SRFTI *Take One*

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Editor's Desk

'Take One', the annual film school magazine of SRFTI has been transformed into a peer reviewed national academic research journal titled as 'SRFTI Take One'.

Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute has by now completed its mission of imparting post graduate courses in film making and television with the introduction of additional wing named as Electronic and Digital Media since 2017. Our next focus is to give importance to the arena of research in film making and electronic and digital media content technology and production. In this regard we have already taken steps to arrange national conferences and symposiums on cinema and television. We have also introduced Independent Research Fellowship programmes for researchers in the domain of cinema and electronic and digital media. Publication of the first issue of the 'SRFTI Take One' is another step towards institutionalizing the pedagogy of research in film and digital media.

This issue is an ensemble of articles capturing technology, aesthetics, movement, history as well as the contemporary practices in cinema and digital media. On one hand 'Sonified Cinema' is an exploration of the novel use of soundscape in some recent films, on the other hand, the alternate film

collectives and screening practices in a digital age and neoliberal milieu gives an insight into dissemination of documentary films outside the mainstream channels. This issue covers the journey of Indian cinema from 'Phalke' to digital age and again looks into the regional Bengali cinema by analyzing its structural transformations.

Cinema has stepped into the age of new media. We are looking forward to more studies on the scope of creativity, practices and challenges in cinema and digital media.

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Sonified Cinema : Historicizing Sound in Indian Films

Budhaditya Chattopadhyay

Introduction

Indian cinema is notorious for producing typical sound experiences that are based on an overwhelming use of "song and dance" sequences whereby careful incorporation and attentive organization of sounds are generally considered by film scholars and historians as being ignored in the narrative strategy (Rajadhyaksha 2007; Gopalan 2002). There are indeed many examples from popular Indian films that have kept mindful sound design at bay, mostly creating a loud and high-pitch auditory setting to provide a remote and imaginary cinematic landscape. Challenging this popular preconception about Indian cinema in the larger public, in this article, I intend to show that this generalized perception of Indian cinema could be erroneous if we consider the historical trajectories of sound production as opposed to exporting an essentialist typecast. The advent of digital technology indeed makes it possible to incorporate rich layers of a

number of prominent sound components in the production scheme of sound organization in the current breeds of Indian films made in the digital realm. Since its advent in Indian cinema, digital technologies have had a significant impact, particularly on the production formats and subsequently on the emergent aesthetics of cinematic sound. Technologies such as location "sync" sound recording and surround sound design has been altering the ways in which film soundtracks are produced in the digital realm of Indian cinema. At the audience's end, these transformations consequently initiate a reconfiguration of spatial, temporal, and cognitive associations, thereby contrasting with their predecessor films made with mono-aural and stereo production formats, influencing tastes, expectations and anticipations. The growing digitalization of post-1990s film technology imparts recognition of authenticity related to location-specific spatial details, particularly in film-sound recording and production. An emergent fascination with real location instead of sets, and documentary evidences in films suggest a rediscovery of cinema's realistic origin. For example, in the recent works of an incipient generation of independent filmmakers, the previous practice of dubbing, stock-sound effects, and studio-based Foley is gradually being replaced by location-based "sync" sound and a creatively designed surround mix. These sound practices incorporate elaborately spatial diffusion of sound into the cinematic space, adding depth, texture, and realistic perspectives. The spatially cognitive and associative sound experiences triggered by these practices emphasize a need for developing new approaches that can articulate the emergent aesthetics in cinematic sound in the contemporary Indian cinema.

Contemporary Indian cinema in the digital realm facilitates specific practice of sound to create cinematic experiences that, I argue in this article, are spatially present and associative rather than conveying mere realistic representation of the site to the audience and or evoking emotive responses (Chattopadhyay 2015, 2016), as respectively

found in the previous era of optical and or magnetic recording of sound. I argue that the digital domain of sound practice has been incorporating surround design of digital multi-track "sync" sounds in the cinematic experience that intend to engage the audience in spatially cognitive ways rather than catering to a merely vococentric audio-visual contract (Chion 1994) or, more particularly, relying on the spectacular song and dance sequences popularly known in Indian films. The independent, creative and innovative practice of sound lead to a new realm of cinema in which cinematic experience is increasingly informed by spatial association of sound; this shift emphasizes need for a historical approach in film sound studies to map the trajectories of sound practices, sonic experiences and a gradual emergence of sound towards the digital era of Indian cinema.

The early developments and direct sound

The first talkie[1] made in India was *Alam Ara* (Ardeshir Irani 1931), which used optical sound recording. The following period from the 1940s to the late 1950s was an era in which cinema adapted to the technicalities of direct synchronized-sound in films that were largely music-oriented and or devotional in nature. The directly-recorded sound in these films provided for some evidence of the fictional sites represented in the monophonic narration. Throughout the trajectory of monaural sound practice in Indian cinema from 1931 roughly to the 1960s with available recording techniques and equipment that had a somewhat limited dynamic range of sound recording and production, the freedom of a microphone on location had been reduced by controlling its directionality to focus on recording "almost always the voice" (Chion 1994: 5), establishing a sound-cinema of an essentially vococentric order. In spite of the limitation of the dynamic range and the controlling and suppression of sound environment due to predominant emphasis on the voice of the actors, some louder

sounds may unwantedly intrude onto the film's directly recorded soundtrack and provide information about the real location of the film. In the legendary Indian film *Devdas* (P C Barua 1935), one can locate a birdcall in a particular sequence, which refers to an indoor locale within a busy city. The birdcall continues throughout the entire sequence and disappears with a cut. The significance of this sound element lies in the direct recording of sound from the very location where the film was shot. That off-screen sound of birdcall in *Devdas* frames the distinct realistic evidence of cinematic space captured in the early "direct" sound practices in Indian cinema.

The realistic representation of locations, settings and situations is emphasized in Satyajit Ray's use of sound in his films that highlight a distinct recognition of locational observation and documentation, establishing his legacy of realism in Indian cinema. Here the definition of "realism" refers back to the tradition of observational cinema that represents reality by recording vision and sound that "comes from within the world of the film" (Kania 2009: 244). Ray's early films were mostly direct recording on location, and later films were inclined to collect most of the sound effects and ambiences from location, using them as the primary source of aural stimuli, information, and evidence. In an interview with Pierre Andre Boutang in 1989, Ray explains his ethos of sound in film as to "use actual sounds creatively".[2] Ray's debut film *Pather Panchali* (1955) makes the audience relating to different locations of the village Boral where the film was shot. This is done by the use of actual environmental sounds, such as wind through the grasslands, drone of electrical poles beside the railroad, friction of tree branches in gentle breeze at the forest's etc. In *Aparajito* (1956) from Ray's *The Apu Trilogy* (1955-59), one can distinctly hear different zones of Benares through the ears of protagonist Apu following his exploration of the places. The respective cinematic passages are built with ambient sounds that make use of their location-specific textures, realistic depth of field

and perspectives in details. In *Charulata* (1964) the elaborate use of sounds from the streets of hawkers, vendors, and their antics intend to engage audiences with the secluded and idle neighborhood in 1870's Calcutta reconstructed, given that it's a period piece. Such spatio-temporal manifestation of sounds makes Ray challenging the Indian cinema of his times, which otherwise illustrates a typically verbose and vococentric exercise in cinematic sound with the continuous talking of the characters as the primary source of narrative, put in place by a loud background music, sporadically punctuated by loosely arranged song sequences.

Dubbing era and the studio-centric sound production

The direct recording practice of sound production continued during the 1950s, a period termed the Golden Age of Indian cinema, when film auteurs such as Satyajit Ray, Chetan Anand and Guru Dutt emerged and placed Indian cinema on the world stage. Through a gradual conversion to more convenient, portable and robust magnetic recording and re-recording, the Golden Age gradually dissolved into studio-centric production practices, following the commercialization of popular mainstream Indian films, with colourful antics, half-known foreign locations and spectacular song-and-dance sequences of the 1980s, 1990s and partly into the contemporary.

During the 60's, magnetic recording and mixing started to be extensively used in Indian cinema. As magnetic medium emerged, it became possible to clean, erase, overdub and employ multi-track mixing. The use of "loop dubbing"[3] and ADR (Automatic Dialogue Replacement) in Indian cinema became a regular practice from the late 1960s on with the arrival of the Arriflex 2C and Arriflex 3 cameras, which required a blimp (a soundproof cover) to shield its notorious motor noise[4] during the location shooting. This distracting camera noise required that everything had to be re-created in the

studio. Eventually, this practice became the standard in Indian films. As dubbing emerged alongside the standardization of analogue magnetic recording and mixing it was facilitated by multi-track re-recording in the studio. The following phase of sound production in Indian cinema was shaped toward what is known as the "dubbing era" (roughly between the 1960s and late 1990s). This was a long stretch of time that illustrated a growing interest in the controlled deployment of a few sound elements as design materials in films, keeping the primacy of the voice along with a prominent usage of background music, song, and dance sequences, and processed sound effects. However, in this hierarchy of sound organization, there was a substantial lack of ambient sounds. This practice was a result of the standardized methods of studio-centric film sound production with a particular aesthetics of post-synchronization using dubbing and Foley as explained above. My interviews with a number of prominent sound practitioners, who were exposed to the production practices of this period, suggest, specific sound practice of dubbing as a narrative strategy was wholeheartedly embraced by the practitioners themselves. The following phase of the magnetic recording, dubbing and re-recording instigated a technologically mediated approach to represent reality in overly expressionistic, spectacular and melodramatic overtones that distanced sound's actuality away from the location, in the process involving imagination of the audiences aiming at creating emotional responses in them and gradually giving rise to the studio's control over cinematic sound practice (Chattopadhyay 2012, 2013, 2015). Magnetic recording and mixing rendered this imagination as something spectacular (Sergi 2004; Kerins 2011) – like an expanded fantasy-like experience with lavish songs and dances in foreign locations and actions packed with synthetic and processed sound effects dislocated further away from reality the location. Largely studio-centric and industry-dependent technicians tended to construct a film's sound environment by artificial means like loop dubbing and sound effects,

typically paying little attention to authenticity, and using songs and louder background music as aural masking. In other word, such practices trended to approach over-modulation, manipulation, and abstraction in enhancing sound's emotional and affective qualities, playing on the fringes of the audience's imaginings and fancies, such as by processing the voice of the villain or bodily sound effects of a character and so on. The specific sonic representations of the characters were constructed using vocal manipulation as well as extended reverb of their footsteps and other bodily postures and violent actions affecting visceral response in audiences by "affective mimicry" (Plantinga 2009: 94) and mirror responses toward producing the popular mass appeal, such as in the popular mainstream films like *Sholay* (Sippy 1975), *Dharmatma* (Khan 1975) and *Coolie* (Desai 1983) for example.

The digital realm and an emerging spatiality

During the early 2000s, a major upgrade followed in the form of the emergent digital technology, which introduced "sync"[5] sound recording techniques and surround sound formats to Indian cinema, accelerating the process of globalization and corporatization of the Indian film industry. It was at this time that there was a significant shift in focus to redefine aesthetics within sound production and for sophisticated terms like "sound design" to emerge. The digital era in Indian cinema commenced in the late 1990s when a large-scale conversion from analogue recording, analogue production practices and optical film exhibition to the digital technologies was gradually taking place. Digital technology was integrated into the production and post-production stages of filmmaking as well as in the projection/reproduction formats. The ramifications of this, cinema adapting to a new technology, have been far-reaching, though it was particularly evident in the way cinematic experience was changing through the

radical use and perception of sound. Since then, the digitalization of cinema has had a substantial impact on the production/reproduction chains and, consequently, on aesthetic choices, strategies and the resulting appreciation of cinematic sound. Digital sound technologies such as "sync" recording and surround sound design in the essentially digital realm of cinema have tended to alter the ways in which film soundtrack was previously produced, namely the "song and dance sequences" known in the mainstream Indian cinema.

The digital domain is thoroughly different from its predecessors. The advent of the digital technologies in cinematic sound has helped overcome the limitations, which were previously posed by optical or magnetic recordings. For a sound practitioner, this means a wider and more flexible milieu of recording and design that invite freedom and flexibility. Mark Kerins writes of the American cinema (which is also valid for Indian cinema to a certain degree):

> When 5.1-channel digital surround sound (DSS) first appeared (…), it offered filmmakers better dynamic range, more channels, and greater flexibility for placement of sounds within the multichannel environment (Kerins 2011: 53).

At present the digital technologies, such as multi-track digital recording and surround sound design reorder the organization of sound and the environment of sound in Indian cinema. With the advent of digital technology, not only the surround sound formats, but the widely available and easy-to-handle digital sound recording devices, applications and facilities make various options and strategies available to sound practitioners. Sync sound as a direct descendent of this trend allows for sound to be recorded on location in synchronization with the camera, and these authentic sound recordings, which are directly linked to the location, are used in post-production stages without the specific need to incorporate extensive stock sound effects and pre-recorded ambiences. This practice has initiated in-

depth methods and options for translating the cinematic location by the use of authentic sound recordings in the design process. Sync recording on location is being supported by recent developments in gadgets with multi-track options that have greater flexibility, access to the farthest corners of the location and applications with precise control over each recorded clip. Multiple options for keeping numerous tracks for ambience, sync sound effects and dialogue open up possibilities for recording a larger number of sound elements and working with multiple layers of sound captured from a location. In the studio scenario, there are ample choices for digitally processing location-specific "actual" sounds to be treated as a fundamental part of surround sound design. There are varied applications to manipulate recorded sounds to restructure and reorder their spatial characteristics into the cinematic sound experience.

The first mainstream Indian film that was shot mostly in "sync" sound was *Lagaan* (Ashutosh Gowariker 2001). In this film, location sync recording and Dolby digital sound technology were implemented following a major debate; and, since then, most of today's films have gradually embraced the digital revolution. *Lagaan* unfolds a multitude of sounds that were previously unheard in a mono- or stereophonic rendering of sound in Indian cinema. The opening sequence in particular draws the audience into the universe of the historic region of *Champaner* in 1890 via a spatially believable representation of sound perspective. The use of sync sound and surround sound critically culminates in *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle 2008), an Indian production due to its use of actors, writers, locations and technicians from the Indian film industry. The production mixer and location recordist Resul Pookutty won an academy award[6] for his work with sound. He later became one of the promoters of and a campaigner for sync sound in Indian cinema. In this film, several sequences that are shot in real locations portray the complex depth of sonic environment that Indian urban areas offer.

In the following phase of Indian cinema, the practice and use of sync sound gained momentum, and more films employed this production practice. Like the parallel cinema, the so-called "independent" filmmakers, who preferred to stand apart from the mainstream to establish auteurist signatures and voices of their own, were the ones who picked up "sync" sound as a stylistic feature in their emerging film works. Dibakar Banerjee, among others from this new breed of Indian filmmaker, used location sync sound to its fullest potential. In *Shanghai* (Dibakar Banerjee 2012), the raw, noisy and rustic spatiality of an Indian city and its familiar phenomenal world is re-presented truthfully and authentically by the use of sync sound recording and surround sound design as a newly established idiom in Indian cinema.

As the new trend of sync sound and surround design becomes the popular expectation from the standard sound experience in the contemporary digital era of Indian cinema with multiplexes emerging in the urban areas, sound practice incorporates newly available technological improvements over the existing set-up. Post-production techniques experience a faster technological development in editing, designing and mixing in multi-channel studio and projection of sound in new theatres and multiplexes, such as in Dolby 5.1 and 7.1 surround set ups and the recent Auro 3D and Dolby Atmos. The first Indian film released in the Dolby Atmos format was *Sivaji 3D* (Shankar 2012). However, Dolby Atmos faced an opponent in Auro 3D, which entered the Indian cinemas with *Vishwaroopam* (Kamal Hasan 2013). Both the formats work on technologies that split sounds into multiple digital surround speakers.

Sonification of cinema: critical commentaries

The advent of digital technology substantially affected stylistic features and aesthetic choices filmmakers and film industry personnel could

utilize and make. Mark Kerins, in his excellently written book *Beyond Dolby*, has argued that film history is rich with examples of technology influencing aesthetics (Kerins 2011: 54). For example, the introduction of sound, colour, and magnetic tape initiated deep changes in corresponding aesthetic features in cinema. Film scholar Rick Altman also tried to articulate the aesthetic implications of sound technology in cinema in his seminal writings (Altman 1992 et al). The advent of digital technology indeed makes it possible to reconfigure the aesthetic strategies of earlier standardized modes of sound production (e.g. monaural mixing, full dubbing etc.) for a new realm of practice marked by an intensified awareness for clarity, quality, flexibility and democratization. This shift helps incorporate rich layers of creative sound components, such as ambience or ambient sound, in the production scheme of sound organization in the current breeds of Indian films made in the digital realm instigating an orientation of site-specificity and spatiality. There is a new breed of Indian films that methodologically distance itself away from the popular mainstream Indian cinema known for its typical narrative tropes of the spectacular but unsitely escapist song-and-dance extravaganza. This new breed of Indian films captures an immersive immediate reality of contemporary India (Chattopadhyay 2016).

In my previous (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016) and current research (2017) that are empirically informed by extensive interviews and in-depth conversations with prominent Indian sound practitioners active in the film industry, I have indicated a major shift observed within Indian cinema. This shift is marked by the proliferation of a new trend, within which the audiences are increasingly feeling the need to relate to the convincingly real and believable sites within the constructed film space as a diegetic universe. A number of recent films such as *Asha Jaoar Majhe* (Labour of Love, Aditya Vikram Sengupta 2014), *Court* (Chaitanya Tamhane 2014), *Masaan* (Fly Away Solo, Neeraj Ghaywan 2015), and *Killa* (The Fort, Avinash Arun 2015) do

not rely on the music, or practically do away with it, using instead a reduced amount of dialogue (or no dialogue, as with films like *Asha Jaoar Majhe*). These films represent a renewed sense of situated-ness in everyday life meticulously portraying ordinary sites known through the lived experiences in contemporary India with its emerging urban spaces and urbanizing rural hinterlands. Due to this narrative strategy, the specific sites depicted in the films become significant characters in the story-world by the spatial rendering of sound.

In line with these assumptions, I would like to formulate the aesthetic strategies in the practice of sound in different technological phases of Indian cinema leading to the contemporary digital. I try here to devise and introduce a general three-step model on the basis of the trajectory of sound's usage in production practices, and corresponding aesthetic shifts. These models take their point of departure in specific phases of technological transitions of the sound production-reproduction chain but do not limit the discussion to the history of technology. Rather, these models highlight characteristics defining the sound aesthetics that emerge from the three different technological phases respectively of direct recording and monaural reproduction, magnetic recording and dubbing and stereophonic mixing up to the contemporary digital era of sync sound and surround design in Indian cinema. Following this technological trajectory, I propose that, the use and practice of sound in Indian cinema (in terms of sound effects and ambience) may be broadly categorized as:

1. Site-specific evidence and realistic representation.
2. Unsitely spectacle and emotive or affective stimulation.
3. Spatial presence and cognitive association.

The transformation of the diegetic space from a screen-centric, monaural soundtrack to the ultra-screen expanded stereophonic space and further to today's spatially enveloping surround sound environment can be understood as paradigmatic shifts from "looking at" to "being

in" or immersion – a clear indication of a spatial shift characterized by the changing relationship between site and sound as crafted through evolving production practices. Much of this shift is made audible through the use and spatial ordering of ambient sounds to create an immersive environment facilitating an embodied experience of a site's presence. I have shown earlier how the screen-centric, monaural recording and production and reproduction of synchronized ambient sound as direct evidence helped to "trace the site." Dubbing (mostly between 1960s and late 1990s) and later, the ultra-screen stereophonic mixing (late 1990s) created an auditory setting of an unsitely spectacle by a deliberate lack of ambient sound to "escape the site." I have also demonstrated that the contemporary digital era is more generous in including ambiences in the sound organization than former eras had been. Consequently, the site becomes more bodily "present." Indian films after 2001 generally embraced digital multi-track sync sound recording before it gradually became standard practice around 2009. The novel experience of listening to the film space in the digital era is marked by low frequency room tone, atmospheric contents recorded from the location in synchronization with the onsite live setting. The mise-en-sonore[7] or auditory setting is rendered by elaborate spatialization of these ambient sounds that provide ample evidence of the site in a spatially enveloping environment of surround sound. These new methods and approaches produce a sense of "being sited" as an embodied experience of the site's realistic and convincing spatial presence. The gradual emergence of sound in Indian cinema culminates into the fuller spectrum of a spatially elaborate sonic environment in the contemporary digital era, leading to greater spatial presence and cognitive association by means of sonic authenticity of location and cinematic situations than that of the previous era. Let me frame this trajectory and the emergence of sound and corresponding aesthetic shifts through different technological phases.

The 35mm optical filmstrip had a dynamic range of about 78 dB, which was what the optical direct recording could get as the "headroom"[8] of recorded sound, limiting the signal-to-noise ratio. Within this narrower dynamic range, vococentric recording naturally delimited the ambient sound content for the film soundtrack, putting an emphasis on the voice. In the magnetic era, the dynamic range of magnetic sound recording was around 98 dB, depending on the magnetic material. The digital surround format, on the other hand, offers over 120 dB of dynamic range, which means that sounds can include more breadth and depth of recording, i.e., retaining very loud sound volume alongside very soft and minute sounds (Kerins 2011). This wider headspace allows for an inclusive capacity for recording, layering, designing, mixing and re-recording of sounds that gradually replace previous practices of fully dubbed dialogue, archaic stock sound effects and studio Foley to include more of the actor's recorded live performance, "sync" sound effects and spatially-elaborate surround design of location-specific ambience. Such creative usage of sounds triggers higher-level processes, bringing into play mental interpretations of the *site* by the perceptual systems that elaborate a coherent representation of the phenomenal sound world in the cinematic experience (Bordwell 2009).

There is no official document or manual related to the best practice of sound for Indian film industry yet. However, examining my interviews and in-depth conversations with several sound practitioners may shed light on the perception of a best practice, critically gauging the industry standards in this context. This is often reflected in the national awards given to the "best" works in the categories of "Location Sound Recordist," "Sound Designer" and "Re-recordist of the Final Mixed Track."[9] Some of the interviewees of my project received this type of awards from national (as well as international) bodies based on the film industry's evaluation of a highest level of craftsmanship in sound production. How do these "best" works

sound? Do they indeed represent and exemplify exceptional works of film sound production, those that demonstrate a sensitive application of artistry? In my opinion, sound-based creative endeavors are often characterized by a refusal to be standardized, destabilizing existing systems of industrial norms and protocols. To articulate how the idea of producing "better" sounds occupies the minds of practitioners and how they aspire to achieve certain (personal) standards of quality and efficacy within the immense constraints of the film industry, I refer to the interviews[10] that discuss how the creative utilization of ambient sound expanded in the digital era (e.g. Ajith A. George, Anish John, Baylon Fonseca, Vikram Joglekar et al). It is ambient sound that is categorically singled out by these established practitioners as the primary element of artistic exploration in film sound production. However, sound production in mainstream Indian cinema is still dominated by the pervasive norms and rules of the film industry, even though the digital realm opens up possibilities for creative intervention by the practitioner, shaking up the hierarchical and feudal chains of industrial and studio-centric production. One example of this is how sync sound requires the glorified actor's committed participation on the film set on a par with the location sound technician, who has long held a lower status in film crew hierarchy. In this project I argue that the best works of film sound are marked by a spatial awareness being more inclusive towards the site, more playful, more aware as well as more nuanced in its application. Here I intend to distance myself from industrial norms and regulations in search for more freedom, hacking the technology and subverting industrial standards. I am, therefore, critical of the standardizing idea of a best practice when it comes to individual artistry and send out a call for greater inclusiveness and sensitivity to the site-specificity of sound. Best practice, as I apply the concept here, envisions a future of film sound where these creative sensibilities will be explored artistically, using industry-dependent ideas of a "best sound" in film only as a

point of departure to reinterpret and recontextualize the conventional notion of "best practice."

However, it is not the mainstream popular realm of Indian films, but the independent, so-called "art house" cinema rather than the cinema for the masses where the possibilities for artistic exploration and developing exceptional examples of creativity in sound are most present. Take for example a review from Amersfoort, The Netherlands, paraphrasing the director of the independent Indian film *Anhey Ghorhey Da Daan* (Alms for a Blind Horse, Gurvinder Singh 2011): "Even a still scene can create its own sound and tell [you] what's going on."[11] The director was present when the film was shown at the Rotterdam International Film Festival 2012 and talked about his ideas of sound in Indian cinema. The statement suggests a clear emphasis on the potential of ambience and its deeply evocative effectiveness in establishing the poetic presence of the landscape shown on a static frame. Sound, in this handful, but growing number, of Indian "indie" films, takes its own course by creating layers of multiple impressions within, around, and beyond the visual narrative and the overarching story. Here the authors' (both the director of the film and the sound practitioner) subjective interpretations of a place are paramount and crucial when developing an auditory setting.

I term this new realm of sound in cinema as "sonified cinema", which is principally crafted through location-aware sync sound and surround design of location-specific ambience in the spatially associative and cognitive environment to create sonic presence and believability. These experiences are enhanced by an elaborate and intricate spatialisation of realistically recorded sound elements as primary layers. "Sonification"[12] refers to the emerging areas of sound practice such as *VR*, *Sonic Interaction Design*, *HCI*, and *Augmented Reality*, where the term has been used in reference to novel approaches to auditory practice that convey information, meaning, and spatial qualities in the interactive context of media environments. My

contention is that, the contemporary sound experience in Indian cinema can be compared to these emerging areas of sound practice that are triggered by the digital technologies.

Conclusions

The digital era of sound practice in Indian cinema has been elaborately incorporating spatial manifestations of sound in the cinematic experience that transcends the typical Indian film soundtrack marked by song and dance sequences. In contemporary Indian films, the previous practice of full dubbing, stock sound effects, and studio Foley are gradually being replaced by digital surround design of authentic, location-specific sync sounds. The practice leads to a new realm of cinema by sound's creative and inventive usage incorporating the wider depth and perspective available to the authentic layers of sounds. Sound in contemporary Indian cinema has been emerging in terms of its potential to create spatially believable environments.

Notes :

1. After the advent of sound in the cinema, early films that incorporated synchronized dialogue were known as "talkies."
2. See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWS5dlxwZDc
3. Source: personal interviews with prominent Indian sound practitioners conducted by me.
4. See the paragraph "sync sound in Asia": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sync_sound
5. Abbreviation of synchronized sound recording made on the location, revived from an earlier practice of direct sound in Indian cinema into contemporary practice of digital recording.
6. See:http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/legacy/ceremony/81st-winners.html

7. The term "film space" is defined as the space that the spectator or audience encounters, a space that is organized and constructed, e.g. the linking of shots through sound editing and sound design. On the other hand, the area in front of the camera and sound device's recording field is known as the "pro-filmic space," as discussed earlier in this article. Combining these two definitions, it can be argued that the choice and arrangement of pro-filmic space substantially affect the spatial dynamics of the mise-en-scène of sound I have invented and applied an unofficial but useful coinage, "mise-en-sonore" or the auditory setting – the actual sonorous environment, spatial organization of sounds, that the listener experiences – a setting that in turn influences the verisimilitude or believability of a film in the ears of the audience.
8. In the vocabulary of the practitioner, "headroom" means the amount of loudness that exceeds a designated reference level a sound signal can handle before it distorts or clips.
9. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Film_Award_for_Best_Audiography
10. Conducted specifically for this project, and will be available as audio recordings.
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Ontological Analysis of The Representation of God in The Cinema of Dadasaheb Phalke

Hitesh K. Liya

One hundred years ago from now a man from India brought home an invention that had given the world a fascinating and alluring opportunity to experience another 'world', a world which could run at their behest, which they inhabited and quitted on their own wishes; a world that also defied the concept of time and ran backwards which gave them a joy of re-living the time already expensed which was impossible in their own 'real' world. With time, people got used to the invention and started enjoying and inhabiting this parallel world regularly. Taking a time off from their 'physical' world and entering into the newly arrived parallel and 'unreal' world, which was much more interesting than their own world, became a part of their routine. They started sharing their time discussing about their experiences in attending to the grandeur and magic of the new world which was intangible yet as

provocative, non-physical yet as effective and unreal yet as believable and experiencing this 'another' world became a social event, just like attending a marriage ceremony, a birthday celebration or a funeral.

Observing people's enthusiasm of experiencing the newly created world, he started creating different kinds of parallel worlds for them to inhabit which were imitations of the real world but tackled the objects and the people differently in their webs of space and time. Unlike in the real world, in his world, things and people could move at faster or slower than their normal speeds, plants could grow at magically faster speeds, time could shorten or elongate its duration and even reverse its direction, bigger things looked smaller and vice versa and everything happened on a Giant screen in front of them. One had to sit on a chair in a darkened hall, just like while attending to an opera or a drama or a musical event, to attend to this world, the only difference was that the Giant screen did not have any depth or any real object played upon it. One could only see these objects being thrown from some mysterious (Godly) source through the ether of light onto the Giant screen, but could not hear, touch, smell or taste them.

These unusual, extra-ordinary and magical characteristics of this re-created world made only of the images from the real and ordinary world captured the mind of the entire nation. The invention which already bewildered the people in other countries was called 'Bioscope' and termed by various names such as 'motion-picture', 'movie' or 'cinema'. The man, Mr. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, fondly called as Dadasaheb, was bestowed with the name of the 'Father of Indian Cinema'.

Every film enthusiast knows the piece of history I have just outlined and a majority of the reader population may wonder as to why such a generalized piece of information, with no critical and technical insight, has been outlined in a magazine like this which is meant for highly specific and narrow fringe of readers. My defense

against such arguments is that every theory and scientific argument, however specific it might be, rests upon the observation and realization of obvious facts. Analyzing those facts with questioning and arguing, reasoning and concluding, further questioning the results, and articulating the whole process with an amalgam of language and logic gives rise to a specific theory or a philosophical argument. My intention here is neither to provide the reader with a concise encyclopedia on the history of cinema nor to come up with a new theoretical approach in film criticism. What I would prefer to do rather is to start with the fundamental facts about Cinema from the history and look at them with a fresh view point and intellectual approach by using science, philosophy and dialectics. My approach in discussing Cinema here lies in raising new questions and involving the reader in a one sided rhetoric and argumentation. To provide solid solutions to the questions I raise will mean ending the topic there. In a span of hundred years, from Phalke's 'Photoplay' to the Digital revolution,Cinema has evolved in its form and appearance at the speed of light. Let's scratch the layers of history and re-visit 'Time' (re-visiting time is a trait peculiar only to Cinema) and see if we can discover something untouched and unknown about Cinema.

Dadasaheb Phalke made films in Colonial and orthodox India. His films brought the Gods and Goddesses of Indian Mythology on the Cinema screen. When people viewed them for the very first time they believed it to be a miracle and bowed their heads in front of the Screen. In spite of being aware of the fact that the pictures on the screen doesn't have any depth and lack sound, it made them 'believe', let only for the duration of the film, that the moving images on the screen were not merely animated objects but had 'life force' in them. Hundred years after Phalke's 'Gods on screen', people still get mesmerized by the vivacious nature of moving images and want to believe, even after gaining enough awareness about the medium, and delve themselves into this world of illusion. I will take the help of a

Canadian philosopher and academician Ian Jarvie in this discussion. In Jarvie's book, '*Philosophy of the film*' [1], he has related the act of film viewing to the topics of Classical philosophy, Ontology and psychology. Jarvie writes, while relating philosophy and film, that when people watch films they are engaged in certain philosophical problems and further argues that,

> The attraction of the film to the viewer/listener is not a case of delusion. It is voluntary illusion. (p.54) [1]

In a state of complete consciousness, people want to be free from their faculty of imagination and accept the lives on cinema screen as 'real'. This fundamental attitude of the film viewers gives rise to a problem similar to that of 'appearance and reality'. Much has been written about this problem in philosophical texts. The problem, when applied for Phalke's films which showed 'God on screen', takes a different shape. Appearances are shadows or impressions of reality and reality is gauged by the sense signals from the physical world. Hence, while viewing a film about an object which exists in the physical sense of the world, when the object appears on the cinema screen, an audience consciously takes it for reality and reacts to it in the same way as he would react to the object in its physical presence. For example, while viewing Lumiere Brothers' '*Arrival of a train'*, audiences believed the impression of the train on the screen to be real and got horrified by it for the first time and mesmerized for the second time. While for Phalke's films, the reality of the image of the God on the screen have to be derived from belief as the existence of God itself is in doubt in the first place. For a believer in God the appearances on the screen are as much believable (or more) as in the mythological texts as there is no reality reference for those appearances which seem to have physical characteristics on the screen. Appearances themselves take the place of reality which smudges the sharp boundary between the two based on our physical

sense datum. Now the question for argument is, does the God on the screen exist? If no, then how do we tackle the belief of a viewer in the appearance of the God which has taken the form of reality and if yes then does it exist merely on the basis of the myth or has film viewing given rise to a new definition of existence? And what happens to the problem for an atheist who doesn't bow his head in front of Phalke's 'God on screen'?

An easy and superficial way out of this situation is to say that the God on the screen is imaginary just like the God in the real life and he doesn't exist in either of the worlds and hence the problem of appearance and reality doesn't arise. Such argument doesn't differentiate between the idea of God in our daily lives and the impression of God in the film. When a believer views the image of the God on the screen, it is more than an idea for him as it generates visual sensations and he alludes these sensations to the impression of God. Hence the so called imaginary world of the film has given rise to a situation which is similar to attending to the real world which is primarily recognized through the sensations. This problem can be alleviated somewhat by bringing in the concept of cognitive evolution and knowledge. The fact that a cinema audience doesn't get completely deceived and disillusioned by the film world comes from 'film literacy'. A viewer 'knows' that the world he is attending to is not real and he has come to attend to this world just to get a temporary kick of the illusion of reality derived from the physical world. This knowledge he has acquired by attending to films time and again and by learning that films are very much like reality but not 'really' the reality. He has to 'suspend' his disbelief while he is attending to and enjoying the seemingly real film world. Lumiere's arriving train was a horror for the audiences for the first time but was mesmerization when they viewed it again as they learned that nothing really is there in front of them and they just have to enjoy the sight of the arriving train in the cinema hall. This analysis somewhat

solves our problem of a believer in God who has a prior knowledge that the God is physically not there on the cinema screen but still he can believe in it as he believes in it when he goes to the temple in real life. Hence the appearance of the God on the screen will not be taken as a miracle for an experienced film viewer and he won't in any way get disillusioned by it. Our dilemma now shifts to the appearance of God on the cinema screen who's physical attributes are similar to those of a human being (or to the person enacting the God to be specific) which is something different and more than the real life experience. How do we account for the suspension of disbelief for a non believer in God who also witnesses the appearance of God on the screen just like a believer and experiences the same kind of impression of 'Godliness' in his mind through the visual sensations created by the 'God on screen'? The question here needs an Ontological argument.

Ontology means the science of 'being'. Jarvie writes in his book [2], while discussing the Ontology of the film, that when we talk of objects 'in' a film we do not talk of the material which makes the film (celluloid strips, digital sensor, projection screen etc) we talk of the objects in the unreal 'world' of the film (people, trees, trains, mountains, rivers etc.) which generate feelings in our mind and we get moved by them. Films thus go beyond their physical 'being' and gets us riveted in the higher aspects of the impressions created by it. We get influenced by the characteristics of the unreal objects on the screen and react to them (smile, cry, feel happy, sad and nostalgic about places etc.) When a film is not being viewed and is only in its physical state of being (celluloid material) then the things 'on' the film are merely the chunks of mass. But when the film is run in a projector and the images on the film are projected on the screen they take a different meaning. The objects, trees, rivers, mountains 'in' the film start existing in the universe and their 'being' influence the cosmos.

According to Jarvie, this means that the inventory of things existing in the universe increases when a film starts running and when somebody views it. But what about Phalke's 'God on screen' who's being is not physical? So when the film is not being viewed the God is in the form of celluloid material (just like trees and rivers). Hence he doesn't exist. But when somebody starts viewing the film, the God comes into being and the meaning of his existence becomes more than just the physicality of celluloid material. But there are no inventories of God in the universe as God doesn't exist in physical form. To analyze Ontological aspect of this situation we will have to take into consideration the being of the person who acted as the God in the film. Ontologically, for the God to exist after the film is being run, one has to have the existence of some kind which can be attributed to the characteristics of God. In other words the idea of God has been put into a physical form. The viewer, having a prior knowledge about the characteristics and attributes of God from already existing myth, relates it to the appearance of a human in the film which is assigned the status of God. The difference between the ontological aspects of other worldly objects in the film and Phalke's God is that other worldly objects has solid physical form and they do exist physically where as Phalke's God exists in the mind through a prior knowledge of the myth and comes into physical being only after the film starts running. This creates a reverse situation for the appearance and reality problem of Phalke's God. The existence of God is physical when it appears on the screen and mental when the film stops running and the viewer has lost contact from the unreal world of film. Does this mean that the existence of God is more effective in the unreal world than in the real one? And if yes than how is it that the existence is taking a qualitative rather than quantitative meaning? If no, then is the physical existence of God derived from the unreal existence of 'God on screen'?

Our discussion ignores the being of the person who played God

in the film. The actor playing God has a dual characteristic when the film is being viewed as for the viewer his being is more than humane and has taken the form of God. Ontological analysis of Phalke's God would be incomplete without accounting for the real existence of the person which is recognizable in both the worlds through the real as well as the unreal aspect of his being. I would refer, here, to an article by a French film critic of 1940's, Andre Bazin [3]. Bazin defines photography as a representation of the world 'as it is' and discusses how photographs differ from paintings in their purpose. According to him photography emancipates painting from its quest for realism and confusion to strive for resemblance. In Bazin's words,

> The relation between the photograph and its object is unique. We respond to a photograph as we respond to nature itself (or people themselves?). Photography uses a lens to strip away preconception, to present the object to us in its virginal purity, by a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part (p. 12). Faced with a photograph of someone we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduce. (p.13) [3]

This argument of Bazin, which considers photography only as a means to capture objects 'as they are' which resemble their objective realities, ignores the fundamental problem of appearance and reality. Bazin's Ontological analysis relies purely on materialist approach and ignores the philosophy and dialectics of the world and its photographic representation. A viewer of Phalke's God for instance, responds first to the appearance of the person who is being filmed and not the person himself. A photographic lens here works to recreate (rather than to strip away as said by Bazin) preconception of God in the mind of the viewer and presents to him an object (the actor) in its dual form (unlike in its virginal purity), one is that of the appearance of the God and second, that of the physical reality

of the actor. The mechanical reproduction of the photograph here is only for the purpose of recording the appearance of the model, and not in creating the artifact of God out of the model of the actor, in which the man plays a definite part.

The most famous analytical statement of Bazin about the photographic image, which has been re- iterated and discussed plenty of times by plethora of film essayists, goes like this,

> The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it…it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the representation; it is the model. (p.14) [3]

This statement holds absolutely true for the objective nature of a photograph and its model. True, the image of the person in the get up of Phalke's God is exactly like the person in the conditions of space and time that governed the shoot of the film. But, by virtue of the very process of its becoming it doesn't share the being of the person of which it is the representation. In our discussion, the being of the model (the actor) in the real world transforms into the becoming of the God in the unreal screen world which is not the representation of the model (the actor).

Bazin's Ontological analysis of Phalke's 'God on Screen' requires a philosophical and dialectical perspective for argumentation and discussion. Besides, in order to analyze such specific topics like God in Cinema requires a string of mythology to be attached to the already established scientific and philosophical theories. Neither Jarvie nor Bazin has linked up the problems of cinema with mythology. Phalke's 'God on screen' has raised interesting problems about the philosophy of film and film viewing.

As we go on analyzing and theorizing we find that there are lots of interesting things to be discovered about cinema under its visible surface of glitz and glamour. After reading this article and engaging

himself in a tour of intellectual debate, brainstorming and rhetoric, one might ask, is there really a need to think so much about films. This question might start a fresh thread of debate in our discussion as we are on the verge of wrapping up this article. My answer is that viewing films without thinking about them would make no harm. But then there is no need of thinking about anything at all. Life can be lived and enjoyed without thinking about it too. But evolution without cognition will remain merely a biological growth. A falling apple would have remained just a 'fallen' apple had not Isaac Newton thought about it. Thinking and discussing makes us aware of possibilities and avenues in the direction of our progress. Perhaps Mr. Phalke was a silent thinker, who went against all the odds of the society of his time and brought home a marvelous invention of twentieth century and made us aware of its boundless possibilities. Had he remained like a spectator of his 'God on screen' and got horrified by watching Lumiere Brothers' 'Arriving Train' and run away from the cinema hall like other horrified spectators, we wouldn't have got the chance to experience, enjoy and evolve with Cinema, and sometimes think about them!

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'Crow Films' : Mrinal Sen and The Structural Transformations of Bengali Cinema (1965-1975)

Maharghya Chakraborty

After the release of *Akash Kusum* (1965), Satyajit Ray had written a critical piece on the film in the *The Statesman*, stating that while the entire film is refreshingly quixotic and comic, the overtly sentimental and serious end, in attempting to make a serious point, is entirely counter-productive[1]. This led to a two month-long debate in the editorial of *The Statesman*, between Ray, Sen and Ashish Burman, the author of the original story. Sen and Burman defended the end, stating it went with their exploration of the life of a lower middle-class youth in that particular socio-political scenario. Satyajit Ray's final reply in the debate is well-known in Bengali film history; he wrote a short lampoon of the story and the film, ending with: 'Distraught hero turns up at girl's residence to make clean breast, is turned out by father. Contemporary finale with boy and girl waving sad farewell. Contemporary moral: A crow-

film is a crow-film is a crow-film.'[2] To the concerns of this paper, the term 'crow film' is extremely significant. Used as it had been by Ray to denote the lack of topicality of the apparently archaic narrative of love and conflict, all overshadowed by an abundance of superficial innovations – newsreel footage, photographic stills, freeze frames, panning shots, rapid changes of scene, irony and sarcasm, reference to other films and also to elements from popular culture, voice-over narration – can the term be re-read to denote both the contentious interplay between form, aesthetics and function and the constructed and the citational nature of what constitutes the cinematic for Mrinal Sen?

In 1995, as part of a proposal to the British Film Institute on the occasion of the centenary of cinema, Mrinal Sen had presented an outline for a screenplay he had wished to film, titled *The Indian Story*.[3] An ambitious project, the screenplay foregrounded the two distinct tendencies that have dominated Mrinal Sen's oeuvre for most of his creative and formative years – the often fraught relationship between aesthetics and form. Ostensibly a tribute to Indian Cinema, the screenplay imagines its historical moment as a tense and anxious one – on the occasion of the Centenary of Cinema, the screenplay anticipates its death due to the onslaught of video technology and television. The animated protagonists of the screenplay (rather, it is perhaps fitting to use the word 'observer' instead of 'protagonist') react by making an epitaph for cinema with the following lines: 'Here, on this planet lived an art, the liveliest of arts, which, giving a glorious account of itself for 100 years, was shamefully elbowed out…' However, as they stand shedding tears over the dying animal called film, their tears gather in a container and magically produce film-strips, the suddenly optimistic end heralding the ability of the medium to regenerate from its own remains. The film was obviously never made.

The conclusion that the sensationalist and overtly melodramatic

screenplay arrives at is quite trite and simplistic. Obsolescence has been structural to cinema from the very early years of its inception and in fact provides cinema with the impetus to constantly reinvent itself. Be it the primitive mode of representation (PMR) of Early Cinema or the later hegemony of the Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR)[4], the coming of sound, or the technological and aesthetic advancements of the post-war period till 1970s, each successive advancement in technology has consequently given rise to speculations regarding the sustenance of the growing machinery of cinema. Technology then plays a crucial factor in the engendering of this anxiety regarding the demise of cinema and consequently it is this very technology that reaffirms the power of cinema to subsume each and every technological advancement in its wake – the inherently hybrid nature of the medium making various mutations possible (sound, then video and television, and now, the digital). With the conclusion of the debate already anticipated, what then emerges as a crucial concern is the context of the debate in a particular socio-political moment – a concern that is central to any attempt at writing histories for Indian cinema.

At this juncture, the screenplay of *The Indian Story*, a roughly nine-page outline, posits an interesting and bizarre challenge. The claims and counter-claims here are multiple. Besides the evocative regeneration of cinema in the end, the screenplay is also the context for a debate on the history of Indian Cinema. The device Sen adopts here is quite familiar to his oeuvre: the unseen visitor to the archive (the screenplay mentions the setting to be the NFAI and the visitor perhaps from BFI) acts as a critical interlocutor, engaging the animated man and woman in a conversation regarding Indian cinema, intercut with actual debates among scholars, historians, archivists, filmmakers, cinephiles and viewers regarding the complicated history of Indian cinema. In one of its most provocative assertions, *The Indian Story* claims that Indian Cinema discovered itself 70 years after the birth of

cinema; the year 1955, the film Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*. In fact, what Mrinal Sen does in *The Indian Story* is to split Indian Cinema into a pre and post-*Pather-Panchali* phase, claiming that what one can exhibit to the world as Indian Cinema begins only with Ray's masterpiece. Consequently, what is the impulse behind the uneasy coalition between an exploration of the history of Indian cinema and the melodramatic scene involving the epitaph to cinema?

A third set of concerns also emerge from the screenplay that might provide a crucial link to understanding this tension in Sen in the last decade of his career as a filmmaker and cinephile. While discussing the 'polemics and rhetoric' that emerge constantly in the debate, the animated couple are faced with a series of 'issues': issues regarding the very function of cinema. The list of issues furnished is: Cinema as entertainment/ Cinema as art/ Cinema as communication/ Cinema as instrument of change/ and Cinema as technological performance.

The two previous questions, regarding the history of cinema and regarding its demise had not really provided the scope to fully explore the functional aspect of the cinematic apparatus, concerned as they had been primarily with the relationship between aesthetics (*Pather Panchali* as the nodal point clearly asserts a certain aesthetic stamp on what will be included in a history of 'Indian' cinema) and form (the very idea of the death of cinema is representative of a constantly evolving exploration of the relationship between the form of cinema and advancements in technology). Granted, both these concerns automatically tease at questions regarding the *function* of cinema. Formalist criticism has traditionally always deliberated on the utility of cinema. However, in *The Indian Story*, *function* emerges as a critical third aspect which, along with aesthetics and form, defines Mrinal Sen's cinematic sensibilities. Be it in the unfilmed screenplay of 'The Indian Story' towards the end of his active years, or the most definitive years of his career in the 60s and 70s, the fraught, contentious and often nebulous relationship among these

three central concerns is clearly evident in Sen. Not entirely on his own, but in a particular social, cultural and political milieu, Mrinal Sen is a figure who is central to the structural transformations that cinema undergoes in the late 60s and the 70s, both nationally and more definitively in Bengal, and within the domain of New Cinema the function of cinema emerges as a critical category. The stress is on the 'not entirely on his own' bit especially because of the inherently hybrid nature of Sen's cinematic sensibilities, the often citational nature of his films, and the eventual direction of the New Cinema Movement Mrinal Sen is a particularly unique moment in Indian cinema when concerns regarding form, content, aesthetics, and function, the social and political upheavals of the time, and the changing codes of post-War cinema, all come together to produce a moment of transformation. Much like the sound debates in Indian cinema in the 1920s and 1930s, technology and advancements in the cinematic apparatus created grounds for debates regarding the changing notion of cinema itself and the future of these new cinemas – hence the repeated references to death and a magical regeneration. The evolution of cinema and capitalism have always had an uneasy parallel; the sound debates resulted in the stabilization of the IMR, paving the way for a celebration of narrative cinema defined by bourgeois notions of closure – the classical Hollywood cinema till the 1960s is the emblem of this development. The claim, if one can assert it so, is this: Mrinal Sen and the New Cinema Movement posited an analogous moment in this history of obsolescence and regeneration, paving the way for a series of developments – both technological and ideological – that would come to define cinema thereafter, even much after the split and/or demise of the New Cinema Movement.

Ruins, both a physical and an affective state, are recurrent in Mrinal Sen's oeuvre, a leitmotif that foregrounds some of his central political, ideological, and aesthetic concerns. As we face an increasingly desolate social and political climate this is remarkably topical considering the

task at hand: mapping the ideological journey of Mrinal Sen as an artist. Considering the strikingly uneven graph that one can plot for Sen's evolution as a film-maker through the turbulent times of the 1960s and the 1970s, an important visual cue that seemingly haunts Mrinal Sen's aesthetic concerns – the ruins – can also serve as an entry-point to map such a journey. Evocative images of ruins recur despite the constantly changing tenor of his career:the murky alleys of Chattawallah Gully and the violent street protests of Calcutta in the 1930s in the wake of the Non Co-operation Movement in *Neel Akasher Nichey* (1959), the ruins that literally frame the protagonists in *Baishey Shravan* (1960, the gradually degrading city seen through the prism of anger in the films from *Akash Kusum* (1965) to the Calcutta Quartet[5], the harsh critique of the middle-class in *Ek Din Pratidin* (1980), the ruins within and without the family in *Amaar Bhuban* (1994) – they are spaces of dialogue between memory and history. Two particular instances are exemplary. The older protagonist of *Baishey Shravan* (Gyanesh Mukhopadhyay) shows his young wife (Madhabi Chatterjee) around his ancestral property, a sprawling ruin of an old palace presumably from the time of the Permanent Settlement Act; their hut is, in fact, situated within the ruins of their past. Yet again, in *Ek Din Pratidin*, nearly two decades later, the entire narrative is mostly restricted within the ambit of a huge, dilapidated house in North Calcutta shared by a number of tenants; the imposing shots of the three floors, their lights periodically going on or off, are complemented by the simmering tension and bitterness among the inhabitants of this living ruin.

Historian Pierre Nora in his seminal essay *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoir* explains it as 'a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense of memory that is torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists.'[6] Ruins, in a way, are sites of

memory (*lieux de mémoire*[7]) in Mrinal Sen's films, in the absence of environments of memory (*milieu de mémoire*) in the political turmoil of the late 60s and early 70s. They are unconsecrated spaces which contain the memories of poverty, oppression, and histories of suffering that thematically and ideologically central to Mrinal Sen's cinema. What complicates this dialogue between memory and history is Mrinal Sen personal politics – a Marxist standpoint that is also constantly at war with the sectarianism and corruptibility of party-based politics. Sen's cinematic sensibilities are thus constituted by these two distinct trends – a notion of cultural memory which is at war with an acknowledgement of the central role of class, poverty and exploitation in shaping history.

Thus, ruins, actual ruins as well as symbols of ruination and destruction, assume a central role when discussing the political upheavals that mark one of Mrinal Sen's most creative decades – From *Akash Kusum* to *Chorus* (1974). The Communist Party of India's relationship and attitude towards Nehru's government had already been tense, what with people like B. T. Ranadive accusing the INC of having gone over to the Anglo-American camp and calling the transfer of power a 'fake independence' and that 'Britain's domination has not ended, but the form of domination has changed.'[8] The sectarianism within the CPI steadily increased through the 50s and 60s; the Sino-Indian War of 1962 saw the power struggle between the Rightist and Leftist factions of the CPI reach a zenith, abetted by the global crisis in the Communist Movement. The CPI formally split in 1964, with the Leftist CPI(M) breaking ranks in favour of a people's democracy headed by the working class that would oppose the feudal and imperialist forces still holding sway. It is significant that both the wings resolved to seek their goal through 'peaceful means', a systematic exorcism of all radical and potentially violent trends. As Sumanta Banerjee points out, 'Thus, the CPI(M) started its journey with suppressed radicals in its ranks. Promises by the

leaders to make it a revolutionary party, different from the 'revisionist' CPI, kept the ranks appeased for sometime.'[9] Dissidence in the ranks of the CPI(M), especially in Bengal, were given concrete shape by Charu Mazumdar and his call to combat the revisionism many had begun to accuse the party leadership of. In 1967, a militant peasant uprising took place in Naxalbari, led by his comrade-in-arms Kanu Sanyal. While the uprising was violently quashed by the police in a few months, the event changed the very fabric of the socio-political scenario in Bengal thereafter, spreading like wildfire through the peasant rebellion to the urban space of Calcutta. From 1967 to 1972, Mrinal Sen's most vital years as a filmmaker, the urban space he constantly produced as a pretext and a context for his films was wracked with violence, rebellion, and death.

Even after the United Front Government came to power in 1967, the mass of lawsuits and counter-petitions by the landed gentry constantly hampered the process of distributing surplus land among the poor peasants. The CPI(M)'s revisionist policies, stress on applying for land through legal channels, the threat that consequently, the new landed peasants would be absorbed by the existing system into reiterating the rhetoric of exploitation and violence– the sheer number of factors contributing to the Naxalbari uprising were immense. The city was no different – the abject conditions, the poverty, squalor, unemployment and daily violence in the lives of the urban proletariat, the increasing population and the rise in number of slums, the food crisis and industrial recession of 1966-67, and gradual worsening of living conditions. In the context of *Calcutta 71* (1972) Sen recollects: 'I made *Calcutta 71* when Calcutta was passing through a terrible time. People were getting killed every day. The most militant faction of the Communist Party, the Naxalites, had rejected all forms of parliamentary politics. At the same time they had a host of differences with the other two Communist Party factions. This in turn led to many inter-party clashes and invariably

all of them ignored the main issue of mobilizing forces against the vested interests – the establishment. This was the time when I felt I should spell out the basic ills of the country, the fundamental diseases we were suffering from and the humiliations we had been subject to. This was the time to talk about poverty- the most vital reality of our country, the basic factor in the indignity of our people. I wanted to interpret the restlessness, the turbulence of the period that was 1971 and what it is due to. I wanted to have a genesis. The anger had not suddenly fallen out of anywhere. It must have a beginning and an end. I wanted to try to find this genesis and in the process redefine our history. And in my mind this was extremely political.'[10]

No discussion of the cinema of Mrinal Sen is possible without discussing the political lineages he shared with the film movements of Latin America and the concept of 'third cinema'[11]. In fact, in the realm of function and use of cinema, this assumes critical importance. Works of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino of Argentina, Glauber Rocha and the Cinema Novo of Brazil, the cinema of Peru, the group Grupo Cine Liberacion, and above all, a 'third cinema' as a political film movement that decries neocolonialism and capitalist exploitation in the context of Latin America, with Hollywood serving as the aesthetic and cultural machine that propagates this in the everyday. The term used by Solanas in the context of his iconic documentary film *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), to describe this cinematic impulse, is the notion of the 'revolutionary activist cinema'. This notion of activism, as a set of conscious aesthetic, ideological and political assertions opposing the status quo, cannot help but remind one of the tense debates on the functions of cinema that the *The Indian Story* grapples with. The contention is this: if *function* can be deduced as one of the central concerns that drive Mrinal Sen's cinema, then it is in the notion of a 'revolutionary activist cinema' that one can find the necessary critical charge to fulfill it – a cinema that simultaneously incites and inspires, that does not work on the

principles of narrative closure of the narrative cinema of the time but seeks to remain uncomfortably open.

These rapid shifts, from amusement to anger to righteousness to self-criticism, evoke a sense of manic energy that marks the 'activist' phase of Mrinal Sen's cinema. Interestingly, the only other film that approximates this manic and exhilarating nature of *Chorus*, at least at the level of screenplay, is *The Indian Story*. Co-incidentally, they both deploy allegorical and fantastic scenarios to foreground their aesthetic and political concerns. It goes without reiteration – the generational nature of Mrinal Sen's aesthetic, formal and political preoccupations and the tense, anticipatory nature of his concerns even years after such a politically and artistically turbulent time. The radical changes in cinema technology during the late 60s and early 70s, through the career of Mrinal Sen, foregrounds the ushering in of a host of structural, ideological, economic and aesthetic changes in Bengali and Indian cinema – changes that would take numerous different avenues for the next two decades. The concerns reflected in *The Indian Story*, so very topical in the present context within the domains of digital humanities, then cannot help but appear preemptive; it is something that Sen's legacy amply justifies. A particularly telling anecdote from his memoirs can be recalled here: 'One evening, an angry group came out of the city theatre and, identifying me at the foyer, rushed to me. They asked me if I could provide them with a subtitled print because the film was beyond their comprehension, the fantasy went over their heads. Such a reaction was not new to me, being so used to this encounter with sarcasm about my work. So, I took it all as part of the game. But I wondered why I kept in check a beautiful line, which Lindsay Anderson, the maker of the remarkable film, *…If…* had earlier told me. He asked me not to forget that "today's fantasy would turn out to be tomorrow's reality!" Lindsay was delightfully prophetic! So, I saw, here was my film, nowhere Lindsay Anderson's. Countrywide Emergency was declared on June 26, 1975.'[12]

Notes and References :

1. The final scene, where they are waving farewell to each other, ends with a direct reference to Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*. The final shot is a freeze frame of Monika (Aparna Sen) as she waves farewell to Ajay (Soumitra Chatterjee) and the camera zooms in on her face, looking into the camera, much like the iconic last shot of Truffaut's film.
2. *Akash Kusum, Film Polemics*, ed. Sakti Basu & Shuvendu Dasgupta, 1992, Cine Club of Calcutta, p. 46.
3. The digitized copy of the screenplay was unearthed by Ashish Rajadhakshya while working in the BFI archives. In his own words, when it was apparent that they were not too interested in it, he had asked whether he might keep a copy.
4. Burch, N. *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane, New York: Praeger, 1973. The terms were popularized by Noel Burch in his seminal book *Theory of Film Practice* (1973) to denote the progression from Early Cinema to the hegemony of the Hollywood studio era. The terms PMR and IMR also foreground how the history of advancement of cinematic technology has always been remarkably concurrent with the advancement of the capitalist mode of production.
5. It is customary to refer to *Interview* (1971), *Calcutta 71* (1972), and *Padatik* (1973) as the celebrated Calcutta Trilogy. However, the film that Sen made immediately after, *Chorus* (1974), despite the absurdist, satirical and allegorical tone, shares similar political, aesthetic and ideological concerns. The urban metropolis, especially, assumes the sort of nightmarish disconnect from the life of its people that one has already seen instances of in the previous films – in *Chorus* the disconnect is heightened to almost fantastic proportions. Elaborate sets by Khaled Chowdhury create the illusion of a timeless, feudal oligarchy, dispensing with gifts and punishment at leisure. But the fantasy is repeatedly ruptured by the three separate episodes within the main framework, much in the fashion of *Calcutta 71*, constantly bringing the focus back to the real/political.

6. Nora, P. (Spring, 1989), 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory 7-24 http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520
7. Ibid.
8. Banerjee, S. (1980), *In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India*, Subarnarekha: Calcutta, p. 79
9. Ibid., p. 95
10. Sen, M. (2002), 'Interview: 1971', *Montage – Life, Politics, Cinema*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, p. 125
11. Solanas, F. and Getino, O. (1997), 'Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experience for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World', *New Latin American Cinema, Volume 1: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael T. Martin, Wayne State University Press.
12. Sen, M. (2004), *Always Being Born : A Memoir*, Stellar Publishers Pvt. Ltd., p. 121

Cinema in The Digital Age

Sugata Sinha

The Hardwares

Samira Makhmalbaf won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes in 2000 for her film *Blackboard*. She was just twenty then. As the youngest recipient of an award in the history of Cannes she gave a moving lecture – *The Digital Revolution And The Future Cinema*.[1]

She said that camera is becoming user friendly day by day. Within few years it will enter into our cornea. North, south, east, west whichever way we may look we will be actually filming our vision. The writers can use their pen at their whims. Film makers will also be able to move the camera in whatever way they want. Till date Cinema hasn't produced its true poet, its true philosopher. It has produced only artisans. The reason is simple - the huge burden of technicalities and finance. Satyajit Ray, Andrei Tarkovsky and John Ford were no exceptions. They had to work in this ecosystem. Digital technology will free cinema from these bindings. The cinema as we

know today will die. The film industry as we know today will cease to exist. And there will be an emergence of new cinema – the personal cinema. Literature has guided the humanity in twentieth century, cinema will guide us in the twenty-first century. Cannes Film Festival was shaken by her prophesies as she continued with these words.

> Let's imagine a world in which painting a picture would be as difficult as making a film and that the ideas of Dali, Van Gogh, or Picasso were to be Implemented by a group of technicians. The digital revolution is like giving the potential equivalents of Van Gogh and Picasso a brush for the first time. If Photo Shop or Windows 98 software programs can render Monet, Manet, Pissaro, Cezanne, or Matisse redundant, then the digital camera can also make Truffaut, Ray, and Bergman redundant. The digital camera is the death of Hollywood production and not the death of cinema. We can of course very well imagine that with the digital revolution we will witness the death of the technicians, when operating the camera will become as easy as unbuttoning one's own shirt. Then will come the death of censorship because "screening" will be as easy and as direct as putting one's film on the Internet in the privacy of one's home and having it watched anywhere in the world. And finally will commence the death of capital because the Inexpensive means of production will render it redundant. But would an astronomical increase, thus facilitated, in the number of auteurs not result in the death of the very idea of the auteur?[2]

Back in the late forties, in France, Alexandre Austrac, a French filmmaker and critique, wrote an article in Cahier Du Cinema – *The Birth Of A New Avant-Garde: La Camera Stylo*.[3] Stylo in French means pen. They wanted to see the use of camera as pen. That was the birth of Auteur or Author Theory which inspired the French New Wave in many ways. They dreamt that Filmmakers would be like

authors writing their films. It was their jihad against Hollywood style of conveyor belt film making where director, cameraman and others were just cogs in the wheel. They wanted to see individual stamps on their films. They achieved the goal to a limited extent. Because camera and the other gadgets of film making were not that much user friendly. Jean Luc Godard was one of the exponents of that kind of film making. But in a 2011 interview with Guardian Godard has admitted–

> I am not an auteur, well, not now anyway, we once believed we were auteurs but we weren't. We had no idea, really. Film is over. It's sad nobody is really exploring it. But what to do? And anyway, with mobile phones and everything, everyone is now an auteur.[4]

But the Mobile and smart phones are going to change in a way that within decades we won't be able to recognize them anymore. Pranav Mistry, an ex-student of IIT and MIT and the vice president of Samsung Research team, is doing a path breaking research in this field. With the help of a tiny chip glued to our fingers like a ring our hands and palms will be ultimately used as mobile phones and cameras. No need of any external gadgets or anything else. A Panavision camera weighs 27Kg, a pen weighs 5gms. But what is the weight of my eyes or the palms? Since it is an integral part of my physique from the day I was born, I am so accustomed with the organs, I never felt the weight and I can use it intuitively. If the camera becomes one of our body parts, we will also be able to use it more intuitively.

Combined Impact of these developments will be huge. The film industry as we know today will wither away. There will be no need of technicians, technicalities and finance. But how these films will be distributed? Films will be uploaded directly on the net. People will pay on line, will download the films directly from the net and with a gadget like Google spec or on any invisible screen Pranav

is developing they will enjoy the movie with 70mm screen and Dolby digital sound right in their drawing rooms. No barriers from exhibitors or distributors or their syndicates. Multiplexes and cinema Halls will be vanishing into the blues. That will be a rebirth and renaissance for cinema.

The next step for cinema will be even more startling. Another path breaking research will take away cinema from our drawing rooms. Film makers will be making movies in their heads and audience will see it in their heads. Today's Computers run on silicon chips. Tomorrows computers will run on DNA chips. DNA are nothing but codes. Computers run on binary codes 0 and 1. DNA runs on ternary codes A, C, T, G. Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine, Thymine. And like the binary codes they can copy each other. The organisation and complexity of all living beings is based on a code system functioning with these four key components. Famous British Biologist Richard Dawkins says -

> What lies at the heart of every living thing is not a fire, not warm breath, not a 'spark of life'. It is information, words, instructions. If you want a metaphor, don't think of fires and sparks and breath. Think, instead, of a billion discrete, digital characters carved in tablets of crystal. If you want to understand

> life, don't think about vibrant, throbbing gels and oozes, think about information technology.[5]

For future computers, enzymes and proteins will be the hardware and DNA will be the software. The size of those computers will be like tiny bubbles. They will be trillion times faster than today's fastest computers. They will be perfectly energy efficient because the energy required to run these computers will come from the internal reactions of our metabolic system. DNA computing is actually a form of computing which uses DNA and molecular biology, instead of the traditional silicon based computer technologies. A single gram of DNA about the size of half inch cube can hold much more information than trillion compact disks. Through our capillaries these Nano Bots or Nano Robots will enter into our bodies, reach our heads and directly connect with the net without the help of any computer, laptop, tab or smart phone. The tiny robots will connect our brains directly with the internet and will empower us with god like abilities, expanding our capacity for emotions and creativity. According to the famous Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, Humans will cease to become humans, they will be Human Gods or Homodeus, a new race will come up.

Till date, we have to learn things, acquire knowledge or skill from outside. In those days nano bots will teach us skills from within our body. If someone wants to be an expert on Shakespeare he won't have to read tons of books. A nano bot will make him a Shakespeare expert from within. If anyone wants to learn filmmaking either he or she will have to find a way to enter into the film industry and work as an observer for some years or he will have to go to a Film school. In those days a nano bot specialized in film making will enter into our body and may be within three months it will teach us to become a filmmaker. But how far are these days. Principal inventor of optical character recognition, text-to-speech interface,

speech recognition technology and electronic keyboard instruments, Ray Kurzweil has a prediction –

> Artificial intelligence will reach human levels by around 2029. Follow that out further to, say, 2045, we will have multiplied the intelligence, the human biological machine intelligence of our civilization a billion-fold. Computers are going to keep getting smaller and smaller. Ultimately, they will go inside our bodies and brains and make us healthier, make us smarter.[6]

Within 25 to 30 years we will be making films in our heads, it will be distributed head-to-head by a wireless network and it will be seen in our heads like daydreaming, reveries or hallucination.

In 1962, Francoise Truffaut had a marathon interview with Alfred Hitchcock, when the maestro lamented –

> For me a film is ninety-nine percent finished when it is written. Sometimes I would prefer not to have to shoot it. You imagine the film and then everything falls apart. The actors you had in mind are not free, you can't get the right distribution. I dream of having an IBM machine which you could feed the script into at one end and the film would come out at the other – finished and in colour.[7]

Those days are almost here.

The Software

Hardware cannot do anything on its own without a command from a software. Now we will take a short detour into the history of software and try to learn few basic things about it. Then we will try to understand its implication for cinema.

Software are of two types. proprietary software and free software.

During the end of fifties software programmes were developed mainly for the in house uses at various universities, research organs related to oceanic or space studies and the defence department of USA. Then the programmers were the users themselves. They used to freely converse with each other about the codes they were developing. Their favourite pastime was to hack others' programmes. It was great fun for them. They used to do this in friendly manner. By hacking various sorts of programme they used to learn the mysteries that lie at the heart of codes. For them hacking was a learning experience. Steven Levy, a leading software historian, has rightly given them their due honour – *Hackers The Heroes of Computer Revolution*.[8]

Gradually the software programmes were gaining importance in various fields beyond government and university projects. From utility objects they turned into consumer products. And the organisations sponsoring the software development projects wanted to clip the freedom of the programmers they used to enjoy.

Till seventies software programmes were not under the purview of any copyright law. Because it was so new that no one was sure whether it should come at all under any copyright law. But the organisations developing the programmes started intense lobbying with the American Congress demanding protection for software programmes. Or else, they warned, this industry won't develop and eventually it would die.

In 1974, the Commission on New Technological Uses of Copyrighted Works was established. CONTU decided that "computer programs, to the extent that they embody an author's original creation, are proper subject matter of copyright." In 1980, the United States Congress voted that computer programs should come under copyright law. European as well as other nations followed the suit. This means software programmes were treated as creative expressions. This had a huge implication for software development as well as the programmers. Software programmes are not like, say, *War and Peace*

or *Fifth Symphony* which can be created by a single person. It involves skill and knowledge of hundreds of developers. Its health depends on knowledge sharing. A novel or a musical piece may be treated as a final product. But the codes of a software can and should always be reviewed, modified, upgraded and improvised.

However, software companies were not at all satisfied with this copyright protection. Till date the programmers have to sign a Non Disclosure Agreement. They have to affirm that whatever codes they are developing cannot be disclosed to any outsider.

And the freedom of the users were restricted by the End Users Licence Agreement. This licensing system is still very much in practice. When we buy a programme and load it on computer at the very outset a licence page opens. If we accept the terms then only the software is installed on our computer. Usually we do not read it and accept it without understanding its implications.

What does this licence actually mean? It means that we have only the right to use it for ourselves. We cannot gift it to someone else, we cannot lend it, we cannot sell it. When we buy a car, a house, a stick, a book or a toothbrush we enjoy all these rights. But if we do that with a software then we will be pirates. Though we have spent our hard earned money on it we are not the owner of the programme. They have not sold us the software itself, they have licensed us to use it only. In country after country legal cases were filed against this licensing system. Sometimes it went in favour of the users, sometimes it went in favour of the software companies. No conclusive answer can be clinched.

Then why they are perpetuating this Licence. Software programmes run on bits. Bits mean binary digits – 0 & 1. And it can capture and express any written, audio visual or various forms of knowledge. It is so universal that it can be copied anywhere anytime. It's like genes. The codes within the genes can be copied anywhere anytime. And if it is copied the mother source remains intact. So is the case with

software programmes. There is an uncanny resemblance between the two. If you share your software with hundreds of person your copy remains intact. There will be no wear and tear. No one loses anything here. It's a win-win situation. The code at heart of gene or software is nothing but pure information, pure knowledge. And knowledge cannot be stolen, it can be shared only and if it is shared knowledge grows by leaps and bounds. But that would ensure the final demise of the content industry which is earning tons of money by restricting knowledge sharing.

During late seventies, a young and bright programmer Richard Matthew Stallman came to MIT Artificial Intelligence Lab as a researcher. He first protested against this Proprietary Software system. To him restricting sharing of knowledge at any level is a crime against humanity. It's against the natural propensity of our world. Because nature permits copying of information through genes. He quitted his high paid job at MIT and founded Free Software Foundation in 1985, which is a non-profit organization.

Hundreds of programmers gathered around him. Their project was to develop a free operating system. For five years they toiled with this project without any payment. Students, teachers, programmers worked in this project in their free or leisure time. In a cut throat competitive and consumerist society like America this sort of Guerrilla warfare was almost revolutionary.

Now two things must be clear. What is an operating system and what did RMS meant by the word 'Free'. An OS is a bundle of hundreds of software which creates a platform upon which various software can run. Like the Windows OS or the Mac OS. At that time Unix OS was very popular. RMS and his group named their OS – GNU.

They wanted to mean it is 'Not Unix'. But where from the letter G came? It was taken from a children's song sung by the British comedy duo Michael Flanders and Donald Swan. Gnu means an

African antelope. They are very forceful, energetic but harmless creature. Free Software is like that. The animal can be seen in their logo. The expression probably wants to say that I am not only energetic but I have a worldly wisdom. I want to share it with you. Are you ready for that?

Secondly, but most importantly the word Free has various meanings in English. Sometimes it means free of cost, sometimes it means freedom. Free here should be treated as a right. You may get free software free of price, or you may have to pay a price. In whichever way you get it you have certain rights over the software. According to RMS –

> Free software' is a matter of liberty, not price. To understand the concept, you should think of 'free' as in 'free speech,' not as in 'free beer.' Free software is a matter of the users' freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change, and improve the software.
>
> A program is free software if users have all of these freedoms. Thus, you should be free to redistribute copies, either with or without modifications, either gratis or charging a fee for distribution, to anyone anywhere. Being free to do these things means (among other things) that you do not have to ask or pay for permission.
>
> You should also have the freedom to make modifications and use them privately in your own work or play, without even mentioning that they exist. If you do publish your changes, you should not be required to notify anyone in particular, or in any particular way.[9]

This is a revolutionary concept in the sense that if someone gives this rights to anyone the up gradation of the software will have no limit. It will run on for N numbers of times. And that will be a huge benefit for everyone, for the mankind. That's how the civilization

accumulates knowledge pool and distributes it for others.

After five years of hard work the volunteers at the free software foundation almost completed the various parts of the GNU OS, except the Kernel. A kernel is the central programme which can understand the functions of various software and hardware and integrate them into a complete OS. They used to post their works in various sites. Linus Benedict Torvalds, a Finnish software programmer, came to know about this work from these postings and started working with the GNU tools. He built up the kernel for the GNU OS. The benefit of the Free Software can be judged from this incident. Torvalds was an outsider to Free Software Movement. But he saved their time and energy. Thus GNU/ LINUX became a viable alternative for windows or Mac OS. Till date lakhs of users work on this platform. The beauty of this Free Software system was once jokingly summarised by Linus Benedict Torvalds –

> Software is like sex: it's better when it's free.[10]

But the path was not so rosy. Suppose a person or a company studies the source code of a Free Software programme, because it is open to anyone, builds up a new programme tweaking that code and then refuses to give away the new code for further development and protects it with a copyright then what will be the fate of Free Software Movement. Free Software activists will develop programmes after programmes and the proponents of the proprietary software will hijack those programmes and earn huge money on that. RMS criticised this mentality as 'Software Hoarding'. To protect Free Software from this type of onslaughts RMS launched a new kind of licensing – Copyleft. This is a revolutionary concept in the age of copyright. RMS had formulated the idea by hacking the concept of copyright.

Copyleft is the practice of offering people the right to freely distribute copies and modified versions of a work with the stipulation that the same rights be preserved in derivative works down the line.

On the basis of copyleft RMS formulated various versions of GNU General Public License which are extensively used by the programmers so that big corporations cannot exploit their work.

RMS is not just a mathematical genius. He is more than that. He knows that words and terms are the hooks that draws people to a concept. The word copyleft is an intelligent play on the word copyright. It has layers of meaning. If copyright is a rightist concept, then copyleft is slightly tilted to the left. However, RMS is not a communist. He has genuine hatred towards any sort of regimentation – be it rightist or leftist. Secondly, but most importantly, copyleft assures that I want to leave copies of my work in a way so that everyone can use it and everyone can benefit from it. Activists of free software movement and fans of RMS immediately started more fun play on the word. Some said copy left means All Wrongs Reserved, others said it is All Wrongs Reversed.

Free Software movement and RMS have wide influence in various fields. He was the man behind Wikipedia, the people's encyclopedia. A hacker group from Sydney created a free software with which, during 1999 Seattle WTO protests, the activists started net posting of videos, photographs and reports of their movement. That was the beginning of citizen journalism. Edward Snowden is also saying that without free software, without the participation of many net security, net privacy and net neutrality cannot be maintained. It cannot be left into the hands of States or few corporations.

> I think everybody has some exposure to proprietary software in their lives, even if they're not aware of it. Your cell phones for example are running tons and tons of proprietary code from all the different chip manufacturers and all of the different cell phone providers.
>
> We are moving very slowly but meaningfully in the direction of free and open software that's reviewable, or, even if you can't

> do it, a community of technologists who can look at what these devices are really doing on the software level and say, is this secure, is this appropriate, is there anything malicious or strange in here? That increases the level of security for everybody in our communities[11]

RMS visited India more than once. In 2001, for the first time in India, a chapter of Free Software Foundation was established in Thiruvananthapuram and State government of Kerala adapted free software in their official work. RMS met various key persons like our ex -president A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, L.K. Adbani, Arvind Kejriwal and others. As a result, Free Software Movement gained some momentum in various States.

From medical science to education, political systems to economic institutions software are running everything. If software are not free there will be no democracy. States will turn the digital technology and internet into a spying machine, corporate houses will turn it into a marketing machine. We will be monitored in every sphere of life without even realising it. We will be turned into modern zombies. Apparently intelligent but actually controlled creatures.

And with this perspective in mind we should try to understand the cinema of the future. Before going into that we must also understand wherefrom this copyright system came. Before printing machine scribes used to copy books. That was a laborious process. Try to imagine how many scribes would take how many days to copy a book like *Mahabharata* which runs for thousands of pages. They involved more persons than a film production involves today. Books were not prevalent as we see today. They were not mass products. They were collector's item to be procured at a high price. Without books there were lesser number of schools and colleges. The spread of education was severely restricted. The first printed book came out of Gutenberg Press in 1455. It was the *Bible*. Gradually printing

of books took momentum and it became a mass product. So there was a justified demand that if publishers were earning huge money by just copying books then the writers should have a share on each copy sold. That was the origin of the term copyright. From time to time it has been applied upon music albums and movies because they are nothing but copies.

Before the advent of printing press, for thousands of year human civilization never knew anything like copyright. Creators used to share their creations and improvise them freely. *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Iliad, Odyssey, Gilgamesh, Arabian Nights, Purana* were not created by a single person. Stories used to circulate among the common men. The stories were usually performed. During performance various popular elements were adapted according to the demands and mood of the audience. They came from various sources. Then someone named Valmiki or Homer collected them into a single piece. Exactly similar things are happening over the net. Kutiman, an Israeli composer collected twenty-two videos from You Tube, different people playing different instruments, and remixed them to a new video which became an instant hit. This is called Mash Up creation or Derivative Art.

In the field of literature Graham Smith mashed up Period with Horror and wrote *Pride And Prejudice And The Jombies*. This mash up became so successful that it became a captivating genre and a series of books came out. *Sense And Sensibility And Sea Monsters, Android Karenina, Meoemorphosis*. In the last named Kafka's Gregor Samsa turns into a cat instead of an insect.

DW Griffith's *Birth of A Nation* is a milestone in the history of cinema. But it had a racist bias. In 2006, Black American DJ Spooky has remixed Griffith's movie with some footage of Ku Klax Klan and created a whole new video – *Rebirth of A Nation*.

While doing these remixes or mash ups some creators are taking permissions from the rightful copyright holders, some are not caring about any permission, some are saying if my creation inspires anyone

else then it is good for everyone else. Nina Paley has created an animation film *Sita Sings The Blues* and she has declared –

> You don't need my permission to copy, share, publish, archive, show, sell, broadcast, or remix Sita Sings the Blues. From the shared culture it came and back into the shared culture it goes.[12]

In 2004 Black American composer Danger Mouse came to prominence when he released *The Grey Album* which combined vocal performances from Jay-Z's *The Black Album* with instrumentals from The Beatles› *White Album*. It became very popular with the fans. The hype around *The Grey Album* caught the attention of Beatles› copyright holder EMI, who ordered Danger Mouse and the retailers carrying the album to cease distribution. Music fans responded with an Electronic Civil Disobedience by posting the number in various sites for free distribution. They said that it is their right to sample music pieces from various sources and reuse it for new creations. This sort of reusing had been done from the days of Mozart or even before. The protest was so widespread that EMI had to backtrack on the issue. Interesting was the Paul McCartney's response over the whole issue. Commenting on the influence of the Beatles and black music he gave this assessment as part of a BBC documentary titled *The Beatles And Black Music*, produced by Vivienne Perry and Ele Beattie.

> It's exactly what we did in the beginning – introducing black soul music to a mass white audience. It's come full circle. It's, well, cool. When you hear a riff similar to your own, your first feeling is 'rip-off.' After you've got over it you think, "Look at that, someone's noticed that riff…I didn't mind when something like that happened with *The Grey Album*. But the record company minded. They put up a fuss. But it was like, 'Take it easy guys, it's a tribute.[13]

The derivative art is nothing new. Tulsidasi and Krittibashi *Ramayana*

are derivative creations. Various artists have taken material from *Mahabharata*, Tagore wrote poems drawing his subjects from Ballads of Marathas, Abadanshatok, Bhktamal, Scottish melodies, Shakespeare recreated on Plutarch, Ovid, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Marlow etc. If Shakespeare is alive today he won't be able to write so many plays. He would have been exhausted settling copyright disputes.

Audience participation was a favourite word for Bertolt Brecht as well as the TV producers. Brecht wanted that audience should not be passive viewers. They should take active part and a critical look into the drama. For him it was an ideological question. For the TV producers it is a tool to get more TRPs.

In 1968 Godard created Dziga Vertov Group and collaborated with Jean Pierre Gorin to make five films. *Tout Va Bien* is one of them. They tried to be physically present during screenings at various places and discuss about the films with the audience. Godard wanted to be more proactive with these films.

In the same year Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino made the Classic Argentine Documentary *The Hour of Furnaces*. The presentation of the movie shows random juxtaposition of candid footage and interviews with clippings from State Propaganda, ad films, snippets from newspapers, archival footage and provocative inter titles. This two-sixty minute documentary was shot in phases. Initially the first two parts were completed and shown to the audience in various clandestine screenings. The directors were always present at those screenings. They recorded the reactions of the audience on celluloid. These interviews as well as various letters were edited into the final part of the film. Thus it became a classic example of audience participation and mash up creation.

With the advent of digital technology and internet audience participation has turned into user generated content. The technology has become so cheap that someone is making a video, uploading it to the net, another one is downloading it and re-editing it with

new visuals, new sounds and uploading it again. These making and remaking can go on for ever. This was actually the process with which various contents were created before the printing machine and copyright regime came. Internet is dragging us to the days of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the days of open creation. Gutenberg printing machine, which was actually an information technology, had negated the realm of open creation. Internet, which is again an information technology, is negating the hegemony of closed creation. It is a classic case of Marxian negation of negation. And the drama is taking place right before our eyes.

Richard Matthew Stallman was the first to realise that copyright regime cannot and should not persist any longer. It's detrimental to the progress of art, culture and civilization. Every age produces its own philosopher who can articulate the propensities of that age in their works and words. Aristotle for the Greek period, Marx in the nineteenth century, Sartre in the twentieth century and RMS in the digital age. Though he does not claim himself to be a philosopher. He sees himself as a programmer and activist. According to him –

> The idea of copyright did not exist in ancient times, when authors frequently copied other authors at length in their works. This practice was useful, and is the only way many authors' works have survived even in part.[14]

Now there is a war going on in between the champions of Digital Rights Management and the activists of free culture. We must find a way out from this stalemate. There are various groups who want to resolve this crisis in an acceptable and practical manner. Lawrence Lessig is the most prominent among them. He is an American academic, attorney and political activist.

He founded the non-profit organisation, Creative Commons and on the basis of Stallman's idea of copyleft he is trying to redefine the idea of intellectual rights. He has formulated six licences on the

basis of copyleft which can be utilised by the creative artists as well as other writers of scientific papers and inventors.

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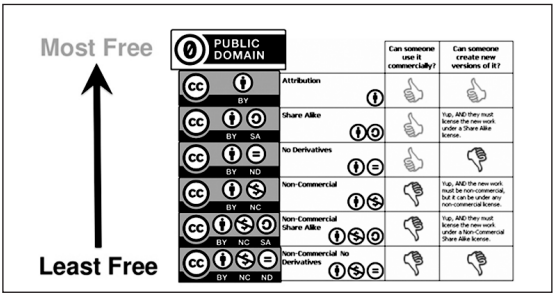
Copyright means All Rights Reserved. CC license means Some Rights Reserved. And the degree of users' freedom through the licenses can be charted in this way –



Though they have shown the CC 0 or the public domain in this analysis but it is not a license. Public domain means the creator does not enjoy any right over the product. If we study the licenses we can see that all the licenses ensure that if anyone uses my material he must give a credit to me. And all the licenses affirm that if anyone wants to distribute my creation non-commercially they are free to do that. That's for the sake of free flow of knowledge. And except two all the licences have the provision of derivative art.

To understand the significance of these licenses we must understand the loopholes of the copyright system. Copyright is an Industrial Regulation act which determines how the proceedings should be shared between the creator and the investor. The objective was to assure a fair payment for the creators. If they don't get anything, there will be no creative endeavour at all and the society will suffer. But if they or their heirs enjoy it for an unusually long period then no one will be able to do any improvisation on that or execute any derivative work from it and again the society will suffer. We must understand that copyright is not a lottery or a welfare system that creators or their heirs can enjoy for an indefinite period.

The first copyright act became effective in America in 1790. It was given for only fourteen years. The real business over a book, music album or movie becomes over within ten years. After that publisher or producers find no interest in making reprints or reruns. Only the collectors preserve the item while others keep searching it in vain.

The commercial life of a creative product is that short. But it can help others to create new creations upon that. Beyond commercial life it may have a prolonged creative life. So, the fourteen years period was absolutely logical. According to Stallman the software are developing so fast that this period should be three years for software. If we lock the codes of a software for sixty or seventy years then it will have a devastating effect on every sphere. Be it medical science, space research, education or art and culture.

In between 1962 and 1998 the span of copyright have been extended in America for six times. It has been done under the direct pressure or influence of the Hollywood, Music Industry and the big publishers. In 2003 the copyright of Micky Mouse was slated to expire. Within next few years of that the copyright of Pluto, Goofy and Donald Duck were supposed to elapse. In 1997 the representatives of Disney and the other big studios of Hollywood and the Music companies and the estates of the famous writers bribed the members of the US congress and on 27th October 1998 the Copyright Term Extension Act or Sony Bono act was passed. Sony Bono was the senator who formally initiated the act. On the next day i.e. 28th October 1998, the Digital Millaneum Copyright Act was passed. According to these acts instead of fifty years after the death of the author the span of copyright has been extended up to seventy years after the death of the author. And in case of Corporate Authorship or Work for Hire the term has been extended from seventy five years to ninety five years after the first publication. Corporate authorship or work for hire means in a company like Disney or Microsoft hundreds of persons do the creative work. But the intellectual rights on their creation go to the company. Filmmakers also work under the banners of producers or production houses. They usually get onetime payment. Their status here is nothing more than a wage labourer. There was an uproar of protests in America against the act. Some said it was actually The Micky Mouse protection Act. RMS

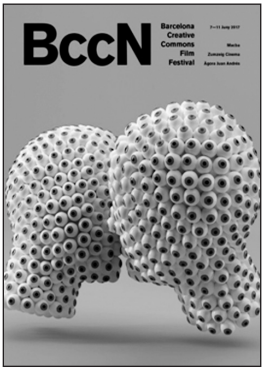
mocked the act when he said that DMCA means Domination by Media Corporation Act. In European Union countries the copyright span is more or less same.

One can easily find who owns a car by searching the motor vehicles records. One can easily find who owns a land or a house by searching the records of land department or Municipal Corporation. But for an old book or a movie whose author or producer has died, say forty years ago, one may not be able to find out who owns the copyright. No country keeps any record about who holds copyright over which item. Because, the state doesn't earn any revenue from copyright proceedings. However, with the premonition that someone may claim the copyright, the publishers avoid a reprint and producers avoid a remake. Thus, lots of creation goes into oblivion forever.

To solve this problem, Creative Commons has devised those machine readable symbols. Instead of © we will find those ⓒ symbols on various sites like Wikipedia, Ted.com, Flikr etc. If we click on those signs they show who owns the right, and what rights they are retaining and in what way one can use those material in your own work. For example Nina Paley's *Sita Sings The Blues* was released with Attribution-ShareAlike CC BY-SA because she wanted that anyone can do any derivative work with her film and anyone can commercially or non-commercially distribute it.

A Story of Healing is a touchy documentary about a team of American doctors' mission to treat common men in war torn Vietnam. The film got Oscar Award for Best Documentary in 1998. The film was re-released with an Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs CC BY-NC-ND in 2007. Because, the makers wanted that no derivative work can be done on this movie. But anyone can distribute it non-commercially. As a result the film got a wide circulation and more people got a chance to see it. Till date 1.4 billion items have been released under these licenses. Since, 2010 they are organizing a Creative Commons film festival in Barcelona.

There is no jury board in this festival. Films are selected and awarded on the basis of audience voting. Their motto is "copy this festival". That means the primary condition for showcasing films in this festival is to have a CC licence and on that basis the films will be shared freely.



Affiliates of Creative Commons have been launched in various countries. Acharya Narendra Dev College in Delhi, Wikimedia India and The Centre for Internet & Society is creating a Roadmap in India for Creative Commons. If anyone wants he can also have this licenses in an easy two or three step online procedure from the Creative Commons site. If a filmmaker avails that his or her films will be widely circulated. Wide circulation means more people will collect it and it would be better preserved.

Copyright rarely offers a viable income with which an author can survive. Bankimchandra was a magistrate, Rabindranath was a zamindar, Premchand was a school master. Filmmakers have to do corporate films or ad films or commissioned projects or TV series or they teach in film schools. The main income of the Singers comes from public programmes. Saratchandra, Rowling, Spielberg and Lady Gaga are exceptions. Still, we may feel, through the copyright proceedings at least we may get some money. If everyone gets everything free of cost how will the artists survive. Some examples…

Nina Paley could not distribute her film through usual channels. She released the film over the net with an appeal for donation. Within years she got more than double of what the distributors were offering. After this phenomenon Nina Paley declared – I am the content industry.

The Man from Earth was a low budget American drama film made in 2007. The film could not cover its cost through a limited hall and DVD release. Then some people started sharing it over torrent and they were discussing it over the various torrent related blogs. Through these blogs the film was able to get a formidable free of cost publicity. And within weeks its ranking on IMDB went from being the 11,235th most popular movie to the 5th most popular movie. As a result the DVD sales surged. The producer of the movie, Mr Eric D. Wilkinson publicly thanked the bit torrent users on his blog –

> Our independent movie had next to no advertising budget and very little going for it until somebody ripped one of the DVD screeners and put the movie online for all to download. Most of the feedback from everyone who has downloaded 'The Man from Earth' has been overwhelmingly positive. People like our movie and are talking about it, all thanks to piracy on the net! What you guys have done here is nothing short of amazing. In the future, I will not complain about file sharing. You Have Helped Put This Little Movie on The Map!!!! When I make my next picture, I just may upload the movie on the net myself![15]

The famous Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho realised the potentiality of file sharing and uploaded his books for free downloading. He created a blog under the name pirate Coelho and declared "pirates of the world unite and pirate everything I've ever written".[16] Before the release, his new books are given for free downloading for one month. That's how the books get immense publicity all over the world which propels the sales.

Two culture jamming and anti-globalization activists, Mike Bonanno and Andy Bichlbaum, made the docu-feature *Yes Men Fix The World* in 2009. Being sued by the United States Chamber of Commerce, release of the movie was postponed in America. The makers released the movie worldwide through the bit torrent network under Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs license with an appeal for donation. So much money flowed over the years that they made a sequel *Yes Men Are Revolting* in 2014. Bonanno and Bichlbaum are now international stars and their films are now available on the footpaths of Kolkata. In 2009, *Yes Men Fix The World* won the audience award for the Panorama section at the Berlin International Film Festival.

In 2013 Simon Klose wanted to make a documentary on the lives of the founders of The Pirate Bay. He created a website for the film and through the site appealed for money. Within three days the campaign raised $51,424. On the basis of that the Swedish government's Arts Grants Committee granted the project an additional $30,000. *The Pirate Bay Away From The Keyboard* was finally released with Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs license.

Cory Doctorow was not a very prominent science fiction short story writer in Canada. The digital & print version of his first Novel *Down And Out In The Magic Kingdom* was published in 2003 with a creative commons license. Due to its open license the book was freely translated into Russian and other languages. As a result, the Canadian and American communities of Science Fiction fans became curious about the book, started buying it and through this cumulative

process the novel got wide publicity. That expanded the market for the print version and Cory Doctorow is now a successful writer and a champion of free sharing.

But these cases are all from the West. If they love any creation, if they find anything meaningful they back it with Donation or whatever way they can. But we Indians are fond of getting anything free.

I have a personal experience in this regard. I was the coauthor of the movies *Phoring* and *Bhalobashar Shahor* with Indranil Roychoudhury. Myself and Indranil were discussing these developments. Then Indranil suggested why don't we try something on this model with a low budget short film. If it works then we can go for full length feature films. A new outlet can be opened bypassing the syndicates of producers and distributors. Thus the thirty minute low budget film *Bhalobashar Shahor* was made and released on you tube with an appeal for donation. The result was pathetic. Not even thirty percent of the budget could be covered. Though the reactions in the comment section were generally favorable.

For us, the Indians, free means free of cost, for us free does not mean right to freedom. That attitude should change. Internet and Digital Technology have created a huge space for free sharing of science, art, culture and knowledge. The countries and the communities who will be utilizing these opportunities will be progressing fast. If we fail to respond to these possibilities, if the new technologies are allowed to hijack cinema, the phenomenon called cinema will turn into a demonic tool of oppression and control. Cinema as an art will be doomed for ever.

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Redefining Cinephilia: Alternate Film Collectives and Screening Practices in a Digital Age and Neoliberal Milieu

Dwaipayan Banerjee

The first decade of the new millennium saw an organic growth of independent and unregulated film collectives in many disparate places; *Pedestrian Pictures* in Bengaluru, *Vikalp* in Mumbai (which later spread to Delhi and Bengaluru), *VIBGYOR* in Thrissur, *Cinema of Resistance* in Gorakhpur (which later spread to other towns in Uttar Pradesh), *Marupakkam* in Madurai. In an age when the mode of digital film circulation had significantly dented the rationale of the older variant of film societies, the new variant of film collectives, through innovative screening practices, took films to a diverse range of new audiences.

Such non-traditional screening practices were not entirely novel, particularly for documentary films. From its inception, the independent non-fiction film had to rely upon alternate modes of film circulation, as the traditional modes of film distribution were out of bounds in most cases. We would show, through the course

of this essay, how the film collectives of the new millennium opened up avenues of critical engagement with the cinematic medium.

Though the present is a vibrant and prolific time for the making and screening documentary films in India, but, writings and scholarship on the topic are few and far between. Besides a handful of insightful articles, occasional reviews and interviews, not many serious studies had hitherto been undertaken on the practice and growth of non-fiction cinema in our country. Only very recently, some scholars have begun to address that vacuum. In their recent book, K. P. Jayasankar and Anjali Monteiro (2016) have tried to map the growth and emergence of the independent documentary in India. They have shown how documentary films in India have challenged the commonly held notion of depicting the 'real' on the screen, by exploring complex relationships between the subjects, makers and spectators of the films. Peter Sutoris, in his important and critical work (Sutoris, 2016), has shown how there was both continuity and rupture from the colonial 'sarkari' documentary films to the films made under the banner of the Films Division of India; how films produced by the Films Division had tried to augment the statist logic of 'nation building' by othering crucial points of differences and disagreements that could upset the benevolent posturing of the State. The book also chronicles how some of the moments of protest and disjoint found its way, in the later part of 1960s, in some films made by the Films Division. These films, made in the period of limited 'autonomy' granted to the commissioned directors, were a refreshing break from the usual way of making documentaries prevalent at that time. In an earlier work (Garga, 2007), there was an important attempt by B. D. Garga to document the history of early 'actualities' and non-fiction films in the colonial era. Besides documentary studies, the film society movement also remains a not-so-studied aspect of our film history. A recent book (Cherian, 2017) maps the growth and spread of film societies in India, yet much more remains to be probed. Though all these scholarly works

did try to bridge the lacuna around non-traditional film screening practices and documentary films in some degree, but some of the crucial questions remain unaddressed.

In this essay, we ask if there are continuities between the new genre of film collectives and earlier (traditional) film societies, and how that continuation might have played out in praxis. Or is it more a question of legacy than actual continuation of screening practices? Second: what have been the guiding principles of these collectives? Third: what are the factors behind their emergence and modest growth in an era of neo-liberalism? Finally: how does it redefine the concept of cinephilia, through its evolving praxis?

The present essay is broadly divided into three sections. In the first, it touches upon the birth and growth of the film society movement in India, where we show how it had started out as part of the grand project of 'nation building' and was (avowedly) elitist in approach. We also show how, in some instances, film society activists attempted to break free of that mould.

In the second section, we map the proliferation of independent documentary films in India, and how it meant opening up of newer screening spaces outside of the Films Division controlled distribution network and formal screening spaces. We also probe whether there were instances of non-institutional screening spaces parallel to the film society movement, and in spite of it, and how that could be related with the larger questions that we address in this essay.

In the last section, we outline the emergence of alternate film collectives that sprouted (mostly) from 2002 onwards, when a decade of neo-liberalisation of the economy had impacted not just cultural products from Bollywood and those coming out of smaller film industries in a significant way; but the emergence of digital platforms and digital modes of film sharing had meant that erstwhile film societies had lost the monopoly as gatekeepers to control the viewers' access to avant garde 'world cinema', so to say. In this context, we try to locate a new kind of cinephilia being shaped by

the alternate film collectives of the new millenium.

Visions of 'Good Cinema'

It is interesting to note in the context of this essay, that the first film society in India, in colonial times, was centred on screening documentary films. Ference Bokra, a Hungarian cinematographer associated with the British army unit, was the founder of the Bombay Film Society, who registered his film society in 1943, in the heady days of the 'Quit India' movement. The film society had a really modest beginning, with only nine members and one film screening per month. The reason for the emergence of this particular film society had a specific colonial rationale, as P K Nair, the first director of the NFFI, commented :

> The first official film society in India, the Bombay Film society was started in 1940 with the blessing and support of the colonial rulers, but obviously with different intentions. Namely, to expose budding Indian documentary film makers to the best of World documentary, especially the works of Grierson, Wright, Jennings and others so that they could be engaged to make effective war effort films for the Raj (as cited in Cherian, 2017).

It would not be out of place to mention that in around the same time, the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), aided by the general slackening of censorship, started screening Soviet and Chinese films, both fiction and documentary, among the masses of people. The Bombay unit (of IPTA), which was more receptive to the new medium of cinema, tried to form an all-India distribution network, through which these films could be screened widely among workers all across the country (Pradhan, 1979). But the nascent efforts of IPTA remain erased and forgotten, whereas the genesis of serious engagement of cultural activists with cinema is generally seen as synonymous with the formation of the Calcutta Film Society.

When the first nineteen members of the Calcutta Film Society met at the garret of Chidananda Dasgupta to form their collective, it was a time when dreams and aspirations around the new nation-state were intact, and the project of nation building even influenced a section of the Left. Not unsurprisingly, the Calcutta Film Society willingly confined its sphere of influence to the upper/middle class citizens of the emerging nation-state, as one of its key founders Satyajit Ray opined that the Calcutta Film Society took up 'willingly to the task of dissemination of the film culture among intelligentsia' (as cited in Vasudevan, 2015).

Calcutta Film Society, however, did not see a smooth expansion of its membership. One of its early members, Ram Haldar, has written that he and Chidananda Dasgupta used to visit houses of their acquaintances, on bicycles, to convince them to take up memberships of the film society (Haldar, 1989). Only after the unexpected critical reception of Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955) did the prestige of the Calcutta Film Society grow. But even then, only in the 1960s did the membership figure reach four hundred. Though one of the later film society activists, Subhendu Dasgupta, recounted that the Calcutta Film Society was always perceived as an elite institution, and many like him felt, when they were entering the film society movement, that the membership of the Calcutta Film Society was restricted for them (personal interview with Subhendu Dasgupta, 27 February 2017).

One of the main thrusts of the early writings published in *Chalachchitra*, journal published by the society, was to place cinema as a credible art form (Chalachchitra, 1950). According to Chidananda Dasgupta, 'we want to make cinema a site of high moral standards and cinema halls as schools (for that)'. (C. Dasgupta, 1950). To differentiate their project of film appreciation from that of the culture industry was one of the recurrent anxieties that the early film society members suffered from. As Vasudevan commented upon some articles written in the *Indian Film Quarterly*, and the *Indian Film Review:*

> (Kabita) Sarkar characterises commercial cinema in terms which have now become familiar: as theatrical, tending towards 'mark in markedly melodramatic strain and exacerbation of sentiments and accumulation of coincidences, as failing in the analysis of individual characters and psychological make-up. …These criticisms were coloured by the image of a critic dealing with an infantile culture which needed to grow up (2015, 76-77).

In around the same time when the Calcutta Film Society was taking its baby steps, the Indian state was also coming to realise the importance of cinema as an important part of 'nation building'. The government-appointed expert committee on films, headed by S. K. Patil, recommended :

> In our view the remedy lies neither in Laissez-faire, nor in regimentation, but in curing all the various elements of their defects and deficiencies and ensuring, that they combine and cooperate in a joint endeavour to make this valuable medium a useful and healthy instrument of both entertainment and education, as well as a means of upliftment and progress, rather than degeneration and decay (as cited in Cherian, 2017).

Following the recommendations of the committee, the first international film festival got started in India, from 1952 onwards. The enthusiastic response that this film festival generated, coupled with a lecture tour on film appreciation by Marie Seaton, helped in no small measure the spread of film societies in both metropolitan cities and small towns. Film societies grew in myriad varied places, such as Delhi, Bhopal, Lucknow, Madras, Bombay, Patna *et al*. Many of the film societies had close relationships with ruling dispositions at that time, and as Cherian has noted 'Marie (Seaton) could not have done what she did without the complete support from Prime minister Nehru and his daughter' (2016, p-32). Eventually in 1959, when the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI) was formed, Indira Gandhi became its vice president. Film societies, which by

1979 grew in numbers to a two hundred odd, became more or less dependent on the FFSI and foreign consulates for procuring films. Arguably, this seriously dented the autonomy and politics of many of the film societies.

However, there were sporadic attempts by some of the film societies, to politically subvert the rationale of the centralised control imposed by the FFSI. It is important to remember that from the 1960s onwards, many film societies in Bengal had sprung up in suburban areas. Also, many of the film society activists came from a leftist background. According to Sabyasachi Deb (personal interview with Sabyasachi Deb, 27 December 2017), this had a lot to do with the fact that around that time films coming from the Soviet Block were shown in those film societies, and leftist sympathisers felt close affinity with the kind of films and wanted to mobilise more people to these societies as members. Though according to S. Dasgupta (personal interview with Subhendu Dasgupta, 27 February 2017) the fact that all film societies had membership fees, and to be a member of one, one had to have recommendations from existing members, and (in some cases) had to appear in written tests, meant only a certain section of *bhadralok* intelligentsia could hope to be included. Also, according to S. Dasgupta (ibid) the repeated nagging worry by some of the members that so-called non-cinephile commoners wanted to join these film societies to see uncensored films with sexual contents (Cherian, 2017 p-121-22) betrays a deep class anxiety about the general mass of people, and their lack of control over their sexuality. According to Suvendu Dasgupta (ibid), widespread popular discontent of the 1960s and militant peasant and student protests after the Naxalbari uprising in May 1967 radicalised a section of film society activists, which got reflected in turn in changing polemics around cinema. A number of essays published in film society magazines after that period moved away from understanding films through an apolitical lens of aesthetics as 'high art', as was the norm, and tried evaluating films through an overall political prism. One

might say, in some of those essays the text of the films got largely ignored, but one needs to read this polemical shift in the context of a broader societal change that got reflected in the writings of the post-Naxalbari period. (Eds S. Basu and S. Dasgupta, 1992 and S. Dasgupta, 1991). Another notable intervention of the 1980s, which subverted the centralised control of the FFSI, was by a film society of students of the Jadavpur University. In an article by the Activist Canvas collective (published on their website canvas.pix), we find :

> In Jadavpur, Jadavpur University Film Society (JUFS), in association with Chitra Chetana arranged for two film festivals. The 1983 festival from December 17 to 21 was entirely a Super 8 festival. It was the first national Super 8 film festival in India. The second festival in 1985 was not exclusively for Super 8 but some slide shows and videos were included. This festival was not as well received as the first one and evidently the interest in Super 8 was on the decline. (Super-8 mm Movement in West Bengal, 2010)

A little before this period, there were instances when the Cine Club of Calcutta tried to take cinema outside of usual screening spaces, and sometimes screened films among working class audiences, trying to initiate a dialogue around that. Though the scope of all these attempts at subversion was limited and (mostly) fizzled out after a limited span of time, but we would argue that these efforts show an important interventionist trend within the film society movement, which otherwise excluded common people from their purview and activities.

'Other' Films: Emergence of Independent Documentary Films

As we have outlined above, the Nehruvian socialist state was trying to facilitate a kind of 'high art' cinephilia among a niche section of the urban middle class audiences through promotion and control of

film society activities. The same Indian state had a more educative approach as far as the general masses of spectators were concerned. The Films Division, or FD as it was popularly known, the 'sarkari' documentary production and distribution unit, was founded more or less at the same time when the Calcutta Film Society was born. There was quite a bit of similarity in the modus operandi of the colonial-era Information Films India (IFI), founded in 1943, and that of the Films Division founded just after independence. Apart from the overarching paternalistic approach towards spectators of their films, and the unshakable faith in development as envisioned by the benevolent nation-state, the 'continuities between IFI and FD also extended to the policies regulating distribution of films. FD adopted the wartime policy of compulsory exhibition across all cinemas in India, including the provision requiring exhibitors to pay rental fees on the prints.' (Sutoris, 2016 p-71). This had also meant that distribution and making of documentary films without the patronage of the Films Division was, more or less, an improbable proposition.

The birth of independent documentary films in India coincided with the imposition of a national Emergency, but that was no mere coincidence. The project of nation-making, which had enthralled even a section of the Left, had been showing up its unstable foundation long before the Emergency was imposed. And it needed, perhaps, the immediacy of the documentary form to tell the story of a turbulent time with all its bone-chilling rawness.

Making of arguably the first independent documentary film in India, *Waves of Revolution* (1974) directed by Anand Patwardhan, started out not with the intention of making a film per se, but with the need to document the ongoing police atrocities in Bihar against the agitation led by Jayprakash Narayan. Patwardhan had gone there as a young volunteer. It was widely anticipated that one particular rally in November would be the site of excessive police violence, and the organisers of the rally felt that someone should document that, and the onus fell upon Patwardhan. The film gradually took

shape as Patwardhan started capturing not just the movement but candid reactions of a wide array of people in Bihar. The film, made in adverse conditions, was finally ready before the Emergency was declared. We would argue that some of the earlier documentary films commissioned by the Films Division and directed by the likes of S. Sukhdev, S. N. S. Sastry and Pramod Pati, were (apparently) more nuanced and aesthetically experimental as compared to *Waves of Revolution*, but what made *Waves of Revolution* unique in the Indian documentary history was its breaking of statist confinement and finding a film aesthetics that was unapologetically 'political'. One copy of the film was smuggled abroad and an English version prepared for overseas audiences. As traditional distribution networks were not readily available, the film was screened amongst various organisations and associations sympathetic to the struggle by the Indian diaspora against the Emergency in India. A description of some of those screenings gives us an interesting example about the emerging practice of alternate screenings of independent documentary films.

> Where a local group of Indians existed who were fighting against the Emergency, the screenings were the best organised and attended and interest was at the highest. The programme would begin with the local group introducing the general political background in India and what the anti-Emergency struggle was trying to achieve. I would then preface the film by describing the conditions in which it was made, warning the audience about its poor technical quality and attempting to fill in some of the information gaps which existed because the film had not originally been made for a foreign audience but for people much more familiar with its content.
>
> After the film, discussions would follow, which were often long and heated. Many of the Indians living abroad were Indira supporters or felt that 'we should not wash our dirty linen in public.'
>
> On one occasion in Boston, a government of India official who was invited to a debate after the film, defended the Emergency,

> and was booed down by the audience made up of both Indians and North Americans. (Patwardhan, in press 2017).

This new kind of film screenings was a clear departure from the way documentary films were screened till that time. Seemingly radical films, such as *I am Twenty* (1967) or *And Miles to Go...* (1965), were all screened in governmental venues, thus robbing them of subversive potential, if any. The merging of the political and the cinematic was one of the most important elements that the kind of new informal screening spaces provided, and most of the independent documentary film screenings after this period have more often than not followed this template. After *Waves of Revolution*, Patwardhan would go on to make many more films, and would take pains to screen each of them extensively. Documentary film maker Sanjay Kak has written about how being present in one of those early screenings of *Prisoners of Conscience* (1978) , as a young student of Delhi University, was an important learning experience for him :

> I don't think anyone gathered in that lecture theatre could have missed the sense that we were witnessing something unprecedented. This was a film about our present, about political prisoners, a phenomenon that the nineteen month long Emergency had produced enough of, but which was not really being spoken of. This was not mere reportage either, for the film also connected us to an earlier history, to the Naxal upsurge of the late 1960s, and indeed to the very *idea* of political prisoners. But more than a record of that moment, the way *Prisoners of Conscience* was made, and probably the way it was shown to us, signaled an unfamiliar, edgy way of looking at the world around us. This was a calm but unabashedly *critical* view, something that documentary film, and most everything that constituted the media in those years, had usually kept a safe distance from. (In press , 2017).

At around the same time, in Bengal, *Mukti Chai* (1977) and *Hungry Autumn* (1978) were made by Utpalendu Chakraborty and Goutam Ghose respectively. These two films were screened extensively by the

smaller film societies in and around Kolkata, and also by human rights organisations, trade unions and other cultural groups. In an interview with members of the revolutionary song-troupe *Ganabishan,* I came to know how they used to screen *Mukti Chai* and *Hungry Autumn* along with Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) in the working class neighbourhoods of Calcutta, and how the screenings generated interesting polemics around the release of political prisoners and the rights of the workers (personal interview with Malay Mukherjee, 12 January 2017). This example (among several others including, most notably, the extensive village screenings of independent political documentaries by the Odessa collective led by John Abraham in Kerala) does show that the emerging independent documentary cinema did influence a lot of cultural activists to use films as a tool to politically interact with their audiences. More such films continued to be made. Tapan Bose, who assisted S. Sukhdev in some of his later films, broke up with Sukhdev after he started eulogising the Emergency. Bose co-directed with Suhasini Mulay *An Indian Story* (1981), on the infamous case of mass blindings in Bhagalpur. Meera Dewan made *Eyes of Stone* (1983), on the cases of dowry deaths in rural Rajasthan; which, according to Uma Chakravarti (forthcoming, 2017), 'shown in women's colleges like Miranda House, (the film) unsettled everyone, led to passionate discussions among young women, and inspired some to join the demonstrations, create street theatre, and hold anti-dowry meetings.' Though not all independent documentaries were successful in ensuring widespread screenings, but we can safely say that from the mid-1980s many of these documentary films, apart from festival screenings, started to regularly seek out newer audiences through informal spaces.

Collectivising 'Seeing'

There remained a contradiction between the number of independent documentaries that got made post the 1990s, and the spread of

screening spaces that tried to showcase these films to the wider audiences. As many of the screenings were mediated by the film makers themselves and some by political-cultural organisations/ institutions, a screening would more often be based on the issues that particular organisation might be interested in. But as more and more documentaries started being made that were not overtly didactic in character, but were self-reflexive and opened up to many interpretations, it was inherently difficult to screen those films if the organising platform happened to be built around an issue in particular. It was imperative perhaps that dedicated independent film collectives came up, which would be politically oriented but at the same time provide the space for the audience to engage with the film texts, not devoiding the film screenings from the importance that the cinematic text entails.

Another rationale behind the emergence of these collectives stems from the fact that, beginning with the late 1990s, as film making and film screening technology became portable, affordable and widely available; India witnessed a phase where a growing number of serious and committed filmmakers were embracing the documentary. However, there was a mismatch between demand and supply when it came to the scenario of public screening of documentaries. The public hardly got the chance to watch documentaries, with the ever increasingly market-driven television, cinema halls and fast-emerging multiplexes all-engrossed with 'fiction films' and Bollywood. These film collectives came to fulfill that gap. Another interesting characteristic that situates these collectives apart from earlier film societies is in their multiplicity of voices, and multiple ways of using films as a medium. Most of the collectives resisted centralisation tendencies, and remained geared towards decentralisation, carrying a strong local flavour and geographical variation. For example, one of the pioneering early groups, the *Media Collective* from Kerala, grew out of the unease around the pressing environmental issues which were largely ignored by the then Left Democratic Front government. The

collective started with regular film screenings, but later went on to include film making in its activities. The *Marupakkam* collective was born in Madurai at a time when Tamil Nadu was witnessing a growing Dalit political assertion, as the collective tried to stand in solidarity with the emerging political phenomenon (personal interview with Amudhan R. P., 22 January, 2017). *Marupakkam* would go on to hold regular monthly film screenings, and much later start hosting the Madurai Film Festival, apart from producing a number of important documentary films. Whereas, around the same time in Bengaluru–

> Pedestrian Pictures started off in 2001, with a film festival called 'Politics of Development'…The attempt was to bring together political activists and filmmakers working on these issues on a common platform with the public, to create a broader discussion on these political questions. Several organisations in Bangalore supported this festival and we got an overwhelming response from the people. This festival was followed by a similar festival organised by Pedestrian Pictures in Mumbai. After this, several organisations from across India invited us to screen films. We travelled widely, screening different sets of documentary films, which talked about the politics of 'development'. (Deepu, in press 2017).

Many of the new emerging film collectives withstood censorship as they tried to explore new possibilities of the role and reception of films in society and polity. In fact, collectives like *Vikalp* grew up as an opposition to governmental (covert and overt) censorship attempts. Before the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) of 2004, the festival authorities introduced a new clause stating that all Indian films needed a Censor Board certificate. Over 275 filmmakers protested by organising a Campaign against Censorship (CAC). As a result, the particular clause was withdrawn. But the selectors at MIFF 2004 excluded some of the important documentary films which, many felt, was done with a clear political vendetta. Many of the protesting film makers thought that rather than boycotting

MIFF, a parallel film festival should be organised. In February 2004, a parallel festival, called 'Vikalp: Films for Freedom', was organised in Mumbai, in a space provided by a leftist organisation. Surabhi Sharma, one of the organisers of the alternate festival wrote :

> The festival opened to a full house. The response was staggering. The shoe-stand outside the hall was overflowing. There was no space to sit. With windows shut and fans whirring away, the space felt short of oxygen, but no one moved.... Films were followed by the most charged discussions amongst the filmmakers and the audience. The quality of those discussions was marked by probing, critical comments. There was incredible openness between the filmmakers and the audience, so even the most critical comment was taken in the right spirit. I do not remember another time when fellow filmmakers so openly discussed each other's work and when audiences responded so vocally. (In press, 2017).

The success of *Vikalp* opened up the possibility of people-funded festivals in other parts of the country. In Bangalore, the attempt at organising a similar festival primarily faced censorship woes, but was held in a different venue nonetheless. The *Cinema of Resistance* campaign organised people-funded festivals in Gorakhpur, Patna, Nainital, Udaipur *et al*. It is interesting to note that in many of these places there was no previous history of film society activities or similar kind of cinephilic engagement with the medium. In West Bengal, the *People's Film Collective* started off with a people-funded annual film festival, and went on to organise monthly film screenings and conversations, which became a space for activists, film makers and the public to engage with topical social issues, using the medium of cinema. It also took feature and documentary films to trade union spaces, villages and among children and young adults.

In Odisha, the new variant of film screenings took a very interesting route. Collectives like *Samadrusti* and *KBK Samachar*, have been making documentaries and short videos focussing on the neo-liberal assault on people, and periodically screening them in the

villages. But film screenings in Odisha are not entirely dependent on the middle-class activists from Bhubaneswar, Cuttack or Puri. According to film maker Subrat Kumar Sahu,

> In these places, where people's movements are going on, such films become a tool to further their strength, and people have been regularly screening films for the last ten years or so. It is difficult to count the number of villages where such films are being screened, because this happens randomly. But, I would say, there are hundreds of such villages. These are not formal screenings where the filmmakers need to be present. Most of the time, the filmmakers do not even know that their films are screened in such and such villages. As I told you, at times, I get to know about my films being screened in certain village after months. I may not even know as yet of other villages where my films have already been screened. And that is such a beautiful thing! It is a political act, where a film is taken for its content, context, and relevance; rather than for who made the film! (Personal interview with Subrat Kumar Sahu, 22 January 2017).

We have tried to argue that the praxis of these new millennium film collectives involve a sustained coming together of film makers, film activists and audiences in shared platforms where the audience has a direct stake and shared ownership of the screening space. This opens up newer possibilities of critical reception and an alternate form of participatory cinephilia, which was not fully explored before.

In Lieu of Conclusion

How did the varied experiences from around the country in the new millennium envisage a new emerging idea of cinephilia? We have tried in this essay not to conclude this question in any specific manner, but instead to map how moving images bring people together, help them in their struggle and open up new avenues of

conversation, and new means of appreciating cinema. We would argue that this new kind of screening spaces and festivals opens up a non-elitist inclusive praxis of cinematic engagement that is distinctly different from canonical notions of cinephilia, whether nurtured by the traditional film societies in our country, or as obsessed by new age middle class connoisseurs as the solitary consumption of moving images on the internet. When Susan Sontag wrote *The decay of Cinema* in the New York Times Magazine, she lamented the death of cinephilia. According to her, "If cinephilia is dead, then movies are dead... no matter how many movies, even very good ones, go on being made." (cited in Morrison, 2016). In recent times many studies, like *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia: Film Culture in Transition* (2010), have tried to gauge what it means after cinema viewing and discussions around cinema have moved to the internet space. But theoretically engagement with the newer variants of film collectives in India, and with its resultant cinephilia, which is very much part of our ongoing digital age, remains to be taken up seriously.

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