mrinal Sen, the director, Ashish Barman, the joint scenarist and Satyajit Ray. In his letter dated 20 August 1965, Ray concluded, "Contemporary moral: A crow-film is a crow film is a crow-film."

<sup>9</sup> *Frontline*, 20 December 1991.

<sup>10</sup> *Mrinal Sen: Sixty Years in Search of Cinema*, Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mrinal Sen, Amrit Gangar, *Navneet Samarpan*, Mumbai, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> *Quatre nuits d'un reveur* [Four Nights of a Dreamer, 1972], *L'Argent* [Money, 1983].

Even the famous French New Wave has been variously described as misleading and heterogenous. Writing about Roberto Rossellini and the French New Wave, Dileep Padgaonkar maintains, “It is Langlois and his colleague and companion, the redoubtable Mary Meerson, who brought Rossellini and the *Cahiers* critics together during private projections at the Cinematheque. The critics were eager to become filmmakers, and Rossellini served as an example of what could be achieved with modest means: doing away with stars, expensive sets, heavy equipment. The young men would soon go on to direct their first films which would be misleadingly dubbed together under the label *La nouvelle vague* [New Wave cinema]. Misleading because much like the term neo-realism, the term New Wave covered a very broad range of styles and techniques.) Peter Graham and several other critics had also described them as a very heterogeneous bunch of filmmakers lumped together, most willy nilly.”<sup>13</sup>

In a letter to Helen Scott, François Truffaut described all of Jean-Luc Godard’s pre-*Alphaville* films as linear. “Jean-Luc’s new film is genuinely new. The very height of novelty! Compared to it, all those he made before were as linear as *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.”<sup>14</sup> [underscore in original]

Later, in 1973, Jean-Luc Godard wrote to François Truffaut about the latter’s film *La Nuit américaine*: “Yesterday, I saw *La Nuit américaine*. Probably no one else will call you a liar, so I will. It’s no more an insult than ‘fascist’, it’s a criticism, and it’s the absence of criticism that I complain of in the films of Chabrol, Ferreri, Verneuil, Delannoy, Renoir, etc. You say: films are trains that pass in the night, but who takes the train, in what class, and who is driving it with an ‘informer’ from the management standing at his side? Directors like those I mention make film-trains as well. And if you aren’t referring to the Trans-Europe, then maybe it’s a local train or else the one from Munich to Dachau...”<sup>15</sup>

In his reply, Truffaut: “I don’t give a shit to what you think of *La Nuit américaine*, what I find deplorable on your part is the fact that, even now, you continue to go and see such films, films whose subject-matter you know in advance will not correspond to either your conception of the cinema or your conception of life.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Under Her Spell: Roberto Rosellini in India*, Dileep Padgaonkar, Penguin, New Delhi, 2008. Padgaonkar received a doctorate in humanities from the Sorbonne in 1968. In April 2002, he was awarded the Légion d’Honneur, France’s highest civilian decoration, in recognition of his services to journalism. Padgaonkar had also studied at the Institute for Higher Cinematographic Studies [IDHEC] in France, under historian George Sadoul, and the theoretician Jean Mistry.

<sup>14</sup> Letter dated Friday, 20 August 1965, Paris. *François Truffaut: Letters*, translated by Gilbert Adair, faber & faber, London, 1990. Godard’s pre-*Alphaville* [1965] films include *A bout de souffle* [Breathless, 1959] and *Le Mépris* [Contempt, 1963]. *The Bridge on the River Kwai* [Dir. David Lean, 1957].

<sup>15</sup> Godard’s letter dated May 1973; Truffaut’s May-June 1973, *ibid.* In the English-speaking world, *La Nuit américaine* [American night] is known as *Day for Night*, this 1974 film is often considered as one of Truffaut’s greatest works. Along with *The 400 Blows*, it is one of the two Truffaut films included in *Time* magazine’s 100 Best Films of the Century.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

भारतः राज्य प्रेरित नयी तरंग। एक घोषणापत्र।

**India: State-sponsored author-cinema and a manifesto.**

A manifesto for a New Indian Cinema movement was issued by Mrinal Sen and Arun Kaul, advocating a state-sponsored author-cinema. In the meanwhile, the debate about art and commercial cinema or good and bad cinema continued for a long time. By the mid-eighties, all the contradictions had begun to manifest suggesting the underlying tension to get public money through the NFDC or the government. In late 1986, CINEMA India-International magazine recorded the opinions of several filmmakers, including Mani Kaul, Shyam Benegal and others.<sup>17</sup>

What Mani Kaul said then is interesting for our context. “I don’t believe there is anything as art cinema. There is nothing as art music or art painting, is there? Why then categorize cinema in such a slot? The only distinction that one can make is between commercial and non-commercial cinema. A good commercial film is one which is capable of collecting as much money as it can, while a good non-commercial film is one which explores the art form of cinema as honestly as possible.” Later, Kaul had also talked about ‘shastriya cinema’ or the classical cinema. According to Shyam Benegal, good cinema was one which re-sensitized the sensibility of the people who watched it, as opposed to the other cinema, which desensitized the mind of an audience. KA Abbas said, “The crowds which throng Amitabh Bachchan’s movies will never come for films like *Chakra*, *Aakrosh*, *Ankush*, *Ardh Satya*, *Paar* and *New Delhi Times!*”<sup>18</sup> Such binaries existed already, and they were playing the role behind building the great Middle Road within the Indian cinema super bazaar. Almost two decades had passed since Mrinal Sen’s *Bhuvan Shome* and Mani Kaul’s *Uski Roti*.

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<sup>17</sup> There was a seminar to discuss whether good cinema was a viable proposition. Organized by CINEMA India-International and the Federation of Film Societies of India, Northern Region, the panelists were Vijaya Mehta, Ramesh Sharma, Subrata Mitra and PK Nair.

<sup>18</sup> CINEMA India-International, Oct-Dec. 1986. *Chakra* [Dir. Rabindra Dharmaraj, 1980], *Aakrosh* [Dir. Govind Nihalani, 1980], *Ankush* [Dir. N. Chandra, 1985], *Ardh Satya* [Dir. Govind Nihalani, 1983], *Paar* [Dir. Gautam Ghose, 1984], *New Delhi Times* [Dir. Ramesh Sharma, 1985].

नयी संज्ञाएँ और कुछ भारतीय विचारधाराएँ।

### New Terms and Some Indian Thoughts.

As terms, New Wave and Avant-garde have always remained on unstable axes of existence, either forced or natural. In India, the situation has remained quite amusing and contradictory in this respect. In their talks or writings, neither Mani Kaul nor Kumar Shahani has used these terms for their works, but reviewers in media have often called them avant-garde! What does Shahani think about the avant-garde?

According to him, the basic contradiction of the cinematographic form arises from its capacity of replacing the object of its 'contemplation' by its image. The commercial cinema has used it to create not only dreams that substitute reality, but its commodity gods known as stars. Even montage has, with the best of intentions, led to the necessary juxtaposition of icons or signs which totally replace reality instead of evoking or analyzing it, thus creating a structure close to myth with all its falsehood. The avant-garde experiments, borrowing syntax from the other arts, have merely been attempts at achieving a kind of respectability for the cinema.

"Well intentioned as these experiments may be, they are a repetition of failures demonstrated earlier on in Europe, particularly towards the end of the silent era. But in our country, literariness or painterliness and, surprisingly, even theatricality, when compared to the normal orgies of the vulgar imagination, still pass for good cinema. Onomatopoeia was not a cinematic device for the French New Wave. It was its vocabulary. Its syntax – where it had articulated any – was that of the American 'B' film."<sup>19</sup>

Mani Kaul does not consider himself an experimental filmmaker. "The environment of my kind of cinema, which is not experimental because I've always known what I'm doing and what the result will be, does not exist. There is no outlet for *shastriya cinema*, as there is say for *shastriya sangeet*."<sup>20</sup> Once, Robert Bresson said in an interview with Jean-Luc Godard that the plot has a certain coherence but the non-plot has a wider coherence, it is not limited by the conventions of a story.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Myths for Sale*, in the Dossier on Kumar Shahani, Ashish Rajadhyaksha [ed.], *Framework* # 30/31, London, 1986; first published in *Seminar*, December 1974.

<sup>20</sup> *I am opposed to story-telling*, Mani Kaul in conversation with Sameer Shah, *The Sunday Observer*, 11 July 1982.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

भारतीय सिनेमा और अग्ररक्षक: आकुलता।

## Indian Cinema and the Avant-garde: Chaos.

The so-called modern Indian media has been hilariously tossing up the word *avant-garde* left, right, center, bottom and top; even for filmmakers who have never deviated themselves from the linear-narrative or conventional filmmaking practice. On the open wrestling grounds of Indian cinema, not only Basu Chatterji, Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Amol Palekar are described as avant-garde filmmakers, but even Shakti Samanta and Gulzar! Under the headline “TV offers hope for avant-garde filmmakers,” a reviewer reported:

“Where is Hindi cinema heading? The movement towards good cinema seems to have petered out into various genres classified as niche filmmaking, leaving the actual harbingers of art-meets-kitsch cinema panting for breath. While various new-age filmmakers like Nagesh Kukunoor and Sujoy Ghosh have benefited from the niche multiplex filmmaking culture, many of the older generation avant-garde filmmakers like Basu Chatterjee, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Gulzar and Shakti Samanta, who bridged the gap between masala and art cinema, seem to have lost their way.”<sup>22</sup> Essentially, this underlines the operations of the famous Indian middle-roader or middle cinema that I will examine later. But even within the middle-cinema brackets, how did these names appear? Obviously, the fraternity of Indian avant-garde filmmakers has been joyfully expanding ever since this term has entered our film vocabulary. Or, perhaps it was already in ‘vogue’ in the fashion industry, on the ramp.

In an interview with film journalist Subhash K. Jha, the famous Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan referred to his producing of and acting in Amol Palekar’s film *Paheli* [2005] and said, “This is my first brush with the mindset of an avant-garde filmmaker.” Well, the actor is also factually wrong because he had earlier acted in Mani Kaul’s film *Idiot* [1991, based on Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel], which had robustly explored the polyphonous contours within its non-narrative *bhāva*. Kaul believes that the biggest curse for a film is linear narrative.<sup>23</sup>

However, Kaul’s comments on *Idiot*, the film, are interesting in our context: “Whereas for years I dwelt on rarefied wholes where the line of the narrative often vanished into thin air, with *Idiot* I have plunged into an extreme saturation of events. [P]ersonally, I find myself on the brink, exposed to a series of possible disintegrations. Ideas, then, cancel each other out and the form germinates. Content belongs to the future, and that’s how it creeps into the present.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> IANS, 4 October 2005.

<sup>23</sup> *Abhed Akāsh: Mani Kaul se Udayan Vajpeyi ke bātchit*, in Hindi [Undivided Space: Udayan Vajpeyi’s conversation with Mani Kaul], a publication of the Madhya Pradesh Film Development Corporation, Bhopal, undated. Prior to *Idiot*, Kaul had chosen yet another Dostoevsky story, *The Meek One*, for his film *Nazar* [1989].

<sup>24</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, new revised edition, Ashish Rajadhyaksha & Paul Willemen [eds.], BFI & OUP, 1999.

It was Mani Kaul, along with Kumar Shahani, who first brought in a deep sense of aesthetic environment within the Indian cinematographic मीमांसा, *mīmāṃsā*, if there was any.<sup>25</sup> They brought in philosophical reflections into Indian cinematographic discourse, which otherwise had remained journalistic, sociological, political, or hagiographic. Most of the discussions around Mrinal Sen's films touch upon their socio-political emphases or messages and not so much about their formal cinematographic engagements, e.g. the famously long debate about *Ākāsh Kusum*. When Sen's film *Calcutta 71* was shown in Calcutta's Metro Cinema, often some young spectators would burst into a spell of slogan-shouting, *Mrinal Sen Jug Jug Jijo* [Long Live Mrinal Sen].<sup>26</sup> What was this boisterous response for? But wait, those who sang paeans of praise after *Calcutta 71*, called Sen a traitor when *Padatik* was shown in Calcutta.<sup>27</sup> Mrinal Sen, generally identified with gimmickry, had loudly asked the audiences to "Stand Up," towards the end of his film *Mrigayā*, but later, he implicitly advised the same audiences to lie down, introspect and search for the enemy within.<sup>28</sup> Or, had his new wave acquired a new novelty? Waves always wave towards the shore, to dissolve into nothingness; surf, roar and all.

In the context of the Indian New Wave, what KA Abbas said almost echoed the sense of continuum: "There is a perceptible qualitative change in the tastes of at least a section of the audience, which was not manifest twenty-five years ago – at the time of my *Dharti ke Lal*, Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar*, and Uday Shankar's *Kalpna* or some years later, Mahesh Kaul's *Gopinath* and Kamal Amrohi's *Daera*. Probably these pictures (and a few more like them) were produced ahead of their times. But not all of us thought that we belonged to 'New Wave', actually we thought that we were fighting against the then current 'new wave' of musical melodramas and inane comedies like *Khazanchi* and *Khidki* and *Shinshinaki Booblaboo*, and going back to the tradition of purposeful and dynamic films of social commitment like *Devdas*, *Aadmi*, *Padosi*, *Roti*."<sup>29</sup>

Let me now go back to the India of the sixties to briefly see how the Nehruvian cultural vision started falling into place or otherwise.

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<sup>25</sup> *Mimamsa*, deep reflection, inquiry, investigation. It is one of the six chief *Darshanas* or systems of Indian philosophy.

<sup>26</sup> *Mrinal Sen: Sixty Years in Search of Cinema*, Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* The phrase 'Stand up, stand up' was inspired by Lindsay Anderson's famous essay on cinema in *Sight and Sound* [Autumn, 1956]. The words that appeared in bold white print at the bottom of the red screen were: STAND UP, STAND UP, REMEMBER THE MARTYRS WHO LOVED LIFE AND FREEDOM. For a film, he had even toyed with the idea of crediting his name with 'Story, Direction and Gimmickry.'

<sup>29</sup> *The Indian New Wave*, KA Abbas, in *Indian Film Society News* [IFSON], a journal of the Federation of Film Societies of India, Central Office, Calcutta, undated. Based on Bijon Bhattacharya's plays, *Nabanna* and *Jabanbandi*, Abbas' directorial debut *Dharti ke Lal* was produced by the Indian People's Theater Association [IPTA] in 1946; loosely adapted from Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* was also made in 1946 and supported by the IPTA, these two films formed a trio with V. Shantaram's *Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kabani* [1946]. In 1948, Uday Shankar's *Kalpna* was shot at the Gemini Studios in Madras, its 122-minute version was shown in the US. In the same year Mahesh Kaul [Mani Kaul's uncle] made *Gopinath*, which featured the verse of the medieval saint-poets Surdas and Meerabai besides other songs, its lead players included Raj Kapoor and Tripti Mitra. *Daera* [Dir. Kamal Amrohi, 1953], *Khazanchi* [Dir. Moti Gidwani, 1941], *Khidki* [Dir. PL Santoshi, 1948], *Shinshinaki Booblaboo* [Dir. PL Santoshi, 1952], *Devdas* [Dir. PC Barua, 1935], *Aadmi* [*Manoos*, in Marathi, Dir. V. Shantaram, 1939], *Padosi* [*Shejari*, in Marathi, Dir. V. Shantaram, 1941], *Roti* [Dir. Mehboob, 1942]. Information source: *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, new revised edition, Ashish Rajadhyaksha & Paul Willemen [eds.], BFI & OUP, 1999.



**सिनेमा: समाज सुधार और राष्ट्र निर्माण।**

**Cinema: Social reformation and nation building.**

The new millennium marks the golden jubilee of several art and science institutions that were established by the initiative of the first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru. National Gallery of Modern Art [1954], the Lalit Kala Akademi [1954] – for the visual arts; the Sangeet Natak Akademi [1953] – for the performing arts; Sahitya Akademi [1954] – for the literary arts; the Indian Institutes of Technology [from 1951 onwards] in different parts of the country – for various branches of science and technology; and in the realm of the cinematographic arts – the Films Division [1948], the Children’s Film Society [1955], the Film Finance Corporation [1960], the Film Institute of India [1960], and the National Film Archive of India [1964]. Those were the times of cultural rejuvenation when India was still trying to build herself socially and economically after centuries of colonial oppression and loot.

Inspired by the Leninist credo that cinema was the most important of all the arts for the Soviet Union, Prime Minister Nehru had appointed the SK Patil Film Enquiry Committee that submitted its report to the Central Government in 1951. The report took over a dozen years for the implementation of some of its recommendations. The Film Finance Corporation (now National Film Development Corporation) and the Film Institute of India (now Film and Television Institute of India) were established in 1960. The FTII was established not to create any new wave in Indian cinema but to supply trained technicians and cineastes to the commercial film industry, to hopefully discipline and reform it, to modernize it within the Nehruvian vision.<sup>30</sup> It should be interesting to note that despite all the progressive moves on the policy level, cinematography was made a part of the Information & Broadcasting Ministry, as also the Cinematograph Act, retaining the colonial legacy. Initial dichotomies were in place right from the early times of the nation building endeavors.

It should be noted that Nehru was highly appreciative of the cinema of Bimal Roy, Mehboob Khan, KA Abbas, and such realist or neo-realist filmmakers who he thought were helping to build a new India, through their messages.<sup>31</sup> When Nehru saw Mrinal Sen’s second film *Neel Akasher Nicey* [Under the Blue Sky, 1958], he congratulated Sen for doing a “great service to the nation.” Within a week after the screening, Nehru addressed the Congress Party’s Working Committee meeting and spoke highly of this film even there. At the same time, the film was equally appreciated by the leaders of the still undivided Communist Party of India. Jyoti Basu was ecstatic about the movie. He promised Sen whatever assistance he required for the promotion of the film. The “sentimental mishmash with the usual commercial props of a villain and a vamp,” *Neel Akasher Nicey*, however, became instrumental in opening the doors of Tollywood for Mrinal Sen.<sup>32</sup> The film details the development of the relationship between a Chinese peddler of small items, Wang-Lu, and a Bengali freedom fighter, Basanti, who is married to a successful lawyer. They meet accidentally and in spite of all differences, Wang-Lu finds in her, the memory of his dead sister. This creates a lot of conflicts and misgivings but, ultimately, the relationship is vindicated.

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<sup>30</sup> While inaugurating the Hirakud Dam in Orissa, Nehru had announced that dams and factories were the temples of modern India. The Nehruvian vision was sabotaged and eventually, literal temples became quasi-industrial, as we see them today. His vision of developing a scientific temper among modern Indians did not realize itself in the true sense.

<sup>31</sup> Eventually, Bimal Roy came in very handy to the middle-roaderists.

<sup>32</sup> *Mrinal Sen: Sixty Years in Search of Cinema*, Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009.

However, after the India-China war in 1962, Nehru was heart broken and frustrated. He felt cheated by the Chinese. Around this time, his daughter Indira Gandhi had already entered the national arena of real politics. Having studied at Rabindranath Tagore's world renowned institute, Shantiniketan, and being part of the Indian film society movement (she was even one of the vice-presidents of the Federation of Film Societies of India), Indira Gandhi was supportive of creating a cinematographic consciousness parallel to a large chunk of mainstream commercial cinema.<sup>33</sup> After the death of her father in 1964, she served as the Minister for Information & Broadcasting until the death of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1966. Mrinal Sen's low-budget *Bhuvan Shome*, acclaimed by Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihalani as the harbinger of the Indian New Wave, happened because of Indira Gandhi, who wanted to consolidate her father's cultural and nation-building vision. Through her personal and ministerial intervention, she had turned the Film Finance Corporation, a government department, into a Santa Claus for filmmakers, wrote Mukhopadhyay. According to him, *Bhuvan Shome* succeeded not because of its 'new aspects'. "It worked because it used some of the most popular conventions of cinema which helped soften the edges of its occasional spiky syntax. These conventions are: a delectable heroine, an ear-filling background score, and a simple wholesome wish-fulfilling screen story (summary in seven words: Big Bad Bureaucrat Reformed by Rustic Belle.)" The film, Ray said, was essentially old-fashioned.<sup>34</sup> For Ritwik Ghatak, *Bhuvan Shome* was a 'lousy film'.<sup>35</sup> But sadly, the good old benevolent figure, Santa Claus, went on becoming stingy and choosy, unable to discriminate between the new wave and avant-garde labels vis-à-vis the genuine cinema of *svabhāva*. He thought mediocrity would bring more money into his legendary bag. He was losing his balance between the stools.

**उसकी रोटी और माया दर्पण का सर्जन। बनाम -  
संचारण-वाग्मिता की नयी हरकतें।।**

***Uski Roti and Maya Darpan and the Rise of a  
New Movement of Communication Rhetoric.***

As we know, almost at the same time, Mani Kaul made *Uski Roti* [1969], which, along with Kumar Shahani's *Maya Darpan* [1972], showed what could define the cinematographic rigour. Gradually, there rose a New Movement against them and the main plank of that new movement was 'communication'. Good cinema was the only one that could communicate with the mass audience, louder went a cry. The rhetoric was not as innocent and unintended as it sounded or seemed. Both Kaul and Shahani made their positions as clear and frank as possible concerning their stand on cinematography. Film reviewers across the country called them imitative of European cinema, particularly of Robert Bresson, without any substantiation.

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<sup>33</sup> The first meeting of the Federation of Film Societies of India [FFSI] was held at the residence of the then Sahitya Akademi secretary, Krishna Kripalani, in New Delhi on 13 December 1959. Satyajit Ray was the founder-president of this federal body with functional film societies in Kolkata, Patna, New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai. Besides Indira Gandhi, IK Gujral (who became the Prime Minister of India in 1997), filmmakers KA Abbas, Mrinal Sen and film scholar Vijaya Mulay were actively associated with the FFSI as office-bearers. Indira Gandhi remained the Vice-President of the FFSI even after she became the minister of Information & Broadcasting. At one time, IK Gujral was designated as the Treasurer. Satyajit Ray was the President of the FFSI until his death in 1992. Other VPs of the FFSI after its inception were Ammu Swaminathan, Robert Hawkins and S. Gopalan; Vijaya Mulay and Chidananda Dasgupta were the secretaries.

<sup>34</sup> *An Indian New Wave?, Our Films, Their Films*, Satyajit Ray, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1976.

<sup>35</sup> *Mrinal Sen: Sixty Years in Search of Cinema*, Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009.

It should perhaps be pertinent to capture some of those time-moments to see how these filmmakers were engaged and dealt with the ‘communication’ movement. Rhetorical counter-arguments were hollow but not inconsequential since they went on affecting both Kaul and Shahani’s filmmaking careers. They knew that a single adverse comment by Satyajit Ray could damage them seriously. I remember a long essay written by Kaul, titled *Communication*, which I had reproduced in the mid-eighties in one of my program notes for Screen Unit, the film society I headed. He said,

“Communication can only be assessed in terms of the *quality of experience*. The words ‘quality’ and ‘experience’ would imply that the one who communicates and the one to whom the communication is directed exist at different levels but that they fall within the bounds of relationship. If the viewer fabricates a fantasy in his mind through contemplation on sensuous objects like the heroine’s shapely legs (sexual) or the hero’s imported car (economical) or the side-heroine’s hysterical dilemma (moral), the cumulative effect of these titillations cannot be termed an experience. Neither can it be understood as communicating.”

Earlier on, Kumar Shahani had written, “A local monopolist and others who envy him – including coffee-house militants – ask grandiloquently, for whom does one make commodities (films)? The answer should be obvious, especially since those who ask the question seem to amass the fortunes themselves. A surplus is extracted from the masses with whom they claim to communicate.”<sup>36</sup> Five years later, he said, “The average Indian film doesn’t communicate anything to the people and mainly supports the ideological framework they are living in. This also applies to leftist filmmakers here, who pretend to work against the ideological framework of our society and use iconoclastic methods in their films which are quite similar to fight scenes by Shetty.”<sup>37</sup>

I am quoting Kaul and Shahani because they were the ones who were attacked from all corners – more from the so-called ‘avant-garde’ middle-roaders than the commercial filmmakers. And these ‘avant-garde’ middle-roaders seemed to have more influence in the corridors of power. Mani Kaul’s conversation with Jean Neveu and Asha Kasbekar in 1973 is quite clearly to the point. Excerpts:<sup>38</sup>

Jean Neveu: The new cinema that you represent, does it try to oppose the Commercial Cinema, does it take it into account or are your paths completely divergent?

Mani Kaul: There are two answers. There is a middle cinema that recognises the existence of Commercial Cinema. Shyam Benegal and others make semi-commercial, semi-artistic films. They are more or less compromises.

Jean Neveu: And the other way?

Mani Kaul: The other way is mine even though I have failed to communicate with my audience. I am infamous in India as a filmmaker. I am very well known all over India but no one has seen my films.

Asha: Why this failure to communicate?

Mani Kaul: No one sees my films.

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<sup>36</sup> *Myths for Sale*, in the Dossier on Kumar Shahani, Ashish Rajadhyaksha [ed.], *Framework* # 30/31, London, 1986; first published in *Seminar*, December 1974.

<sup>37</sup> *I’m against political films*, Kumar Shahani in conversation with Khalid Mohammed, *Debonair*, August 1979.

<sup>38</sup> Published in a journal of Mumbai’s Alliance Française, undated.

Asha: But why?

Mani Kaul: Everybody knows Mani Kaul, in Assam, in Kerala, in Meghalaya but no one has seen my films. They have not released my films. I am a myth. Everywhere I meet my admirers but no one has seen my films.

Asha: But wouldn't you describe this as a failure in some way?

Mani Kaul: Not from my point of view. I don't think that I have a problem of communication. I don't believe that it is my business to communicate.

Asha: You don't feel that it is your business to communicate?

Mani Kaul: No, certainly not.

Asha: Why?

Mani Kaul: It is the business of distribution.

Asha: But can't it be said that they won't distribute your films because they realize your failure to communicate?

Mani Kaul: No. Those who understand my work are those who understand quite a lot of other things, my problems, my views on cinema etc. Those who don't understand are those who are not exposed to my work. I don't see that the transmission of my work is my responsibility.

Jean Neveu: But surely, when you make your work, you are trying to communicate? Don't you have in mind a particular public, a specific public?

Mani Kaul: Certainly not. Certainly not specific. Not even general. I don't take anyone into account.

Asha: Then you make your films for yourself?

Mani Kaul: I do not make them for myself. What do you mean I make them for myself?

Asha: But if they are not for yourself... then they are for transmission...

Mani Kaul: The transmission is not within my control. I can't even hire a hall here in Bombay. I don't have the money. That's transmission, you know.

Asha: But suppose you could hire a hall. Suppose your films were distributed on a large scale, would you then feel that you were communicating with your audience?

Mani Kaul: Now look. When you talk of communicating, it is not the substance of my work that communicates. It is a certain system of thinking that communicates itself to another system of thinking. An audience has a certain pattern of thought. When it sees a film and identifies with it, the audience is identifying with that pattern of thought. That is communication.

Jean Neveu: You do not think that a film can have an impact, an educational purpose?

Mani Kaul: If transmitted well. Yes, transmission is the problem.

Jean Neveu: By transmission, you mean distribution?

Mani Kaul: Yes, but I prefer to use the word transmission. Distribution is a commercial and economic activity. By transmission I mean knowledge of the work.

According to Kaul, in France, if one talked of ‘avant-garde’ filmmakers, one could only think of Bresson and Marguerite Duras, two old people who were still experimenting, daringly, boldly, cinematically. The others were just filmmakers who simply wanted to pass messages in their films, they did not care to have an actual relationship with the audience. These people would not last. They keep changing, he said.<sup>39</sup> Indian cultural policy-makers were increasingly getting convinced about the ‘communication’ argument vis-à-vis public funding. For instance, Jagdish Parikh, the chairman of the FFC, would draw three circles on a piece of paper whenever he saw Kaul. Pointing towards the middle circle, the FFC chairman would declare that it was the middle circle that the country needed. “This reminded me of medium-scale industrialists. The middle-circle is where success is. I am naturally categorized in the last circle. I can’t work within that circle. The alternative would be to stop making films and start selling ‘ganderi’.<sup>40</sup> What’s the difference? I view my films as sensuous. Perhaps a few will see their meaning and many others will ignore or ridicule them. But I cannot communicate by making a film like ‘Ankur’, about a beautiful maid servant and her handsome master. We never understand their relationship in a historical perspective. And if a boy throws a stone defiantly against the masters in the end, that’s completely in keeping with the Hollywood tradition of the ‘40s. There is more concern with the glamour behind the images rather than with the dirt. Benegal’s films are easily understandable, which perhaps explains the success of his work, especially with the outsider.

“The regional films which were highly applauded five to seven years ago depended a lot on photographing the local reality. Now-a-days, the ‘new’ Bombay films have started offering that reality. A slum is shown in an international nuance. Today, it’s the middle ground which is a comfortable place to be in.”<sup>41</sup>

In the famous climax of Mrinal Sen’s film *Interview* [1970], Ranjit Mullick had picked up a stone, broken the shop-window and disrobed the mannequin dressed in Western clothes. Mukhopadhyay feels it was less poignant than the identical climax in *Ankur* [1973]. He considers *Interview* as Sen’s first avant-garde movie.<sup>42</sup> He also thinks that using non-actors was Sen’s experimentation in this film. For him, another ‘unique experiment in Indian cinema’ was Sen’s inserting some clips from the Argentinean filmmaker Fernando Solanas’ *The Hour of the Furnaces* and Joris Ivens’ documentary on the Vietnam war in *Interview!* This was the state of experimentation in the so-called Indian New Wave! What was perhaps interesting was that the middle-roaders (like the people from advertising) were also experimenting with the audiences like the commercial filmmakers; they were ‘experiments’ outside cinematography’s अन्तःप्रज्ञा.

Those days, as if every intellectual in India was worrying about ‘communication’ in cinema. *The Hindu* came out with a three-page broad-sheet supplementary on the subject and the related questions. To cite a few: is the ‘new’ Indian cinema really new? What needs to be done to make the masses aware of the current positive trends? The respondents were Mrinal Sen, Basu Bhattacharya, G. Aravindan, Ravindran, J. Mahendran, Nachiket & Jayoo Patwardhan, Girish Kasarvalli and Gautam Ghose. Most of these filmmakers believed that the film had to communicate with the masses. Only G. Aravindan was different but he was the least vocal according to his *svabhāva*.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Skinned pieces of sugarcane that street vendors sell in Mumbai.

<sup>41</sup> *I am opposed to story-telling*, Mani Kaul in conversation with Sameer Shah, *The Sunday Observer*, 11 July 1982.

<sup>42</sup> *Mrinal Sen: Sixty Years in Search of Cinema*, Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> *The Hindu*, 18 February 1980, published during the International Film Festival of India held in Bangalore.

मध्यम मार्ग का विस्तार और मध्यरक्षक का अग्ररक्षक बनना।

### Widening of the Middle Road and Mid-garde becoming the Avant-garde.

The safer communication highway called the Middle Road was getting longer and wider across the country, happily encroaching upon the rue Avant-garde with media support. Nehru's statement about 'service to the nation' was made conveniently pliable via making films that they thought were able to communicate with the Indian mass audience, the real financier of films both privately or publicly produced.

Central Government film sponsorship, it seems, had also provoked regional-non-regional tensions. The nation invested thousands of hours of precious time in debating what was art cinema and what was commercial, what was good cinema and what was bad, causing meaningless misery to several young and promising filmmakers who were striving to create cinematography true to their *svabhāva* without indulging in binary rattle-tattle but their voice was not as strong as their vocal counterparts, who could influence 'information & broadcasting' dispensations as well as financing policies. All this while, the middle cinema was preparing its breeding ground, and it was this cinema (more than the commercial cinema, as Kaul said) that posed a danger to cinematography. And eventually, the middle-roader was branded as avant-garde! Middle-order soldiers became अग्ररक्षक, the front guards – the avant-garde!

Mani Kaul: "The middle cinema has reached out to a wider audience, but at the expense of cinematography. I wouldn't say the same about big-budget popular cinema, and the distinction is interesting to make because the popular cinema may seem to be socially irresponsible, but it's definitely concerned with innovations of a technical kind. Whereas the middle cinema, which I call the populist cinema, is far too burdened with social, psychological and anthropological ideologies for it to come close to the discipline of cinema. That's why these filmmakers have to rely on some startling narrative – if they didn't, the film wouldn't make sense. Yet, such films often get raved about. Because, reviewers and audiences often assess a film on its theme, and they mistake the theme for the content.

"The thematic is something which keeps recurring in the film and gives structure to the work, like thematic music. Content would be the world-view, which is really the substance of a film. Content is so close to form that many a time, people will say there's no difference between the two. Which one definitely can't say about theme and form.

"The mainstream is not the enemy of cinematography any longer, it's the middle cinema. These people should go and join some revolutionary forums or social reform groups, why do they want to make films?"<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *The Outsider*, Radha Rajadhyaksha's interview with Mani Kaul, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 9 April 1989.

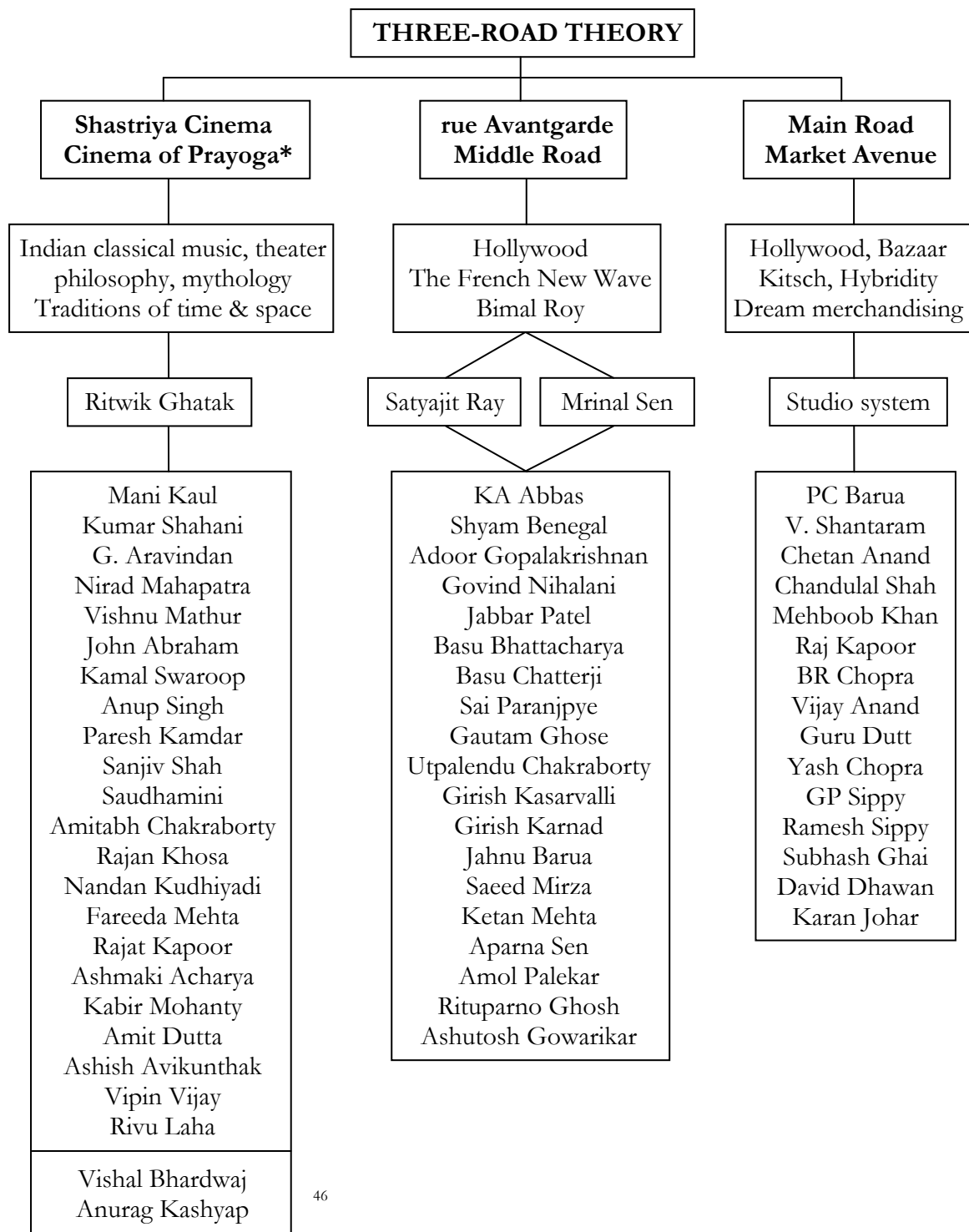
Personally, I think that it was from the ‘nation-building’ endeavor and the ‘information & broadcasting’ ideology that the entire rhetoric of cinema as a medium of mass-communication emerged, and from that, a middle-stream, the famous Indian middle-roader cinema, ‘experimenting’ to find ways to communicate with the masses.<sup>45</sup> It was a difficult time for filmmakers such as Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani to survive against the rabble-rousing rhetoric by a certain section of film and policy makers. They were loud enough to maintain that if cinema failed to ‘communicate’ with the masses, it was a waste of public money.

At this juncture of time, it might be an interesting exercise (though tentative and subject to any number of modifications) to try and see how the three roads could possibly be clustered.

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<sup>45</sup> Like his Theory of Three-Worlds, the middle-roader was a strategic political term employed by Mao Zedong; not from the Buddha’s मध्यम मार्ग or the middle path. When Mani Kaul’s film *Siddheshwari* was shown at the New York Film Festival, J. Hoberman described it as a ‘genuinely avant-garde film from a Third World.’ He also felt that the film was as indescribable as perfume. *Voice*, 8 January 1991.

Table 1



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\* Because it has the quality of being intuitive and congenial, capable of achieving a certain *bhāvasandhi*. As we know, Kaul has been questioning the spatial ideology of the Renaissance Perspective – see his essay “Seen From Nowhere” in *Concepts of Space. Ancient and Modern*, Kapila Vatsyayan [ed.]. Interestingly, while working on the Yale Conference paper, I came to know that Mani Kaul was to make a two-hour long feature film called *Prayog* for the Ministry of Education, on adult literacy [mentioned in *Mani Kaul’s Cinema*, Nalini Rajan, *Youth Times*, 1-15 January 1979].

<sup>46</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> Osian’s Cinefan Film Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema [2009], what Mani Kaul tried to do was interesting in terms of new contemporary trends in Indian cinema.



The above classification is arrived at by broadly analyzing the debates of the time, in order to perceive some of the patterns that have been emerging on the Indian film firmament and I personally believe that in a country like India, there should be adequate space for everyone to exist and work.<sup>47</sup>

Let me recall some of the optimism that Kaul and Shahani had about two decades ago. Kaul: “I am of the belief that there are quite a few students of the last four years, who are brilliant filmmakers, like Rajan Khosa, Saudhamini, Ashmaki, Anup Singh and Rajat Kapoor. They are unknown names and nobody can see their future, but I can.”<sup>48</sup> Three years later, Shahani: “Anup Singh, Paresh Kamdar, Fareeda Mehta, Ashmaki Acharya, Rajat Kapoor, and earlier graduates like Kamal Swaroop and Nandan Kudhiady – all of them should have been at the vanguard of the film movement of the ‘90s.”<sup>49</sup>

What is obvious is that both Kaul and Shahani had a very strong following among young students and filmmakers, and they still have. Under existential pressures, most of these filmmakers have to turn to teaching or marginal filmmaking. Among the younger filmmakers, Amit Dutta has been engaged with quite a compelling work. Fortunately, a small little space is still left within state-sponsored institutes such as the FTII in Pune and the SRFTI [Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute in Kolkata].

Mukhopadhyay comes out with a new brand of package called the ‘Mrinal Sen *gharānā*’<sup>50</sup> and thinks Gautam Ghose, Utpalendu Chakraborty, among other Bengali filmmakers, are his direct successors as far as Sen’s political cinema is concerned. “Even on the national scene, from Govind Nihalani’s *Party* to Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s *Mukhamukham*, one can discern his influence.”<sup>51</sup>

Anyway, the above classification shows how strong the presences of both Kaul and Shahani are in the country, even in the increasingly shrunk space for actual filmmaking practice. By now, the Indian cinematography could have got much more from them to offer something concrete to the world, as perhaps our classical music had done.

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<sup>47</sup> While Ritwik Ghatak was the Vice-Principal of the FTII, he would very fondly write to his wife Suroma about Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani, his students.

<sup>48</sup> *The Outsider*, Radha Rajadhyaksha’s interview with Mani Kaul, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 9 April 1989.

<sup>49</sup> Kumar Shahani to Khalid Mohammed, *The Sunday Times of India*, 6 December 1992.

<sup>50</sup> *Gharānā* [derived from the Hindi *ghar*, meaning ‘house’], is a term used in the Hindustani [north Indian] classical music tradition to refer to a stylistic school of hereditary musicians and their disciples who represent a distinctive musical style over successive generations.

<sup>51</sup> *Mrinal Sen: Sixty Years in Search of Cinema*, Dipankar Mukhopadhyay, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009.

How does Mani Kaul compare Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak's cinematography?

**Table 2**

<b>Satyajit Ray</b>	<b>Ritwik Ghatak</b>
Ray attempted to integrate neo-realism within the Bengali framework.	Ghatak derived inspiration from indigenous theater.
More descriptive of a reality.	Less descriptive of a reality, more like an injunction upon reality.
Widely accepted abroad.	Not so widely accepted abroad because he was harsher and did not universalize gently. <sup>52</sup>

About Satyajit Ray's cinema, Kaul makes extremely perceptive observations. "The naturalism in his earlier films is not the kind seen in his films today. He started by taking great help from Tagore, his lyricism, and to make a case that there is hope, albeit of a romantic kind. He reflected the period of the '50s well, the good period of Nehru. It's interesting to study his films after Nehru for they seem to have less and less reason for hope and instead attempt to make totalitarianism lyrical. I cannot see cinema from the standpoint of his brand of humanism. I work from the standpoint of a rupture of a tradition and try to understand this rupture instead of romanticizing or moving away from it. Ray has described me as some sort of a phenomenon but because of my failure to communicate. He has said my films are of no use. All forms, he perhaps feels, should grow from his form – he acknowledges a breakaway but he doesn't approve. If you see the work of Girish Karnad, Shyam Benegal, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, you find his tradition of lyrical neo-realism."<sup>53</sup>

The Ritwik Ghatak legacy? "People often ask what we, his students, have inherited from Ritwik Ghatak. The problem, here, is that they have not realized what it means to work in a continuous line of tradition. Our elders prefer imitation to development. They would prefer that learning still be restricted to the feudal mode. The hereditary principle may be removed but the young must copy what they have picked up from the master craftsman. It is the most certain method of retaining the status quo, of endorsing the work of opportunistic mediocrity. In an atmosphere where our cultural attitudes and artifacts have been identified with the objectification of effete feudal Brahminism and European humanism inflicted on us by the colonials, Ritwikda's work is the violent assertion of our identity. It is the cry of the dying girl in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* which echoes the hills, our right to live," wrote Shahani.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *I am opposed to story-telling*, Mani Kaul in conversation with Sameer Shah, *The Sunday Observer*, 11 July 1982.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Dossier on Kumar Shahani, Ashish Rajadhyaksha [ed.], *Framework* # 30/31, London, 1986; originally written for a Ritwik Ghatak retrospective, 1975.

I have found many people comparing Kaul's and Shahani's cinematography as being similar on the surface level. Many of their thoughts are quite radical and resemble – but they have their own personalities. The following inputs might help us distinguish their cinematographic praxis. Kaul chose *dhrupad* while Shahani, *khayāl*.<sup>55</sup> Kaul studied under Ustad Zia Fareeduddin Dagar while Shahani studied under Pandit Jal Balaporia as also Pandit Sharadchandra Arolkar and Neela Bhagwat.<sup>56</sup> Under the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship, Kaul studied the Crisis of Form in Cinema. Shahani received the Homi Bhabha Fellowship and studied the epic form, concentrating primarily on the *Mahābhārata*, as also Buddhist iconography, Indian classical music and the Bhakti movement.<sup>57</sup> In 1982, Kaul made *Dhrupad* while Shahani made *Khayāl Gāthā* in 1988.<sup>58</sup>

These simplified observations are just to hint at some basic facts that could be elaborated to see much more deeply how their filmosophies resonate. It should be interesting to consider how they look at their filmmaking practices in this context. Mani Kaul: “Like the two sides of a coin, Dhrupad is made up of tone and silence. It might seem strange to suggest that one should go to a musical concert to listen to silence. But that is the truth of a Dhrupad experience; its fullness will be appreciated only if one begins to relate to both tone and silence, particularly to a kind of pervasive and whole silence that stands above the tonal expression. A togetherness of tone and silence carries the listener to the figure of the being of a raag.”<sup>59</sup> About *Khayāl Gāthā*, Kumar Shahani said, “[...] when we made *Khayāl Gāthā*, the freer principles of practice found fuller elaborations; even as we used the golden section, the forms within became vehicles of sequences in simultaneity. [...] There are, thank God, no formulae. The universalisms offered by our specificities are fortunately open to improvisation, allowing both tradition and individual temperament to applaud themselves in the same moment.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> In the musical tradition of North India, *dhrupad* was the dominant form of vocal music during the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and has continued to remain in circulation although the *khayāl* form of vocal music has prevailed since the nineteenth century.

<sup>56</sup> Zia Fareeduddin Dagar [b. 1932] is an exponent of the Dagar *gharānā*, the oldest stylistic school of *dhrupad* stretching back to the sixteenth century. Sharadchandra Arolkar [1912-94], Jal Balaporia, and their disciple Neela Bhagwat belong to the Gwalior *gharānā* of *khayāl* vocalism.

<sup>57</sup> A devotional school of thought that originated in South India around the sixth century and gradually permeated the whole of medieval India. Eschewing the orthodox ritualistic prescriptions of the Hindu clergy, the saint-poets of the *bhakti* movement evinced an intimate emotional bond of love and grace with the divinity, which is conceived as *saguna* [with attributes or form] and *nirguna* [without attributes or formless]. The word *bhakti* [devotion] is derived from the multivalent Sanskrit verb *bhaj*, which connotes the following meanings: to honour, to worship, to serve, to share, to partake of etc.

<sup>58</sup> Most of *Tarang* [1984] evolved during this period of study and analysis as Shahani examined the different possibilities for the epic form in cinema. Kaul also draws from Indian classical treatises such as Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka* [9<sup>th</sup> century] and Parsvadeva's *Sangit-samayasār* [13<sup>th</sup> century] etc.

<sup>59</sup> *The Rambling Figure*, Mani Kaul, in *Soundscape: the School of Sound lectures 1998-2001*, Larry Sider, Diane Freeman and Jerry Sider [eds.], Wallflower Press, London, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> *Immanence*, Kumar Shahani, in *Rasa: The Indian performing arts in the last twenty-five years*, vol. I, *Music and Dance*, Bimal Mukherjee & Dr Sunil Kothari [eds.] Anamika Kala Sangam, Research and Publications, Calcutta, 1995.

## अन्य राज्यों द्वारा फिल्म निर्माण सहाय।

### Film Production Assistance by States etc.

Decades have gone by and the NFDC has rendered itself almost redundant. It has not been able to preserve the negatives of the films it had helped produced. But the Nehruvian cultural vision within his concept of mixed economy still held on to an extent. And we cannot deny some of the achievements of the FFC. Of the 46 films that it had financed or committed to finance, over fifty per cent were released [see Appendix I]. The Film Finance Corporation was set up in 1960 on the recommendation of the SK Patil Film Enquiry Committee Report [1951]. Initially controlled by the Ministry of Finance, it was transferred to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting in 1964. Its original objective was to promote and assist the mainstream film industry by 'providing, affording or procuring finance or other facilities for the production of films of good standard'. By 1976, the FFC's independent cinema policy came under attack from various quarters. The Committee on Public Undertakings issued a Report [79<sup>th</sup> Report, 1976] on the FFC arguing that "there is no inherent contradiction between artistic films of good standard and films successful at the box office [and] the Corporation should satisfy itself in all possible ways that the films have a reasonable prospect of being commercially successful." In 1980, the NFDC was established by amalgamating the FFC with the partially state-owned Indian Motion Pictures Export Corporation [IMPEC], making it the sole canalising agent for the import of all foreign films, with incentives to non-resident Indians to buy, import and distribute foreign films in India. Between 1981 and 1988, the NFDC was also the parent organization for the Directorate of Film Festivals.<sup>61</sup>

Some states established their own Film Development Corporations to support healthier cinema by providing financial subsidies, establishing film institutes, cultural centers etc. The state government of Madhya Pradesh took the lead in producing films both by Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani, *Satab Se Uthta Aadmi* [1980] and *Khayal Gāthā* [1988], respectively. The government was then headed by Arjun Singh of the Congress (Indira). As Ustad Zia Fareeduddin Dagar said, "Cultural development was one of his passions. It is because of him that the magnificent Bharat Bhavan cultural center developed in Bhopal."<sup>62</sup> At that time, the Secretary to the Department of Culture in MP was Ashok Vajpeyi, who later went to Delhi as Joint Secretary, Department of Culture in the Central Government. Ustad spent a lot of time with him during those days, and they developed a great deal of respect for each other.

One of the least seen films, *Ghasiram Kotwal* [1976], produced by Yukt Film Co-operative, was partly financed by Dena Bank, a nationalized bank. The well known playwright Vijay Tendulkar adapted his play for this film co-directed by Mani Kaul, K. Hariharan, Kamal Swaroop and Saeed Mirza. It was shot by several cinematographers including Binod Pradhan, Rajesh Joshi, Manmohan Singh, and Virendra Saini. The music was composed by Bhaskar Chandavarkar. The whole group had studied at the FTII.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, new revised edition, Ashish Rajadhyaksha & Paul Willemen [eds.], BFI & OUP, 1999.

<sup>62</sup> *Interview with Ustad Zia Fareeduddin Dagar* [October 6, 1988], in the *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society*, RC Mehta [ed.], a special issue on *Perspectives on Dhrupad* [Deepak Raja & Suvarnalata Rao, guest editors], vol. 30, Jan-Dec 1999, Baroda, India.

<sup>63</sup> Its lead players were Om Puri, Mohan Agashe, Rajani Chavan, Vandana Pandit, Shriram Ranade and Ravindra Sathe. Later in 1978, Yukt Film Co-operative also produced Saeed Mirza's debut feature film *Arvind Desai ki Ajeeb Dastaan* [The Strange Fate of Arvind Desai].

Once, I met a manager of this bank to acquire the film for a screening of Screen Unit. Thanks to the kind manager, I could screen it sometime in the 1980s. In fact, it was subject to a court order from the bank and that delayed its general screening after the premiere in Madras in January 1977. Unfortunately, very few people have seen this film. Fourteen private banks were nationalized in 1969 by the Government of India headed by Mrs Gandhi. Interestingly, the world's biggest film industry was not recognized officially as an 'industry' by the Government of India as other industries were. As a result, no private film producer could approach public finance institutions, including banks, for loans. Such recognition has been accorded only recently, in 1998.

Ketan Mehta's *Bhavni Bhavai* was also partly financed by a cooperative bank in Ahmedabad. All public money. In fact, all money is public money, I believe.

### निर्माण-प्रदर्शन द्विभाजन।

#### **Production-Exhibition Dichotomy.**

Embracing the debate about good and bad cinema, a parallel concern grew for the exhibition of films financed by the FFC and later, by the NFDC. In order to nurture the risk-taking explorations of cinematography, this was an extremely important aspect. Over two decades back, eminent film critic Chidananda Dasgupta wrote, "For a quarter of a century, the centrally controlled FFC-NFDC has talked about founding small 'art theaters' for the showing of socially aware and aesthetically made films, but actually nothing has been done. Funds for theater-building have invariably gone to the commercial cinema, with ineffective provisions for reserving time for 'new cinema' added as an afterthought. These theaters developed an ambience in which socially concerned and artistically ambitious films cannot survive.

"In the field of film exhibition, commercial considerations have held sway. The result is that films are made but often cannot be shown, because they are asked to compete with commercial cinema in commercially oriented theaters. It is like a cricket or hockey team that never plays on home ground, but only has hostile crowds facing it."<sup>64</sup> In this sense, the Art House Cinema [another name for the New Wave or Parallel Cinema], never took strong roots in India.

BK Karanjia, who took over as the chairperson of the FFC after Himmat Singh resigned to fight elections, narrates a practical story: "As things were, these films would only cater to a minority audience. The difficulty of securing them a fair chance at the box-office was caused by the absence of art cinemas in the country. We began talking about art cinemas more than a decade ago. We are still talking! Hurdles in the way are the low priority of cinema in India, the exorbitant cost of land in a state like Maharashtra and the high rate of entertainment tax. Unlike in other countries where art cinemas are exempted from entertainment tax, in India, the first art cinema, Akashwani Auditorium, was expected to pay the same tax as the regular cinemas. The theater grossed over Rs. 1800 [US\$ 240] for a full house. Out of this Rs. 1800, as much as Rs. 1000 [US\$ 133] went to the government by way of entertainment tax."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *In the Cause of Better Cinema*, Chidananda Dasgupta, in *The Sunday Free Press Journal*, 11 September 1988. Dasgupta talks positively about Kolkata's Nandan and Trivandrum's Kalabhavan.

<sup>65</sup> *Launching the new wave*, BK Karanjia, in *The Indian Post*, 6 November 1988. During his seven-year tenure [1969-76] as the chairman of the FFC, 36 films were financed. Around 1970, 1 US\$ was equal to approx. INR 7.5. The subject of cinema comes under the Concurrent List of the Indian Constitution, meaning both Central and State Governments can legislate upon policies on the stipulated items.

In this context, what Kumar Shahani had stated was important: “So far, the Government of India has only advanced loans through the former FFC and occasionally, through nationalized banks. What Indian cinema needs is a direct investment, which could immediately cover one-tenth of the film industry. A direct investment of 15-20 crores in hundred parallel films and hundred art theaters in a year could set the ball rolling. The specious excuses offered earlier by bureaucratic apologists will no longer hold water. Over a ten-year period, such a programme would not only be self-sustaining but could start providing funds for literacy and social medicine. In some socialist countries, one learns that the film industry has voluntarily taken on such tasks.”<sup>66</sup>

As late as 1992, Shahani felt that, more than ever before, the NFDC should represent all that is exploratory and pure in cinema. “NFDC and Doordarshan can meet the challenge of the satellite channels and the freer import of films only by opting for a purer form, for a cinema that doesn’t merely try to imitate *The Bold and the Beautiful* and the Michael Jackson pop videos. I quite like Michael Jackson but that doesn’t mean that I must spawn a Michael Jackson lookalike at home. The answer is to assimilate alien influences and create something that is totally new and relevant to our context.”<sup>67</sup>

Exhibition was always a big struggle even for those filmmakers whose story films (songs not excluded) had the potential of attracting audiences to a greater extent. With the additional support of the NFDC, Saeed Mirza, for instance, could find two theaters, Gemini in Bandra and Liberty in South Bombay, for his film *Albert Pinto ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai?* Unfortunately, the NFDC was able to procure the Gemini theater only at a very exorbitant price. A 200-seat capacity at Gemini would fetch only Rs. 800 per day to the film producer if all the four shows are full. As Mirza put it, that was the main theater available to him when he decided to release his film and he had to accept it. The other theater at which Mirza premiered the film was Liberty, generally famous for trashy films, wrote Anil Saari.<sup>68</sup>

Kumar Shahani’s experience about showing films on the national television channel (Doordarshan) is important to know. One of his films, *Khayāl Gāthā* [1988], produced by the Madhya Pradesh government had won an international award and was shown in many festivals. The officer viewed the film and told Shahani that she was unable to find a ‘slot’ for it because the prime time was ruled out and it could not be screened in the regional cinema slot because it was made in Hindi. “We can only slot it during a mourning period when a national leader dies, because there is a lot of sarangi in it. But wait, we cannot use it even there, since the film has a dance sequence!” And for private channels, as Shahani told Vajpeyi, the primary consideration is marketability with a capital M. “There are filmmakers who do make ‘slottable’ films to suit the ‘needs’ of the system.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Cinema of Research and Relevance*, Kumar Shahani, in *Film World*, October 1980.

<sup>67</sup> Kumar Shahani to Khalid Mohammed, *The Sunday Times of India*, 6 December 1992.

<sup>68</sup> *The Hit Generation*, Anil Saari, in *Sunday Magazine*, c. 1980.

<sup>69</sup> Udayan Vajpeyi’s interview with Kumar Shahani, *Indian Horizons*, Jan-March 2008.

अग्ररक्षकता और परंपरा। सातत्य।

### Avant-garde and Tradition. In Continuum.

In conclusion, I would like to return to Mani Kaul once again. To a question about Bresson's influence on him, he replied: "I think there is a certain tradition in Bresson, which I should pursue. It's not a question of Bresson's influence. I'm interested in the tradition, not in Bresson. I believe it is possible in cinema to evolve traditions. In fact, I'm sorry there is no tradition of Guru Dutt in the commercial film industry. It's a terrible thing. Who among today's directors can do a film like *Sabib Bibi Aur Gulam*? Nobody has his technique, his control, his vision of lighting. That tradition was never developed. Not even of Bimal Roy or PC Barua. People don't understand the value of a tradition that goes beyond an individual. It belongs to history."<sup>70</sup>

It should also be interesting to note what Kumar Shahani thinks about his film *Khayāl Gāthā* and whether it had departed from his previous works. To a question, Shahani replied to Rashmi Doraiswamy: "I'm sure it must have departed but I can't put my finger on it. I just worked on things which interest me. I don't feel the pressure to actually make a departure."<sup>71</sup> Talking about *Tarang*, he said, in an epic context, myths are open systems, even if they are clearly stated, while rooted in tradition. The oppositions are temporal, of that historic moment. "That is how *Tarang* can be easily grasped by everybody in our world."<sup>72</sup> I presume, in saying so, Shahani gets closer to his *svabhāva*, in continuum.

In the interview quoted above, Kaul talked about time, "Time does not exist in terms of past and present. What precedes and what is to come is all at once, it's all there. The past is not gone and over but is continuing to exist as the future is occurring. The particular manifestation in a particular time is only a relative form. It's not the truth."<sup>73</sup>

I would like to talk about Kaul and Shahani's first films, *Uski Roti* and *Maya Darpan* respectively, as they were the seeds. Kaul's filmosophical narrative had found its polyphonic seeds then. A polyphony that later deepened itself in *The Idiot* (adapting Dostoevsky's novel in 1991), a polyphony that has been celebrating itself through Kaul's thought and work – in *abhed ākāśh*, the undivided space. What is important for Kaul in this space is a presence of the absent, or, in the vocabulary of an Indian philosophical thought – अनुपलब्धि, *anupalabdhi*, the non-availability that perceives the absent object. It is one of the six ways of perceiving objects in space.<sup>74</sup> There are four stages of being, the *bhāvas* that reveal the state of an object's absence in space, viz. प्रागभाव, *prāgabhāva*, प्रध्वंशभाव, *pradhvanshabhāva*, अत्यंतभाव, *atyantabhāva* and अनोन्यभाव, *anonyabhāva*. As Kaul explains, *prāgabhāva* is literally a prior absence, as the absence of a melody in a space of silence or of a figure on a plain drawing paper, somewhat in the nature of how a child's mouth may experience the absence of breast inside the womb, i.e. missing the breast before its sensuous experience. The shape of the void in the mouth was, as it were, the

<sup>70</sup> I don't believe in Third World cinema, Mani Kaul in conversation with Rafique Baghdadi and Rajiv Rao, *The Sunday Observer*, 4 December 1983.

<sup>71</sup> If the camera could sing: An interview with Kumar Shahani, *Sunday Mail*, April 1–7, 1990.

<sup>72</sup> No Caricature of Class Contradictions, Amrit Gangar's interview with Kumar Shahani, *The Daily*, 26 August 1984. He said that the ambivalence of nature has to be maintained through a lyrical work as in the short stories of Tagore or a film like *Maya Darpan*.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> The first five deal with the cognition of an extant object: *pratyaksha pramāna* [direct sense perception], *anumāna* [inference], *āgama* [verbal testimony], *upamāna* [comparison] and *arthapatti* [supposition]. The sixth, *anupalabdhi*, deals with the 'perception of the absent object i.e., with the perception of an object because it is absent.'

shape of the breast. The specific space is already a material out of which the future object would be formed: the material is marked by the particular absence. The absent object would then be formed not *in* that space but *of* that space. Once formed, it finds for itself an experience of being in that space and, therefore, severed from the very material it is made of and torn between an inner and an outer presumption. In the fourth, *anonyabhāva*, the object, on account of its difference and separateness from all else, on account of its individuality, is perceived absent in all other spaces.<sup>75</sup> This kind of absence is eminently present in our *shastriya sangeet*, classical music.<sup>76</sup>

In his cinematographic praxis, Kaul first considers the absence of the object before it matures into an appearance, and then, the second absence when the object is splintered, and finally the third, when the destroyed object is totally absent. The notion of non-availability in the word *anupalabdhī*, as Kaul says, “is precise because it not only makes the absence necessary but also its perception plausible. Within the integral musical space stretching on a scale of twelve notes, a specific or individual melodic theme becomes present only because that theme is absent elsewhere in that integral space.”<sup>77</sup>

Kaul’s cinema draws from this tradition of Indian wisdom and we witnessed the play of present-absent first in *Uski Roti* in its spatial-temporal explorations without it becoming a formalist or an *avant-gardist* exercise in the Western sense of the term. For the first time in India, *Uski Roti* did away with theater and literature completely in its disposition. In this sense, Kaul is closer to Robert Bresson without being Bressonian. Within the European tradition, Kaul especially likes Dostoevsky, Matisse, Bresson and Tarkovsky (barring his last two films) since they all were working against the idea of perspective and convergence. In India, Kaul feels closer to Ritwik Ghatak who was radically different from Bresson. “I have absorbed all of them,” Kaul told Vajpeyi.<sup>78</sup> And when I asked him as to how he could reconcile with two different sensibilities and worldviews, that of Bresson and Ghatak, Kaul said, “They both helped me cure the disease called realism.”<sup>79</sup>

Kaul avoids creating reality, or a sense of reality, by treating a fragment in relation to another fragment and so on. He considered a shot as a whole, as also a detail as a whole detail and not a detail of a whole. The close-up shot, for instance, abstracted itself from all space-time-coordinates, raising it to the state of entity. In the same vein, a flashback was not a shift in the flow of time, a device to explain the events, like the corresponding analepsis in the short story, as pointed out by Cecilia Cossio.<sup>80</sup> Kaul’s deep sensuousness intensifies in ellipses.

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<sup>75</sup> *Seen from Nowhere*, Mani Kaul, in *Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern*, Kapila Vatsyayan [ed.], Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

<sup>76</sup> Kaul’s concept of *shastriya cinema* becomes meaningful in this context.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Abhed Ākash: Mani Kaul se Udayan Vajpeyi ki baat*, in Hindi [Undivided Space: Udayan Vajpeyi’s conversation with Mani Kaul], a publication of the Madhya Pradesh Film Development Corporation, Bhopal, undated. Excerpts translated into English by Madan Gopal Singh, in *Cinemaya*, no. 31.

<sup>79</sup> Amrit Gangar’s interview with Mani Kaul in *Cinema of Prayoga*, Brad Butler and Karen Mirza [eds.], no.w.here, London, 2006. For Bresson, a shot by shot construction was fundamental; for Kaul, the shot becomes a figure – like a movement. The story occurs in flashbacks and Bresson made a strict schism between the present, in which the recall is occurring, and the past, where the events actually take place. “But I don’t believe in the idea of flashbacks where such a split in time occurs. For me the past is memory, and therefore a mental happening. The future event is really something that has sensuous extensions.” [Kaul to Alan Twigg, *The Independent*, 6 October 1989].

<sup>80</sup> *Mani Kaul’s Uski Roti: Giving Silence a Voice*, Cecilia Cossio, in *Narrative Strategies: Essays on South Asian Literature and Film*, Vasudha Dalmia & Theo Damsteegt [eds.], CNWS Publications vol. 66, Leiden, 1998.



For his debut film *Maya Darpan*, Shahani adapted a novel of the same name by Nirmal Verma. Shahani's rigour emerges from his own understanding of the epic form and lyricism. Aditi's constant longing for a green landscape in the story made Shahani think of making the film in color. That led him to work on movements in colors – space in time. And the suggestions of sound in the story, when transformed into the cinema, had to be freed from a one-to-one content that “people had been working with for a long time in Indian cinema.” For the first time in Indian cinema, Shahani wanted to make an implicit political statement through cinematographic sensuousness. Through Verma's story, the film traces how young Taran is crushed by the weight of a rigid social-familial *paramparā*, the convention called tradition, and her vain attempts at emancipation. It is through the rigors of colors that Shahani conceives and constructs his narrative – the colors that have been such an integral part of Indian life. It is through colors and their figurative embellishment that we see how Taran frees herself of romantic dream and feudal oppression. In a nutshell, the whole action, and not merely emotional equivalences, is structurally worked out in color – in *Maya Darpan*.

Obviously, the film does not attempt to use colors as a psychological component. By avoiding a one-to-one equation between content and color, it evokes lyrical counterpoints as Taran senses life in a much broader historical context. *Maya Darpan* remains the most humanely internationalist film that also dignified the cinematography.<sup>81</sup> It is also interesting to see how Shahani tries to integrate austerity with अलंकार, *alankāra*, with व्यंजना, *vyanjana*.<sup>82</sup>

In its narrative, *Maya Darpan* (also shot by KK Mahajan) too resolutely does away with theater and literature and the character identification devices – and perhaps that again made it दुर्बोध, *durbodh*. Or so the re-viewers described it to the viewers. The narrative space (slow or fast) always became problematic – even when the times were not so restless without the remote control. The cinema had always been viewed as a popular (or more appropriately, populist) medium that needs to entertain the public at large. *Manoranjak*, or what pleases the human mind should also *engage* itself within the context of art.

*Uski Roti* and *Maya Darpan* are the films that provided a magnificent glow to the Indian cinema – a glow that the mind's eye would care to conserve in its splendidly subjective (not individualistic) space. The cinema, as Shahani feels, is a sufficiently open form that can “syncopate abstract equations with frankly tumescent jouissance. It can extend the synaesthesia of the knowing senses to that of the active senses and address the *cita*, rediscover the *bhutas*...”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Cinematography not in the sense of a cameraman's work but in the Bressonian sense of creative filmmaking. “Two types of film: those that employ the resources of the theater (actors, direction, etc.) and use the camera in order to *reproduce*; those that employ the resources of cinematography and use the camera to *create*,” wrote Robert Bresson in one of his *Notes*. There are around 450 notes by Bresson on various aspects of cinematography in his diaries from 1950 to 1958 and from 1960 to 1974. These small little notes speak volumes about his concerns without being elaborate or explanatory in detail. This in itself is an exercise in austerity - the very essence of thoughts.

<sup>82</sup> *Alankāra*, ornamentation; *vyanjana*, indicating, manifesting; a sign, connoting a suggestive meaning, perhaps in the sense of ‘the oblique meaning’ as Barthes called it.

<sup>83</sup> Kumar Shahani in his Introduction to *Film & Philosophy*, K. Gopinathan [ed.], Publication Division, University of Calicut, 2003. *Cita* is thought or perception; *bhuta*, being.

## कला और दुर्बोधता की समृद्ध परंपरा। A Rich Tradition of the Durbodh.

दुर्बोध होना कला के लिए नया नहीं है। दुर्बोध कलाकृतियों की एक समृद्ध परंपरा रही है। हिन्दी के पाठकों में आज बेहद लोकप्रिय कवि निराला को भी दुर्बोध माना जाता था। निराला की जटिल कविताओं को तोड़ मरोड़ कर सरल बनाकर प्रस्तुत करना हिन्दी साहित्य का सबसे बड़ा प्रिय व्यापार रहा है। हास्यास्पद यह है कि यह व्यापार खुद निराला के समय में भी पर्याप्त प्रचलित था। निराला अपनी कविताओं के दुर्बोध होने को जानते थे और उसके कुपाठ से विचलित भी होते थे इसलिए के समय-समय पर लिखे अपने पत्रों में स्वयं अपनी कविताओं की समझ के मार्ग खोला करते थे।

मणि कौल अपनी हर कृति में अनोखा मार्ग खोजते हैं। अपने इन अन्वेषणों पर वे उतने ही निराले ढंग से बात भी करते हैं। अगर आप उन्हें ध्यान से सुनें तो उनकी बातों में उनकी दुर्बोध कही जाने वाली फिल्मों को समझने के सूत्र मिल जाया करते हैं। उनकी फिल्मों को दुर्बोध कहने का शायद यह आशय है कि उनकी फिल्मों में ऐसा कुछ पाया जाता है जो ग्रहण करना आसान नहीं जान पड़ता। फिल्मों को जिन तरीकों से देखने की हमारी आदत बन गई है, मणि की फिल्में देखते समय ये तरीके कारगर सिद्ध नहीं हो पाते। शायद ये फिल्में हमसे फिल्में देखने के नये ढंग की अपेक्षा रखती हैं...

[उदयन वाजपेयी के पूर्व कथन के कुछ अंश, *अभेद आकाश*]

The literal meaning of the word *durbodh* is anything [e.g. a work of art] that is difficult to understand. I have quoted Vajpeyi since it is connected with the ‘communication’ issue that I have referred to and quoted at length.

Perhaps what we needed was a New Wave of viewing. Unfortunately, instead of doing that, we pushed cinema in to the syllabi of Mass Communication or Mass Media in our country. Recently, the recommendation of the report of the Karanth Committee about the setting up of the Chalachitra Akademi (like the other Akademis referred to earlier in this paper) is being discussed again.<sup>84</sup> But such patchworks cannot create a consistent and productive national film policy. They only keep ourselves busy playing around the labels.

What Vajpeyi says is interesting with reference to understanding an obviously difficult or an easily inaccessible work of art: “Art is not unaccustomed to a *durbodh* existence, such works of art belong to a rich tradition. The poet Nirālā, once considered difficult among the readership of Hindi literature, is extremely popular today. One of the most beguiling enterprises in the realm of Hindi literature has been the distortion of Nirālā’s complex poetry for the sake of facile presentation. Strangely enough, this enterprise was patently active even during Nirālā’s lifetime. While Nirālā was alert to the intricacies of his poetry, he was also upset by its misinterpretation, discernible from his periodical correspondence which reveals vital clues for the comprehension of his poetry.

“With each film, Mani Kaul seeks to explore an unfamiliar path. He also engages in unique discourses on his research and enquiry. If one listens to him carefully, one can gather several clues that permit the appreciation of his supposedly *durbodh* films. Perhaps, this reckoning is indicative of something that is difficult to comprehend in his work. We have been habituated to watch films with an approach that is rendered ineffective while seeing Mani’s films. Perhaps, these films expect of us a new cognitive approach...”  
[Excerpts from Udayan Vajpeyi’s preface to his book *Abhed Akāsh*]

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<sup>84</sup> KS Karanth’s report, Working Group on National Film Policy, was published in 1980 but remained unimplemented.

The history of *durboḍh-tā* in art (cinematography not excluded) is perhaps more exciting and stimulating than its counterpart that perhaps prefers submission and spoon-feeding to curious questioning. It is one's *svabhāva* that connects with the world of *bhavā*, and that keeps on getting disrupted with forces *extraneous* to the domain of art. The *akbādā* of Indian cinema is an active ground – regularly adding to the number of martyrs inside and outside the margins marked by the mass communicated market mania.

The 1980s are worth examining for the *svabhāva* of the time, if I may say so, following my *svabhāva* theory. In *The Times of India*, Lens Eye [Khalid Mohammed] wrote, “Fortuitously, far from the madding mob, there are filmmakers who would rather fight than switch. If the year 1988 is remarkable for any trend, it's the revival of the spirit of struggle. Of course, the idea is to sell one's film to the public. At the same time, this is to be done without pawning one's soul. There is an audience for the offbeat and the meaningful, they do want something more than drivel. Naturally, independent filmmakers who work outside the super-studio system controlled by high-flying production banners would like private financing. But since producers work by the logic of no-risk, the alternative is to turn to government-sponsored backing.” Lens Eye titled his piece, “The new wave is alive and kicking.”<sup>85</sup> *Samaya* always carried a mixed feeling of hope and despair, of upsurge and downsurge.

Just a year prior to the above, the same paper had carried an article [The Lost Wave] by the author and critic Kishore Valicha who thought that the serious Indian cinema was on the verge of extinction. For him, the non-conformist cinema was represented by Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani and Jabbar Patel. He also cites instances of films made by Gautam Ghose, Prakash Jha and Mahesh Bhatt.<sup>86</sup>

**नयी चेतना: शाश्वत। समग्र।**

**New Consciousness: Eternal. Holistic.**

I think what we need is a New Consciousness that will have the capacity to hold all the Waves that will be followed by New Waves, and yet Newer Waves, and absorb the inherent contradictions to tolerate the good and the bad, without moralizing. Waves do interest me as continuous flow, not as disruptions of time. They keep renewing themselves and there is no front guard or back guard as in an army.

I personally think that we need to liberate cinematography and its vocabulary from the roots that lead us to military or defense, to church or theology. The two institutions that have always loved to go hand in hand in history. In modern democracies today, most ministries of defense are essentially ministries of offence; the security advisors to the governments are essentially insecurity advisors; it is through the sense of insecurity that wars are waged by the mighty nations on the weaker ones. To be avant-gardes (front guards), nations experiment with their bombs on innocent people as mighty commercial producers keep experimenting with masses of ordinary people, who truly finance their films.

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<sup>85</sup> *The Sunday Times of India*, 24 August 1988.

<sup>86</sup> *The Sunday Times of India*, 18 October 1987.

We also need to liberate cinematography from its 'language' or 'linguistic' interpretations. Even the French la Nouvelle Vague theoretician Andre Bazin treated cinema as language [ref. to his essay *The evolution of film language*]. Film is not language because it does not have any semantic order. As Deleuze says, film should not be treated as language. In every seminar, even today, people keep using the phrase 'film language'. Mani Kaul:

“गलीचे का आप एक शोट लेंगे तो उसका क्या अर्थ है? वह शब्द नहीं है। तब फिल्म को खाम-खाँ भाषा कह देने का कोई मतलब नहीं है।”

“If you take a shot of a carpet, what is the meaning of that? It is not a word. If so, there is no meaning whatsoever in describing film as language.”

Kumar Shahani: “To savour the sensuous is another matter. To discover in it the bouquet of evolution; the tearing, surging cataclysms that form Beauty and remain inherent in it. How should I open it all out? The given 'languages' of the moving image are entirely 'acultured', not in laboratories, but in the Hollywoodien minds of commissioning editors, distributors and a section of the clientele imploited into accepting time-space structures suitable to dead or distracted attention spans.”<sup>87</sup>

I would feel that by taking cinematography out of its 'language' mode, we would liberate it from literature and bring it closer to music or its resonance. In fact, Deleuze wants to find a way of appreciating and describing that distinguishes film from language and narrative systems. For Deleuze, the moving image is not a system of reference. For him, the filmic medium is direct, not referential.<sup>88</sup> It might be difficult to uplift cinematography to the condition of music, but it could perhaps get closer to it.

We need a re-New-al of consciousness, of the capacity to view our own cinematography. We also need to get cinematography closer to its true *svabhāva*, its own intuitive state, in continuum. Instead of transitory waves, we need to retrieve the ripples on the tranquil waters of a lake. Instead of novelty, we need to imbue cinematography with the stability of its own state. In continuum.<sup>89</sup>

अस्तु।

Note: A working paper presented at “The Avant-garde in the Indian New Wave,” the Annual Conference of Yale Film Studies Program, 5-7 February 2010.

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<sup>87</sup> *Immanence*, Kumar Shahani, in *Rasa: The Indian performing arts in the last twenty-five years*, vol. I, *Music and Dance*, Bimal Mukherjee & Dr Sunil Kothari [eds.] Anamika Kala Sangam, Research and Publications, Calcutta, 1995.

<sup>88</sup> *cinema2: the time-image*, Gilles Deleuze, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.

<sup>89</sup> In 1986, I had interrogated the application of words such as 'experimental', 'avant-garde' and 'new wave' in my program note for Screen Unit [2 September 1986]. So, in a way, my interrogation is 'in continuum' too. In this program note, I had quoted Andrei Tarkovsky, “People tend to talk about experiment and search above all in relation to the avant-garde. But what does it mean? How can you experiment in art? Have a go and see how it turns out? But if it hasn't worked then there's nothing to see except the private problem of the person who has failed. For the work of art carries within it an integral aesthetic and philosophical unity; it is an organism, living and developing according to its own laws. Can one talk of experiment in relation to the birth of a child?”

## Appendix I

### FILMS FINANCED BY THE FILM FINANCE CORPORATION LTD. From September 1968 to June 1974

Sr. No.	Film Title	Language	Status	Director
1.	Bhuvan Shome	Hindi	R	Mrinal Sen
2.	Anubhav	Hindi	R	Basu Bhattacharya
3.	Bahuroopi	Gujarati	R	Ramnik Vaidya
4.	Dastak	Hindi	R	Rajinder Singh Bedi
5.	Kanku	Gujarati	R	Kantilal Rathod
6.	Ailya tufan dariyala	Marathi	R	Jaywant Pathare
7.	Adina megha	Oriya	R	Amit Mitra
8.	Sara aakash	Hindi	R	Basu Chatterjee
9.	Phir bhi	Hindi	R	Shivendu Sinha
10.	Ek adhuri kahani	Hindi	R	Mrinal Sen
11.	Badnam basti	Hindi	R	Prem Kapoor
12.	Bilet pherat	Bengali	R	Chidananda Dasgupta
13.	Trisandhya	Malayalam & Hindi	R	Raj Marbros
14.	Padi pishir barmi baksha	Bengali	R	Arundhati Devi
15.	Swayamvaram	Malayalam	R	Adoor Gopalakrishnan
16.	Ashad ka ek din	Hindi	C	Mani Kaul
17.	Heer Ranjha	Hindi	R	Chetan Anand
18.	Uski roti	Hindi	C	Mani Kaul
19.	Shantata court chalu aahe	Marathi	R	Satyadev Dubey
20.	Shasha	Hindi	R	Arjun Dev Rakshak
21.	Donhi gharcha pahuna	Marathi	R	Gajanan Jagirdar
22.	Chamana athagunth	Oriya	N	Parbati Ghosh
23.	Sankalp	Hindi	C	Ramesh Saigal
24.	Grahan	Hindi	C	Sunil Ghosh
25.	Maya darpan	Hindi	C	Kumar Shahani
26.	Dhakom	Tamil	R	Babu Nanthenkode
27.	Mansara bilap	Oriya	U	Niranjana Patnaik
28.	Aakrant	Hindi	R	Girish Vaidya
29.	Garam hawa	Hindi	R	MS Sathyu
30.	27 down	Hindi	C	Awtar Krishna Kaul
31.	Gunasundari no ghar sansar	Gujarati	R	Govind Saraiya
32.	Jukti takko aar gappo	Bengali	U	Ritwik Ghatak
33.	Dweep	Malayalam	N	Ramu Kariat
34.	Boatman of Padma	Bengali	U	Nityananda Dutta
35.	Padatik	Bengali	R	Mrinal Sen
36.	Dak bangla	Hindi	U	Girish Ranjan
37.	Parinaya	Hindi	U	Kantilal Rathod
38.	Duvidha	Hindi	C	Mani Kaul
39.	Taser desh	Bengali	U	Shyamal Guha
40.	Dikkatra Parvati	Tamil	R	SS Rao
41.	Uston paranh	Punjabi	N	Basu Bhattacharya
42.	Tyag patra	Hindi	N	Ramesh Gupta
43.	Barva bibarna	Bengali	N	Biplab Roy Choudhury

44.	Barbondhu	Bengali	N	Bijoy Chatterjee
45.	Mansai na diva	Gujarati	N	Govind Saraiya
46.	The wild wind	Kannada	N	TP Rama Reddy

R – Released

C – Completed and expected to be released shortly

U – Under production and expected to be completed shortly

N – Loan yet to be disbursed

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Source: *Winds of Change*, Mriganka Shekhar Ray, in *Indian Film Society News*, a journal of the Federation of Film Societies of India, published by the Central Office, Calcutta, undated.