

**THE POLITICS OF THE MEDIA :  
A CASE-STUDY OF THE INDIAN CINEMA**

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I certify that the dissertation entitled "The Politics of the Media : A Case Study of the Indian Cinema", submitted by Miss Niraja Gopal, in fulfilment of eight credits out of the total requirements of twentyfour credits for the degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) of the University, is, to the best of my knowledge, a bonafide work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

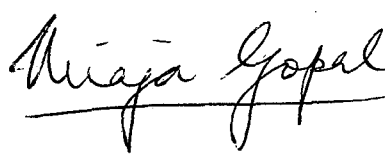
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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the discipline of politics has seen a distinct shift in emphasis - from the study of political structures and institutions to a new and expanding concern with the social bases of politics. The explanation of politics in terms of the exercise of legitimate political authority has widened to include questions of how this legitimacy is secured. For, all political systems are, regardless of the classification of constitutional experts, built upon largely similar bases - a structure of ideas that forms the fundamental cohesive force in any given society and the acceptance of which gives it the legitimacy it enjoys. This process - of the formation of political attitudes congenial to the maintenance of the system - takes place through, firstly, formal institutionalised structures like religion, law, the family and, secondly, through the many non-formal means of ensuring conformity, such as education and the media of mass communication.

It is in this perspective that the popular Hindi film has been analysed in this study. The politics of the cinema has been frequently construed somewhat narrowly - as pertaining to the communication of overtly political and even propagandist ideas alone.<sup>1</sup> This study looks into a category of films which, through their treatment of everyday social problems, possibly help towards influencing the formation or reinforcement of political attitudes. The fact that this is the class of film

with the widest all-India appeal, is only an added measure of its importance.

In the Indian context, academic attention to the media in general and the film in particular, has been scarce. Journalistic and critical writings constitute the main body of published work on the Indian cinema. In fact, barring a considerably outdated sociological work by Dr. Panna Shah of Bombay University (1950)<sup>2</sup>, a recent study of censorship policy by Aruna Vasudev<sup>3</sup> at the Sorbonne, a statistical study of the politics of the Tamil cinema<sup>4</sup>, and one book on the economics of the film industry<sup>5</sup>, there has been no academic work from any perspective least of all from that of an inquiry into the process of the formation of basic political attitudes. Today, there exists a definite need for the isolated work of the sociologist, the historian, the economist and the aesthetician to be more completely integrated in a manner that yields conclusions that are politically relevant and meaningful.

Politics and sociology in the West have become increasingly occupied with shades of popular culture and the media<sup>6</sup> - areas which till recently, would have been decisively designated as esoteric or irrelevant. The enquiries of western social science in the sphere have been largely stimulated from within two major theoretical perspectives - functional theory, in its search for the processual aspects of politics and social actions; and the Marxist, in its concern with the total context of social

existence, with the cultural and ideological (no less than the overt economic and political) avenues of class domination.

In this project, some attempt has been made to study the social and political functions performed by the popular cinema in India today. It is premised, therefore, on the assumption that the cinema is a politically significant phenomenon, in terms of the process that the Marxian theorist and the functionalist social scientist would respectively describe as "legitimation" or "political socialization". Thus, interest in the effectivity of ideas is, in fact, an early concern shared by Durkheim and Marx.

Ideologically, the work is quite simply, eclectic. No framework has been adhered to entirely - chiefly because of the absence of complete conviction in readymade answers, and also, particularly, because of the flexibility this affords.

The work begins with a preliminary survey - in the first chapter - of its theoretical possibilities : with a review of film theory, communications theory, and various streams of political and social theory which appeared, however, to offer the glimmerings of a framework, briefly and elusively, for the actual investigation. This proved to be an inconclusive search - which to a degree, forced the choice in favour of the many virtues of eclecticism.

In the second chapter, the attempt to identify and assess the degree and the nature of the impact of the popular film

led to a long digression on antecedent traditions of popular cultural expression, traditional theories of aesthetics and the roots of contemporary political culture. It is in this background that the development of the cinematic form in India has been discussed and the lineages of today's popular Hindi film traced. The actual communication potential of the cinema has been assessed through the treatment of a few significant recurring themes.

In the third and penultimate chapter, the nature of governmental control over the film industry has been analysed - an important dimension for a country which possesses non-socialist world largest government-owned network relating to films. Censorship apart, the various media through which the government provides supports to the film industry, as also its monopolies in the sphere of documentary films and the children's film movement, have also been discussed.

The structure of cinema as an industry also raises a few important political issues. Thus, the political economy of the Bombay film industry requires examination. The fourth and final chapter deals with the economics of film-making, film distribution and exhibition, including the control and ownership of resources, studios, film companies and cinema theatres.

These two facets of control - governmental and economic - serve to reinforce the first level of analysis, of the content?



of communication. It provides, it is hoped, insights into not merely why, but also how, this process is made possible. The politically meaningful dimensions of cinema as art, as entertainment, as communication and as an industry converge, at this point, to suggest perhaps the beginnings of an argument.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. On the question of propaganda in film, Cf. Steve Neale - "Propaganda" in Screen, Vol. 18, No. 3, Autumn 1977, pp. 9-40. Also, Cf. Roy Paul Madsen, The Impact of Film : How Ideas are Communicated Through Cinema and Television, Macmillan, New York, 1973, Chapter 17 - "The Propaganda Film", pp. 395-419.
2. Panna Shah, The Indian Film, Motion Picture Association of India, Bombay, 1950.
3. Aruna Vasudev, Liberty and Licence in the Indian Cinema, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978.
4. Centre for Social Research Madras, The Impact of Film on Society published at New Delhi, 1974.
5. R.D. Jain, The Economics Aspects of the Film Industry in India, Atma Ram and Sons, New Delhi, 1960.
6. Cf. I.C. Jarvie - Towards a Sociology of the Cinema, Routledge and Legan Paul, London, 1970. Even earlier than this work, there was Jakob B. Mayer's study, The Sociology of Film, Faber and Faber, London, 1947. Subsequently, of course, there have been studies too numerous to be accommodated in a mere footnote. Cf., in this connection, Peter J. Bukalski, Film Research : A Critical Bibliography with Annotations and Essay, G.K. Hall, Boston, 1972.
7. This is not in the nature of what is known as 'content analysis'. A number of films were seen and some of them have been referred to by way of illustrations, wherever relevant.

## Chapter 1

TOWARDS ANALYSING THE 'BOMBAY' FILM :  
THE POVERTY OF THEORY

"A theory of film which claims universal validity must provide either an exhaustive catalogue of film forms or a description of the medium in such general terms as to offer minimal guidance to the appreciation of any movie. The problem arises from the embarrassing richness of the cinema's aptitudes" (1)

For an antiquity of less than a century, this is indeed a phenomenal wealth - not merely in terms of the development and spread of the cinematic medium, but also and more significantly for our purpose, in terms of the voluminous amount of thinking and writing that the cinema has inspired. The literature surrounding the subject of film, in its various aspects - of // form (technical and aesthetic) and function (socio-cultural, historical, political and economic) - is immense - and has developed to a degree where it can compete confidently with disciplines of markedly greater vintage in quality no less than in quantity.

It would not, perhaps, be altogether inaccurate to say that while this concern about cinema has stemmed from a definite recognition of its social impact, it has rarely tended towards sociological explanation, most often crystallising in enquiries into the nature of the form, the medium, and the technique of film. And, again, film theoreticians have rarely been film-makers. In fact, with the notable exceptions of Eisenstein,

Pudovkin, Godard, Pasolini and the entire Cahiers du Cinema tradition in France, most theoreticians of film have never grappled with the medium themselves.

In attempting to study the phenomenon that is the commercial "Bombay" film - one that continues to defy accurate and unanimous description - there are several preordained ways of approaching the problem. Whether for reasons of the veritable uniqueness of this form or whether, on the other hand, because of the markedly different context in which these conceptual categories and theoretical frameworks originate, much more than mere selection and application is involved. A formalistic understanding is redundant when used to explain a cinematic usage so markedly poor in form, and borrowed sociological analyses raise a whole network of inescapable questions and counter-questions, as economic and socio-political categories do not admit of simple transference.

### Film Theory

It is perhaps inevitable, in an enterprise such as this, that many important aspects of film about which a great deal has been extemporised and theorised should perforce be ignored. Only such film theories as claim to offer elements of value in assessing the political impact of film, or such as appear - even if they do not claim - to be fruitful for such analysis, will be considered, briefly. Such a preliminary treatment necessarily introduces some degree of arbitrariness. In this case, an arbitrary classi-

fication of film theories is being ventured, divided into primarily two kinds - formalistic (as distinct from the Formalist School in film making/theory) and sociological - (the simple distinction but medium message). The former tend to focus on the technical, formal and structural aspects of the film medium. At an elementary level, they are concerned with the production, shooting, editing and processing of films, with the entire gamut of activities and techniques that go into the making of a film. Perception, in a formalist analysis, would consist of an attempt to understand frames, shots, sequences, etc. rather than the content, message and 'perception' of a film in social terms. The latter is attempted by the second type of theories. These offer diverse methods of approaching a film - varying from the treatment of film as an art form, as entertainment and popular culture, as a medium of mass communication, as an industry, and so forth. Several theories with a sociological orientation use combinations of one or more of these elements.

R.G. Collingwood<sup>2</sup>, for instance, in his study - "The Principles of Art" - devotes a whole chapter to "Art as Amusement" in which the cinema merits a passing reference. But Collingwood's analysis raises a further question - that of the identification of "art" with "artifact"<sup>3</sup>, the latter being his major criterion for amusement art. Opposed to this view, is that which treats art in terms of purely aesthetic criteria. This would tend towards another kind of formalism, which would be sociologically barren. And, yet again, it could be taken into an altogether

sociological direction - in the case, for instance, of a Marxist aesthetic<sup>4</sup> which views art as a social phenomenon, and is capable of linking it, simultaneously, with the question of film as popular culture. A somewhat more eclectic view (that of Kenneth Clark, for instance), of art - as reflective of social reality, is also possible without going to either extreme of formalism or sociological determinism. This multiplicity of characterizations and theoretical incorporations only serves to make our task more complex.

One way of studying film theories as such has been outlined by J. Dudley Andrew<sup>5</sup>, drawing upon the Aristotelian reduction of all natural phenomena into their four "causes" : material, efficient, formal and final. From these, Andrew has adapted his four-fold classification through which, according to him, every question about cinema can be investigated :

- (1) "The raw material", including questions about the medium - its relation to reality, use of time and space and other processes such as colour, sound, etc.
- (2) "The methods and techniques" - questions about the treatment of the raw material, including the creative processes which are involved in this. That is, psychological factors (of the film-maker) and the economics of film production.
- (3) "The forms and shapes" of film - questions of genres and audience responses to them, etc.

- (4) "The purpose and value" of cinema - the larger question of impact and implications.

The formalistic theories identified earlier would, broadly, raise questions only of the first kind (in Andrew's taxonomic scheme) some aspects of the second and third, without touching upon the fourth category. This is not, however, to say that these are altogether without value for answers of the fourth kind, which is here the primary concern.<sup>6</sup> Even the most technical treatment of film has bearings on its practice and on its social dimension - the important thing, however, is to understand the limits of this value.

Early film theorists were primarily concerned with securing recognition and the status of an art for the film form. They were also concerned as such with the potential of the film as a medium, with its uses and its relation with reality. A large number of early explorations in the realm of film theory were, in fact, made by psychologists like Hugo Munsterberg<sup>7</sup> and Rudolf Arnheim<sup>8</sup>. Gradually, theorists with more distinctly philosophical concerns - e.g., Andre Bazin<sup>9</sup> - came to study the cinematic form. Only in the last two decades (the sixties and the seventies) have specifically political interpretations of film<sup>10</sup> come to the fore - on the one hand, from Cuban and other theorists searching for a "third cinema", a liberating force for the Third World and, on the other, from the French tradition of film-makers like Godard. In the latter case,

there is the "politiques des auteurs" theory which considers films in the nature of personal statements of individual directors, and study films systematically, covering the work of one director after another. The chief problem with this theoretical outlook is that random audiences do not see films that way.

Film theory, even of the formalist kind, has faced internal conflicts and controversies. It started out with a dichotomy between Expressionism and Realism - as exemplified, initially, in the almost documentary<sup>11</sup> "realism" of the Lumiere brothers' films<sup>12</sup> as opposed to the pure fantasies of Melies.<sup>13</sup> In James Monaco's<sup>14</sup> conception, Realist theories are those that "celebrate the Raw Material" aspect of Andrew's classification, whereas the Expressionist theories are those that focus on the film-maker's ability to manipulate, modify and shape reality through the film. These, therefore, fall into the "Methods and Techniques" and "Forms and Shapes" categories, these being combined into one, if seen as opposite - practical and theoretical - facets of what is essentially a single phenomenon. It is the final aspect - that of the "Purpose and Value" of film, that is not explicitly tackled by either of these two kinds of theories. Historically, however, as the dichotomy between Expressionism and Realism comes to be recognised as false, the focus shifts from essentially "generative" theories of this kind to what are called "receptive" theories. Essentially, the difference between the successive stages of refinement in



the history of film theory revolves around the difference in emphasis on either or all of the three stages involved in any communicative process, including the film - that is, the artist/communicator; the channel of medium/transmission of expression; and finally, the reception by an audience.

The 1920s and '30s saw the development of Expressionist theories as the dominant force. They focussed on the medium itself and the use of it by the film-makers, but did not place emphasis on the role of the spectator, did not involve the observer as participant. A variation of the Expressionist theme (most highly developed in Germany) developed in the Soviet Union, before Stalinist "Socialist Realism" appeared. The chief figures in this movement of Formalism were Pudovkin and Eisenstein and, from Hungary, Bela Balasz. Pudovkin and Eisenstein were both film-makers themselves, and developed theories of editing that came to form the core of their writings on cinema. The theory of montage in Pudovkin was one where the montage technique was used simply as a supportive aid for the main narrative, created from stock shots edited in a sequential way. In Eisenstein<sup>15</sup>, however, montage was converted into a much more dynamic principle, used not to support narrative, but to create ideas out of stock shots<sup>16</sup> arranged at the discretion of the Director, in a certain sequence. Unlike in Pudovkin, where there was no question of interpretation on the part of the spectator, and the narrative was guided by the film-maker, Eisenstein's is believed to be more dynamic

theory<sup>17</sup>, where the possibility of interpretation was left open. Eisenstein's extreme Formalism is, further, often seen as the means whereby the Expressionist/Realist dichotomy was partially overcome - for, in Eisenstein's conception, it was "necessary to destroy Realism in order to approach reality".<sup>18</sup>

The 'forties and 'fifties, on the other hand, were the high point of Realist theories of film. Andre Bazin and Italian neo-Realist film-making both contributed to this - as did, in the realm of the non-fiction film, the work of Grierson on documentary, since this emerged as a genre in respect of which the relevance of Expressionism was limited. Bazin's neo-Realism stressed the individual shot - the mise en scene - as opposed to the principle of montage. This was later overcome by Godard<sup>19</sup> in the 'sixties, when he postulated a dialectical unity of both the mise en scene and montage, and denied the mutual exclusivity hitherto maintained between them. Siegfried Kracauer<sup>20</sup> approached a new level of Realist film theory maintaining that the film, to the extent that it exists in the context of the world around it, serves a purpose. It must return to the reality it emerges from :

"For Kracauer, film has a human, ethical nature. Ethics must replace esthetics, thereby fulfilling Lenin's prophecy, which Jean-Luc Godard was fond of quoting, that "ethics are the esthetics of the future". Having been divorced from physical reality by both scientific and esthetic abstraction, we need the redemption film offers: we need to be brought back into communication with the physical world. Film can mediate reality for us. It can both "corroborate" and "debunk" our impressions of reality". (21)

André Bazin's neo-realist creed of "the essential objectivity of the camera"<sup>22</sup> was also overcome, in later years, by the radical cineastes of the journal he founded - the Cahiers du Cinema. With François Truffaut's "politiques de auteur" theory, focussing on the role of the film-maker and with the burgeoning of a radical tradition in French cinema, the camera's commitment was ensured.<sup>23</sup> By this time, the uses of techniques of mechanical reproduction to mass produce, indefinitely, the individually chosen/photographed/and near-created images of the film-maker, made obvious the importance of the camera - a fact that Bazin could only sense but not articulate. As such, the differentiation between realism and reality took time to crystallise.

The influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss in cultural studies took the form of the adoption of structuralist methods by film theoreticians, also. In film theory, semiology developed as an offshoot of structuralism, the term 'Cine-Structuralism' expressing a degree of adherence to principles of both kinds. Perfected by Christian Metz and Roland Barthes in France, Umberto Eco in Italy, and the contributors to the journal Screen in England, Cine-Structuralism is essentially grounded in the assumption that cinema, like other texts, has a language and a grammar of its own,<sup>24</sup> that can be decoded, by reducing the structure of the film to its paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures, within which a film can be "read" through its sets of codes and sub-codes. The differentiation between denotative

and connotative images<sup>25</sup> and the analysis of a film through its signs - iconic, indexical and symbolic<sup>26</sup> - constitutes, among other inessential (for this purpose) complexities, the cine-structuralist method. Umberto Eco<sup>27</sup> has outlined four stages in the development of semiotics from the early '60s to the early '70s - from an<sup>1</sup> "overvaluation of the linguistic mode", to<sup>2</sup> a stage where doubts and uncertainty about the universal validity of the system of analysis appeared, through a stage, in the early seventies,<sup>3</sup> when the semiotics of the process of production of the film was singled out for special treatment, making the question of political ideology part of "the semiotic equation"<sup>28</sup> to the most recent stage of shifting attention from the production or making of texts to the consumption or perception of them.] At a theoretical level, much criticism has been levelled against semiotic analyses of film, in terms of its emphasis on theory rather than on ✓ film<sup>29</sup> and its existence for the sake of its own attractions rather than for the sake of film. On a more technical level, also it has been accused of being rooted too firmly in a linguistic model, the application of which to cinema is not always sound. Similarly, while Marxist analyses which have incorporated elements of cine-structuralism, are believed to be more sensitive sociologically, these too, have come up against hard criticism. As, for instance, in the case of Cahiers "reading" of an American film of 1939 - "Young Mr. Lincoln" by John Ford - which is defined negatively as not being either a commentary

or an interpretation, or a mechanical structural reading or, finally, a simple de-mystification - but consisting in deciphering what the film does not say through symbolic associations as also the aid of Freud and Marx. This has been criticised for not merely a faulty and shallow understanding of America's economic situation in the 1930s but also, among other things, for "the subscription to a structural linguistic model of arbitrary signs that can generate identities and oppositions ..."<sup>30</sup> (emphasis added).

Besides this, the only application of cine-structuralism to Indian cinema - the analysis of three Satyajit Ray films by Father Gaston Roberge<sup>31</sup> - does not lead to any conclusions of a sociologically significant nature. How much less meaningful it is likely to be if applied to the films of directors like Raj Kapoor, Manoj Kumar, Manmohan Desai, etc. - especially in an environment where audiences do not view and respond to films as films of a particular director, but for other, less cerebral reasons<sup>32</sup>, such as stars, music and so forth - needs no elaboration. If the only contribution of linguistics to the study of film is to "uncover and state with a degree of accuracy those elements in a film which cause a critic or even a simple cine-goer to give a film a specific response"<sup>33</sup>, perhaps this could be done more usefully by focussing on more meaningful elements than the number of shots, number of large syntagmas, screen time, film time and so on.<sup>34</sup>

The basic purpose of this somewhat prolonged survey of film theories is mainly to demonstrate the inadequacy of any of them - taken individually or even in the kind of specious combinations that have been known to arise - to aid a socio-  
 ✓ logical understanding of cinema, especially the kind of film which is sought to be analysed in this study. Most of them tend towards increasingly abstruse degrees of formalism, with concerns that tend to chase each other to successively higher degrees of obfuscation.

This is not, however, to suggest that a formalistic understanding is entirely redundant. On the contrary, it can certainly  
 ✓ be an aid, if kept to a restricted use and not allowed an excessively independent role, disregarding other, larger questions. Thus, for instance, an understanding of the power of the film medium in terms of its ability to induce a feeling of identification and of "being-present"<sup>35</sup> is important - it also includes the relatively technical, but connected, questions of the use of the spatial and temporal dimensions in film, of the "historical present" in which a fictional film is usually situated, of the technology that gives film "a scientific assurance of authenticity"<sup>36</sup>, the concrete images of which it is composed, and the conditions of viewing, which heighten the illusion of reality by preventing comparison of size.<sup>37</sup> Similarly the somewhat more psychologically-oriented aspects - as, for instance, the induced habit of viewers, who automatically invest a two-dimensional image with three dimensions and who,

rather than participating in a deceptive illusion, often willingly and consciously suspend the critical faculty of disbelief, entering into an experience which is "like a game with conventions which both parties accept before the game starts".<sup>38</sup> And then again, the "embellishment", as it were, of the image by techniques of lighting, exposure and printing which transforms the image into a connoted message.<sup>39</sup> Several of these factors are, of course, culturally conditioned and determined. As, for instance, was brought out in a survey conducted in rural Africa, where the process of adaptation to the idea of moving images on a screen was found to take considerable time, and to have been a recent phenomenon.<sup>40</sup> However, this is simply to emphasise the fact that a technical and formalist understanding has its utility - but only upto a point, beyond which it becomes meaningless, unless informed by a larger perspective.

#### THEORIES OF SOCIALIZATION

It remains, now, to consider the contribution of theories which are not strictly generic to the film medium itself - theories, that is, which originate in the concerns of cultural, sociological and political studies and the application of which has been sought or attempted in the field of cinema, as well. There are essentially two kinds of treatment - one may be called a relatively liberal outlook, in contrast to the second, Marxist one and its many variants. This first focusses, basically, on the treatment of cinema either as a medium of mass communication

or as a part of culture patterns ; tackled, in both these classifications, as a political medium, allowing for the transmission of politically relevant values and as a contributory factor in the process of political socialisation.

The most significant dimension of the concept of political socialisation is, essentially, its description in terms of the attitudinal influences on individual behaviour patterns that ensure the integration of the individual into society.<sup>41</sup> While, in the conceptions of David Easton and Gabriel Almond<sup>42</sup>, political socialization is the means whereby the political system supports and maintains itself, and one of the four input functions performed by all political systems, it is, on the other hand, endowed with the potential of being a vehicle of political and social change, through the impact of secondary socialisation agencies. This is the process of re-socialization usually treated as pertaining to adult life. The mass media, however, are generally considered as agencies serving the  re-inforcement function, rather than one of the re-socialisation. In themselves, they are not seen as constitutive of influences enough to characterise them as primary agencies of political socialisation. Their impact is considered limited for a few basic reasons : (a) fundamental political attitude, acquired early in life and deeply rooted, are not susceptible to media-induced change, and the greatest power of the media occurs where attitudes are not so rooted; (b) that the commercial nature of the mass media (with particular reference to the USA) does not





permit a treatment of controversial issues, which may offend an audience in any manner. The messages transmitted, therefore, remain within the broad consensus of acceptability; (c) the factor of individual selectivity from among the multiplicity of view-points expressed, which ensures that only such messages are retained as confirm the political opinions/prejudices of readers/listeners/viewers. While these factors are presented as limitations on the impact of the media, it is, on the contrary, possible to locate in them the very roots of the media's strength and persuasion. Thus, within the framework of the behavioural paradigm in contemporary political science, the concept of political socialization has acquired some objectionable attributes that do not reflect on the concept itself, as much as on the framework. The basic flaw in situating this concept within an overarching behavioural paradigm is simply that it assumes the fact - political socialisation - without in any way questioning, critically, its function.

On the other hand, media studies themselves are rarely sensitive to the various possible levels of politics operating in the media. They tend to see these only in terms of specific aspects/genres of film - such as the newsreel and the documentary film - which exhibit an overt political content, or are political by virtue of their being governmentally or politically sponsored. The less overt levels of political communication through cinema are not given much attention. This is illustrated in the studies of Wilbur Schramm and Daniel Lerner<sup>43</sup>, among others, which



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adopt the "development" model of the American Social Science Research Council in the field of media studies, and are especially aimed at estimating the impact of the mass media on the "developmental" and "modernizing" process in the developing countries of the Third World. The criteria for identifying the process, and estimating the pace, of development are obviously specious and unacceptable. What is important here is that such studies also suffer from fundamental theoretical weaknesses. As, for instance, is brought out in a paper by S.C. Dube, where he puts forth the argument that the film medium has a potential that "could be used", but has not been because :

"The popular image of the film, in the rural mind, associates it with two attributes :

(a) they provide entertainment; and

(b) they have a corrupt and deruralizing influence.

Only limited use has been made of this medium to teach detailed practices; their principal use so far has been to build certain images and to convey information regarding specific programmes and innovations. Most of the films have an urban bias. Where they seek to entertain as well as to educate, the emphasis on entertainment is so great that the educational part is wholly or partly missed. Or, alternatively, the instructional element is so heavy and crab that the film bores the village people. Choice of themes, mode of treatment, and use of language and symbols leave much to be desired". (44)

No attempt is made to understand the potential of this "entertainment" medium as it presently exists, to estimate how far the communication of ideas, through the films that the rural audiences do see, retards or aids the "modernizing" process, even in terms of the highly questionable criteria of the model itself.

There are, however, studies with a dominantly sociological or anthropological perspective that contain relevant insights for any study of politics and film. Among the early works of this nature are those of Hortense Powdermaker<sup>45</sup>, an anthropologist's view of Hollywood and Henry James Forman's study of films and children.<sup>46</sup> In their attempts to uncover subtler levels of communication they tend to emphasise 'symbols' as conveying ideas - but the symbols treated are not the entire backdrop of statements that the film may constitute, but more overt symbols, such as the national flag or portraits of national leaders. Moreover, most studies of this nature tend to focus on the various dimensions of the film medium in isolation from each other - e.g., censorship, thematic content, and economic structures, may all be considered as politically relevant, but in an essentially limited - because isolated way,

Diametrically opposed to this is the view, presented by the entire Marxist tradition. In spite of the differences of emphasis internal to this framework as it develops from the early statements of Marx/Engels themselves, through the work of Lenin, Gramsci and Lukacs, to the much more contemporary studies by theoreticians like Althusser, on the one hand, and those of the Frankfurt School, on the other - the commonality between them is - an essentially integrated perspective, which aims at considering film, as it does other social phenomena, in all its totality. The Marxist view of cinema can be subsumed under either

or both of two categories - one which treats it as a communication medium and, as such, as part of modern "popular culture". The second possible dimension is that which views cinema as an art form, and seeks to apply to it the same criteria and judgements that govern its aesthetic principles in other spheres of artistic production and practice. Both, however, are linked to the questions of ideology<sup>47</sup> and legitimation, in the discussion of cinema in capitalist society.

The underlying assumptions are essentially those which were articulated by Marx - briefly, in the Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, where he puts forth the proposition that social being determines social consciousness, rather than vice versa; and, in much greater detail, by Marx and Engels in The German Ideology, where it is amplified further :

"Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life process as the inversion of objects of the retina does from their physical life-process". (48)

The principle of hegemony, later developed by Gramsci, also finds its earliest articulation in the same text :

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas ; i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental

production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch". (49)

Lenin's use of the concept of 'ideology' to describe socialism, as well, considerably diffused the meaning of the term in the sense of illusion/false consciousness. But the very radicalism of Marxian thought was grounded in the assumption present in its critique of ideology as bourgeois ideology and therefore as "failed science, not authentic science"<sup>50</sup> - that the limits of ideology could be overcome, and that its transformation was a certainty once socialism replaced capitalism, and with it brought a new socialist consciousness. If there was, as Gouldner believes<sup>51</sup>, a strain of positivism in the acceptance of this future consciousness as non-ideology, as successful, as science, then it could hardly have been apparent to those who took the desirability of the posited goal for granted. It was Antonio Gramsci, in his early writings as well as in his Prison Notebooks, who further developed the concepts of ideology, hegemony and culture and the "national popular".<sup>52</sup> 'Hegemony' for Gramsci was the process by which a ruling class

not merely ensures the conformity and submission of subordinate classes by domination, but, in fact, directs and leads them by winning their acquiescence. This process of "containment"<sup>53</sup> is operated by hegemonic structures, working through ideology. Gramsci's postulation of a separate, but linked, balance of forces at the command of the State - the repressive state apparatuses, functioning through coercive means, and the ideological, functioning through the creation of consent and legitimacy - is one that has remained a commanding position for several years.

Althusser's discursive comments on the subject of ideology endowed it with a greater philosophical/epistemological content. Ideologies, to Althusser, constitute the sphere of the lived and ✓ the experienced, rather than of the 'thought' :

["it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men. They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them". (54)]

✓ Althusser's important essay on "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses"<sup>55</sup> introduced another element of great significance : the notion of reproduction of the ideological/cultural conditions of production. The process of reproduction - hitherto confined to the explicitly productive aspects of capitalism : labour power and the relations of production - was now expanded to include -

"a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e., a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression ... it is the forms and under forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power". (56)

This expansion involved the drawing-in, into the command-area of advanced capitalism, of structures like cultural institutions, the media, religion, and so forth - the "necessary displacements"<sup>57</sup>, through the mediation of which ruling classes perpetuate their governance and control.

A somewhat different emphasis is to be found in the work of the Frankfurt School theorists - especially, in the sphere of culture, that of Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and Habermas and Marcuse. The peculiar combination of radicalism and pessimism that characterizes the work of the Frankfurt School, is evident in their treatment of "The Culture Industry" also. But, before assessing the work of the Frankfurt School, it also becomes necessary to trace the theoretical lineages of the concepts of "popular culture" and "mass culture". While a return to Matthew Arnold, Nietzsche, T.S. Eliot, and F.R. Leavis would appear to be ruled out, it is nevertheless important to point out that "popular culture", in its contemporary usage in western social science, denotes an idea, the chief // attribute of which is grounded in the emphatically maintained distinction between it and the concept of "folk culture". While one stands for a post-literate, post-industrial and

urbanised culture-pattern, the other indicates a pre-literate, pre-industrial and largely rural cultural formation.<sup>58</sup> Further, popular culture is, once again negatively, defined in terms of its differentiation from "minority culture" or "high art" to the extent that it is the product of an age where art is converted into entertainment for the leisure-time of the vast majority, but where the appreciation of the classical forms remains an expensive privilege, confined to private art collections, on the one hand, and, on the other, the privileged training to enjoy Beethoven and Rimsky-Korsakov. In a slightly more specific sense, popular culture has also been used to denote working class culture patterns, especially in the work of Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson<sup>59</sup>, but the contemporary usage is one that is more general, and, perhaps, more "levelling", in an ironical sense. And, to the extent that the forms of popular culture - the popular press, popular music, theatre, television, film, radio and popular literature, including crime fiction, romantic fiction and comics - are mass produced on a large scale and backed by elaborate structures of economic and financial control, popular culture is seen as playing a vital role as a vehicle of ideology helping to legitimise class domination.✓

This conception is, in its essentials, carried over into the work of the Frankfurt School, with slight terminological changes, Kornhauser's<sup>60</sup> concept of "mass society" and C.Wright Mills' position on elite culture begin to converge, at this



point, with the description of "mass culture" that is put forward by this school of thought. But it becomes necessary, here, to differentiate between the positions of individual theorists within the Frankfurt School itself - Adorno/Horkheimer's characterization of "the Culture Industry" was somewhat different from the considerably more optimistic positions of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. The work of Adorno and Horkheimer is informed by a dissatisfaction with the categories of traditional orthodox European Marxism. They look with undisguised unhappiness at the increasing atomisation of the individual in "mass society", where technological complexity is heightened, but there is no perceptible evidence, in their view, of a breakdown of capitalism. In "The Dialectic of Enlightenment"<sup>61</sup>, there is an impassioned critique of popular culture which offers "Enlightenment as self-deception".<sup>62</sup> The repressive role of the "culture industry", notably the mass media, is here thoroughly investigated, in its various dimensions the oppressive domination of technology and its control determined by an economic rationale; the use of technology, star cults and psychological formulae to make films sell; the perpetuation of illusion to a stage where "real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies"<sup>63</sup>; the moulding of individuals into a type where one man is interchangeable with another, and where they share only the "perfect similarity" that is the "absolute differences"; the role of laughter and amusement, creating an induced harmony that is "a caricature of solidarity"

and the fusion of culture and entertainment which only serves to deprave culture further.

In Walter Benjamin's<sup>64</sup> celebrated essay on "The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1939), on the other hand, there is present an obvious sense of wonderment about the potential of the photographic and cinematic image. Benjamin recognizes the alienating and illusory effect of the camera's use the fact that the camera is subjective, incapable to capturing an artistic performance in its entirety because it can record only angles, and therefore, fragments; the control over film at the cutting-table, no less than from, behind the camera; the potential of the cinematic image in terms of its exhibition to large numbers of people, simultaneously; and finally, the abrogation of authenticity in the work of art - its determination, henceforth, not by "ritual" but by "politics".<sup>65</sup> And the concept of the decay of the aura that Benjamin introduced continued to be used by others, including Adorno. A significant aspect of Benjamin's work, however, has been seen in his essentially forward-looking analysis of the possibilities opened up by the "age of mechanical reproduction" - in which Benjamin saw the potential of a truly democratic, humanised culture which would be easily accessible to all, where art objects would be shorn of the magical properties ascribed to them by virtue of their uniqueness, and where the barrier between creator and audience would be reduced, giving way to the possibility of an actual popular participation. He also saw, in reproduction techniques,

the possibility of the extension of the Marxist thesis of increasing collectivization in capitalist production to the sphere of artistic production and social relations in this sphere. Though Benjamin's thesis retrospectively appears to be exaggerated and unfounded, it is valuable for its insights.

The more recent works coming from the Frankfurt School, including those of Habermas<sup>66</sup>, are informed with a characteristic pessimism that no longer sees, in advanced capitalism, the possibility of socialist transformation. Thus, the hegemonic function of Gramsci's civil society is rejected as non-existent and the onus of the responsibility is placed on the "public sphere", their counterpart to Gramsci's "hegemony". The totally organised and strictly administered capitalism of this century represents, to the theorists of the Frankfurt School, a new resilience for the capitalist order<sup>67</sup> which has successfully "bought off" and "incorporated" the working-class, through the "culture industry" among other things. Today, the Frankfurt School posits a crisis of legitimation in advanced capitalist societies. This, in fact, is in the nature of a cultural crisis, since capitalism is no longer capable of providing a culture and an ideology that can sustain it. Which is the primary reason for its increasing recourse, as evident in late capitalism, to a monolithic State structure and its oppressive bureaucratic welfare apparatus. Not only has the system 'incorporated' the individual, but also the class struggle.<sup>68</sup>

The other major dimension of the Marxist view of cinema is that which treats it as an art form, thereby taking into account the questions of the mode of artistic production, the conditions of artistic labour and so forth. In his attempt to develop a "scientific" Marxist aesthetic, Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez<sup>69</sup> proceeds from the fundamental postulate (present in Marx's own works, notably in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts) that capitalism is essentially hostile to art. While maintaining this, Vazquez simultaneously asserts that truly great works of art, belonging to any mode of production, including capitalism, are capable of transcending their times. The absence of any clear criteria for defining such works of art as also the initial premise of capitalism's hostility to art, are both rooted in a dilemma that does not admit of easy solution : on the one hand, Vazquez argues against crude extremes of sociological determinism which make us evaluate art merely by virtue of its socially "progressive" or "reactionary" content in social terms ; and, on the other, he also rejects an approach of pure aestheticism. The dilemma is one that continues to influence the rest of his analysis as well. The alienation of the artist in bourgeois society is Vazquez prime example of the hostility of capitalism to art : on the one hand, all art is seen as essentially rejecting the prevailing social order; and, on the other, the necessity of an art that eulogizes socialist society (after its establishment) is also admitted - making the determination of "art" dependent on wholly political, rather than aesthetic, criteria. With regard to film, Vazquez's position

is one of extreme regret - that this art form, with so much potential, should be virtue of the economic resources that film making demands be so utterly dependent on, and victimised by, capitalism. However, the work of Fellini, Renoir, Bunuel, etc. is, for him, a source of considerable comfort and the vision of a socialist cinema attractive enough. But, here again, the fundamental contradiction chases the argument; on the one hand, Vazquez hails the technology of mechanical reproduction as potentially great - for the possibility it offers for achieving a truly collective art form. Simultaneously however, he criticises the use of film technology insofar as it induces the atomisation and alienation of the individual, and stresses his loneliness and separateness. In the ultimate analysis, it is only in potential - awaiting the socialist revolution - that wholly and consistently great art can be brought into being. Here again the factor of State-induced or patronised art is not necessarily sanctioned - Vazquez is alive to the fact that creativity, while conditioned by the life-situation of the artist, is nevertheless not entirely explicable in these terms. And, unable to decide whether the establishment of a socialist society is a necessary prerequisite for great art or whether, on the contrary, art can itself be an instrument of helping man to conquer his alienation, Vazquez leaves the problem with the formulation that only a "truly aesthetic and human appropriation" of the work of art can ensure a situation where the production and consumption of art will

be humane and equitable, rather than mediated by economic or ideological reasons. But, the problem of ensuring a "truly aesthetic and human appropriation" remains undetermined and unresolved.

Apart from the obvious contradiction in Vazquez's analysis, there are other problems as well - primarily those of application. It is difficult, for instance, to contend that, in India, it is the films of Mrinal Sen, which informed with a socialist consciousness, represent great or true art - and that, on the other hand, the obviously more eclectic films of Satyajit Ray constitute by the same criterion, non-art. Apart from being a patently absurd formulation, this would also raise the problem of accounting for the emergence, and recognition by the Government, of a dissenting cinema in India. The mode of production does not alone determine the nature of art - a point that Vazquez emphasises while discussing "the law of the uneven development of art and economy in capitalism"<sup>70</sup> but appears to forget while making subjective judgements about specific art forms and art history. Moreover, the very complexity of the film-making process - in sheer physical terms, of numbers and finances - makes the "auteur" theory, taken over by Marxism to a degree, somewhat simplistic. In India, for instance, directors are hired by producers and producers' syndicates which finance films, supervise them at every stage, decide storylines, stars, music directors and so on. The 'auteur' theory, with its emphasis on the predilections of the individual director, does not hold

for a consistently de-individualised film industry such as the commercial film world of Bombay.

The Marxist framework, as a whole, further, appears to present certain important problems, if sought to be applied to the Indian situation. Some of these can be briefly outlined. To begin with, it must be asserted that no simple transference of frameworks is possible. A straightforward application of the Marxist approach to cinema - treated as a popular 'cultural' form - would raise several problems. Firstly, there are the basic questions of satisfactorily characterizing Indian economy, politics and society, whether as feudal or capitalist or any variant or combination of these. This is widely recognised to be a major problem in the study of Indian society and politics one that does not admit of a single and simple explanation in terms of borrowed and general categories alone. The ideological/superstructural aspects of Indian society admit even less of precise or easy description. Thus, there is the question of a crisis in legitimation, as the Frankfurt school theorists would call it. For, even if a certain consensus about the characterization of basic economic structures is arrived at, the possibility of cultural <sup>lags</sup> lasting for decades, obviates a mechanical postulation of corresponding superstructural forms. The process of legitimation in Indian society is often identified and described, but the question of what exactly is being legitimated remains nebulous. Since this is likely to determine the entire question of the modalities through which such legitimation

is achieved, the problem becomes even more complex. It is, for instance, possible to see, in several Indian films, manifold examples of value systems that are more feudal than capitalist.

Further, the impact of a medium so dependent on sophisticated technology, on people who are largely unacquainted, in their daily lives, with the most elementary kinds of technology - e.g., electricity - needs to be investigated. In fact, the entire question of a highly developed (technologically) communication medium operating in a technologically undeveloped sector/environment needs to be studied before generalisations about the "dialectic of ideology and technology" in Gouldner's sense, borrowed from advanced capitalist societies, can be ventured. In a situation where the nature, the role, and the facets are so indeterminate as to make the phenomenon of "ideology" entirely devoid of "grammar"<sup>71</sup>, and, in a situation where the role and impact of technology on the life-styles and thought-processes of people is still too young and too unknown it is impossible to put forth generalisations of this nature.

In the Indian context, moreover, it is obviously impossible to speak of "popular culture" in the western sense. The overarching influence and all-India spread of the cinematic medium certainly gives it a unique position vis-a-vis all other cultural forms : the press demands a state of literacy which we have not yet achieved, television has a limited range, radio is a medium



much more limited in its dynamism than the cinema and one whose credibility as a government-owned organisation is always suspect. But, on the other hand, in villages where the exposure to cinema is exceedingly low<sup>72</sup>, it is unlikely that the only cultural sustenance of the people is provided by the cinema.

// That is, the role of traditional culture-patterns and cultural forms needs, also, to be taken into account. To what extent, if any, does the all-India Hindi film lead to cultural displacements, by supplanting traditional patterns of culture? Or, on the other hand, is it a split modernisation - altering the technology, but reinforcing the values and thought content of feudal culture. This is a question that is particularly important in the rural context - for the urban situation is one where alternative forms of popular culture are few and the influence of the cinema paramount. And there can be no one formula to explain away the situation in an all-India manner. What the Bombay film has achieved demands more than borrowed theoretical frameworks to compete with it in its thoroughness, and to explain and understand it.

The diversity of culture-patterns organised in terms of not merely region and language, but, further, in terms of caste // and sub-caste, is important and must be accounted for. A "class analysis" of the Indian cinema cannot suffice, by stating that it exercises a soporific effect on consciousness of oppressed workers and peasants, "incorporating" them into the system and making them work for its maintenance, rather than the possibly

more beneficial (for them) state of rebellion against it. Indian cinema cannot mean the same thing to all people- and, if it does, then there must be something peculiar to it, which combines, in itself, elements that would be equally acceptable to differently conditioned minds in different parts of the country. In traditional cultures, otherwise separated by linguistic, regional and caste boundaries, a commonality in terms of religion is one possible uniting factor. But in the urban environment where the cinema is mostly seen and appreciated, the question is more complex. And yet, even in urban centres like Delhi, the important clusters of regional cultural activity are almost wholly centred around temples. It becomes necessary, at this stage, to take into account studies of traditional culture-patterns in India, from a sociological/anthropological perspective. And, further, to look for a possible answer in Indian aesthetics.

Studies in the sociology of Indian culture have, conventionally, treated the subject identifying "three major sub-structures: (1) Elite; (2) Folk and (3) Tribal"<sup>73</sup>, where the last-mentioned is taken as a "whole" in itself, while elite and folk cultures are seen as interacting with each other. The highly Sanskritic, written and systematised elite sub-structures and, on the other hand, the more oral and less rigorous classicism of the folk sub-structures are seen as continually interacting and borrowing from each other. This is perhaps made possible by the fact that they both share, in a measure, what M.N. Srinivas would perhaps

call an "all-India spread". The concept of "spread" is important - for, while being essentially caste-determined, elite sub-structure are seen as of pan-Indian impact, with regional and local boundaries, with the difference remaining only a linguistic one. Similarly, gods and goddesses are different only in name - the fundamental aspects of their nature or of the nature of the relationship that obtains between them and men are often identical. This identity is in direct contrast ✓ to, and often at variance with, elite religious systems, where regional variations are marked since dialects have been used and formalised as media for the literary works of elites. But the common "world-view" shared by both kinds of sub-structures is believed to be rooted in their share religious adherences, i.e., in their basis in the same fundamental values, and in their subscription to "common metaphysical justifications of the existent social order".<sup>74</sup>

It is only urbanisation that changes the culture-pattern. While the emerging "middle-class" sees itself as the bearer of the elite tradition, it is not the elite tradition in the tradi- ✓ tional sense; but, rather, a new somewhat westernised system of values and beliefs that displaces the old structures altogether. But our concern here is with the degree to which these displacements and changes affect also the rural structures - and, of course, the nature of these changes. While the question of Hindustani classical music, for instance, from its development from priestly and royal patronage to being cast on to an open

market to compete for the tastes of the new zamindari or middle class culture (in early colonial days) has been studied by Prof. D.P. Mukherji<sup>75</sup>, similar work on other classical art forms are conspicuous by their absence. The case of cinema is somewhat more complicated, since its impact is one that has to be gauged from its migration, from urban to rural environs, rather than vice versa. But that does not obviate the necessity for taking into account traditional culture-patterns, since the impact is one that can be assessed only in those terms. And, in doing so, there arises the problem of confronting "spreads" of various kinds, in order to reduce the problem to a general level, as much as possible. Here, there are the several concepts of "universals", "specialities", "alternates", "the cultural common denominator", the "great" and the "little tradition", and so on which have been put forth in several anthropological and cultural studies.<sup>76</sup> From M.N. Srinivas' work, it is possible to extract his distinction between the concepts of horizontal and vertical spread, as of value. The concept of horizontal spread, which sees essential similarities in the culture of the same layer of society in different regions, and that of vertical spread, which stands for those cultural elements which are shared, irrespective of caste/class divisions, within geographical boundaries - are significant. Both these levels must be taken into account in any study of culture-patterns-traditional, emergent or prevailing.

The commonality identified, in terms of religion, in all these sociological studies leads to a consideration, in the realm of art, to the possibility of an answer in Indian aesthetics. The theory has been advanced that one possible reason for the all-India appeal of the Bombay film is its incorporation of elements of all the nine rasas, which enable a complete coup of traditional theatrical forms. In Bharata's Natya Shashtra, for example, the ideal spectator is defined as "one who is happy when the course of the drama is cheerful, melancholy when it is sorrowful, who rages when it is furious, and troubles when it is fearful".<sup>77</sup> / Sympathetic appreciation - to the extent of near identification - is a phenomenon common to the average film-goer.

Though speculative in nature, these are, perhaps not unimportant considerations. For, in any transference of theoretical frameworks derived in other - notably western and advanced capitalist - contexts, it is hardly possible to ignore aspects of existing reality and cultural circumstance.

Finally, there is, in this context, the question of cultural policy, which has exercised the minds of many social scientists and policy-makers<sup>78</sup>, and within the ambit of which is included the question of cinema, its future and governmental attitudes towards it. Theoreticians have usually maintained either of two positions : (a) that cultural policy should ideally be one of no policy making at all<sup>79</sup> ; or (b) that while cultural policy can aid the process of economic development, it can, by itself,

achieve little<sup>80</sup> and therefore that only the establishment of a socialist society<sup>81</sup> can bring about a sound cultural state.

On a more practical level, it has been frequently suggested that there is need to preserve folk and tribal cultural traditions<sup>82</sup> - which are currently being eroded by, for instance, converting into commodities, objects of folk/tribal art.<sup>83</sup> Then, again, the question is raised of whether, since these forms of art are outcomes of a collective consciousness, it will be possible for industrialisation per se to once more ensure a truly collectivist appreciation of art<sup>84</sup>, or whether this will be possible only under a socialist form of society. In all these analyses, the media come in for very little attention, mostly in terms of eliciting comments about their lack of cultural standards<sup>85</sup>, and so forth. The only possible avenue of redemption for the film in India is seen by many in its nationalisation by the Government<sup>86</sup>, so that the "content" may be controlled. The probable nature of this control is rarely, if ever, discussed.

This coverage of various aspects of the problems of studying Indian cinema has been wide-ranging not because it aims at a pretentious completeness, but, rather, because it seeks to raise questions about the many dimensions involved in any such study, which may serve at least a negative purpose to prevent an overly simplistic treatment of the subject. It remains, now to investigate in some detail the one avenue that film theory has traditionally neglected (but which is

extremely important in the Indian context) - the roots of the modern popular cinema in traditional culture. This would, perhaps, help to uncover links and provide clues towards explaining the reception of film and its impact on viewers.

Notes and References

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4. Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics and Life : A Collection of Articles, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, Cf. especially "Art as a Socio-Aesthetic Totality", p. 67-74.
5. J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories : An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1976.
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13. George M., a stage magician in France, focussed on the film's ability to change reality and create illusion. Many of his films had the words "nightmare" or "dream" in their title.
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16. **Cf. John Berger's comparison of filmed painting - when a painting is reproduced by a film camera it inevitably becomes material for the film-maker's argument. A film which reproduces images of a painting leads the spectator, through the painting, to the film-maker's own conclusions. The painting lends authority to the film maker. This is because a film unfolds in time and a painting does not. In a film the way one image follows another, their succession, constructs an agreement which becomes irreversible. John Berger, Ways of Seeing, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 26.**
17. **Monaco, op. cit., pp. 309-13.**
18. **Ibid., p. 313.**
19. **Monaco, op. cit., pp. 260-63, 278-79 and 318-23.**
20. **Seigfried Kracauer, Theory of Film, Oxford University Press, New York, 1960.**
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22. **Gaston Roberge, Films for an Ecology of Mind : Essays on Realism in the Cinema, Firma RIM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1978.**
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27. **Discussed in Monaco, op. cit., p. 326.**
28. **Ibid.**

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33. Ibid., p. 93.
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37. Amos Vogel, *Film As a Subversive Art*, Random House, New York, 1974, pp. 9-10.
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## Chapter 2

THE HINDI FILM : FORM AND CONTENT

"The theatre screen is not a window through which you look at the world, it is a world in itself".

- Joris Ivens

"Because people grow to be like what they think and dream, and the movies, whether they intend to or not, guide the thoughts and dreams of millions".

- Fred Eastman and Edward Onelette

This chapter seeks to achieve a very limited task - to outline those elements of the average commercial Bombay film that could have a sociological/political import; and, to lend such speculations some plausibility by comparing them with the producers' own perceptions of their films. All this has been attempted within a framework that traces the lineages of today's popular cinema historically - firstly, rooting its formal aspects in older traditions of cultural expression; and, secondly, investigating its actual content in the context of the development of popular cine-going tastes in the past few decades. The give-and-take between these two levels has contributed, in no small measure, to the contemporary situation in popular culture, especially in urban and semi-urban areas where the impact of the cinema has tended to centre.

To understand the socio-political impact of the film on Indian society - or even to assess its potential - is inevitably

to come up against fundamental questions about the place of culture in Indian society, and the place of film in that culture.

### CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN INDIA

Few societies have been more self-consciously concerned about culture and civilization than India. This is, moreover, a concern that has always been present - whether as a positive obsession, or as a target for debunking traditional chauvinisms. As a result, we have what Nihararanjan Ray would describe as a "dynamic continuity".<sup>1</sup> The levels of cultural activity, its geo-physical variations over a sub-continental spread and, above all, its historical complexities, make it almost impossible to designate it as a single "culture", except in a very loose sense. Art history, in turn, has not tended to be historically specific - contributing, in some measure, to terminological confusion. But if an attempt has to be made, it must treat the problem historically and in the traditional<sup>2</sup> terms in which it has been articulated. Only then will it become possible to outline the elements of India's political culture, and to locate the contribution, in it, of the legitimation process in general, and the film in particular.

Culture, in India, is not synonymous with art. Art is only a fragment of culture, and one expression of it. And this is as true as of high, classical art, as it is of 'popular' culture in the Indian context. In fact, it is only in the latter

sense that art begins to approach a certain synonymy with culture, being as 'everyday' in character, as is culture as a whole. The 'everyday' -ness of culture is, in fact, the key to the understanding of its place in Indian society. This is evident, above all, in the roots of the Sanskrit words 'krishti' and 'sanskriti' denoting the total context of life.<sup>3</sup> In both usages, culture was as extensive as life itself and, within it, silpa or art, was one way of achieving the ends of culture : improvement of the self and its environment. Sukracarya's Sukraniti<sup>4</sup> is one treatise that emphasises this 'daily' character of art, automatically giving to art and culture a social dimension. The Sukraniti outlines an essentially functional theory of art, by categorising the arts into 64 kalas, 23 derived from the Vedas and 41 others. These range from dancing and gardening through metallurgy and battle arrays to the management of infants, the preparation of 'paans', the whipping of criminals and the cleaning of utensils.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from being an essentially daily occupation, art and culture were also invested with a certain social, collective character. The concept of kula-shila<sup>6</sup> is one expression of this. It exemplifies not the mere knowledge of culture and its application to real life, but the actual practice of it. To kula, cultural and social heredity, every individual was expected to add his own contribution - sila - new ideas and responses to changed and changing life-situations. And each generation's sila became part of the next one's kula. Continuity was preser-



ved and change was dynamic, because additive and not substitutive.

Art was perceived as an instrument of cultural aspirations. Objects of art were not seen as expressions of their maker's artistry, but rather, as agents for the refinement of the sensibility and the intellect of the viewer-listener-reader. The principles of rhythm, balance, proportion and harmony in the chhandas of art were agents of disciplining the mind and senses. The ultimate aim of a highly cultured life was detachment ; possible only, at its highest, for the sahrdya and vidagdha.<sup>7</sup> This was, in fact, the common purpose of all the arts.

The unity of art was also indicative of its inter-connectedness.<sup>8</sup> The Vishnudharmottaram (presumed to be an appendix to the Vishnupurana) has an important section in which the cultivation of one art is made dependent on another - sculpture on painting, painting on dance, dance on music, music on singing and so forth.<sup>9</sup> Nihar Ranjan Ray has shown how the temple complexes and village community-halls were

"so designed and organised as to unite and bring together, physically speaking, all the arts displayed and performed at one and the same place where congregated the largest majority of the community of a given time and place. The obvious purpose was to communicate to the senses and perceptions of the commonality of the people, a feeling of unity of all the skilful, imaginative and creative endeavours of the community". (10)

The best index to the commonality and uniform purpose of all is perhaps to be found in the concept of 'rasa'. Rasa is a concept

around which much theorisation of a high philosophical order has taken place. But Rasa does not, contrary to popular belief, pertain only to high aesthetics. It is seen as informing the actual appreciation of all art and cultural forms at various levels, while remaining an academic preoccupation. Thus, while cerebral explanations of it were naturally limited, the fact of 'rasa' itself was seen as highly differentiated, corresponding to the differentiations within any given audience. A common thread running through several treatises - including the Priyadarsika, the Mricchakatika, the Vikramacaritra and Natya Sastra - is the acceptance of the work of art as a "Kama-dhenu", yielding to the spectator just what he seeks from it or is capable of understanding".<sup>11</sup> The qualities of the paṇḍita (learned), the bhakta (pious), the rasika (connoisseur), the ācārya (masters of the art) and the alpa-buddhi-jana (the ordinary laymen) provide different ways of appreciating art from all possible points of view - "learning, piety, sensibility, knowledge of technique and simplicity".<sup>12</sup>

No art, thus, is without 'rasa' - which is a comprehensive principle standing, at once, for the art-process in all its phases - "the creation, the created and the appreciative".<sup>13</sup> Rasa is at once the objective factors (as, for instance, costumes, scenery, movement, characterisation, etc.) and the subjective reactions these evoke in the audience. Rasa is born, according to Bharata, out of four conditions :

Determinants : the aesthetic problem, plot theme, etc., viz. : the hero and other characters and the circumstances of time and place.

Consequents : deliberate manifestations of feeling, as gestures, etc.

Moods : transient moods (thirty three in number) induced in the characters by pleasure and pain, e.g., joy, agitation, impatience, etc. Also the permanent (nine), viz., the Erotic, Heroic, Odious, Furious, Terrible, Pathetic, Wondrous and Peaceful.

Involuntary Emotions : emotional states originating in the inner nature : involuntary expressions of emotion such as horripilation, trembling, etc. (eight in all)". (14)

The most essential condition for a work of art is unity - and, to evoke rasa, one of these permanent moods must be the dominant one, without in any way destroying the balance. This is the sthayibhava, which unites and lends stability to the various emotions in the performance. The conditions that enable the spectator to most fully identify and transcend the performance are several. Distance from real life is one of these. The mental attitude, more than physical and temporal distance, make this detachment possible, allowing for what modern theoreticians of the cinema call "the willing suspension of disbelief".

The spectator :

"disengages himself not from the whole situation but only from that part of it which impinges upon his practical self and which in normal life would lead to action. The difference between his everyday response and the aesthetic response is simply this; that whereas in the former case the emotions aroused have a motivating force, in the latter they only colour the consciousness, lending to it every other ingredient but that which leads to action. Ordinary emotion (bhava) consequently devoid of its troublesome element (the element which makes it personal to a particular self) and losing its self-

isolation and limitation, converts itself into generalised emotion". (15)

Impersonality is what makes possible this entering and leaving, at will, of a world to which one does not ordinarily belong. In a make-believe world, the application of standards of real life is not even attempted. And yet, the process is, simultaneously, a complex one "of impersonalisation and identification, of objectification and a subjective experience".<sup>16</sup>

In order to lend credibility and encourage identification, extraneous devices like dance and music, sets and costumes are used. The use of masks, in traditional Indian theatre, for example, submerged the mortality of the actor playing god or demon in a mythological play. But, more important than all these devices, is the mental discipline of the rasika himself. Complete identification with the object of art is identification on a wholly different plane of existence. It is the ultimate and highest aesthetic accomplishment. "Imaginative recreation" on the part of the spectator is necessary if he is to relive, with the artist, the very process of creation.

Theories of 'rasa' are, in fact, consistently seized of the problem of the audience. In the response of the ideal spectator or sahridaya lies the only proof of the existence of rasa. And a truly successful work of art must be able to communicate, to the audience, the artist's own experience through his creation. There are, however, several obstacles

that prevent this identification from taking place. Among these are unrealistic themes, underdistancing, physical and other handicaps and many others which have an almost contemporary ring when examined in the light of the handling of the film medium in India (see pages 65-66).

One important aspect of traditional theories relating to audience perception of a work of art is the fact that this is very often couched in religious terms. The first question in the excerpt from the Vishnudharmottaram pertains to the making of images of deities. According to Coomaraswamy, an important difference between Oriental and Christian art is the absence of realism/naturalism and the attempt to duplicate what is seen.<sup>17</sup> No artistic frills are used to embellish and augment the effect of a folk art form. On the Bengali jatra, for instance, Tagore has commented that perfection is not the endeavour of the performer - it is, rather, the appreciative audience which must "perfect the song in their own mind by the force of their own feelings".<sup>18</sup> Images, in Hindu art, are thus regarded as if animated by the concerned deity. The Krishna Leela, according to Nilakantha, is not a historical event, but a series of events that take place in "the heart of man".<sup>19</sup> Religion, thus, adapts itself to human need, and God makes Himself as we are. The aesthetic quality of the image is here irrelevant. The criterion in art, therefore, is not of likeness or illusion, but of "vitality, unity, grace", and so forth.<sup>20</sup>

The influence of religion is one equalising factor in both 'high culture' and 'popular' cultural forms. But it is particularly pervasive in folk culture, where art is of a collective nature and there is little room for individuality and originality. In fact, while in Europe, the individualisation of art, art with a named artist/maker/creator, comes only with the Renaissance, in India this can be seen as only one stream of two - the restricted artistic field, thriving on court patronage, and lending itself to a literary, almost Brahmanical appreciation. The "discovery of the individual"<sup>21</sup> in Mughal art, however, could not, as in the Renaissance, achieve a more extended meaning for life and culture outside the courts. Usually, literate arts alone were signed arts, authored arts - but they were not the arts of the many. The second stream - of popular, collective art - had a great deal in common, despite regional differences : mainly the religious motif and, perhaps partially, a similarity in social and economic conditions, levels of technological development, traditions of political rule, and so on.

Rural artistry was essentially the purveyor of a community tradition. It was also, largely, familistic : art being a hereditary vocation and the artist being seen as having a productive function rather than as a parasite on society; whole families were often employed on a single work. Then, again, it was predominantly themes connected with family life and events that were portrayed. Even the gods had mortal dimensions -

they all had families, needs and preoccupations similar to those of their worshippers.<sup>22</sup> But predominantly, the agrarian situation - being the location of this art - provided the themes and motifs for it. Songs and dances, proverbs and festivals, all centered around agrarian life. To the extent that agrarian life was collective life, rural art was collective in spirit as much as in its creation. Art and life were, thus, co-extensive. The complete fusion of religion with social life was also reflected, in the cultural and artistic spheres. In terms of content, almost all traditional Indian art has some religious or semi-religious associations. This is not at all surprising given the extent to which religions themselves can be seen as social institutions. The position of the temple, for instance -

"...a temple or temple-complex, functionally speaking, was the main, indeed the most important centre of local social life. It served as the main marketing centre as well as the public meeting place of the community which on special occasions included men and women from far and near. It served as a bank and treasure-vault for whatever valuables a community happened to possess, and when there were civil strifes, political upheavals and military incursions, it was the securest fort where the community used to seek its shelter. Secondly, it was the standing public exhibition ground of contemporary life of actuality and imagination in terms of the visual languages of sculpture and painting. It was also the main centre for all the contemporary performing arts like those of music and dancing, drama and dialogue in verse. It was the centre for giving readings and holding discussions and disputations. A temple or temple-complex was indeed the habitat of all the contemporary muses and hence the audio-visual communication and education centre of the community. The centre of whatever formal education and scholastic activities the community could provide for was also the temple and the temple complex". (23)

But, in all this, the limits of the argument cannot be forgotten. Coomaraswamy has asserted<sup>24</sup> that freedom of worship and thought are not persecuted, but a breach of social etiquette is a much more serious matter which could lead, in an extreme case, to social excommunication. Types of conduct, sanctioned by tradition, provide models of good form, and religious differences lose pre-eminence.

#### SOME ELEMENTS OF 'TRADITIONAL' POLITICAL CULTURE

Both these dimensions of the argument together provide a good clue to the study of political culture in India<sup>25</sup>, and the place, in it, of the religious motif. The first underscores the fact that the conditioning of responses to political rule is, in some measure, the function of belief-systems rooted in religious world-views; the second points to the important commonalities that, despite religious differences, colour perceptions of obedience and governance.

In the first part of this chapter, the religious roots of culture and art in India have been described in terms of the dominant Hindu tradition, and used almost interchangeably. This is, indeed, an argument fraught with dangerous implications, not the least of which is sectarianism. And yet, the predominance of the Hindu world-view cannot be altogether denied - not merely in terms of that being the quantitatively largest religious community at any given time<sup>26</sup>, but also in terms of its assimilative capacity and its far-reaching impact on other incoming



religious and belief-systems. This impact was of a kind that would, in the sphere of political culture, appear to present a peculiarly unified picture, despite wider religious differences.

Between Hinduism and Islam in India, for instance, there developed commonalities of a wide-ranging nature, only some of which were rooted in religion. Shared dilemmas of an economic and social nature can be posited as important sources of common culture traditions - the spread of rigid stratification principles in terms of the caste system, for instance, to Islam and Christianity is one illustration. Similarly, there was a common subjection to revenue administration and to economic exploitation arising out of land relations, the principles of law and criminal jurisprudence were the same for all, while only personal law remained separated on religious grounds. D.P. Mukherjee has spoken in terms of 'primary' similarities which do not, historically, respect communal boundaries : Manners and social etiquette, for instance. If, after all, a rigid system of stratification, deeply rooted in religion, could spread, other aspects of social life were not likely to be impervious to the effects of the numerically superior and more deeply entrenched indigenous intellectual order. Some of these similarities which cut across religious boundaries are also, perhaps, significant from the point of view of political culture. And it is striking that while sociologists so wide apart as Yogendra Singh and D.P. Mukherjee should have accepted the same elements as characteristic

of this common "tradition", political science in India has tended to ignore them altogether.<sup>27</sup>

Among these elements are, for instance, ideas of 'ordination', of hierarchy, subservience, obedience, quietism, passivity, acceptance and so on. In the Hindu and Islamic traditions, equally, there are better developed theories of responsibility - social and familial - than of rights. Rights are rarely absolute, always hedged in by conditions.<sup>28</sup> Even in the sphere of politics, the divinity of the ruler, the sanctification of his authority by the priestly or spiritual leadership and so forth, are basically similar. Responses to political rule may be rooted in, firstly, a respect for authority per se, grounded in the fundamental fear of the consequences arising from confronting it; and, secondly, in cultural and social world-views, to some degree influenced by religion. Broadly, these can be seen as informing, at least partially, the perception of political rule and governance in traditional India. The paradox of contemporary Indian politics is that, in spite of a markedly different political situation and despite a considerable degree of technological sophistication in the instruments of rule, the motifs exploited to political advantage are still rooted, quite deeply, in perceptions of this kind. That cultural forms do unwittingly or otherwise, contribute to this process is a question that needs to be examined in the context of the film. But, for the present, it would be worthwhile to see how, even in formal terms, a new form like the film medium has been moulded and influenced by

traditional cultural forms.

The Film Medium in India : Its Roots in Older Traditions of Cultural Expression

That familiarity facilitates acceptance is a truism - one, moreover, with a certain measure of validity. It is also a principle that appears, consciously or otherwise, to have inspired the handling of the film medium in India, in consonance with elements of older cultural traditions. Nothing, it is certain, could be remoter from traditional means of cultural expression than a technologically advanced medium like the film. And yet, it is in India, where the gap is greatest, that elements from antecedent cultural traditions have been borrowed and drawn upon. The technological distance between traditional folk media and the film, for instance, has been quite effectively bridged by the similarities in form that become apparent on a closer examination of this medium and its use in India.

Art history constantly emphasizes the fact that no art is without precedent.<sup>29</sup> Giving to the popular Indian cinema - in its potential - the benefit of doubt regarding its claims to being an "art form" - this argument would appear to be of great relevance to any discussion of contemporary Indian culture. The extent of the displacement that the film has effected in the older arts is a question that is always debatable. On the one hand, there is the argument that there has not, in any case, been an absolute decline in the numbers of people that provide

audience for the classical arts - and, therefore, that cinema has not eroded these. This is somewhat specious argument - for it ignores the fact that the so-called "classical" arts have expanded to include large audience at the same time, compared to their earlier situation of complete dependence on feudal patronage. Dependence on urban markets in metropolitan centres is undoubtedly less secure than court patronage, but it has, perhaps, its monetary compensations, even though for a select few. What (because high art has found alternate high class as an audience) has, in fact, suffered is not this kind of art but rural art forms - folk art at the level of small village communities. Industrialisation and its attendant problems like urban migration have had as much to do with this, as have other factors. To the extent that the cinema has penetrated the rural parts, it has effected a displacement of a different kind altogether - one that is made possible by a certain continuity. In a situation of low literacy, older folk art forms were primarily visual forms. The position regarding literacy has not changed significantly, and the emphasis on the visual continues even today. The only difference is that while earlier, this art was being produced from within and by the members of the community, it is now brought from an urban centre. This new dependence on centres of communication/entertainment located in urban areas is in the nature of what contemporary communication jargon would call a "one-way flow". The distinctions between performer and audience now become absolute<sup>30</sup>; art does not, any longer, remain

ceremonial and collective enterprise organised around activities that are shared.

Another view is that the film has replaced only the novel in India.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, this ignores the important fact that the film is capable of appealing to non-literate audiences, too. More importantly, it becomes difficult to credit, given the relative rise in literacy rates, the sheer increase in publishing figures, and so on. Undoubtedly, the quality of literature that sells may be of a markedly different, some may even say inferior, quality. But then, just as the sales of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's novels may have decreased, much more has the tendency to base films on those novels. Popular literature and the popular film are today, in India, treading much the same unfortunate ground.<sup>32</sup>

It is, however, in the fields of dance and music that the film is generally considered to be the worst offender. The guise in which classical and folk dances alike are presented in the popular Hindi cinema is regarded with a good deal of anguish from exponents of these forms in their pure state :

"films have set the standard for the dance. In many small cities where we perform, at the outset people expect to witness dance as they know it from the cinema ... Many of the dances are unidentifiable with Eastern culture and are more akin to the Hollywood version of the 'exotic East'". (33)

But it is perhaps in the realm of music that the film has had its most far-reaching impact. And that is a development

that was prefigured as early as the first Indian sound film, 'Sound', to the Indian film-producer, spelt an opportunity to use music to supplement visual entertainment. Some of the early 'talkies' are known to have had little content besides music and dance, with upto as much as 71 songs a film.<sup>34</sup> This can, perhaps, be seen as a throwback to the earlier tradition of the performing arts in India where pride of place, in the arts, was given to the music.<sup>35</sup> The ease with which all the musical, dramaturgical, dance and visual elements of traditional art forms have been incorporated into cinematic usage in India is little short of striking.

The combination of almost all the 'rasas' in any one given film appears, in fact, to be the touchstone of the archetypal "ideal" Indian film. The dominant 'rasa' or 'sthayibhava' may vary from one to the other, but rarely are the comic, the sad, the wondrous and other elements excluded from the average film. There is, indeed, something for everyone even though at a qualitatively different level.

Techniques of distancing are at least partially built into the cinematic medium. So also the use of 'identification' and 'impersonalisation' techniques which are functions of any fictional story rather than of the actual stylistics of its presentation.<sup>36</sup> This, however, is not specific to the landing of the film form in India : even film theories of western origin have repeatedly taken cognisance of these aspects.

The most interesting parallels are in the several obstacles that classical aesthetic theory in India outlines as hampering identification of the necessary order (see page 55-6); and correspondingly, the "remedies" suggested to overcome them. To make an unrealistic theme credible, for instance, devices were suggested. Indian films are more uniformly unreal than most - or, if not unreal, then pseudo-real - pretending to a reality that does not exist anywhere except in imagination; but which peopled by apparently ordinary and familiar beings with whom identification is encouraged, and furnished with some of the trappings of real life, give it an unreal sense of reality.<sup>37</sup> The use of extraneous devices such as sets, costumes, dance and music to encourage self-identification is already an integral part of the trappings of the commercial cinema. Dance and music in bizarre backgrounds are given credibility by the use of innovative techniques such as the fantasy. Fantasy sequences are intrinsic parts of most Bombay films, and should perhaps be seen as more than provident avenues for the diseased imaginations of producers and directors, as they usually are. Bizarre extravaganzas - taking place, quite literally, in cloud-cuckoo-land, misted over at the edges to create an airy feeling of non-existence, in a world without definite, tangible boundaries - are patently unreal, and expect to be treated as such. But, in relation to the rest of the film, they inversely suggest the reality of that which is not, on the screen, patent fantasy. That is, a fantasy sequence would not get seen as a fantasy within

a larger fantasy. On the contrary, its obvious unreality would tend to subtly underscore the reality of the rest, in contrast.

In traditional forms of cultural expression, the performance of a preliminary ritual like a benediction or a dance was seen as one way of overcoming the initial 'underdistancing' of the spectator. The Indian film has, at its disposal, other such meaningless rituals - the darkened hall is one, advertisement films and other shorts are another. But, it is important and interesting that there are hardly any films which do not start with a religious invocation or symbol of some kind. Further, the actual launching of the production of a film (its 'mahurat'), as any popular film magazine would show, is itself a veritable ritual, with pandits and auspicious dates. Even the choosing of a title, the first letter of it, and the number of words in it are often astrologically determined.

Aesthetic theory also numbers, among problems of identification, "the lack of evidence" which requires a complete audiovisual impact. It is, of course, in the very nature of the film medium to provide that. The lack of pre-eminence is sought to be remedied by the stability that the predominance of one 'rasa' can provide. The Bombay film, today, is rather limited in genre - being almost synonymous with a romantic film. Around this one 'sthayibhava', all the other, minor moods are arranged. But every film must, nevertheless, be replete with as many 'rasas' as it can possibly accommodate.



There is, thus, a clear theory about audiences and audience-response in Indian aesthetics. The differentiated view of the audience is one important aspect of this. The Indian film all caters to a widely differentiated audience - not, perhaps, an audience graded hierarchically on the basis of appreciative capacity defined in aesthetic terms. The nature of investment in the Bombay film - its magnitude and its sources - make it inevitable that the film should contain elements so diverse that they are obviously meant to entertain various sections of audience, by casting them in the same mould as characters in a film are cast. They, too, are stereotypes. Where the stereotypes at the two levels are congruent, the formula is called a "runaway box-office hit". Where not, it "flops". And in his search for formulae, for tried and sure recipes of success the producer-director also performs a social and political function. But that is, perhaps, to raise the question too soon. To return to the point, there is romance for younger people, religious music for old ladies, noble examples for seriously inclined young men, some rebellion against authority followed by an eventual 'return to the right path' for the angry young, fight scenes for the adventurously disposed and so on.

The 'new temples' of modern India are not, as Nehru said, its steel plants. They are, without question, its cinema halls. Temporal stars have replaced the heavenly pantheon in their power to elicit devotion. These are the new heroes, the new gods, the new supermen. In traditional art, the Gods were made human,

given families and needs, activities and preoccupations corresponding to the daily lives of their devotees. They were sought to be made progressively real. Today, the trend is the exact reverse - apparently just-like-us men and women are portrayed as exceptionally talented, superhuman, invincible (physically and intellectually) while, on the other hand, the film magazines and gossip-column encourage identification by giving them their real, just-like-you-and-me lives off-screen.<sup>39</sup> One role reinforces and adds to the other. The mystique is complete.

There are, thus, many similarities of a formal nature that can be detected in the handling of the cinematic medium in India with the handling of the other, older and more traditional art and cultural forms. This is not to say that our film producers are deeply steeped in ancient tradition. It is merely to suggest that the task of a comparatively "new" medium (which has taken only three-quarters of a century to establish itself) must have been considerably facilitated by drawing upon already present elements in an older tradition of cultural expression. This would become further evident in the next section (a brief historical overview of the development of the cinema in India) which points to the fact that the film in India, in its development, evolved, in its contemporary form, through a long route that began with the mythological/devotional film, a genre that persisted for many decades as the dominant one. Films are

powerful vehicles of ideas - but an idea (especially a new one) often needs to be given a familiar wrapping. Palatability is as much a function of form, as of content.

An Historical Overview of the Development of the Hindi Cinema

The film came to India in 1896, as early as the west. It was not, of course, film as we understand it today : only the illusion of movement created by flickering photographic images on a screen. Though brought to India by the Lumiere brothers of France, this novel form of urban entertainment soon found its indigenous patrons, as well. The history of the first decade of Indian cinema (and, indeed, the first decade of this century) was the history of short films, some documented in India itself, some imported - as before - from Europe. Two trends of this period prefigured, significantly, the developments that were to follow. In Calcutta, Hiralal Sen, one of the pioneer exhibitors of films, went into production and, in 1903, brought out a package show called "Indian Life and Scenes", which was advertised as including,

"events of Indian history, scenes from Indian mythology, chapters from domestic life, flowers of our theatrical scenes ..." (39)

This was a trend that was to prove, to the present day, the extreme soundness of financially backing a mythological film. Another important, though much less sustained trend, was the nationalist one. J.F. Madan's Calcutta-based Elphinstone

Bioscope Company - later Madan Theatres - advertised, among its earliest ventures, "Swadeshi" pictures, filmed records of the 1905 Anti-Partition movement in Bengal.

However, it was still some years before these trends could be brought to fruition in feature film-making. In the interim, the reign of shorts continued with subjects as diverse as, on the one hand, the Delhi Durbar of 1911, the Garden Party to Sir Shapurji Broacha, cricket matches and so forth; and, on the other, films on Benares, the Ganapati Festival, etc. So little is known about the audiences for these early films - but, given the small handful of cinema halls based in the bigger towns and cities, it was perhaps inevitably that the themes should be largely of the former kind.

It was only in 1912 that India's first feature film<sup>40</sup> was released - R.G. Torney's Pundalik. Nor surprisingly, it was based on a legendary theme about a famous saint of Maharashtra. It ran for a record two weeks and was frequently advertised in these terms :

"a fascinating religious subject, a popular Hindi drama".

and

"Almost half the Bombay Hindu population has seen it last week and we want the other half to do so now". (41)

Pundalik set the trend for the films that followed it, the most notable among them being D.G. Phalke's 'Raja Harishchandra'. All these films, almost without exception, took inspiration from

the epics, and other mythological sources.<sup>42</sup> Their titles speak for themselves :

Savitri (1912), An Episode from Ramayana (1912);  
Raja Harischandra (1913), Mohini Bhasmasur (1913),  
Satyavan Savitri (1914), Lanka Dahan (1917), Ram Banvas  
 (1918), Krishna Janma (1919), Kalia Mardan (1919),  
Ahilya Uddhar (1919), Viswamitra-Menaka or Shakuntala  
Janma

At the close of the second decade, 25 feature films had been produced in India, almost all of which were capable of appealing to wide - though presumably Hindu - audiences for reasons of (a) their popular religious or mythological themes and (b) the fact that they were silent films, not yet besieged by the complications of sound and, therefore, language. They could appeal to audiences that were culturally and religiously homogeneous though territorially and linguistically far apart :

"During the silent days, it helped a great deal to re-create on the screen stories that were widely known to the people. There was another reason too, though a latent one : this celebration of India's glorious past was an implied criticism of the alien power that ruled India, and which has brought so much misery to its people.

Besides, the Indian has always felt close to and fascinated by his mythology".

Till the first major crisis of the film medium in India - the introduction of sound - film-making continued through the '20s, much as it had in the previous decade. Mythologicals

were turned out in large numbers, with film-producing companies plagiarising each others' work, and there were many re-makes of the same themes : as, for instance, with Pundalik, Tukaram and Ambarish.<sup>43</sup> Early attempts to make films rooted in the contemporary milieu were not particularly successful - witness Dhiren Ganguly's "social comedy" - Bilat Ferat (England Returned) (Bengali). Ganguly, soon enough, turned to films like Yashoda Nandan. The 'social' theme was brought into the cinema by a curious route : the national movement. There was a spurt of newreels on manifestly nationalist themes<sup>44</sup> : the bonafire of foreign cloth in Bombay in 1921 was filmed, as were the Ahmedabad Congress (1922), the 37th Congress at Gaya, the funeral of Chittarenjan Das showing Gandhi, Gandhi's tributes to Tilak after his death, and so on. There were other films, too - 'Mahatma at Juhu', 'Mahatma's Miracle', 'Charkha' (which sought to depict the benefits of the Khadi movement) and less direct films like 'Vandemataram Ashram' (in which Bhakta Prahlad was described as a satyagrahi) and 'Non-Cooperation' (a comedy with a politically motivated title). At least one film company - the Kohinoor - displayed a sense of adventure in veering away from mythologicals. When it did produce them, it used them craftily - as, for example, in its 'Bhatka Vidur', based on the Mahabharata, where the spinning-wheel was used symbolically and the downfall of the Kauravas was hinted at as a possible outcome of the British Empire, too. But these developments were somewhat clouded over by the fact that there was a tremendous increase

in the number of films produced over this period of time. The figure, which stood at 18 per year in 1920 had, at the turn of that decade, gone up to 172. And the major part of these remained, without question, the ever-popular mythologicals and semi-mythological historical films.<sup>45</sup> Little had changed from the previous decade : Nala Damvanti (1921), Dhruva Charitra, Shiv Ratri, Ramayana, Bhatka Shiromani, Susaktha Haren, Sankaracarva, Puran Bhagat, and many other mythologicals were made along with some devotional and historical films : Life of Lord Buddha, Prithviraj Chauhan, Veer Durgadas, The Light of Asia, Razia Begum.

By the mid-20s, a few contemporary themes had begin to be taken up. Beeswin Sadi, Sharif Badmash, Kala Naag, Justice, Handsome Blackguard, Telephone Girl, Typist Girl, Cinema Queen etc. Political satire had one notable champion - Phalke. His 'Municipal Election' was a lampoon of election practices. But the more significant attempts to make films aware and contemporary were in films obviously inspired by nationalist rhetoric about social reform - especially untouchability, dowry, child widows and other such problems. Thus, there were films like Two Untouchables, Child Widow, Sharda (Kanva Vikraya), Young India, Social Evil, etc.

None of these films were limited to any one particular film-production centre, being spread across the country, but mainly focussed in Bombay, Poona, Calcutta and Madras. The

coming of sound to the Indian cinema was, therefore, to have important repercussions for not only its audience-appeal, but also for the locations of the major production companies. The establishment of Bombay as the centre of the Hindi film industry was the most important of the changes wrought by sound. Bombay was also the first to diversify into the production of fantasies, on the one hand, and contemporary 'socials', on the other. The film centre based in Bengal began to draw heavily upon literary works, particularly those of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. In Madras, the emphasis was still on mythologicals and other 'spectacle' films - that, indeed, continued to be the invariable beginning for any new regional cinema - the Telugu cinema, for example, started with Bhakta Prahlad. It can be suggested that the mythologicals served a very important purpose, insofar, as by providing the themes for this new medium of entertainment, they also ensured for the medium itself a certain continuing receptivity, even when the themes began to change. It could also be suggested, but with much less certainty and much more caution, that the credibility enjoyed by the cinematic medium in later years may have been positively affected by the religious connection.

The 'thirties, however, saw the development of a more secularised religious content in films. Once the initial rush - to re-make (with sound) mythological themes which had already been exhausted in the silent era - was spent, there was a fresh trend to make films around the lives of popular saints.



Many of these were made in a spirit of attack against religious dogmatism. V. Shantaram's "Amrit Manth", "Chandidas", etc. are examples of these. But popular ardour for anything resembling a religious/miracle theme proved to be undiminished. Sant Tukaram (Prabhat Talkies), which also won an award at the Venice Film Festival, proved this. Not merely did people turn out to see it in large numbers, but posters and photographs from the film became objects of religious worship.

Some of these films were also used to carry messages of a 'social' (then invariably nationalist) nature. Chandidas for instance, preached the virtues of temperance. There were films about the emancipation of women (Barrister's Wife, Talash-e-Hug); about the evils of bigamy (Maa); about the cruelty of marrying off young girls to considerably older man (The Unexpected); about 'fallen' women (Purnima); about divorce (Talag); about prison life (Jailor and Baghban) and so on. 'Dharti Mata' debated the relative merits of industrialisation and agriculture. The solutions, however, were rarely radical. For example, one of the most popular films of the '30s - P.C. Barua's Devdas (1935) - based on Sarat Chandra's novel, was a story of a wealthy young man whose love for a poor girl is frustrated by barriers of tradition and class. But, though it did touch on important social problems, the film, like Barua's others, was, "in the end, constructed to evade them".<sup>46</sup>

"To some extent Devdas was a film of social protest. It carried an implied indictment of arranged marriage and

undoubtedly gave some satisfaction on this score to those who hate this institution. The powerful appeal of Devdas to the young must have been based in part on this element. Yet once this theme has set the story in motion, the film Devdas seems far less interested in the social problem than in the suffering".  
(emphasis added) (47)

Another Barua film - Adhikar (1938) - illustrates this point as well :

"The story tells of Radha, a girl of the city slums, who longs for wealth and happiness. When she learns that she is the illegitimate daughter of a rich man, whose other daughter Indira, born of legal wedlock, is living in utmost luxury, she goes to Indira and claims half their father's estate. Indira, shocked at what she learns, gives her shelter and money. Not content with this, Radha now brings about an estrangement between Indira and her fiance Nikhilesh, and ultimately goads her half sister into giving her not only half but the whole of their father's estate. However, her unscrupulous ways turn the world against Radha in the end she learns to her dismay that even her boy friend of the slums, Ratan, no longer cares for her.

By making Radha, in the later portions of the story, an increasingly unscrupulous character, the dramatist managed to remove the spotlight from the problem of social and economic disparity with which he confronted us at the start. In the end, he left matters weighted on the side of the status quo. Barua, aware of many issues, but enamored of doom, was not essentially a radical force". (48)

The 'thirties were also, notably, the period when the narrow 'Hindu' appeal of films was widened to include Muslim characters as well - largely through films purporting to be historical. Films preaching Hindu-Muslim unity went through rigorous censorship (e.g., Ram Rahim), even though censorship, at this stage, was largely limited to overt political comment. But there were,

as Rangoonwala suggests<sup>49</sup>, authorities higher than the censors themselves. And when issues that were essentially communal took too amiable a turn, these "higher authorities" exerted themselves. This happened when a film "Wrath" - portraying a romance between a Muslim boy and a Hindu girl - proved too unpalatably radical, and the film was 'banned' in Bengal and the Punjab, where the Hindu-Muslim population ratios were high. Unity and harmony were obviously acceptable only so long as contemporary issues were not disturbed.

The early '40s were not significantly different from the late '30s. The mythological trend was temporarily exhausted, and a new tradition of romantic entertainers was inaugurated, which was to reach its highest (or lowest) point in the '60s. These were films like Kangan, Bandhan, Jhoola, Basant, Prem Nagar, Station Master, Deas Baig, Jawab and so on. Family dramas also a major preoccupation of the film-makers of the '60s, were released in large numbers, constructed around essentially domestic issues : Ghar Ki Lagi, Ghar Sansar, Grahasti, Charanon ki Dasi, Shyvan Siddha and so forth, the last mentioned with clearly nationalist overtones. More daring themes were also tackled - including untouchability (Achhoot), mercy-killing (Deepak), communal harmony (Padosi), corruption (Apna Desh) and others. Only a handful of notable films on saints - Bhakta Kabir and Bhakta Surdas - were made. Mehboob's Roti was a film with a progressive 'socialist' message, where the millenium was portrayed in the form of a mountain tribe where there is

complete sharing and no class barriers. Debaki Bose's Apna Ghar was patently Gandhian in its message of the victory of the weak and poor by peaceful means, changing the heart of the strong and rich.

By the mid-40s, however, a very mixed picture presented itself. A fresh spurt on the mythological front (with Bharat Milap, Draupadi, Shakuntala and Ram Rajya) was paralleled by semi-historical productions like Shah Jehan, Sikander and even a Muslim social Khazanchi. The constants remained nationalism, romance and mostly combinations of both these elements. Songs were the most effective medium of nationalist sentiment - even a few bars of a popular nationalist tune could, and often, did, offend the censors. It is not surprising that what later became independent India's national anthem was first a film song.<sup>49</sup>

The war did not affect the films unduly, except around 1945, when production fell, in quantitative terms. In terms of quality, the rash of musical, romantic entertainers became more or less endemic. They were pursued by film-makers largely because they were trouble-free so far as the censors were concerned and on the other hand, because they were also most profitable. Some producers, of course, continued to produce mythologicals in the firm belief that it was a socially responsible // and wholly desirable thing to do :

"I believe in the need for mythological films. I believe they have a mission and I believe in that mission .....

Pictures like Tukaram, Goal Krishna and Dnaneshwar more nearly represent the social genius of India than most of the so-called social films. They present deep-seated moral and spiritual ideals through personalities not merely idealized but also idealized through centuries. They symbolize the Golden Age which most nations and faiths believe existed and which most religions hope to bring about. As such symbols, their influence on the public mind is wholly wholesome and definitely desirable".  
(50)

By 1949, the shortages (war-tims) had cleared, and a spurt in production followed. The 1945 figure of 99 films (74 of them in Hindi) revived to 200, of which 156 were in Hindi. Pitifully few purposeful films were made in this pre-independence period - Dharti Ke Lal, Neecha Nagar and Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani were perhaps the only exceptions. The ratio between the two kinds of films has not been bettered to date. And not all the awards given to Satyajit Ray, or the financial backing given to Mani Kaul and others by the Film Finance Corporation, has been able to rescue the Hindi films to the so-called 'new wave'. The emergence of producers like K.A. Abbas in that era made as negligible a ripple on the total film scene then, as the proponents of 'the other cinema' have been able to achieve in recent years.

Through the following decades, of the third of which we are now nearing the close, there was an absolute increase in production figures and an absolute decline in quality. There was, in the '50s, the much acclaimed work of Bimal Roy (Do

Bigha Zamin, Sujata) of Raj Kapoor, of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and, marginally, of Gurn Dutt. In Bengal, Satyajit Ray, Tapan Sinha and Ritwick Ghatak made their mark. But the overwhelming numbers were of the romantic dramas which went from strength to strength<sup>51</sup>, in their own proliferation as much as in audience expansion. Both production and acclaim were made increasingly possible on a larger scale than ever before, by the increase in exhibition facilities - cinema halls, whether permanent, temporary or touring.

"Escapist fantasy", "aesthetic bankruptcy", "appealing to the lowest common denominator", "bad western influences" - were the most vituperative attacks the industry could elicit. Few attempts were made to explore what exactly this phenomenon - below contempt for some and a veritable addiction for many more - stood for, and why. Two studies were made in the '50s, Asit Baran Bose's Inaccessible Ph.D. work in sociology from Lucknow University and Panna Shah's survey-based research work from Bombay University.<sup>52</sup> In the '60s, Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy undertook a detailed examination of the Indian film from its origins. And that was all. The most updated of them all, of course, was the latter, valuable for its insight as much as for its keen investigation of the industry as an industry. The emphasis was, of course, on nothing that could be seen, optically, as developments for the better on the Indian screen, but the vast mass of the average Bombay film was not ignored, either. And in the absence of much information

about this period, it is to their work that one must turn for an overview :

✓ Meanwhile in Bombay, formula was king. The formula, as dictated by exhibitor and distributor, called for one or two major stars, at least half a dozen songs, and a few dances. The story was of declining importance. It was conceived and developed toward one objective : exploitation of the idolized star. The subject matter, with increasing concentration, was romance. An overwhelming number of Bombay films now began with the chance acquaintance of hero and heroine, often in unconventional manner and novel setting. In backgrounds and characters there was strong bias toward the glammers. Obstacles were usually provided by villainy or accident, not by social problems. Dance and song provided conventionalized substitutes for love-making and emotional crisis". (53)

This formula of a star, six songs, three dances<sup>54</sup> was pursued, and the result usually spelt commercial success. Novelty was introduced gradually - it touched, first, the hero and heroine, progressively westernised in attire and behaviour, but always professing a conservative Hindu outlook on all questions. It spread, gradually, to music and to dance. Jazz penetrated the sphere of music and film songs, hitherto based on semi-classical music, were openly plagiarised from popular western melodies. The traditional villain was also subject to western influence - particularly from the American gangster film. Organised gangs of smugglers, racketeers and sundry criminals replaced the earlier villains who were, quite simply, evil men of bad intentions, rarely sinister and sophisticated, with international spheres of control and influence. Similarly, the vamp was now based in expensive, but seedy, restaurants/hotels. She was

rarely, now, the exploited prostitute with a heart of gold, comforting the hero in his frustrations, but the evil, gun-wielding and cabaret-dancing seductress with possible link-ups with the villain himself. This dictated the new quality of dance forms introduced into the Hindi film, the other side of which was typified by the heroine, representing the forces of good and noble, whose dance style was obviously borrowed from the former, but kept up a pretence of being rooted in firmly Indian traditions of classical/folk dance.<sup>55</sup> All these apparent changes, however, are only symbols of a more important trend. The Bombay film was increasingly carrying ideas with a strong sociological import, the transmission of which was only being facilitated by ploys of this nature. Before attempting to detail some of these, it is necessary to return, briefly, to a survey of the academic/critical work that has already been done on the subject.

#### What the Hindi Film Conveys : A Survey of the Existing Literature on the Subject

Academic attention to the sociological aspects of the Indian film has as has already been pointed out, been less than adequate. The basic assumptions underlying the small number of treatments that do exist are few enough to allow quick enumeration. That entertainment is the main function of the film industry is the most fundamental of these. It is as much a reflection of producers' attitudes as of viewers. The implications of film for society have been seen as uniformly good so long as they



provide, through entertaining diversions, a kind of release - escapism is here the key word. When, however, the accepted standards of 'wholesome' entertainment are even slightly transgressed - or, worse, violated - there are outcries of protest. Two of the most familiar slogans of these are 'sex' and 'violence'.

A trifle less evaluative in nature are the assessments of film in terms of other criteria : in physical/psychological terms, Panna Shah has drawn heavily upon research into child and adult psychology (mostly in the U.S.A) to show the harmful effects of cine-going on the eyes, the dreams and the behaviour patterns of individuals.<sup>56</sup> In 'social' terms the focus invariably rests on fashions, fan magazines, identifications with film stars and so forth. As for political content, it is almost customary to point to Tamil cinema, to lament the lack of a political Hindi cinema and, of course, to cite the hand-picked examples of Kissa Kusse Ka and Aandhi - each identified with a particular political situation/regime/personality. At best, the films of producer-director Manoj Kumar (Purah aur Paschim, Upkar, Roti Kapda aur Makaan) are seen as vaguely political, for their strong commitment to nationalist ideas.

The assumptions in this analysis are somewhat different. That entertainment is the purpose - ostensible or otherwise - of the film form in India must be granted. But that must not be allowed to obscure the fact that it may also be performing

✓ a social, even political - albeit not apparent - function. Filmologist Roberge, for example, makes the point that the whole "style" of the Hindi film and the "taste" in which the enterprise is commandeered, smack of "ruling class ideology" - of deliberately attempting to keep the separateness of 'us' and 'them' clear, by not letting the "masses" rise to their level of "good taste", of denying them a partnership in the celebration of life :

"They must be content with enjoying the spectacle of that celebration which the ruling class gives them".  
(57)

✓ So, too, the fact of the Hindi film being "escapist fantasy" can hardly be denied. But the normative aspect of the argument must be abandoned. Escapism is perhaps good and effective in the same sense as a tranquillizer is. But from whose viewpoint, is another matter altogether. Even the "corrupting" influence ✓ of the Hindi film is not intrinsically different from the effects which are seen as good or wholesome. In the case of ✓ violence, for instance, Roberge points out that far from providing the impetus for violence, the Hindi film is a safety-valve for it.<sup>58</sup> The violence is so worked out in the cinema-hall that it becomes redundant outside. It is not a stimulant, but a soporific.

As far as society and politics are concerned, fashions and fan magazines are only the trivial and external symbols of a much greater impact. Whether this impact does actually occur,

is not a question that can be answered - either by Dr. Panna Shah's questionnaire to movie-goers or by Dr. A.B. Bose's statistical content-analysis of 60 Hindi films. But it is this impact to which at least some clues must be found, however, imperfectly and tentatively. Here, this is attempted by picking up the treatment of a few definite themes that frequently recur in the average commercial Hindi film, on the basis of about 25 to 30 films, most of them produced in the last 3 years and some in the '60s and early '70s. It might, for example be rewarding to study the treatment of the urban-rural nexus, of religion, of poverty, of law and order, of justice, of women and so forth. This could be supplemented by citing producers' own views on the function of film in society, their role in it, and, very specifically, the terms in which they see their own films. Together, it might be possible to build up the outlines of a picture that would provide important clues to the process variously described as legitimisation, socialisation etc.

A small digression, however, appears to be in order before embarking on this study. This pertains to the Tamil parallel.<sup>59</sup> The average Hindi film, it must be emphasised, like the average M.G. Ramachandran film, is political. The only difference is that it does not tell you whom to vote for - it merely states that that is inconsequential for those who have their dreams. The ploys and methods are almost exactly the same - only the symbols are not those recognised by the Election Commission.

There is, that is, no MGR, no badges bearing his portrait, no DMK slogans or flags. But M.G. Ramachandran plays the same role as so many film stars of the Bombay film-world do. The difference is only that they do not stand for elections themselves : they are content to be frequently photographed with Cabinet Ministers, apart from the countless ways in which they unwittingly help their ilk.<sup>60</sup> Just like MGR himself, the Hindi film hero is affluent, but conscious of his perfunctory obligations towards the downtrodden toiling masses, is virtuous (no drinking; no women except in "justified" situations; no smoking; etc.)<sup>61</sup>, and abandons his audience as carelessly.<sup>62</sup> The Hindi film hero does not, of course, follow his audience to the ballot-box or break promises made in election manifestos. MGR has found, for himself, an identity that is capable of political exploitation. The Hindi film hero is perhaps a trifle less ambitious. He is content to provide, for somebody else, the same opportunity. He lends his mystique for a larger political purpose. It is said in much more abstract terms than is a vote - but it is, as surely and as certainly, concrete. It is, of course, said that is possibly neither consciously given nor perhaps consciously taken advantage of. But that does not necessarily detract from its potential.

#### The Thematic Content of the Hindi Film

Films in India are unquestionably an urban phenomenon. The point has been repeatedly made that the small number (in relation to the population)<sup>63</sup> of cinema halls are distributed

mainly over the cities and large towns. The number of temporary and/or touring cinemas is so small as to be almost negligible.<sup>64</sup> In the remote, interior areas of the country, a film is either a rarity or, which is more frequently the case, the film has never been seen. There is little statistical evidence to show exactly how many people in India have seen a film, and how often. Even the developmental films shown in otherwise ~~impenetrable~~ (cinematically) areas by the Government's publicity department - the Directorate of Field Publicity - are rarities. As for the feature films (commercial) bought and exhibited by this department over years, the number is small and a repeat visit to the same village is an unfrequent occurrence.

Some small studies have, however, been undertaken. There is, for instance, Y.B. Damle's investigation about the communication of "modern ideas and knowledge"<sup>64</sup> in 7 villages around Poona city, in Maharashtra, is illustrative. Ranging from 11 to 72 miles (in distance from the city), Damle's findings show that the further one moves away from the city, the better preserved are traditional patterns of recreation. Only in one village where most people are employed in factories, on the immediate out-skirts of the city, have people seen films. In the furthestmost village, Patan, only the Patil has once seen a mythological in Bombay. While studies like Damle's are not common, the general point that the cinema has a mainly urban impact can be invested with a fair amount of credibility. It cannot, however, be forgotten, on the other hand, that the cinema

is slowly, but surely, penetrating the rural areas : whether through the actual extension of exhibition facilities, or through other media like the radio.

This limitation of audience is in direct proportion to the actual content of the average popular Hindi film : also located in urban settings. Incursions into rural areas for "local colour" and a few dance sequences are frequent. But there is rarely, today, a film which is wholly rural in character and never moves into the city (an exception, of course, is the recent trend towards gangster films inaugurated by 'Sholay' where the choice of rugged mountain locales is mainly dictated by the model that is the American wild west). The city has a fatal attraction for the city-bred film-maker. That is what reflects the actual surroundings - though glamourised a thousand-fold - of the majority of film-goers. Rural sequences are always welcome - for, after all, much of the population of any city is migrant labour of various kinds, often with strong roots in rural homes. 66

But if the point be then made, as it often is, that the film reflects the legitimising values of capitalism, in an environment where its situations and audiences belong to the most capitalised sector of Indian economy and society - the city - it cannot be sustained. The ideology, so-called, of the Hindi film is not an ideology that admits of such clear identification or description. It is not ideology of the kind

that western Marxism can validly conceive of - one that somehow corresponds with socio-economic formations. The Indian film is, as is Indian society itself, a peculiar mix. The film is urban in location, its characters are urbanised - if not actually westernised - their fortunes have evidently been accumulated through capitalist ventures like factories and industrial houses. But, conversely, the values the Indian film purports to stand for and abide by are calculated to appeal, most strongly, to ideas and values that could loosely be designated as "feudal" in nature. That is not, perhaps, a very satisfactory word to use, but the attributes of thought-processes, commonly described as such, are the same - a deeply religious outlook, a respect for ascriptive criteria of status, a clear concept of a woman's place, paternalist ideals of authority and obedience, and so forth.

Thus, for instance, heroes and heroines, glamorously outfitted, evidently by European fashion - houses, court each other in foreign capitals, exhibiting little signs of "Indianness", besides their language. Usually the hero is without an occupation, he is either poor and unemployed or rich and not in need of employment. In both cases, he has ample time for romance. It has been suggested that the film-goer is made to enjoy and condemn the "westernised" (used synonymously with "bad") ways of others, after having participated in them.<sup>67</sup> Thus, once respectably married, the heroine ceases to be the modern, westernised woman she was - she is suddenly transformed into a devoted,

home-loving and very willing slave of her husband. She has been shown her rightful place, after the audience has been given its share of fun. Henceforth, only the vamp will provide the same kind of excitement.

Between the hero and the heroine, one is usually abundantly rich, and the other is invariably in extremes of penury. In the older films, the only obstacle in their path was parental opposition which first frowned upon the suggestion of romance and later consented to it. Today, significantly, the two major obstacles are wealth (or the absence of it) and the villain.

The archetypal villain has also undergone a stupendous change. Starting out as a villain meant only to intervene in a romantic situation for purely romantic reasons, he became, a little later, more than just intrinsically evil. Gangsterism, Hollywood-style, pervaded the Hindi film, and the villain acquired a few certain attributes - wealth, lust and a link-up with an international gang of smugglers or criminals with unlimited technological resources of evil and havoc at their disposal. After wealth, the villain : together and exhaustively, they constitute the totality of all the possible problems that can be faced. The wealth of the villain himself is, of course, newly-acquired, through corrupt and dishonest methods. The rich villain with evil intentions (re : the heroine) is always used, to good effect, to counterpoint the poor hero, striving for purely romantic reasons for the hand of the rich heroine.



His striving is also an unsuccessful one till such time as her rich father's heart is transformed by the virtue, personal courage, daring moral and physical strength of the hero<sup>68</sup> in his struggle against the forces of evil. Once the villain has been exposed - the police brought in, in other words - the poor hero can claim the hand of the rich heroine, and make good. This peculiarly individualistic creed of the rags-to-riches kind, of people who make it by the sheer force of their brawn and the patent honesty of their dispositions is paralleled, on the other hand, by a tremendous respect for ascriptive criteria. Thus, villains who belong to an affluent background, with ancestral wealth, are invariably reformed and brought back into the fold of the Good (Main Tusi Tere Anjan Ki and many others). The equation here is - ancestral wealth and status equals respectability and inherent goodness.

The wealthy - whether hero or heroine - is surrounded by ancestral wealth, enjoys a unique social status and is personally known to the entire industrial and professional elite of the city. It is striking that the depiction of wealth invariably takes a certain form. The affluence of an executive flat in a city like Bombay, for example, is the advertisement film's notion of affluence - not that of the Hindi film-maker.<sup>69</sup> The notion of wealth in the average Hindi film is incompletely portrayed if it does not possess any of the following attributes :

- an immense palatial mansion constructed, in a large metropolitan city, on the lines of a feudal 'haveli';
- the furnishings must be opulent, the dimensions over-awing. The familiar trappings are a long winding staircase running from the luxuriously carpeted, curtained and chandeliered living room downstairs to an often unseen number of equally opulent rooms above; and a piano.
- a large retinue of faithful old retainers, servants and maids (as in Aandhi, Sholay, Dhooon Chharon, Bobby, and almost any other film) :

"Servants are usually caricatures : sometimes of the comic variety ... The very nature of the Hindi film, which confines its heroes to the upper middle class, or at any rate, to upper middle class aspirants, is antipathetic to the servant being the hero". (70)

- Heroes have been depicted as servants and chauffeurs of heroines, but only to the extent that allows them to be in convenient proximity from the romantic point of view : witness, Chupke Chupke. In all these cases, he is usually an adventurous lover in disguise.
- cars, preferably foreign models and in numbers that permit a new one to be shown every now and again. Also, uniformed chauffeurs."

At the other end of the spectrum, is the manifestly poor home. It is sparsely furnished, with an often empty but always spotlessly clean hearth and a paucity of food which the devoted and long-suffering mother of the poor, unemployed hero, is constantly attempting to hide from her son. Unlike the wealthy home, where there is arrogance and no affection, everyone in the poor home is supplied with a heart of gold. The importance of happiness, and the certainty with which it must exist in a poor household, is constantly juxtaposed with the minor irritants

of the wealthy home, irritants which take on the aspect of major obstacles to the real happiness/Love which wealth - cannot buy.

In the ultimate analysis, however, the poor hero is absorbed into the rich home where he will, presumably, create an even greater heaven of paradisaical happiness. His fight was one for personal welfare, not collective<sup>71</sup>, and he has achieved his goal. The inhabitants of the rich household have been rescued to their original goodness and humanity. But, in social terms, the object of his struggle conquers him through the heart. sermonising is at an end - the solution is presented, inevitably, as a fortuitous one, where the meek have, in fact, inherited the earth. Their 'bad days' are at an end - the promised new dawn is always an affluent one. The extremes of wealth and poverty depleted as polar opposites, in the beginning, have been amply reconciled<sup>72</sup> through the path of 'true love' and the manifest injustice of poverty is replaced by wealth which is presented just as reward.

This end is also symbolic of the end of Evil, and the triumph of the Good over it. The villain is either handed over to the forces of law and justice or else killed by accident, so that the hero may not be implicated in the murder, even in self-defense, of an enemy out to destroy him. The hands of the ultimate victors are not to be soiled by blood. The Good has triumphed - the Evil has its retribution, either at the hands of Fate or at those of a right-thinking and fair constabulary-

cum-judiciary.<sup>73</sup> This is a norm which the Hindi film has not departed from, even in the wake of the relatively recent trend of gangsterism. The gangster-hero was brought into the Hindi film with Sholay, the all-time hit of Indian film-history.<sup>74</sup> Amjad Khan's portrayal of the formidable, ruthless dacoit - Gabbar Singh - has sparked off, subsequently, a whole series of romantic thrillers of the Sholay type, not to speak of advertisements for biscuits where the preference is shown not of the star (Amjad Khan), but of the character he represents ("Gabbar ki Apni Pasand"). The film industry has, almost completely, abandoned the conventional villain with the international lin-ups. It has found, in Sholay, a new range of possibilities - indeed, almost a new genre. Our indigenous equivalent of the American wild west comes in the mid-'70s with the discovery of the dacoit, fighting amidst rugged mountain plateaux, on horses and with guns. No more the subtle and highly sophisticated (technologically) means; now it is man-to-man combat. The new hero has to be more than the sensitive poet of the '60s, with reserves of physical strength which are called upon only at the end. For him, romantic diversions are only part of his role - courage and training in the use of weapons are his ways of fighting battles. Indeed, the very field of battle has changed - it is no longer a cruel society denying him the woman he loves because he is poor, it is, now, an adventurous villain, whom he is committed, rarely for a good reason, to fight and destroy. But the final destruction

cannot be done by anyone other than the police - or else, the Hindi film would have betrayed its most fundamental commitment towards society. That this society is one that is always happily resurrected and forever-after resolved at the end of each film is in the very nature of this commitment.

The portrayal of the forces of law and order - the police - and the judiciary, is also striking for the political point it makes. So also the armed forces. War films are few and far between in India, but for the glorification of the armed forces, any opportunity is 'good enough'; there are few films where an officer of the defence forces of the country is portrayed in a derogatory manner. One film - Achanak - which portrayed the hero, an army officer, as a murderer was notably an exception, as its reception indicated. The aspect that is, predictably, highlighted most in films relating to war is that of sacrifice to the highest cause - our country. Thus it is that only singularly high-minded and noble heroes join the army and the police. In the latter case, it is usually a hero who is the son of a corrupt industrialist/smuggler, whose commitment to truth and justice is stronger than family ties. A Hindi film is not complete unless the legitimacy of the final solution has been categorically endorsed by the uniformed officers of the law. If, on the other hand, the nature of the story dictates that the courtroom be called in, justice is always done by a stern, magistrate/Judge, prominently seated under the national emblem or a portrait of Gandhi or Nehru, dispensing justice.

Even if a producer is daring enough to cast aspersions on the integrity of the judge himself, these are always carefully removed at the end (Kanoon). The ultimate sanction for the film must be provided by either or both of these - a point that has been forcefully made by actor Utpal Dutt :

✓ "...utter one sentence on police brutalities in the streets and at the police station, and the censor are on it like the Gestapo. Show a strike where workers fight blacklegs and policemen together, as they do everyday in India somewhere or the other, and the scene cannot pass. Speak the truth about the Minister who thrives on graft and bribery, it will be cut. In fact, speak the truth about class struggle in any form whatsoever, the Gestapo will pounce on it. The realization is dawning upon us by and by that those puritanic ladies and gentlemen who call themselves censors are not there to check on indecencies at all. They are there as to suppress every trace of political dissent, every mention of revolt, every reference to the system under which we live". (75)

One important aspect of the "indecencies" that the censors are ostensibly there to check is the problem of women :

✓ "They should ban films degrading to women. Women in most films made in this country are either play things for men to enjoy or slaves of their husbands. Slavery is glorified as an Indian ideal ... it is high time women in this country stood up in revolt against films of this type". (76)

The Hindi film, paradoxically, veers between extremes of rhetoric about the glory of Indian womanhood (especially motherhood) and, on the other hand, the actual treatment of women which belies this altogether. The concept of women as an adjunct to a man, as a 'belonging' is an essentially feudal one, rendered palatable with generous servings of respectful rhetoric. And

some part of this is also inviolate : brutality towards women is only a small part of their treatment in films and a much larger part of their real lot; and yet, the slogans are taken seriously enough for some of them to be actually inviolate:

"The villainesses ... however devious and scheming, rarely stoop to actual murder. They tend to repent rather than die violently in the last reel. Perhaps this also establishes a fundamental difference in the sexes. Whereas a male villain is disgusting to children, the female villain draws the line at violence where they are concerned ... They are depicted as caricatures and amuse, rather than offend". (77)

✓ They amuse because they are not seriously evil. They do not offend, indeed cannot offend, because there is always a straightforward explanation for their being what they are : vainglorious playthings with monetary ambitions and no scruples. The ideal that must be sustained, even while every other word of the screenplay and every action of the hero gives the lie to it, is that of the heroine. She revels in her oppression.

The religious element in the Hindi film is very similar to the depiction of womanhood in it. The God-fearing hero/heroine are usually deeply imbued with religious values and initiated into the practices of religious observance. Their homes - rich and poor - have a correspondingly affluent or humble place for devotion. The deities, like their devotees, are usually Hindu. Few films are complete without a devotional song or 'bhajan' - which usually serves either of two purposes : (a) illustrating the fundamental virtue of, for instance, a

prospective daughter-in-law (Dulhan Wohi Jo Piya Man Bhaave) or of a prospective son-in-law (Mere Jesyan Saathi) - all parental reluctance can be won over by a display of 'bhakti', (b) in situations where the temple is visited for solace, as the last resort to a problem that appears to have no secular solution, religion is portrayed as the last, but surest, refuge of the desperate and forlorn.

The trend towards the genre of the mythological film has not altogether disappeared, either.<sup>78</sup> It enjoys seasonal popularity from time to time. In almost every decade of film-making, there is a revival of the mythological/devotional phase where the accent is on "the magical, the miraculous and the spectacular in the exploits of the Hindu gods and goddesses". Jai Santoshi Ma, the most recent of these, is believed to have sparked off a rash of 'religious' activity, of temples devoted to the goddess, of weekly fasts, and so forth. Large numbers of people would, after the fashion of temple-going practices, leave their footwear outside the cinema hall; the throwing of coins, as a mark of devotion, was a common practice, and the moment the deity appeared on the screen, the audience would, in unison, bow down in respect. Calendar art has, today, adopted these deities of the screen. In fact, religious cinema has had much to do with other forms :

"Values of film determine the visual style of other forms of popular visual communication; calendar pictures, magazines illustrations, hoardings, posters and advertisements, schemes of interior decoration.



Even the traditional iconography of statues and pictures for religious worship has accepted the visual values of the film; the conventional Durga image for the Bengali puja festival is looking more and more like Suchitra Sen<sup>a</sup>.  
(80)

The secularism of the Hindi film, then, is a very limited secularism. The very fact that the Government decorates and certifies as tax-free films that promote communal harmony is a pointer, negatively, to the situation that actually prevails. But the fundamental religion of the Hindi film is Hinduism. The hero of the Bombay film is usually Hindu - but almost always casteless. He is probably given non-committally Hindu names (usually without a proper surname, always Kumar or somesuch, never Patel/Menon/Kaul) to appeal to the widest possible range of audience, without offending any regional or caste-based sensitivities. But on the question of religious observance, the Bombay film producer is clear - caste Hindus are evidently favoured.

The 'Muslim social', so-called, is in fact, a positive rarity. At best there are a few films like the recent, successful Muqaddar Ka Sikandar, a film so strongly identified with the personality of the star who plays the tragic-hero of its title that any glimmerings of Islamic environment are lost. He is hopelessly in love with a Hindu girl, but dies nobly after arranging her marriage with his own (Hindu) protegee and friend. He is Muslim only in the nuances of Urdu speech that mark the screenplay - having been orphaned at an early age, and having

learnt how to live and succeed in the city streets he is Muslim only in name, non-religiously.

Hameeduddin Mahmood has some interesting reflections to make on the question of the Muslim social. He ascribes the early success of Ardeshir Irani's "Alam Ara", in an era when mythologicals were strongly favoured, to the "elegance"<sup>81</sup> of Urdu expression, and its use in Gawwalis and Mujras, pointing out that it was only after the advent of the sound film that such success was made at all possible. Muslim themes and characters could, however, be undertaken successfully, largely if they were historical in nature (Nur Jehan, Shah Jehan, Sikander, Mughal-e-Azam, etc.). This trend continues into early '70s, culminating in Kamal Amrohi's spectacular costume drama Pakeerah. This, along with films like Mere Huzoor and Chaudhvin Ka Chand were all set in essentially feudal times. The reason is not far to seek : Razia Begam, for instance, provoked a great deal of protest because the Empress was portrayed out of purdah.<sup>82</sup>

All these elements, outlined above, appear to be constitutive of the average Hindi film. Satyajit Ray has commented :

"The ingredients of the average Hindi film are well known: colour (Eastman preferred); songs (six or seven) in voices (one knows and trusts; dances - solo and ensemble, the more frenzied the better; bad girl good girl, bad guy good guy; romance (but no kisses); tears, guffaws, fights, chases, melodramas; characters who exist in a social vacuum; dwellings which do not exist outside the studio floor, locations in Kulu, Manali, Ooty, Kashmir, London, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo - who needs to be told. See any three Hindi films and two will have all the ingredients listed above" (1971)

The point is not one of detail, but of pattern and general design. And to the extent that Hindi films share attributes of this nature, they also make largely uniform statements about Indian society and social relations; in fact, the variations occur only at the first level, never at the second. The variations that do exist are around the same broad themes. The political bearing of the points of sociological import outlined above is as certain as is the fact that people's perception and ideas about themselves and their place in society have a great deal to do with the degree of apathy/involvement that informs the practice of politics, and, therefore, with the popular perception of the political system and its reasonableness.

Some broad statements about society and politics in India do emerge from the confused picture the Indian film presents. A documentary filmmaker, Anand Patwardhan, has pointed out<sup>84</sup> that films attacking feudal injustice are often allowed (Ankur, Nishant) and even supported by the political powers-that-be. A film about bonded labour, for instance, would secure governmental approval fairly easily, for it would help to project an optimistic picture of a modernizing society. The treatment of poverty, injustice and oppression in a contemporary urban setting, on the other hand, takes on a markedly different dimension. Whether this unevenness in treatment is rooted in a fundamental insecurity of ideological structures that are more vulnerable is a moot point.

Feudal social relations prevail, of course, largely in rural areas. Here the myths of authority have not changed significantly. In a situation where the revenue officer and the constabulary have been jointly venerated for very long, the attitudes of "sarkar" and "mai baap" - standards set by British rule - continue even today. They have, in fact, been given an added legitimacy by virtue of the fact that they are no longer racially alien representatives of authority, but of an administration that is popularly elected. The greater security of the system is subserved, in fact, by maintaining and preserving feudal conceptions, despite the ostensibly democratic ideals of "one man one vote". These are elements in which the Hindi film, at any given point, abounds.

Urban life, on the other hand, is characterised by greater and possibly more apparent frustrations, where the contrasts are more clearly accentuated and rarely familiarly legitimised from birth - as, for example, would be the case for the rural landowner vis-a-vis generations of sharecroppers or bonded labourers. This, despite the now worn argument that exploitative relationships in capitalism are more mediated, veiled and indirect. In a sense, they can be seen as more direct - to the extent that their legitimisation is not a part of helpless acceptance. Every individual discovers, for himself, the cost of fighting the system. Socialisation patterns, therefore, could conceivably take a somewhat different form, where ascriptive bases for obedience like caste and ancestral

subjugation can gradually be eroded to equally ascriptive - but with changed criteria - bases like wealth, status, etc. New forms of exploitation, then, would continue to be justified in substantially the same terms as before.

Organizations like trade-unions, though also often followed for reasons like caste loyalties, do provide at least one possible avenue of protest. Organised protest obviously threatens to erode the legitimacy of a system much more effectively than could happen in a submissive rural situation, conditioned by long years to passive resignation. Urbanisation and its attendant problems - including housing, employment, etc. - can bring a magnified awareness of exploitation, as practised on larger numbers. And when the recreational patterns of urban people are largely limited to the cinema, it is hardly surprising or fortuitous that the Establishment would be sensitive to threats from these quarters. It is, therefore, a rarity that the complicity between government and business, between the policeman and the city thug, between the force of law and those who can pay for their protection, should escape the censors' editing-tables. In a feudal location, thus, some degree of exploitation and its social roots is, on occasion, allowed. Not so in a capitalising urban situation. 'Trouble', in a feudal setting, is usually, in the work of the film-maker, depicted as brought about by natural calamities like floods, drought and so on. This is true of a large number of films over the last 25 years, - from Mother India to Satyam Shivam

Sunderam. On occasion, the greedy, exploitative and villainous landlord is also added - but his villainy, too, must often wait upon a natural calamity, to augment the misery of the situation. In an urban situation, on the other hand, villains get progressively unreal - they stand for international crime, which is not part of the average person's daily existence. Minor villains sometimes take the form of disruptionists in industry, which presents an interesting configuration of forces - the capitalist factory-owner, on the one hand; and two enemies, on the other : one of these, the real enemies are the villain and his gang of common hoodlums, while the other is that of true workers, demanding a rise in wages but rising to protect the factory when it is threatened by the disruptionists plans of the rival gang (Resham KI Dori). Normally led by the hero of the film, this second enemy gains the approval, sympathy and even gratitude of the employer, who is immediately transformed from a heartless accumulator of profits into a humanitarian, paternalist industrialist. He is, of course, helped in this Owenite transformation by the fact that his daughter has formed a romantic attachment with the labour-leader of this second, loyal group of workers-protectors.

The depiction of feudal social relations, then, is, in very general terms, either benevolent (as in Sholay, where the Thakur of the village - a police officer by profession - functions as its protector; and also in Main Tulsi Tere Aangan KI) or oppressive. Where the latter, the landlord is personally

✓evil with hired mercenaries, and usually represents a sub-plot rather than the dominant focus of the film. In either case, goodness or evil intent and personal attributes, not social ones.

Capitalism and the capitalist, on the other hand, are seen in a light of which Robert Owen could not but have approved. The capitalist is invariably a do-gooder in potential. The capitalist is misguided by his profit-conscious business associates and advisers (who usually line their own pockets at his expense, until exposed by the poor but loyal and honest hero). There is, for example, a successful film - Namak Haram - where the hero, a capitalist of means, has a close friend who is poor but determined to make an honest living. He joins the factory of the former, is immediately endeared to all his fellow workers there, and takes up cudgels on their behalf - converting his wealthy friend through sentimental/emotional means. Another common instance in Hindi films is the renunciation of corrupt practices by an industrialist/black marketeer, because his principled son threatens to leave home or joins the police. The potentially good capitalist must also conform in many important ways. His basic Indianness, deeply religious outlook, etc. are, throughout, important pointers to this basic potential.

The question of protest in the average Hindi film is, thus, ✓essentially one of individual protest, based on principles, usually ethical. Collective protest rarely finds a place on

screen. This is, perhaps, inevitable given the fact that the very posing of a screen problem is individualist in nature - since the problem is never social, nor can its solution be so. The fight of the protagonist(s) is always an individual battle, waged individually, drawing upon individual resources and resulting in an individual triumph. Whether this is a result of "projective extroversion"<sup>85</sup> or whether it has more complex social reasons is debatable. In any case, the fact remains that harangues on society - the impersonal 'samaaj' - are polemics against, at best, the enemy of the moment, whether represented by industrialist parents of means or a pointless villain. When these obstacles - of evil and of poverty - have been successfully surmounted (at the end of each film) it can be safely assumed that 'samaaj' is alright, after all. The fact that society does not so generously accommodate such demands, or that, even if it did, it would not necessarily be a token of its fundamental rightness, does not occur to the film-maker. The film-maker's perception of society and of problem is, actually no different from that which we have ascribed to him. Excerpts from the publicity releases (for film distributors) of three films make this amply clear :

\* 'CHARAS' is the story of that eternal vigil by a dedicated band of officers of International Police, the perils of their constant fight with the ruthless smugglers, the fiery ordeals through which their duty has to pass at the very risk of their lives.

'CHARAS' is the story of a brave young man, whose personal vendetta makes him launch a one-man battle



against the ruthless villain - an international smuggler of narcotic drugs.

Convinced to serve a greater human cause, he eschews (sic) his personal vendetta and accepts to serve the forces of law in the International fight against the smuggling of cursed drugs.

\*\*\*\*\*

'CHARAS' is the story of great human characters who trail the blazing path of glory by risking their lives for duty and love.

...of helpless human beings balancing on the sword edge of sin and virtue.

...of innocent souls subjected to the torture of ruthless killers.

\*\*\*\*\*

This super spectacle adventure of romance and action echoes from India to the shores of Mediterranean through the Canals of Venice to the Alps of Switzerland and the streets of Malta". (86)

#### RAM BHAROSE (GOD'S OWN MAN)

On the sword edge of Good and Bad rises a story of human values dramatic stresses and their sacrifices.

RAM BHAROSE is the story of two brothers, whom circumstances had forced to choose their own path.

Ram (Randhir Kapoor) is a simple and pure soul, with devotional faith in his gods, he accomplishes the impossible "Rambharose style". Like his father, who was a brave and decorated police officer, he dreams of joining the police force and thus serve his motherland.

In dramatic circumstances a national mission of great importance is thrust (sic) on him. This honest and brave patriot rises to heroic heights and is even ready to lay down his life for the mission. By the blessing of Lord Ram, in his own topsy turvy ways, he accomplishes the 'Impossible'.

Bhanu Pratap (Amjad Khan) his elder brother, is all fire, his harsh and ugly experience in early life has cut him into an iron man. He spites the society. 'Sole' is his only religion - 'Money' his only god.

Kiran (Rekha) is a victim of circumstances. She has been cleverly moulded into a 'Mafia Queen' by a nefarious group of powerful villains, who helped by foreign interest, indulge in anti-national activities in India.

The dangerous and lively of 'Ram', 'Bhanu', and 'Kiran' criss cross each other like a jigsaw puzzle, unknowingly the hand of fate pitches them in a battle against other - fighting for the same mission.

The winning discs go on changing hands and the high voltage drama mounts - one for all - all for one - through a lot of fun, adventure, frolic and action.

Soon the winds of time change their direction and the realities crash. Bhanu realises that much greater than his 'Money God' is the peace of his soul. Also, the Mafia Queen Kiran, has already melted, in the pure love of simple Ram.

Three pitched against each other now join hands, and become one unifying force, but the truth is revealed too late and the villains are too strong.

Ram Bharose is an entertainer full of hilarious situations, high power drama, thrilling action. A story full of warmth, of human relations and human bondages, of human greatness and human weakness". (87)

B.R. Chopra (film-maker) on the role of the film-producer in society :

"I have always tried to tackle purposeful themes and I have covered social, national and international problems. Those pictures clicked, they brought me some kind of name. I got the highest award - the Public Award, not only as financial success but also as appreciation of my work".

(Film is a collective art where) "a producer has to be many things ranging from a politician to a prophet".

"Film-makers have a great responsibility to improve public taste by making quality pictures and purposeful films. It is their responsibility to make films of what they need, not they want". (88)

C.J. PAVRI (film-maker) :

"No matter what the variations, the basic undercurrent of most Indian motion-picture themes is always the heartless Rich and the wronged and suffering Poor. The best that some pictures attempt to do on behalf of the "wretched" Rich is to salvage him out to redemption by making him renounce his wealth in favour of the poor, or by making him write off his entire life in selfless service to the Idle and Indolent.

....

The ominous thing about it all is the relative absence of any organised genius controlling the tidal wave of this anti-social force inundating our films. We are forced to recognise it as the most natural byproduct of our mass-thinking - motivated by our indestructible beliefs in such time-worn truisms as "The Poor are the Blessed" and "God that made mouths will find the means to feed them". The producers of films happen to be only the latest exploiters of these sentiments which, to their perpetual misery have consoled, swayed, and in the context of present times, influenced our ignorant masses". (89)

Given the physical and circumstantial constraints that determine the sphere of influence of the film, its actual communication potential is fairly limited. And yet, among the large urban audiences that the Hindi film and cinema commands, it possesses a considerable impact. At least part of this impact can be explained by reference to the two major facets of control over the cinema - governmental and economic.

Supporters of all establishments everywhere have always fearfully and accurately believed that the film is a powerful medium. In India, producers and box-office trends, on the one hand, and complacent censors on the other, effectively ensure that the cinema is not permitted to transgress its officially authorised limits. Tamed by these twin forces, the Hindi film builds up an alternative world which is no less communicative than the most radical slogan-mongering could be - the difference is in the message itself. This is not, however, to postulate a sinister producer-government combine - which, besides laying itself upon to valid charges of crudity, would be difficult to empirically sustain. It is merely to present these two levels of control in a complementary relationship, suggesting linkages that may and often do operate - consciously or otherwise - to reinforce and subserve each other. Together, what they achieve is no different from what film-maker Luis Bunuel hinted at in his celebrated remark :

"But that the white eyelid of the screen reflect its proper light, the Universe would go up in flames. But for the moment we can asleep in peace ; the light of the cinema is conveniently dosified and shackled".

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cf. Niharanjan Ray, An Approach to Indian Art, Publication Bureau, Punjab University, (Chandigarh, 1974).
2. The term is here used in a very loose and historically non-specific sense : arising, essentially, from the vastness of its ambit in cultural history, as opposed to social and economic history.
3. 'Krishti', derived from the Sanskrit root 'Krish' - to cultivate - goes back as far as the Atharvaveda, and is generally recognised as the oldest Vedic Sanskrit word for culture. 'Sanskriti', on the other hand, dates from the Aitareya Brahmana, and derives from 'Sanskara' - gam and kr - meaning, literally, to improve a thing to perfect. Ray, op. cit., p. 211.
4. Sukracarya's Sukraniti, translated by Binoy Kumar Sarkar, published by Motilal Benarsidass in their Oriental Reprints Series, New Delhi, 1975.
5. Ibid., pp. 156-160, Clauses 130-131 to 202.
6. Ray, op. cit., pp. 214-217.
7. Ibid., p. 219.
8. See Kapila Vatsyayana in Brandon (ed.), The Performing Arts in Asia, UNESCO, Paris, 1971, p. 26.
9. Cited in Ray, op. cit., pp. 266-67.
10. Ibid., p. 268.
11. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, The Transformation of Nature in Art, Dover Books, New York, 1956, pp. 108-09.
12. Ibid., p. 109.
13. Sneh Pandit, An Approach to the Indian Theory of Art and Aesthetics, Sterling Publications, (New Delhi, 1976), p. 32.
14. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Siva, Sterling Books, (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 36-37.
15. Pandit, op. cit., p. 36.
16. Ibid., p. 38.

17. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, op.cit., pp. 30-31.
18. Rabindranath Tagore, quoted in Coomaraswamy, ibid., pp. 27-28.
19. Ibid., p. 159.
20. Ibid., p. 160.
21. Ray, op. cit., p. 248.
22. Ibid., p. 265; also, see Coomaraswamy, T.N.I.A., op. cit., p. 116.
23. Ray, op. cit., p. 258.
24. Coomaraswamy, T.N.I.A., op. cit., p. 35.
25. The argument in this section draws upon the works of :  
Rajni Kothari, Politics in India, Orient Longmans, Delhi, 1972;  
S. Kaviraj, Political Culture in Independent India - An Antiromantic Presentation, Paper presented at the Indian Political Science Conference, Patiala, 1978; and  
R.J. Moore (ed.), Tradition and Politics in South Asia, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979.
26. According to 1971 Census figures, Hindus are in a majority of 82.72% in relation to the rest of the population. The next most populous community is the Muslim - with 11.20%, the others are all below 3%. India : A Reference Annual, 1977-78, Govt. of India, p. 9.
27. Rajni Kothari, in his Politics in India, op. cit., has taken note of some of these, but the qualifications he applies cannot be altogether agreed with. However, his work (esp. pp. 278, 287-290, 280) is notable for the fact that it represents the first, and perhaps still the only sophisticated recognition of the question.  
D.P. Mukherjee has taken note of this in his Modern Indian Culture, Hind Kitabs Ltd., Bombay, 1958 and in the volume of essays entitled Diversities, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1958.  
Yogendra Singh has discussed the problem in essays on Modernization in India, Manchar, New Delhi, 1978, Chapters 6 and 7.
28. D.P. Mukherjee, Modern Indian Culture, ibid., p. 35. Also, pp. 35-36 ff.

29. A.L. Basham in his conclusion to "A Cultural history of India", edited by himself (OUP, London, 1977), has commented sketchily on the continuity of the contemporary film with ancient dramatic tradition - particularly Sudraka and Bhavabhuti. He sees a stability in the taste of Indian audiences over the centuries, pp. 492-93.

More specifically, Andre Malraux has written :

"Behind each artist stands the cathedral, the library and the museum. Behind each form is originally another form ... every form is a conquest - a taking over, an incorporation, a further development - of another previously existing form whose traces it bears".

(Quoted in B.D. Garga in Brandon, op. cit., p. 113).

30. A.R. Desai (ed.), Rural Sociology of India, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, chapter on "The Aesthetic Culture of the Rural People", p. 81.

31. Based on a seminar discussion organised at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for the Cultivation of Arts, March 6-7, 1979.

32. Ritwik Ghatak, the famous Bengali director has discussed this problem at length :

"the relationship between the cinema and the novel has now become a two-way affair. Literature is cramming in all kinds of cinema. Cliches and stock situations which authors think will endear them to film producers. And films are based on such stuff, thereby providing a further fillip to such writing. The result : the growth of banality and vulgarity in literature and cinema".

(Quoted by B.D. Garga in his essay in Brandon (ed.), op. cit. p.121).

33. Singhjit Singh, "The Impact of Films and Television on Dance, seminar paper read at a seminar on "Impact of Mass Media on Performing Arts", Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for the Cultivation of Arts, March 1979, pp. 2-3.
34. Feroze Rangoonwalla, Seventy Years of Indian Cinema, India

35. Even outside of the Indian tradition, there has been theorisation of a high order, on the question of the use of music in films. Pudovkin has written :

"Just as the image is an objective perception of events, so the music expresses the subjective appreciation of this objectivity".

(Quoted in Roger Manvell & John Huntley, *The Technique of Film Music*, Focal Press, London, 1957).

36. "...In fiction films the dramatic conflict of characters pushes the story forward. The audience really is sucked into the good story and is at one with the action on the screen. Nobody knows who's acting next to him, so complete is the identification with the characters, the wish to be the hero or the heroine. With famous, established stars and a weak story you can be sloppy in a fiction film and still get that kind of audience identification".

(Joris Ivens, *The Camera and I*, Seven Seas Publishers, Berlin, 1969, p. 212).

37. "Movies have a surface realism which tends to disguise fantasy and make it seem true ... There is, of course, no necessary correction between surface reality and their truth meaning. But if one is true, the other is more likely to be accepted. On the stage, often the inner meaning is accepted and - the obviously false settings. In the movie, it is frequently the reversed ... " Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood : The Dream Factory*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1951, p. 14.

38. For a discussion of the phenomenon of stardom and its constituents, Cf. Francesco Alberoni, "The Powerless Elite" : Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars" in David McQuail (ed.), *Sociology of Mass Communication*, Penguin Books, 1976, pp. 75-96. Cf. also, Alexander Walker, *Stardom : The Hollywood Phenomenon*, Michael Joseph, London, 1970 and Anthony Curtis (ed.), *The Rise and Fall of the Matinee Idol*, Weldenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1978.

39. Rangonwalle, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

40. There has been a continuing controversy about which feature film can justifiably be called the first. Conventionally, the superior claim of Phalke's "Raja Harishchandra" was clearly recognised. Of late, however,orney's "Pundalik" has won some supporters, because it chronologically pre-dated Phalke's film by a year. Rangonwalle, pp. 27-30.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 28.



42. B.D. Garga, "Screen Adaptations of Indian Literature", in Brandon (ed.), op. cit., p. 114.
43. Rangoonwalla, op. cit., p. 52.
44. Ibid., pp. 58-63.
45. Rangoonwalla, Indian Filmography - Silent and Hindi Films (1897-1969), J. Udeshi, Bombay, 1970, pp. 7-57.
46. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, Indian Film, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1965, p. 77.
47. Ibid., p. 77.
48. Ibid., pp. 77-78.
49. Rangoonwalla, Seventy Years of Indian Cinema, op. cit.
50. V.G. Damle, Prabhat Special Supplement in the Times of India, September 9, 1939, quoted in Panna Shah - The Indian Film, The Motion Picture Association of India, Bombay, 1950, pp. 94-95.
51. Panna Shah, ibid., pp. 125-136.
52. All references to Bose's findings are based on the news paper reports published in 1959 which Barnouw and Krishnaswamy have quoted extensively. Panna Shah's thesis was subsequently published as "The Indian Film", ibid.
53. Barnouw and Krishnasway, op. cit., p. 148.
54. Ibid., p. 150.
55. This issue reportedly created a considerable stir in the Madras Legislative Assembly, where agitated members held "long, nervous debate on whether to ban rock'n' roll from Indian films, without anyone having a clear idea of what the evil was. After some debate the Home Minister, Mr. Shaktavatasalam, was asked to enlighten the legislators on the nature of rock'n' roll. He answered: I do not know the details or the technique of it, but I have heard that it is an obscene dance performed by men and women". Quoted in Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, ibid., p. 265.
56. Panna Shah, op. cit., pp. 164-178.
57. Gaston Roberge, "Mediations", unpublished ms.

58. "...by restoring the justice and balance lacking in society, the film offers a form of comforting compensation. The cinematic villain functions ritualistically as a representative victim for the audience's social concern far from being a threat such films are a political safety valve". Leif Furhammar and Folke Isaksson in *Politics and Film*, Studio Vista, London, 1971, p. 244.

59. For details, see The Impact of Film on Society, published by the Centre for Social Research, Madras in 1974; this work is based on a survey study of the influence of Tamil cinema on its audiences. Also, cover story, India Today, August 1-15, 1978, pp. 34-41, "MGR : The Celluloid Politician".

60. Film stars have, of course, been crowd-drawers at elections meetings, notably in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections. But the connection that is being suggested here is less direct. And, for the forthcoming (1979) Lok Sabha Poll, there has already been one concrete attempt to start a political party of film stars to lobby for the film industry. News item in the *Indian Express*, Sept. 6, 1979, p. 1.
61. Even in the Hindi film today, it is villains who constantly drink ; a hero may do so only in the depth of frustrations and, consequently, whenever his small miseries are at an end he becomes upright once more. The small degree of dissipation that he is allowed is only to heighten tragic effect, he cannot normally be shown as smoking/drinking/womanising. And, of late, there even are censorship restrictions which prohibit the showing of drinking, except in "a bad light". Cf. Editorial in the *Times of India*, March 4, 1979.
62. One of the worst examples of this is the following excerpts from an annual number of a film magazine, written by film star Nargis, then (1953) at the peak of her popularity :
- "...Let's begin with the love letters, penned by pan and biri wallas as well as by clerks and the more educated class. The former lay stress always on one point : that rather than dance and cavort on the screen for the entertainment of thousands I would be better off married even to one of their class".
- "My Public and I" by Nargis, *Movie Times*, Annual, 1953, p. 48.
63. In 1975, there were only 9,551 cinema theatres (of which 6,030 were permanent cinemas) - with a total seating capacity 1,05,54,600. India should, it has been calculated,

have ten times the number of cinema theatres to cater to the whole population. B.V. Dharap, Indian Films, 1977 and 1978; Motion Picture Enterprises, Poona, 1979, p. xxi.

64. According to 1975-76 figures, there were 3,367 touring cinemas, as opposed to 5,650 permanent cinemas, a small enough ratio, considering that the population to be reached by the touring cinemas is so many times larger. The total number of cinemas in the country has not increased much in the decade from 1965-1976, showing an increase of less than 2,000 in permanent cinemas. It is, however, significant that the cinema is gradually infiltrating lesser touched areas; witness the two-fold increase in the figures pertaining to touring cinemas - 1,639 in 1965-66 and 3,367 in 1975-76. India: A Reference Annual, 1977-78, op. cit., p. 149.
65. Y.B. Damle, "Communication of Modern Ideas and Knowledge in Indian Villages" in A.R. Desai (ed.), Rural Sociology in India, op. cit., Part III, Chapter 5, pp. 378-88.
66. Cf. Milton Singer, When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 75-77.
67. A point made forcefully and discussed at length in Vivek Ghotge, "Hrishikesh Mukherjee: A Man and an Artist", Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, Thesis, 1971-72.
68. To quote the observation of Charles Chaplin on this subject is to underscore its timeless relevance:
- "The hero can outfight, outclimb and outlove anyone in the picture. In fact, every human problem is solved by these methods - except thrilling".
- Charles Chaplin, My Autobiography, The Bodley Head, London, 1964, p. 273.
69. The film "Anubhay", for instance, was much acclaimed as a 'realist' venture, simply because it was shot wholly in the actress' own flat. This is rare exception, and nowhere yet near the rule.
70. Kobita Sarker, Indian Cinema Today, Sterling Books, New Delhi, 1975.
71. Ibid., p. 38.
72. C.J. Pavri, "Celluloid and the Flame: An Indictment of the Propagation of Class Hatred Through Films", in Movie Times, Vol. IV, No. 35, July 17, 1953, p. 11.

73. The presence, on screen, of uniformed officers of the law is calculated to inspire a sense of security - much more so in the case of an officer of the defence services, where the aspect of heroism and sacrifice for duty is greatly emphasised. Another category of nationalist films however are those of Manoj Kumar who always plays the lead role in his own films, and is always called "Bharat". He symbolises, invariably, the epitome of Hindu culture, its glory and grandeur as opposed to the inherent sinfulness of the modern West (notably in Purab Aur Paschim) : the two are presented as irreconcilable polar opposites. This kind of film is a kind of cultural nationalism, as opposed to the more directly political nationalism that a war film can arouse. War films, further, have been very few in number, and, significantly, appear only when India has passed through a military crisis. Thus, 1965-66 (Hageegat), 1971 (Hindustan Ki Kasam etc.
74. Gaston Roberge, 'Films for an Ecology of Mind', Calcutta, 1978, pp. 67-71.
75. Utpal Dutt, Keynote Address to the Symposium on Cinema in Developing Countries, Seventh International Film Festival of India, 9 January 1979, p. 10.
76. Ibid., p. 11
77. Robita Sarkar, op. cit., p. 41.
78. An interesting discussion of "Bhakti in the films" is that by Milton Singer, op. cit., pp. 162-64.
79. Satish Bahadur, "The Context of Indian Film Culture", in Film Miscellany, A Publication of the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, December, 1976, p. 92.
80. Ibid., p. 96.
81. Hameeduddin Mahmood, The Kaleidoscope of Indian Cinema, East-West Press, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 111-13.
82. Satyajit Ray, quoted in Gaston Roberge - Chitrabani - Calcutta, 1974, p. 168, columns 1 and 2.
83. Razia Begum was banned first in Hyderabad, where a representative of the then Nizam visited the cinema where it was being exhibited and ordered its stoppage. It was, due to widespread Muslim protest, at the portrayal of "a Hindu-Muslim palace romance", also subsequently uncertified in many other places. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, pp. 26, 48.

84. Anand Patwardhan, in the course of the discussion at the Symposium on Cinema in Developing Countries, 7th International Film Festival of India, January 1979. However, it is significant that when the question of sending Ankur to a foreign film festival arose, its director, Shyam Benegal, was asked to append a prefatory note to say that the events in the film pertained to pre-1947 India. See, Aruna Vasudev, Liberty and Licence in the Indian Cinema, Vikas, New Delhi, 1978, p. 176.
85. Philip Spratt on the psychology of capitalism and the possibility of its "flowering" in India, in Hindu Culture and Personality ; A Psycho-Analytic Study, Delhi Printers Prakashan, Delhi, 1977, Chapter 16, pp. 353-65.
86. Excerpted from Synopsis of the film Charas, a Ramanand Sagar Production, in their publicity release.
87. Synopsis of Ram Dharese, produced by Ramanand Sagar, from their publicity release.
88. Quoted in Raghuvir Singh Kotwal, "Producer in Relation to Society with particular reference to B.R. Chopra and his films", Film and Television Institute of India, pp. 7-8, 10.
89. C.J. Pavri, op. cit.

## Chapter 3

GOVERNMENT AND FILM

The Government of India commands what is, perhaps, the largest governmental network controlling films, anywhere in the world. The nature and degrees of control, of course, vary from the partial to the complete, depending on the particular area of activity. Thus, while the Film Finance Corporation has a very marginal role to play in importing foreign films and financing indigenous ones, the Central Board of Film Censors is the supreme authority for deciding what can or cannot be exhibited. Then there are the Children's Film Society and the Films Division, which enjoy virtual monopolies in their respective spheres, the one because no private producers would invest in a limited audience film, the other actively preventing the development of a short film movement outside of its own efforts. These apart, there are also the many small ways in which the Government props for the Hindi film ethos of contemporary "culture" - through its own radio and television media which help film producers' coffers by promoting their films, film songs and stars. All these activities take place at the level of the Central Government - more precisely, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. And the legal sanction for these arises from the brief and terse constitutional provision in the Seventh Schedule which places the "sanctioning of cinematograph films for exhibition"<sup>1</sup> in its care. Subject to the provisions of this entry, the State Governments are authorised, in

Item 33 of the State List (List II) to regulate the licensing and conditions of exhibition, etc., of cinemas within their jurisdiction.

The regulations on both these levels combine to create a truly extensive network, uniquely different from that prevalent in any other sphere of cultural or artistic activity, and from the norms that regulate other media of expression such as the written word. This policy of extreme interventionism in, for instance, the sphere of censorship is the perfect foil to the policy of supreme indifference that characterises the official attitude towards conditions in the film itself. The 'rules' governing the relationships between the producer and his hirelings - from stars to stuntmen to the lesser labourers - are market - relations of such a patently primitive and exploitative character, as to thrill a latter-day Adam Smith. But these, like the free flow of huge quantities of parallel currency, and much other economic chaos do not attract the same degree of concern. Extreme paternalism and protectionism in one sphere is matched by an equally extreme degree of non-interference in another, where it appears more necessary. But these are merely two facets of a single policy that can be seen as non-contradictory, if not eminently reconcilable.

The present law broadly covering the field of the film in India is the Cinematograph Act of 1952, as amended in 1973 and, again, in 1974.<sup>2</sup> The Cinematograph Act has fundamentally two aspects - one relating to the certification of films for

exhibition - i.e., the rules governing the composition and functioning of censor boards - and the other dealing with the licensing and regulation of cinematograph exhibitions. In the latter category, the Central Government has only limited powers, and the State Governments are empowered to frame their own laws. Basically, these (in Part III of the Act) are in the nature of executive powers to ensure safety and public welfare - as, for example, by regulating provisions for seating-space, emergency exits, and other facilities. The Centre, however, exercises considerable restrictive powers. If, for instance, the Lt. Governor or the Chief Commissioner or District Magistrate

"is of the opinion that any film which is being publicly exhibited is likely to cause a breach of the peace (he may) by order, suspend the exhibition of the film and during such suspension the film shall be deemed to be an uncertified film ..." (3)

The Central Government can make rules that regulate facilities for public safety, or lay down the terms and conditions for the grant of licenses, or prescribe the time within which appeals can be made. It can also exempt completely the exhibition of any film from all the relevant provisions of this Part.<sup>4</sup>

Under the provision made under this Part of the Act, all State Governments have framed laws to regulate the licensing of cinema exhibition. The more substantive aspect of the Cinematograph Act, however, relates to censorship. Before discussing the



present legal position on the question of censorship, however, it might be worthwhile to examine censorship as it has been practised in India, in its historical context.

It is not altogether surprising that the earliest governmental measure enacted to regulate the cinema in India was in the sphere of censorship.<sup>5</sup> It was undoubtedly dictated, at least in part, by the compulsions of imperial stability. And, as with much else in contemporary India, the present laws governing censorship exhibit very clearly, indeed, their debt to the code that prevailed prior to 1947.

The concern here being to identify the political aspects of censorship in India, there are two complementary avenues for the search. The first lies in the structure and composition of censor boards, their personnel and the basis of their appointments, and the second in the actual content of the cuts that are effected in films. The first is somewhat limited - since the colonial practice of having senior police functionaries as ex-officio chairmen of the regional censor boards has been more or less discontinued, by putting on these panels eminent "public" figures, who may or may not be connected with the film medium, but who are considered responsible enough to be entrusted with the guardianship of the morals and political ideas of the nation. Covert policing, of course, has continued. For, in spite of frequent Governmental assertions that the Censor Board should be as autonomous a body as possible, the representation on it

of the Regional Officer (from the Directorate of Field Publicity, of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and usually a member of the Central Information Service) has not been discontinued. And there have been occasions when the views of the Regional Officer have precipitated conflicts and clashes within the Board itself. As, for instance, with the film Kissa Kursee Ka before the Emergency.<sup>6</sup> On the whole, however, little is known about this facet of censorship, and nothing that can be used to make a sustained and reasonably valid political argument.

The second aspect of censorship - its content and the principles that govern its practice - have been admirably and extensively researched in Aruna Vasudev's doctoral thesis for a University of Sorbonne.<sup>7</sup> Prior to 1918, the censorship of such films as were produced (indigenously), imported and exhibited, were governed by the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code.<sup>8</sup> In that year, however, the Cinematograph Bill, introduced in the Legislative Council in 1917, was enacted into law with two main purposes in view - the introduction of safety measures to protect audiences against fire in cinema halls; and second, and more important, was the establishment of four regional boards to oversee what could and could not be exhibited on the screen - decisions which were evidently made, several years later, on political, racial, religious and moral grounds. The authority to do so was vested in the Censor Boards, for all four of which the Commissioner of Police was

President ex-officio, and on which other representatives were either chosen for their religious and racial backgrounds (one Hindu, one Muslim, one European, and so on) and, sometimes, the Chambers of Commerce were also given representation. These appointments, of course, were as much a reflection of the prevailing political/constitutional practice (as embodied in the various Constitution Acts of 1909, 1919, 1935, etc.), as today's laws are of contemporary political forces.

Other powers, such as licensing of places of exhibition and so forth, were vested in the District Magistrate and the Commissioner of Police, who also had the power to suspend or annul the certificate of any film in the areas within their administrative jurisdictions.

Fundamentally, the nature of censorship as actually practised, appears to have been basically racial and political in its thrust<sup>9</sup>, even where done in the name of religion. All censorship provisions of this nature were always on the Government's own initiative. Censorship decisions engineered by public protest were usually on moral grounds. From the films of D.W. Griffith through those of Sergei Eisenstein to indigenous films like 'Bhakt Vidur', censorship was ruthless and complete. It was, of course, much easier to rigorously operate in the era of the silent film, where only sub-titles had to be cut. The grounds for censorship were, predicatably, -

"they exhibit the white man in a foolish or contemptible light" (10)

"immoral, indecent and offensive to Mahomedans". (11)

"It preaches class warfare and eulogizes assassins and murderers" (12)

"This film tends to lower the prestige of the Government in the eyes of the uneducated cinema-goers" (13)

"omit scene showing a squad of British soldiers with fixed bayonets driving back a crowd in Constantinople" (14)

Similarly, sub-titles were omitted, reformulated and changed :

"Damn the law. We are the people. We are are the law" (15)

"Dreamed of a day when the Government would be a government of the people, for the people",

which was substituted by -

"Dreamed of a day when peace and contentment would prevail in the land" (16)

Since the majority of films exhibited in India in these years were foreign - mainly American - these cuts were usually made only to prevent any hint of comparability in the Indian political situation with that anywhere else.

In Indian films, it was words like "freedom", "swaraj", "crescent" and "flag" which were deleted, as a matter of course. So also, predictably, all newsreel items regarding Gandhi and Nehru, were banned. Even characters (in films) dressed like Gandhi or wearing a Gandhi cap or using a spinning wheel, were immediately suspect and censored. With the introduction of sound, and the possibilities - in terms of words, music, etc. - inherent in it, censorship had to be toned up. It had also to

keep pace with the growing numbers of films being indigenously produced.

In the meanwhile, however, the Indian Cinematograph Committee's (the Rangachariar Committee) Report was completed in 1928, which made recommendations on the basis of findings and evidence collected through an extensive cross-examination of film-makers and others. The principle of imperial preferences was rejected, and proposals were made for concrete governmental supports for the development of the indigenous film industry. Loans, aid, awards, scholarship schemes, and reservation of screen time (in cinema halls) for Indian films, were suggested. The development of the industry was not, thus, being suggested for itself, but merely to facilitate the application of rules. The racial criteria of censorship were, of course, accepted in toto.<sup>17</sup>

The advent of the 'talkie' saw the beginning of a more directly political censorship, which focussed, not only on the political leadership and symbols of the national movement, but also widened to include political undertones of a broader and more general nature - the depiction of poverty (Bala Joban)<sup>18</sup>, of labour trouble (The Mill of Mazdoor)<sup>19</sup>, of peasant oppression (Benarsi Thug)<sup>20</sup>, and even of anti-casteism (Sant Tulsidas)<sup>21</sup> which had, in the national movement, acquired a distinctly political dimension. Bicharak, a film based on a story by Tagore, was considered objectionable for, among other reasons,

"it shows one of His Majesty's judges in an unfavourable and damaging light",<sup>22</sup>

Aruna Vasudev suggests that extreme political censorship led in subsequent years, to two major trends in film making in India - (a) the mythological and (b) the American-style "social".<sup>23</sup> There was also, however, another trend which reached its highest point in the 1930s - this was the treatment of contemporary social problems - like dowry, casteism, etc. A manufacturing company like New Theatres, for instance, produced 150 films without even one of them needing to be censored. But the Second World War once again saw the insidious introduction, into the soundtrack and the images, of nationalist symbols - and censorship accordingly, tightened. At the end of the war and in the years just before and after independence, shortages of many kinds saw increased Governmental control on other aspects of the film industry, also.

In the immediate post-independence era there was, on the one hand, a throwback to nationalist ideas which was manifested in the zealotry with which censorship was brought in tune with ideas of the great glory of Indian culture and tradition.<sup>24</sup> In Bombay state, for instance, the introduction of prohibition was, concomitantly, to be propagated in films.<sup>25</sup> In 1949, the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act was passed and the categories (based on age group) of 'Unrestricted' and 'Adult' exhibition were introduced. Now, censorship which, under the Government

of India Act, 1935, had been a concurrent subject, was put into the Union List in the Constitution of India, 1950, in accordance with the provisions of the 1949 Act. Thus, a Central Board of Film Censors was established, while some limited powers of decertification were retained by the State Governments, which could now uncertify a film for a maximum period of two months, after which the concurrence of the Central Government was necessary. A new category of predominantly educational (PE) films was also introduced.

Of all subsequent legislations, the most important is the Cinematograph Act (1952) (Act No. XXVII of 1952) which, along with the later amendments, governs the current censorship policy, repealing, as it did, all previous enactments on the subject, including the Cinematograph Act of 1918. Provisions were further made in the 1952 Act itself, for the framing of rules to carry it into effect - these, drafted, came to be known as the Cinematograph (Censorship) Rules of 1958 (as modified upto 1978). The rules are, in essence, no different from the rules of 1920 as much in the provisions relating to decency and morality, as in relation to political matters. The 1952 Act itself was not significantly different from previous enactments on the subject. It included the power of the Censor Board to grant 'A', 'U', or no certificate at all; provision for appeals to the Central Government against adverse Censor Board rulings; the power of the Central Government to change or withdraw the certification of any film, for a period of two months,

within which an opportunity for representation was to be given to the film-maker.

The provisions of the Cinematograph Act of 1952 were essentially designed to be consistent with the provisions of the Constitution regarding freedom of speech and expression - namely, Article 19. Even the relevant phrases regarding "reasonable restriction" (Article 19, Clause 2) were directly borrowed from the Constitution itself. This also helped the Government to a considerable degree when, in later years, in Parliament and outside, in defense against criticisms of too much liberality, it always sought refuge behind the bogey of "constitutional limitations".

For all this, however, the regular ritual of appointing Enquiry Committees and so on, was not given up. In this, as in all other aspects, the pre-1947 practices were faithfully duplicated. Censorship, for instance, formed one part of the considerations of the Film Enquiry Committee which submitted its report in 1951. Its recommendations for five-year certificates was adopted in 1953, as also its other - somewhat trivial - suggestions for certification fees and so on. The Khosla Committee Report (the Enquiry Committee on Film Censorship) of 1969 (26), made more concrete proposals towards the liberalisation of censorship policy and about the reconstitution of Censor Boards, but these, too, were left to gather dust on Government shelves. The Khosla Committee's recommendations



were essentially similar, in treatment, to those made by the Estimates Committee of Parliament in 1967, on the basis of a detailed investigation into the functioning of censor boards.

Among the recommendations that emerged from these reports was a plea for assessing the total impact of each film<sup>27</sup>, rather than individual sequences or sentences. The Khosla Report held that censorship

"must be authorized by law, and must be confined within the limits permitted by law and the provisions of the Constitution" (28)

The suggestion was made for the creation of a third category of films - given 'G' certificates - which could be seen by children under 16 years of age, provided they were accompanied by their parents. A total restructuring of the Censor Boards was recommended by the Khosla Committee, which wanted it to be made an independent body, responsible for its decision, which should be final, so that censorship would cease to operate as just another Government department. The suggested qualifications for members of the Censor Boards were, however, ambiguous as ever :

"persons with discrimination, possessing a knowledge of Indian art, culture, traditions and above all, persons with a liberal and modern outlook" (29)

The pre-censorship of scripts was to continue on a voluntary, advisory basis, as would the different standards in certifying

foreign and Indian films. Stricter censorship for Indian films exported abroad, to "eliminate a distorted image of our social, political and cultural life being presented to other countries"<sup>30</sup> was recommended by the Khosla Committee Report. The only liberalisation it suggested, for which there were, and continue to be loud protestations and equally loud acclaim, was its decision that kissing should be allowed on screen. For this bold stroke of ingenuity, it was popularly branded as a radical report - and, perhaps, for the same reasons, not acted upon.

But, in essence, the Khosla Committee Report was no different from any other -

"A scene casting aspersions on the integrity, impartiality and ability of the judges will be liable to be banned or deleted on this ground. Criticism of a judicial decision by attributing base motives to the judge will also bring the film within the mischief of this clause" (31).

"Films containing matter defamatory of a national hero such as Mahatma Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru should be banned, or the defamatory reference deleted. At the same time, it is unwise to develop a kind of hypersensitivity to even a humorous remark aimed at raising a laugh in reference to well-known public figures" (32)

All liberalisation was, ultimately, to be subject to the "interest of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public sector, decency or morality ..."<sup>33</sup> This, in itself, is wholly unexceptionable, for that is the degree of freedom allowed even to the Press. But, in the latter case, there exists no provision for pre-censorship, and punishment

only follows violation. In the case of film, however, there is both pre-censorship and post-censorship.

A later amendment to the Act, claiming to incorporate the suggestions of the Khosla Committee Report, was received by the film industry with great outrage. Little of this anger was, however, directed towards the actual principles governing censorship, in which there was no change at all. The industry's concern was focussed, essentially, on the steep hike in the fee to be paid (per metre) for consideration by the Censor Board : a measure that was, rather naively, designed to guarantee the independence of the Board, by making it economically self-supporting. In practice, however, this was substantially negated by the provision for the appointment of Appellate Tribunals, the highest courts of appeal against decisions of the Censor Board.<sup>34</sup> Another change was that fraudulent practices could now be checked, since it was made compulsory to display the reverse side of the censor certificate at every screening of a film - thus displaying the cuts ordered by the censor which could be checked by inspecting officials at any time.

It was the Emergency that drew, from the Government, its first most explicit recognition of the power of the film medium, and of its determination, even in normal circumstances, to treat the film on a different level from other media, such as newspapers, as far as criticism of the Establishment was concerned. Censorship, in this period, expanded in scope from the

mere ordering of cuts in specific films to control of a more generalised nature over the industry as such. All government-owned media - the Directorate of Field Publicity, All India Radio, Television, the Song and Drama Division - in any case entered into it in one way or another. Newly imposed controls over the press also affected it in no small measure. Thus, film journals and magazines were given guidelines for self-censorship :

"The film journals should also eschew any news item or comment which panders to base public curiosity without fulfilling any public interest. This relates even to verifiable news. Harmless gossip is however permissible" (35)

Similarly, guidelines for film publicity were also laid down and enforced, but these pertained only to the two constant bogies of sex and violence. Appointments to the Advisory Panel of the Central Board of Film Censors were expectedly engineered.<sup>36</sup> Nor did the Board itself prove to be altogether incorruptible : many films were deliberately asked to be referred to the Central Government

"in order that substantial pecuniary considerations should find their way to the right quarters" (37)

And, further

"in the case of at least one movie Rs. 4 lakhs were paid to get the Censor certificate expedited" (38)

All these facts got highlighted after the Emergency, for obviously political reasons. But the more important point

contained in these illustrations is that, without access to evidence as the Das Commission (which investigated the question of the misuse of the mass media during the Emergency) had, it is difficult to prove that similar pressures - from Government and from industry - do operate at other times, as well. It is, on the other hand, not logically necessary that they do not. The only difference is that it takes an Emergency to bring them into sharp focus publicly. As with the subtler aspects of censorship - the actual pruning of scenes and dialogue - it would be incorrect to suppose that these relatively unimportant instances of administrative malpractice occur only in politically strained times.

So also, then, with the actual details of censorship - only those instances came to light subsequently, as were important from the point of view of the then current political situation. As, indeed, was a film like Kissa Kureese Kaa. Replete with crude political symbolism - with obvious references to the Emergency regime and its style of functioning, caricatures of personalities and institutions - Kissa Kureese Kaa became, in the post-Emergency era, a major focus of attention for all those outraged by "Emergency excesses". For the succeeding government, it was only more grist to the political mill. The intensive follow-up action, culminating in the recent High Court judgement, sentencing S. Gandhi and V.C. Shukla for complicity in the matter<sup>39</sup> has only served as more publicity grimmickry. The fact that the Annual Report of the Ministry of

Information and Broadcasting (for 1977-78) proudly quotes the certification of Kissa Kurgae Ka (the remake) and two other films (Sahib Bahadur and Chanda Marutha) as tributes to its own radicalism does not, therefore, come as a surprise. 40

less extreme, but in principle similar treatment was also meted out, during the Emergency, to films like Aandh<sup>41</sup>, a hardly veiled film version of the life of the then Prime Minister, and Andolan, a film about the Gule India movement of 1942, feared for its possibly subversive consequences<sup>42</sup>, All the President's Men, a Hollywood film based on the Bernstein-Woodward investigations into the Watergate scandal, a film that was ultimately passed. On the other hand, a film like Sholay, which so openly violated all governmental injunctions regarding "violence", was quietly passed because its maker, Ramesh Sippy, happened to be a close personal friend of the then Minister for Information and Broadcasting, V.C. Shukla. Mr. Sippy's underhand foreign exchange dealings regarding Sholay were, presumably for the same reasons, similarly overlooked.<sup>43</sup>

The reactions are equally predictable. Kissa Kurgae Ka is patronised, and recommended by Door-darshan (though found unsuitable by it subsequently<sup>44</sup>); Andolan is declared a "national film" and exempted from entertainment tax.<sup>45</sup>

Film policy, in fact, was one of the major platforms of the Janata Party in the March 1977 Lok Sabha Elections. The autonomy of the Censor Board was to form one part of this, and

a promise was made to change what the Janata Party General Secretary, Mr. Surendra Mohan, described as the use of "the film industry for partisan ends."<sup>46</sup> All that has actually been accomplished is the announcement of a peculiarly irrelevant set of "new guidelines for the film censors" to "simplify and rationalize censorship rules".<sup>47</sup>

These new guidelines for censorship, together with the amended Cinematograph Act, 1952 (especially Part II of it) which covers the certification of films for exhibition and export, constitute the basic authorisation for all aspects of censorship - from the constitution and composition of the censor boards, and allied tribunals, to the principles that are expected to govern their functioning. Thus, the manner in which the Censor Boards shall be constituted; the appointment of assessors to assist it in the matter of examining films in regional languages; the constitution of special committees like Examining or Revising Committees (usually from among the members of the Board itself); the appointment, at regional centres, of advisory panels and so on, are all clearly detailed by the Act. But it is the principles that are expected to guide the deliberations and decisions of such Tribunals that are particularly worth noting :

"A film shall not be (certified under this Act) if, in the opinion of the authority competent to grant the certificate, the film or any part of it is against the interests of (the sovereignty and integrity of India), the security of the State, friendly relations

with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or involves defamation or contempt of court or is likely to incite the commission of any offence" (48)

Vide sub-section 1A of Section 5B of the Act, these have been further amplified. The general principles are divided into three categories, two of which relate to moral standards while the third enjoins that

"the prevailing laws shall not be so ridiculed as to create sympathy for the violation of such laws" (49)

As far as the application of these general principles are concerned, they are dealt with under six broad heads :

- (a) crime;
- (b) vice or immorality;
- (c) relations between the sexes;
- (d) indecorous exhibition of the human form

The remaining two deserve fuller quotation.

"(e) brings into contempt the armed forces, or the public services or persons entrusted with the administration of law and order"

"(f) is intended or likely to :

- (i) wound the susceptibilities of any foreign nation or any community or the followers of any religion;
- (ii) foment social unrest or discontent to such an extent as to incite people to crime;
- (iii) promote disorder, violence, a breach of the law or disaffection or resistance to Government.



Explanation to Clauses (E) and (F)

First :- The following types of films shall be considered unsuitable for public exhibition :

- (i) A film which is likely to arouse disrespect of a foreign country or is liable to be looked upon by a foreign country as derogatory to itself, or which is liable to embarrass the relations of the Government of India with any foreign Government;
- (ii) A film which preaches or liable to incite people to acts of violence or which tends to encourage subversive activity with a view to overthrowing established authority or institutions.

Second :- In particular, the following matters shall be regarded as objectionable :

- (i) Disparaging references to the people of a foreign country or the head of a foreign State;
- (ii) Picturisation or subversive methods or of guerilla technique. (50)

Among twenty-six other additional restrictions, there are, again -

- "(xv) drunkenness or drinking that is not essential to the theme of the story"
- "(xvii) accentuation of class distinctions or stimulating class hatred"
- "(xxv) gross travesties of the administration of justice". (51)

For films to be certified for export, the image they depict of the "social, cultural or political institutions of India"<sup>52</sup> are to receive special attention.<sup>53</sup>

The revised censorship guidelines issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on January 7, 1978, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of section 5B of the 1952 Act, the CBFC was directed to keep new guiding principles in mind for film censorship. Responsiveness to social change, to "the values and standards of society"<sup>54</sup>, were urged, and freedom of creative expression from undue curbs was emphasised. It was "in pursuance of the above objections"<sup>55</sup> that the Censor Board was ordered to ensure that :

- (i) anti-social activities such as violence are not glorified or justified;
- (ii) the sovereignty and integrity of India is not called in question;
- (ix) public order is not endangered;
- (x) visuals or words involving defamation or contempt of court are not presented". (56)

In addition to these, the plea was made for a film to be judged in terms of its overall import, while being seen in the light of the "contemporary standards of the country and the people to which the film relates".<sup>57</sup>

#### ALL INDIA RADIO AND DOORDARSHAN

##### (A) All India Radio

Among the more substantial supports to the film industry are those provided by the Government - owned broadcasting media - the All India Radio and, more recently, Doordarshan. Of the two, the former - for obvious reasons of scale and scope

must take precedence.

It was in the late fifties that the attempts of Dr. B.V. Keskar - the then Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting - to use AIR to elevate popular taste to appreciating classical music floundered, and were finally abandoned in favour of the inauguration (in 1957) of a channel, that subsequently gathered fame as the ubiquitous Vividh Bharati - devoted to popular, mostly film, music.<sup>58</sup> In 1967, this channel went commercial, and air-time began to be sold for purposes of advertising, ranging from not only the quick spots and jingles of a few seconds' duration, but also longer (upto 15') Sponsored Programmes, mostly relating to film stories, film stars and film songs.

Today, Vividh Bharati programmes are broadcast from 31 centres, which also include, additionally, two short-wave transmitters, located at Bombay and Madras. Apart from these latter two centres, the other stations broadcast upto 12 hours 50 minutes on weekdays and 13 hours 20 minutes on Sundays.<sup>59</sup> The major proportion of this is, of course, film music and other film-based programmes like film stories, including special programmes for the armed forces one of which is, every week, presented by an important film star/film personality, with personal reminiscences of other film stars/film events. Altogether, these programmes effectively sell popular film culture.

Commercial broadcasting is presently beamed from about 20 centres, earning colossal amounts by way of advertising revenue - in the region of about Rs. 6.80 crores (provisional figures for 1976-77).

There are at least three aspects of broadcasting and the film in India that merit attention. The first is the place of film music in contemporary popular culture in India. It is hardly surprising that in a situation where the film is about the only source of (at least urban) recreation, film songs are about the only existing - and developing - form of popular music. Secondly, the question of how this music is, in actual fact, popularised mainly through the radio, and only marginally in any other way, bears investigation. Thirdly and finally, the question of how the Government-owned media contribute in very real, material terms, to the coffers of the film producer via royalty payments as also the give-and-take between the two in the matter of advertisement revenue became issues of some importance.

The symbols of "modernizing" India are not only the bicycle and the watch, but also the transistor-radio. Empirical evidence for this is available in a study undertaken by the Commercial Broadcasting Service of All India Radio, where about 35 per cent of the respondents indicated that the Vividh Bharati channel had been an important factor in their decision to buy a radio set. Similarly, a survey of the purchase-plans

of non-radio owning households, showed that, in urban areas, the radio was second only to the watch/clock or the bicycle. In rural India, the priorities were more staggered, and agricultural inputs like bullocks/ploughs and implements, naturally came first.

The reason for this is very closely connected, it would seem, with the reasons to the popularity of the Hindi film. If one is a myth-maker, the other perpetuates and consolidates the myth. The important thing, however, is not to look for causes and effects, or for which comes first - but rather, for the reason why, jointly, they constitute the whole entertainment and cultural horizon of India today. Nor is it enough to treat film music on par with popular music in the West, or to launch upon sociological investigations to account for its popularity in terms of what it stands for and reflects in social terms. The major differences, here, are two - firstly, unlike in the West, film music in India is not wholly music that is generation-bound. Nostalgia for the older film songs of K.L. Saigal or Kanan Devi may doubtless exist, as does that for Nat King Cole or Pat Boone in a parallel generation of the West - but Indian film music continues to draw votaries of all kinds and ages. Its range spans 'bhajans' adapted to film situations to the plagiarised rock music of two decades ago set to Hindi lyrics to even "suitable" songs for children. Western popular music - whether jazz, rock or any other - always caters to the contemporary young.

Secondly, and more obviously, popular music in the West is rarely connected with films - between the handful of films of Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and the Herman's Hermits to today's Saturday Night Fever and Abba - The Movie - the examples are few and far between. These, together, with a small number of musicals and themes from films, are the marginal exceptions on the periphery of the Western popular music world. In western cinema, music is used as part of the effects in a film - in India, the film is often built around the songs. In Hollywood, the musical is a genre by itself, - in India, every film must contain elements of the musical. The decision upon the storyline and the writing of the screenplay are immediately followed by the composition of the lyrics and scores of the songs and the picturisation of these. The choice of music director and song-writer for the Bombay film is almost as crucial a decision as that of the lead stars. No financier or distributor is unlikely to invest in a film, until such time as he is certain of at least two things - the cast and the music. Thus, we have the bizarre instance of Satyajit Ray's Shatranj Ke Khilari effectively blocked for release by distributors who claimed that they had been deceived about the number of song sequences the film actually contained.<sup>60</sup>

Whether the popularity of film songs and music owes itself to the helping hand lent by radio or, whether, on the other hand, radio merely caters to the demands of its listeners, is a pointless debate. The salient and irrefutable fact is that on both

fronts - of programme composition and of programme preference - Vividh Bharati and especially film music, are the highest scorers.

According to 1976 figures for the composition and duration of home service programmes, excluding Vividh Bharati, 38 per cent of all air-time was devoted to music. This was a total of 119,952 hours and 31 minutes, which was more than one-third of the total transmission of 3,17,071 hours and 28 minutes. Vividh Bharati, by itself, got a magnificent figure of 1,43,378 hours and 27 minutes more than the entire chunk of music (which includes a small percentage of film music) on other, local stations. Comparing these 1976 figures with those for 1977 throws up interesting insights.

Programme Composition (Home Service), 1976 and 1977<sup>61</sup>

Type of Programme	Approximate Percentages	
	1976	1977
Classical Vocal	7.0	6.6
Classical Instrumental	6.6	6.2
Folk Vocal	3.4	3.5
Folk Instrumental	0.1	0.1
Light Vocal	7.9	7.2
Light Instrumental	1.1	1.1
Devotional Music	4.6	5.0
Film Music	5.6	6.1
Western Music	1.7	1.0

Talks, Discussion, etc. (spoken word)	11.2	11.6
Drama	4.3	3.8
News	23.5	24.8
Religious	0.1	0.1
Children	1.2	1.2
Women	1.4	1.4
Rural	6.0	5.8
Industrial	1.4	1.4
Armed Forces	1.4	1.3
Tribal	1.8	1.6
Educational	2.6	3.0
Publicity	2.1	2.2
Others	5.0	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The share of film music, outside of the Vividh Bharati programmes appears to have increased. It is, in fact, the only item besides the News, to register a substantial increase from 5.6% of the total output to 6.1%. Vividh Bharati, of course, continues to maintain, despite a sharp decline (unaccounted for) of 3,173 hours or so in total output, a relative preponderance when compared with the total air-time given to all other kinds of music programmes pooled together.<sup>62</sup>



There are some important facts about the programme preferences of listeners that could be profitably highlighted. These are based, largely, on insights gleaned from the data tabulated by the Audience Research Unit of All India Radio, on the basis of several listener surveys (general and specialised) conducted in recent years.

A comparative study of some general and specialised listening surveys over the years 1972-1979 significantly reveals no marked change in the programme preferences of listeners. There are, of course, changes in exact percentage and figures, and other variations depending on the regions/ areas where they have been conducted - but these are marginal, and in no substantive way detract from the overwhelming impression that film music is the major and most fundamental interest of listeners almost everywhere - whether in the metropolitan cities, the smaller towns, or villages in most parts of the country.

A listening survey conducted in and around Delhi<sup>63</sup> in December 1972 showed that 84% of those interviewed listened to Vividh Bharati almost every day. Of those who tuned in to other stations - whether local, regional or external - around 70% did so to hear film music. Further, among those who liked to listen to Vividh Bharati in particular, 90.98% tuned in for film music, with the next highest category (news) claiming a listenership of 57.60%.

Again, according to the first Time Budget Survey Report conducted for the Commercial Broadcasting Service of All India Radio, in 1976, in the four metropolitan cities of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, Vividh Bharati was the most popular of all stations.<sup>64</sup> Its weekly reach proved to be 87% of those interviewed in Bombay, 86% in Calcutta and as high as 92% and 98% in Delhi and Madras respectively. The pattern of listening was, in all these cases, usually concentrated during certain peak hours, which the fixed-point schedule revealed as being those devoted to film music or film-based programmes. A profile of the listeners themselves showed a high degree of correlation between the figures for Vividh Bharati listening and those of the cine-going habits of the respondents. Thus, while in Madras and Calcutta, regional language films scored, for obvious reasons, over Hindi films, the figures for those who saw a Hindi film once a month or more frequently were still in the region of 40-45%. In Delhi and Bombay, not surprisingly, only 13.1% and 21% (respectively) could claim never having seen a Hindi film. Comparing these figures with those of the newspaper reading habits of the same respondents, it becomes even more clear that the Hindi film can truly surpass linguistic barriers. In Bombay, where a Hindi film is seen more than once a month by 55% of Vividh Bharati's listeners, 90% of the same do not ever read a Hindi newspaper. The position is similar in Madras and Calcutta, while in Delhi alone is the balance (41-59) favourable to Hindi newspaper-reading respondents.

Yet another study of programme preferences, conducted in 1976, by the Institute of Economic and Market Research<sup>65</sup> threw up important insights into commercial broadcasting and the Vividh Bharati service. The field work for this survey was carried out in Bhopal, Jullundur, Patna and Tiruchirapalli, with a 60-40 ratio of urban and rural distribution respectively. This study is important for the distinction it showed between urban and rural programme preferences. In both, local stations appeared to score over Vividh Bharati, with negligible lead in urban areas, and a substantial one of 13% in rural areas. Programme preferences, too, varied, with agricultural programmes being greatly appreciated by rural audiences. Though the "news chunk", by itself, scored highest in the total popularity rating, the combined pool of old and new film songs together exceeded even that (51.1%, to 50.4% for the news). As for the quality of programmes broadcast over the Vividh Bharati channel, most respondents (urban and rural) expressed satisfaction with programmes as they were.<sup>66</sup>

Asked about what programmes they sacrificed while tuning in to Vividh Bharati, a range of 47-61% in the various cities/towns responded that they had discontinued listening to other local programmes in favour of Vividh Bharati. 4% went to the extreme of suggesting that, were this service to be discontinued, they would stop listening to the radio altogether. In fact, the ownership of radio receivers in the areas covered was found to be largely coterminous with the popularity of Vividh Bharati.

The importance of this channel in influencing the purchase and prospective purchase-plans for radio sets is reinforced by the sharp increase in radio ownership following 1957 when the Vividh Bharati service was first introduced.

These general trends find fresh reinforcement in the most recent surveys. The popularity, among non-radio households, of Vividh Bharati is indisputably established. In the urban situation, film music takes precedence over all other programmes, while in rural areas, predictably, it comes second or third, with the news and programmes of agricultural interest being strong competitors. In fact, news broadcasts over the Vividh Bharati channel have been found to generate an appreciable listening, in addition to the bulletins broadcast on the main/local channels. Film music, in fact - which comprises about 53.84% of the total programme composition on the C.B.S, Delhi - perhaps helps to shed some of the lustre of its own popularity on the advertisements which constitute the next most significant (numerically) category on the Commercial Broadcasting Service, with 16%-18% of a monthly average of 436 hours and 34' of total broadcasting time (in Delhi alone). The CBS's own survey, in 1976, showed that advertisements were especially popular in rural areas, and enjoyed a fair degree of credibility as bringing correct market prices and information about new products.

All in all, the Vividh Bharati service scores very easily over its sister channels in urban areas, and is a close competitor

for popularity in the rural regions. Given the fact that it has a considerably smaller geographical range, because of a weaker transmitter - in Delhi, for instance, Vividh Bharati covers 15,190 sq. kms. and 94,81,696 people, compared to Delhi 'A' which covers 166,360 sq. kms. and 5,12,28,471 people and Delhi 'B' which has a range of 54,537 sq. kms. and 2,26,87,912 people, and exactly the same as Yuva Yami or Delhi 'D' which enjoys not even a small fraction of its popularity - it still commands a disproportionately high listening. This speaks a great deal for the ease with which a government-owned radio station, no less than a privately owned industrial enterprise, can be commandeered in the service of 'popular tastes', so formed and provided. In fact, even in the ostensibly harmless film music programmes based on listeners' requests, there is much manipulation. An ex-employee of the H.M.V. Gramophone Company has disclosed that he had, while in their employ, a set of 200 postcards in his desk at any given time, to be used for sending fake requests to radio for songs featuring on musical albums which were accumulating dust in HMV godowns. It usually worked - and there were instances when not a copy was left unsold, as repeated (and actually unasked for) listening created, for the record, a popularity of its own. This is just one of the ways in which AIR contributes to the maintenance of gramophone companies, film producers and their music directors and playback singers. Another is through the more legitimate avenue of royalty payments. In 1977-78, All India Radio disburse

by way of royalty payment for film-music played on Vividh Bharati, a sum of Rs. 8.5 lakhs approximately. In addition to this, some amount of the total AIR Royalties of 22.15 lakhs would also have gone towards film music played on other channels on radio.<sup>67</sup> These royalties, paid to the Gramophone Company in Calcutta - according to the internationally accepted copyright terms under the Phonographic Performance (Eastern) Limited are in contrast to the revenue received from commercial advertisements which, for the previous year (1976-77) was in the region of about Rs. 6.80 crores. The benefits, therefore, are mutual.

(B) Doordarshan

The situation is not very different in the field of television. Hindi feature films, song sequences from them, and interviews with film personalities studded with excerpts from films, account for about 15-20% of the weekly output, on an average. This is not, in itself, a worrying figure. What is significant is that these three to four hours per week constitute the peak viewing time in terms of popularity. The surveys conducted by the Audience Research Unit of the Delhi Doordarshan establish this conclusively and beyond all doubt.

A 1976 survey of programme preferences<sup>68</sup> showed that 94.6% of the respondents did not like to miss the Sunday feature film in Hindi. Similarly, 93.8% did not wish to miss Chitrahaar

(a programme of song and dance sequences from Hindi films). Third in order of popularity were listed programmes from Bombay Television which, given the cultural climate in that city, are heavily dependent on the Hindi film (Yaaden Jo Kuchh Yaad Rahen and Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan). The greatest indifference was, of course, expressed towards 'Krishi Darshan' (a programme for farmers) and for current affairs programmes, interviews and serious discussions. Even the news in Hindi could claim only 38% viewing.

Similarly, a study of the duration of viewing clearly showed that TV was watched on an average of about 44' a day. On Sundays, it reached a maximum of 155', while on Wednesday (owing to Chitrahaar) it maintained a steady lead of 52' over the average listening on all other days of the week, which were in the range of 34-38 mts.

That this state of affairs should have at all been allowed to develop in a country where Television was introduced for fundamentally developmental purposes, is a pity. It has been suggested, that this was, in fact, brought about by a definite category of viewers/prospective viewers and manufacturers :

"TV began humbly in this country. Twice-a-week 20 minute programme were started on September 15, 1959; they catered to 180 teleclubs organised around the TV sets provided in villages within a range of 40 kms of the capital city. For some years Indian TV continued in this way, then a section of the elite, who had imported their own sets exerted pressure for an entertainment-oriented TV service. The would-be manufacturers of TV sets with an eye on the potential market joined them.

In 1965 the government made the first change in the wake of mounting pressure, by including entertainment for the first time in TV programmes". (69)

Education and entertainment became increasingly distinct and apart, and now Television's

"idea of education is a staid programme on algebra and that of entertainment, the vulgarity of the commercial cinema". (70)

It was, therefore, inevitable that a situation of extreme dependence on the commercial cinema should ultimately emerge. When politicians' ideas of manoeuvres for diverting popular attention from a rival political rally take the form of screening "Bobby" on Television<sup>71</sup>, the power of the medium and its use in the urban environs of its birth and nurturing becomes apparent. It has also been suggested that this dependence is a part of the helpless economics of financing TV in a country like India - where the revenue from licence fees on TV receivers cannot pay for the cost of producing TV programmes, which, it is estimated, is a comfortable 85% of the total cost of TV, only 15% accounting for transmission costs.<sup>72</sup> Thus, it is maintained, the nominal royalty on screening feature films - or excerpts therefrom - is much cheaper than producing a programme yourself, and is often adopted as a handy substitute. But, given the fact that, on an average, Rs. 20,000 are spent every month on films and film-based programmes (for the Delhi centre alone), this may not be the only reason. It is a combination, of what is popular and widely appreciated, and expense does not always



count - as, for instance, when Television rights for a Youth Congress film function - Geeton Bhari Shaam - were bought.<sup>73</sup>

Fundamentally, it is a case of perpetuating certain already well-shaped patterns of popular culture which, unlike in the west, play a complementary and supplementary role to popular cinema. TV in India, has not made the cinema obsolete<sup>74</sup>, but has, in fact, added to its general effectiveness and appeal.

#### THE CHILDREN'S FILM SOCIETY

The Children's Film Society, established in 1955, is one of the darkest skeletons in the cupboard of the Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry. Its existence has been intermittent and its ineptitude in achieving anything positive is only one aspect of its larger failure. This is the fact that it has, very effectively, prevented the children's film movement in the country from being given a definite shape and direction. The Films Division has done approximately the same thing on the documentary/short film front, but at least its output - in numerical terms cannot be discounted. The Children's Film Society, on the other hand, has produced a meagre number of feature films, meant, as one critic described it :

"either for mentally retarded children or for retarding the normal ones". (75)

Few spheres of film-making have suffered as much from the onslaught of the popular Hindi cinema as the children's film.

Its first handicap - to which the CFS was meant to provide some kind of an answer - was the fact that producers were simply not willing to make films for a specialised, limited audience (the child) fearing financial losses. Secondly, there was no parallel, in India, to the practice in many western countries, of the film industry as a whole contributing some part of its resources to foster a healthy children's film movement.<sup>76</sup> In many of these countries Governmental initiative was matched by private finance, and films emerged which were suitable for children. In India, in the absence of such an alternative, children have either been wholly unexposed to cinema or - which is worse - been exposed to its popular Bombay form. This is where the Government thought it was stepping in. Its motives were laudable :

"Audio-visual education is by far the most fruitful means of communication. In 1949, a Film Enquiry Committee established the need for special children's films. On their recommendation, the Children's Film Society, India, was set up in May 1955 under the Societies' Registration Act, 1860, with the assistance of the Central Government, for encouraging the production, distribution and exhibition of films specially designed for children and adolescents". (77)

But the films, when they came, plainly showed the influence of the Bombay film. Song and dance sequences (with the former being sung by adult playback singers), unreal themes, a typically 'Bombay' treatment - all of these perhaps inevitable, in view of the Society's own description of 'How it Operates' :

"Though its registered head office is in New Delhi, the Society conducts its main activities of Production, Distribution and Administration from Bombay, the capital of the film industry in India.

The society has a General Body consisting of representatives of Member States, well-known film producers, distributors and experts in the field of Child Psychology and Education. This body formulates the rules, regulations and policies of the Society". (78)

Since its inception in 1955, the Children's Film Society has produced a total of 98 films, including features, shorts, puppets and cartoon films. Apart from these, it has added about 50 films from abroad to its library. These are the achievements that have been fairly well publicised and documented. But, on the other hand, to questions like what prevents the Children's Film Society from producing so few films per year; how many children have actually seen the films made and collected by the CFS; how quality and suitability are ensured for such a sensitive area of audience; how successful the CFS has been in reaching non-urban, non-school going small children - to all these, and many more, important questions, the CFS provides no answer. There is no computation of audiences covered,<sup>79</sup> let alone of the type and location of the audience. There is no effort to ensure that each print of every film is optimally utilised through frequent and widespread screenings. There is no effort at all to even attempt to reach rural children through the agency, of a sister-unit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Directorate of Field Publicity which can, at least sometimes, provide a film-show that may not be directly carrying a message meant to promote the Government's develop-

mental effort.

The obstacles, admittedly, are many. Just as the producers of the Bombay film world hesitate to venture into the production of children's films - perhaps, fortunately, since most of them could only have produced eminently unsuitable films around clumsily handled clichéd themes<sup>80</sup> - so also, exhibitors and cinema-owners/managers prefer to have a re-run of an old commercial film, than have an unprofitable showing of a children's film.<sup>81</sup> The bottleneck is as much at the level of production, as of distribution and exhibition.

Films recommended or sponsored by the CFS are also shown at the tax-free rate of Rs. 1/-<sup>82</sup> which makes it even more futile from the exhibitor's point of view. Thus, the few Sunday morning shows in Delhi and Bombay are either sponsored privately - e.g., the Britannia Bread Company - or, of late, shown in Bombay at the theatre owned by the present CFS Chairman, Mr. V. Shantaram. None of these facts augurs very promisingly for the future of the Children's Film Movement in India. Add to this the cost of producing one good film, and juxtapose it against the meagre Rs. 14 lakh (1977-78)<sup>83</sup> budget of the CFS, and the situation becomes more discouraging.

But all of it cannot be blamed on the budget - there has been singularly little effort to do anything with what existed. On the contrary, part of the reason for the temporary closure of the CFS some years ago was because of financial mismanagement.

Even today, petty corruption like frequent visits to foreign film festivals by officials of the CFS<sup>84</sup> persists.

However, the Society has now - perhaps to join the International Year of the Child bandwagon - drawn up a rather ambitious programme for its activity in the current plan period (1979-1984). It has realised that, at least in the realm of children's cinema, the national all-India Hindi film cannot work and that there exists no such 'universe of discourse' which can be generally understood - geographically, culturally or socially. Thus, two feature films are being planned in each of the 12 major regional languages of the country, every-one of which will be dubbed in the remaining eleven. In this way, the Society aims to reach the

"under-current of commonness that blends the diverse people into a single identity - Indian". (85)

This is, of course, a statement that in its naivete, even surpasses the simplicity of the child's world.

Administrative and creative incompetence, thus, has been helped along by financial inadequacy and mismanagement, to create a distinctly unhappy situation in the sphere of children's cinema. The Annual Report (for 1975-76) of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, for instance, shows that the CFS one of the smaller units, had, against it, the fourth highest no. of outstanding inspection reports. The Audit for the year ending 31st March 1975 pointed to many irregularities such as :

"Grant-in-aid in excess of requirements; loss of stores; loss of prints; irregularities in distribution and exhibition of films; Overpayment of T.A.; non-maintenance of compact records; non-maintenance of service books; unauthorised payment of exhibitions charges; irregularities in purchases; record not produced". (86)

The fact that the promotion of children's cinema was taken up by the Government itself, it could certainly have been pursued more earnestly and energetically. If the Government had succeeded even in the limited sphere of forcing or devising outlets for exhibition, as it did for the Films Division, the question of content, quality and increased production could have been subsequently remedied. But it has been a clear case of mistaken priorities. The same Ministry that could block out completely the prospects of an independent short film movement in the country by choking exhibition outlets, has not been able to command its strict control in this sphere to do something similar for children's cinema. As a result, children's films are like orphans - unwanted and unchampioned, except when policy-gestures must be made. For instance, in the policy-statement made at the beginning of 1979, the Year of the Child - a Rs. 10 crore complex for film-making (located in Bombay) was promised to "the children of this country".

That, itself is a mistaken nomenclature. The children exposed to the film medium are the urban, school-going, relatively affluent children, for whom the medium has two distinct aspects - educational and entertainment. The latter is provided by the

popular Bombay cinema on TV and otherwise, which is being positively encouraged by the CFS and the Government by their ineptitude in doing something positive to counter it. The former is provided by the educational shorts made by the NCERT and its units, which are in the nature of audio-visual teaching aids. Even these, in spite of being limited to affluent schools with projection facilities, have a wider audience than the little closed world of Sunday morning shows of the Children's Film Society.

The rules and regulations of the Society clearly state that films can be borrowed only by institutions (recognised as educational institutions by the relevant State Department of Education) with exhibition facilities of their own. The village school could obviously never hope to become a part of this closed circuit, not to speak of the vast majority of those children who do not go to school, in any case. The CFS has not made any attempt, and is unlikely to take any initiative, in reaching out and finding the audience that needs it. But it still spins fantasies about poor street urchins, victims of circumstance, who - at the end of the film - get transported into the world of affluence and luxury<sup>87</sup> in ways not dissimilar from those that take the conventional hero of any Hindi film into a happier world.

The dilemma of the CFS is, thus, one of both quality and coverage. Neither one would be any use without the other - but,

neither is being pursued with any degree of effort. Till such time as that is done, the Hindi film is being given an alibi to continue using unrealistically precocious children to perpetuate a stereotype that has already been adopted by much cinema that is ostensibly meant for children.

#### DIRECTORATE OF FIELD PUBLICITY

The Directorate of Field Publicity (DFP), established in 1953, with 34 mobile units, today commands a vast network of 216 units, grouped under 17 Regional Offices that cover the entire country. Of these, 67 are located in the border areas, and the thrust is mainly towards reaching the rural areas, especially those which are deep in the interior, and usually inaccessible. The avowed purpose of this three-tier organisation comprising the Directorate (at Delhi), the 17 Regional Offices and the Field Units is to work concertedly -

"to carry the Government's policies and programmes and to interpret them to masses through their own language aided by audio-visual means. This helps in mobilising mass support and also motivating the people for action in their own sphere of activity. Main themes of publicity comprise democracy, secularism, national integration, communal harmony, planned development with emphasis on people's participation and family planning.

It also provides a feed-back by supplying public reactions on Government's policies and programmes. The Field Publicity Organisation thus functions for Government not only as its communicator but also as its eyes and ears". (88)



The methods of communication range from simple oral communication through the use of traditional folk media to the use of a technologically advanced medium like the film. Thus, every field unit is equipped with :

"a jeep, 16 mm projector, generator, and a transistorised radio-receiving set besides adequate number of documentary films on a variety of subjects, mini photo-exhibition set, posters and publicity literature. A few feature films on national subjects are also available. The units normally tour for twenty days a month and strive to cover at least two villages a day". (89)

The use of that much-vaunted technique of communication - the multi-media approach - has been commandeered by the D.F.P. A look at two recent annual reports, however, shows that the employment of film for communication (or perhaps to enhance the receptivity of an audience) is the more frequent, if all its activities are divided into two categories - the film (features, short films, Indian News Reviews, etc.) and non-film (folk plays, puppet performances, ballads, etc.).

Thus, the report for 1975-76 shows that, in 1975, there were a total number of 8841 tour days, in the course of which a audience 86511400 persons was covered. Of the activities in these tours, 116454 were film shows as against only 9701 Song and Drama programmes. The comparable figures for 1977 also support this trend.<sup>90</sup>

Between the years 1965 and 1979 alone, the DFP had purchased a total number of 45 feature films, in numbers varying

1977	Tour-days	Film Shows	Song & Drama	Audience
January-March	9731	19640	4114	21027900
April-December	21593	54737	6880	44709700
Total	31324	74377	10994	65737600

Source : Annual Report, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1977-78, pp. 126-27, Appendix VI - (1) and (ii)

from 2 to 35 prints of each.<sup>91</sup> The average life of each print is at least 300 screenings, and prints are often over-used in these units. Assuming that each film show draws an approximate audience of 30-50,000, the total amount of population covered becomes phenomenal. Similarly, between 1968 and 1979, 86 short films were bought by the DFP, mostly through the Film Division.<sup>92</sup> The selection of "suitable" films is made by an Advisory Committee on National Integration, with certain specific ideas in mind. The procedure generally followed is that the DFP asks for a print for review, after being approached by the producer/distributor of the film. This print is seen by the Advisory Committee in the course of its weekly meeting at the Films Division auditorium in Delhi. The Committee, consisting of the Director of Field Publicity, the Joint Chief Producer of the Films Division, one Director (Information and Publicity) from the Ministry, and two Deputy Secretaries (Finance and Films respectively) makes the choice of film on the basis of its suitability from the point

of view of governmental publicity.

The final decision, it is generally accepted, is always that of the Director of Field Publicity himself. If a decision is made in favour of buying the film, the Film Finance Corporation steps in to fix the price of the film, and the number of necessary prints are then purchased.

The feature films bought by the D.F.P. are rarely exceptions to the average popular Hindi film, which have been produced with an eye to the market. Thus, from the background paper prepared for discussions at a recent conference of Regional Officer of the D.F.P.<sup>93</sup>, it is evident that a limited budget for feature films precludes frequent buying, particularly of new films, which are transferred on to 16 mm by private producers only when their commercial potential has been completely exploited and exhausted. For some reason, the 'points for discussion' seem to centre around the DFP's inability to buy more and newer films. There does not seem to be as much concern about the kind of films bought and exhibited. Admitted that the choice of feature film is somewhat restricted, and admitted that some films like Ankur, Manthan, etc. have been bought, the two aspects of DFP policy seem to reconcile admirably -

- (i) that films should have a message that makes their exhibition by the Governmental apparatus purposeful and useful; and
- (ii) that these films should be chosen from among the scores of popular Hindi films released every year.

The equation between these two could, in fact, be seen as a kind of reflection on the message the average film carries, or is seen to communicate. In this context, the lament of the Regional Officers' conference that not enough and new feature films can be bought, only strengthens the inference. It is not surprising that the audiences that a film show attracts are much larger than most others. And, given the fact that it is part of the DFP's policy to exhibit these feature films on a priority basis in remote areas which are ordinarily beyond the reach of the commercial cinema circuit, the Directorate is, in effect, merely supplying its services to extend the role of the exhibitor, by stepping in where he is, for monetary considerations, unwilling to go.

#### THE FILMS DIVISION

The Films Division, in its origins, was a sudden and somewhat unseemly revival of the pre-1947 Information Films of India, a production unit for propaganda films set up by the British to meet the requirements of the war years.<sup>94</sup> Prior to independence, much nationalist protest was voiced at the very existence of the IFI, and at the manner in which block-bookings were made and payments extorted from the commercial circuit, for the exhibition of its films. Its temporary eclipse following independence was followed by the "realization" that educative, instructional and motivational films were needed. In 1948, the old system was hastily resuscitated and its develop-

ment undertaken in an even more rigorous and effective manner. 95

In the twenty-fifth year of its existence, in 1974, the Films Division published a comprehensive catalogue of its films. Here, it described itself and its role in these terms :

"The Films Division is the central film producing organisation of the Government of India, under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It is responsible for production and distribution of newsreels, documentaries and other films required by the Government of India for public information, education, motivation and for instructional and cultural purposes."

The aim of the Films Division is to mobilise the use of the dynamic medium of the film to disseminate information to the broadcast spectrum of the Indian and foreign audiences and to focus attention on important aspects of country's life with a view to bringing about enlightened participation in the affairs of the nation and objective appreciation of facts, events and personalities. The aim of the films produced for use abroad is to project an objective image of the country to secure proper appreciation in foreign countries. Yet another aim of the Division is to assist the growth and development of the documentary films as a medium of education and communication.

This organisation is the largest single documentary film producing unit in India and one of the largest of its kind in the world". (96)

More often, however, the Films Division has tended to project itself as an organ of governmental publicity - and has, indeed, been seen as such.<sup>97</sup> This is as much a result of the predominant emphasis, in its newsreel production, on filming unending streams of ministerial pronouncements, inaugurations and foundation-stone laying ceremonies by governmental/political celebrities, etc. as of the indifferent production quality and thematic content of its other short films. The inevitable

stifling of creativity in a bureaucratic environment is one of the chief afflictions of the Films Division today - and one which, together with the blocking of exhibition outlets, is doing incalculable harm to even the possibility of the development of a short film movement in the country, outside of its ownegis. Each of these points deserves to be considered in some detail, as the F.D. itself commands an exhibition network available to no other single agency in the land. Its productions are seen, by virtue of the Compulsory Exhibition Scheme, by almost 70 million people every week. Its audiences include not merely the 'captive' audiences in cinema halls, but also those organised by the DFP in rural areas, those in Indian missions abroad, the limited but not inconsiderable - television audiences, and the small numbers of people who see Films documentaries in its own auditorium in the major cities. The Films Division is paid, for its newsreels/documentaries at the rate of 1% of the average weekly box-office earnings. Not only does this provide some index of the size of audiences for the commercial cinema, it is also the only reliable computation of what box-office earnings are in any given year. Thus, in 1976-77 the F.D. earned, by way of rental, Rs. 201 lakhs<sup>98</sup>, which points to the stupendous economic dimensions of the film industry, where a hundred times that figure is collected from the exhibition of feature films.

The kind of films produced by the Films Division and the nature of its themes has usually been wide-ranging - including

art and experimental films, biographical films, instructional films made for use in the classroom, and films made for defence personnel and other specialised audiences. There are also a small number of feature-type/feature-length films, and some others for tourists and export promotion. The large numbers of them, of course, are motivational and developmental films which lend added credence to charges of Governmental propaganda. The themes of these are usually drawn from among the following: family planning, agriculture and the modernization thereof; national integration; and social problems such as dowry, fragmentation of land and property, disease, child development; life insurance and savings, etc. There is a greater tendency to concentrate on this category of themes, and very little effort to continue making biographical films (like those on Tagore, Begum Akhtar, and Ahmad Jan Thirakwa)<sup>98</sup> or nationalist/geographical films and so on. The resources the Government can command are being channelised towards "message-oriented" films.

When, in 1948, the practice of block-booking was, on the model of the Information Films of India, sought to be revived, there was a great deal of protest from the exhibitors against the move, as also against the increased rental charges that were being imposed on them.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, and for many years later, the Films Division built its counter-attack on the somewhat shaky foundations of the argument that film producers

themselves had, from 1937 onwards, frequently demanded a certain amount of mandatory screen time for short films "in the interest of national culture". After 1948, however, with the change in national political climate, they tried to argue that the Films Division would be given a voluntary outlet by many exhibitors. It was even suggested that the Films Division should, if it wanted to have an outlet, pay exhibitors as the Government paid the newspapers for advertisement space. Neither of these suggestions was heeded by the FD, which imposed and implemented, on a national level (through asking the state Governments to do so) a policy whereby every screening of a film on the commercial circuit would necessarily be preceded by a 20 minute film of newswel, "approved by the Film Advisory Board". This, the Ministry soothingly argued, was designed to promote the short film movement in the country. The films approved by the FAB and those produced by the FD, were, predictably, no different and coincidence between the two soon became a matter of course. The complaints of exhibitors, too, gradually turned into resigned acceptance. The antagonism was the more acute because the measure had, to begin with, been effected by executive ordinance, rather than through legislative enactment.

The greater anguish, of course, was not of the exhibitor, but that of the independent documentary producer on whose success depended the development of a viable documentary film movement in the country. The possibility, such as it was, has by now



been completely eliminated as a result of the monopolistic control of the Films Division.<sup>101</sup> The only avenue open to the independent short film maker to produce and find an exhibition outlet for his work is by being on the approved panel of the Films Division itself - a list of consisting of about 75 people every year, of whom some are given an occasional film to produce. A total number of 100 black and white films (apart from 40 national, 38 regional and 1 special newsreel) released by the Films Division between April and December 1977. The target for 1977-78 was 130 documentary and short films, of which only 40-45 were proposed to be parcelled out among independent producers. A large number (81 films) were "donation" films.<sup>102</sup> It is possible to be on the panel of producers of the FD without hardly ever getting to produce a film for it - and it is enormously difficult to get on to the panel, in the first place. Apart from an immense amount of paper-work, the conditions required are such that a producer fulfilling them would not need to be on the FD panel, in the first place.<sup>103</sup> If, despite this, a producer is fortunate enough to be a member of the panel and to be invited to quote a tender (usually all producers on the panel are, unless the theme of the proposed film is specialised, in which case only limited tenders are invited), and if his tender is the lowest and his competence is reasonably assured, the contract may be given to him. More important films are often given to producers outside the panel, through negotiations and mutual agreement. Being assigned a

film is not, in itself, a solution. There are many subsequent difficulties, including those of covering initial production costs, getting paid in time and so forth. The lot of the independent film-maker, in other words, is not a joyous one. However, even that, in itself, is not cause enough for anguish: each story of an individual producers' struggle is a reflection on a larger cause - the cause of the short film in general. The fate of an ordinary, privately-produced documentary is anonymity. Of the recent few bold treatments of directly political themes (Waves of Revolution and Prisoners of Conscience by Anand Patwardhan; Mukti Chai by Utpalendu Chakravarty and Chhatranhang by Nina Shivdasani, etc.) only those (of Patwardhan, notably) that could be used for political purposes were adopted and screened (on TV) by the Government. The others cannot even aspire to the certificates of dubious distinction conferred by the Central Board of Film Censors. There is, in other words, little opportunity for a thinking, purposeful cinema to develop, as a constructive alternative to the unthinking but communicative popular fiction film, meant ostensibly only to entertain. Governmental policy provides, on the one hand, various supports to the letter (through Radio, Television and other media owned by it) and, on the other, actively prevents anything in the nature of a purposeful alternative from emerging, even in the relatively unpopular realm of documentary film. It has appropriated to itself the sole responsibility for <sup>the</sup> civic and social education of the Indian population. The fact that it has executed

this task in a singularly unimaginative manner is the least of its offences. Its major achievement has been, undoubtedly, to stultify the documentary movement so effectively that, even were exhibition outlets for independent productions to emerge somehow, it would be an uphill task to make an audience, conditioned to FD quality, documentary-conscious and interested, let alone appreciative or discerning. It has been justly commented, "... official anything is bad, but official films are worst".<sup>104</sup>

#### THE FILM FINANCE CORPORATION

Eleven years after the recommendation of the Film Enquiry Committee (S.K. Patil Committee, 1949), the Film Finance Corporation was established by the Government of India, in response to the increasingly evident ills of the Bombay film industry - and particularly, the role in it of moneylenders, black money, distribution strangleholds and so on. The FFC, now nearing extinction<sup>105</sup>, was set up as an autonomous corporation, with a clearly defined charter of objectives. For all practical purposes, however, it has continued to function as a constituent unit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

The functioning of the FFC in the 19 years of its existence is the clearest example of Governmental intention regarding the film industry. The FFC has proved to be little more than an ineffectual fulfilment of its frequent declarations of intent to salvage film from industry. The meagre resources that have been channelised into the FFC and the manner of their utilisation

have allowed the popular film industry continued free play to develop unhindered in directions which the FFC was ostensibly brought in to check. In this enterprise, the FFC has merely played a negatively complementary role - by providing an edifice that can be pointed to, in response to the criticism of detectors of the popular cinema, without any concrete effort to make a meaningful alternative. The reason for this is, perhaps, more a function of government's lack of inclination than of ability. They are, moreover, consequences that were bound to follow from the limited nature of the original conception.

The suggestion for a government-financed film financing corporation was first made by the Indian Cinematograph Committee, reiterated, in more concrete terms, by the Patil Committee, and always welcomed by the film industry. It took a State government's initiative and a successful film to finally convince the Union Government that action on this front was called for. The West Bengal Government, acting without precedent, and for extra-official reasons<sup>106</sup>, decided to finance Ray's Pather Panchali, and recouped its financial investment twice over besides claiming many international awards as the owner of the film. The Central Government's decision to start the FFC was more than partially influenced by the story of this venture. An idea which had hitherto been consistently rejected as impractical was now, suddenly given concrete shape, legislative approval,

a charter, some money and a former Income-Tax Commissioner as its head, presumably to ensure financial management of a high order. <sup>107</sup>

On March 20, 1960, the FFC was born - with the main objective of financing good cinema :

"films portraying life in its true and nobler forms at 9% rate of interest - reduced to 7% in cases of prompt payment. There should be realism so that one may identify oneself with the characters, situations and problems projected in the films. The theme may be social, historical, cultural or even religious, but it must carry a message or purpose in a manner neither propagandist nor dull. There should also be healthy entertainment and humour.

The Corporation is not trying to take on itself, the role of a reformist movement in the Indian film world, it only aims at helping in the production of films that will progressively turn out to be works of art, laying stress on the lasting values of life". (108)

Apart from the financing of films of quality, the FFC was also entrusted with supplementary tasks, partly to add to its own financial strength. The import of foreign films; the organisation of film festivals (in co-operation with the Directorate of Film Festivals); and the import of the raw-stock requirements of the film industry - were all to be supervised or routed through the FFC. Some of these activities, it has been recently announced, will be re-allocated and re-organised. But the position till 1977-78 was as originally designed. And, pending administrative change, it is on that basis that an evaluation of the FFC must rest.

Starting out with an authorised capital of Rs. 1 crore (of which the issued capital, wholly subscribed by the Government, is Rs. 50 lakhs)<sup>109</sup>, the FFC was later given a further governmental loan of Rs. 1 crore, of which the bulk was to be used for financing the production of films. Just Rs. 5 lakhs was kept aside for distribution activities, and another 12.5 lakhs for exhibition. By the financial year ending March 31, 1971, the total amount paid back by the Corporation was Rs. 27.64 lakhs. Till now, it had financed 92 feature films and 33 documentaries, with Rs. 2.59 crores.<sup>110</sup> While the Ministry is always eager to point to the 41 national and other awards FFC films have so far won, it is more than to ignore the large numbers (undisclosed) of FFC-financed films that have never found an exhibition outlet, and are consigned to godowns. Despite the FFC's frequent announcements of proposals for launching small theatres for 'art' films and limited audiences, nothing has been done. Even receptive university circuits have not been penetrated.<sup>111</sup> The very search for small theatres is, in effect, an explicit admission of its inability to promote good cinema as an alternative to the popular films it was set up to counter. Lack of sufficient effort to get the films seen and appreciated on the popular circuit has compounded the problems created by a similar lack of discrimination in the choice of films to be financed. Altogether, a situation has been created where the FFC is being virtually driven to seek outlets for limited audience of film intellectuals. The original purpose has already been defeated.

Further, FFC procedures for selecting a film to be financed have never been received with any degree of enthusiasm. The necessity for collateral securities and so on make it almost impossible for a talented film-maker to embark on a career where the initial investment - even for the FFC's consideration alone - is not altogether negligible. Granted even that some of the controversies generated between film-makers and the FFC may be exaggerated out of proportion<sup>112</sup>, the procedures for loan application are not trouble-free and straightforward. Nor is the actual procedure for selection. The few successes of the FFC have almost invariably been individual successes of their directors that have lent credibility to the FFC's work rather than vice versa.<sup>113</sup>

The only source of profits that the FFC has found is, in the import of films from abroad (48 imports had been made upto 1978). But for one brief period, when a governmental policy decision was taken against American films, these imports have been largely from among the more ordinary, and sometimes even below-average, productions of Hollywood. They have been little more than the western equivalents of the popular Hindi cinema that the FFC indigenously boycotts. Their main justification has been that these (mostly English language) films are popular here, cheap to buy and import, sound sources of profit, and often support the FFC's other nobler commitments. Thus, the FFC is, on the one hand, financing experimental avant-garde 'art' films (rather than trading the middle-way it was originally

designed to) and, on the other, paradoxically, importing the western counterparts of what it discourages within. Quite apart from the not altogether negligible impact of these imports on indigenous popular cinema, it is surprising that an institution that participates in the organisation of India's annual international film festivals, and is exposed to much that is good in international cinema should, for monetary considerations alone, compromise so drastically on quality. When the FFC - with its clearly defined objectives, encourages trends such as these, it can hardly be treated as a serious governmental attempt to encourage alternative trends in Indian cinema.

Another lucrative source of profit has been in the form of the FFC's commission on the import of raw stock. By March 1976, the FFC had already earned Rs. 69 lakhs as its commission in this respect, with the Indian Motion Picture Export Corporation acting as a sub-agent. The task of exporting Indian films abroad is now wholly supervised by this organisation, and no longer by the FFC, which was also appropriating significant revenue on this account. <sup>114</sup>

The FFC has, further, never maintained any kind of balance between imports and financed films. The Ministry Report for 1977-78, for instance, ambiguously states that a total number of 16 films released between April and December 1977, while 8 films were imported during the same period. The exact balance between the Indian and the foreign releases in any given period



is glossed over. Similarly, the fact that, between April-December 1977, the Corporation sanctioned 13 loan-applications (Rs. 35.37 lakhs) does not say very much, as does not the estimated figure of its available resources (as on December 31, 1977) at Rs. 26.09 lakhs.<sup>115</sup>

The total position becomes clearer when we take into account the fact that the total number of films produced in the country stands at around 500 per year (often more) of which Hindi films are a considerably large segment. The FFC financed films in any given year vary from two in one year to six in another, with ambitious plans to increase the number to 20-25 per year. The proportion, within this number, of feature films to documentaries is, once again, unknown. The general ambiguity - deliberate or otherwise - that characterises the activities of the FFC is, no doubt, an important reason for the criticism that its non-achievements attract.

These two major aspects of FFC policy assume almost comic dimensions when contrasted with each other. The FFC is eager to proclaim its achievements (financial) on the import front. It proudly announces that 85 films have been imported by it since 1975-76, when it was first granted an import licence, with 15 on the way (in January, 1979). The national exhibition network built-up for these films shows 557 outlets used in 1977 alone. In contrast to this, there is the spectacle of many FFC<sup>116</sup> financed films lying unused in cans, with no hope of ever finding exhibition outlets. If there had been serious

intent, parallel to this effort on the home front, too, the FRC might perhaps have overcome its early teething problems and developed a sounder, more discriminating policy of selection, not entirely without an eye to popular standards. It has failed to counter popular Hindi cinema on its own terms - deviating, on the one hand, into extreme avant-gardism and, on the other, encouraging on the import front what it is supposed to discourage on the domestic. This policy of dual standards is only one inadequacy of FRC policy in general. Thus, it can make statements like this in the face of its glaring failures on the question of promoting good Indian cinema, for which it was originally brought into being :

"Given the glaring shortage of theatres here, FRC deliberately soft-pedalled imports till now, so that no film would lie idle. Towards the end of 1975-76, 29 films were waiting in the queue for release. So, while the number of new imports was kept down, the number of exhibition outlets was boosted. Presently, every film imported is in circulation and FRC has already stepped up imports in the first half of this financial year.

Earlier, imported films were given over to sub-distributors who were drawn by the more commercial aspects of films. But for the last two years, FRC has taken over distribution itself, showing vastly improved results in terms of mix of films, number of outlets covered, print usage and income earned". (117)

The secondary and supplementary activities assigned to the FRC have today become the raison d'être of its existence, and the therewithal of its survival. The original purpose has been long-forgotten and consigned to oblivion.

There are, in addition, to these, some other Central Government units which are also, in one way or another, connected with film. The Indian Motion Picture Corporation is among the more important of these. Established in 1963<sup>118</sup> with the primary objective of supplementing private trade; exploring the possibilities of opening up markets in areas other than the traditional - West Asia, Africa, the Far East, where Indian immigrants settled in large numbers; and regulating trade, the Indian Motion Picture Export Corporation also, like the FFC, today faces the possibility of extinction.

Its work has been of no great distinction apart from the fact that it has, through Film Markets and so forth, signed many agreements with other countries for the export of films. These, however, have been at a State-to-State level, while the bulk of motion picture export continues, even today, to be controlled by private enterprises. It does, however, claim a few notable distinctions - among them, checking the smuggling of films, under-invoicing, the accumulation of foreign exchange abroad and the illegal exploitation of Indian films. Its exports which, in 1976-77 reached Rs. 32.29 lakhs<sup>119</sup> were estimated to rise to about Rs. 40 lakhs in 1977-78. Even this, however, is only a fraction of the total export earnings from Indian films which, between April 1976 and March 1977 totalled Rs. 7,31,58,204 for feature films alone.<sup>120</sup>

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting also controls the Directorate of Film Festivals, which has acquired a reputation for its administrative and financial mismanagement during Film Festivals and otherwise. Similarly, the Films and Television Institute of India has not been a run away success, with large numbers of its graduates struggling for employment in an industry where talent or training alone do not spell success. The National Film Archive, also at Poona, has plodded along steadily - and, given its limited resources, has done rather well. Finally, there is the annual ritual of National Awards for films, now twenty-six years old. Here, the Ministry has followed the practice of decorating good films from outside the Bombay film industry - but, given the other supports it provides to the latter, one less does not really count.

The latest governmental position, though a fluid one, is a proposal for the merger of the FFC and the IMPEC with the National Film Development Corporation (the NFDC), with a raised authorised capital of Rs. 4 crores for it. Though established in 1975, the NFDC had not been launched with a defined charter of objectives and range of activities. Whether this will or will not now acquire concrete shape is, of course, debatable. But it is significant that, soon after the announcement of this policy decision, the 24-day old Charan Singh Government was attempting to stabilise itself on one major front - AIADMK support, conditional upon the formation of a separate Ministry

for film and culture. It was, certainly, a step that could have had significant repercussions on the future of the Indian film industry. The film medium has proved, in the recent past, to be charged with political import, as an instrument as much as a bargaining point, for the control of which political battles are fought.

Notes and References

1. The Constitution of India, Seventh Schedule (Article 246), List I - Union List, Item 60.
2. The Cinematograph Act, 1952 (Central Act No. 37 of 1952). The Amendments to the Act in 1973 and 1974 were both given Presidential assent, but the enforcement of the latter is still contingent upon a Central Government notification in the Official Gazette.
3. Section 13, Part III, Cinematograph Act, 1952, *ibid.*, as reproduced in C.L. Bafna - Law Relating to Cinemas in India, Jaipur, 1978; Bafna Law Publishers, p. 32.
4. Clause 17 of Part III, in *ibid.*, p. 34.
5. Cinematograph Act, 1918 (Act No. 11 of 1918) pp. 10-14 in Cinematograph Act (as Amended Up to Date) with History of Amendments and Short Comments by the Board of Editors, Law Book Co., Allahabad, 1978.
6. The Examining Committee, which saw the film on 26.4.1975, was divided on the issue of whether it should be passed with cuts, or refused a certificate altogether. The Regional Officer was one member who held the latter view, and it was therefore referred to a Revision Committee, which passed it by six to one, with cuts. But the then Acting Chairman of CBFC, disagreeing further referred it to the Government, where a ministerial decision was taken, and the film was refused a certificate altogether on 11.7.1975. Government of India - White Paper on Misuse of Mass Media During the Internal Emergency (August 1977), pp. 85-87.
7. Subsequently published as "Liberty and Licence in the Indian Cinema" by Aruna Vasudev, New Delhi, 1978, Vikas Publishing House.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 11. These laws were concerted "mainly with obscenity, wounding religious susceptibilities or inciting disaffection against the Government".
9. The principles of censorship, by and large, followed clearly recognised principles of British policy in general. It is interesting that the British Board of Film Censors enjoyed an amicable relationship with Whitehall for several years, and this happy mutualism was stopped only after world war II. The vigilance practised within Britain itself was fundamentally no different from that practised in colonial India.

Thus, among items to be censored were - "references to controversial politics, scenes tending to disparage public characters and institutions, incidents having a tendency to disparage out Allies, scenes holding up the King's uniforms to contempt and ridicule, and 'Relations of Capital and Labour', by which is meant anything that suggested conflict between workers and employers", in Guy Phelps, Film Censorship, London, 1975, Victor Gollancz Limited. Chapter 7 - Political Censorship, pp. 144-160.

10. Quoted in Vasudev, op. cit., p. 21.
11. Ibid., p. 25.
12. Ibid., p. 26.
13. Ibid., p. 26.
14. Ibid., p. 23.
15. Ibid., p. 23.
16. Ibid., pp. 23-24.
17. Ibid., p. 38.
18. Ibid., p. 47.
19. Ibid., p. 47.
20. Ibid., p. 47.
21. Ibid., p. 47.
22. Ibid., p. 49.
23. Ibid., pp. 48-50.
24. B.D. Garge quoted in *ibid.*, p. 76.
25. This is no different from the recent guidelines for censorship, suggesting that drinking should not be shown in films except in a bad light, and that the evils of drinking and the virtues of temperance must be underlined whenever drink is shown on the screen. Times of India, March 4, 1979, Editorial entitled 'Dry' Films?. Also, The Statesman, January 11, 1978, Editorial entitled "Guidelines for Films".
26. Report of the Enquiry Committee on Film Censorship, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi

27. A stipulation that has been further reiterated in the new censorship guidelines issued by the Government on January 7, 1978. "New Guiding Principles for Film Censorship - Notification. Directors to the Central Film Censor Board", Clause 3 (i) and (ii).
28. Quoted in Vasudev, op. cit., p. 127.
29. Ibid., p. 130.
30. Ibid., p. 131.
31. Khosla Committee Report, p. 153.
32. Ibid.
33. Vasudev, op. cit., p. 132.
34. Ibid., p. 140.
35. Ibid., p. 183.
36. White Paper on the Misuse of the Mass Media During the Emergency, op. cit., p. 85.
37. Ibid., p. 83.
38. Ibid., p. 83.
39. The Times of India, p. 1.
40. Report 1977-78, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, p. 39.
41. In some places, Aandhi was even advertised as : "See Indira Gandhi in Aandhi". The film was suspended from exhibition for two months in July 1975. Many appeals to the Ministry, and 28 cuts and retakes latter, it was passed in March 1976, substantially changed. White Paper, op. cit., p. 85.
42. Andolan was, in May 1975, given 'U' certificate, and classified as Predominantly Educational (PE). Before it could be released, however, the Central Government recalled it in November 1976, demanding important cuts. White paper, op. cit., p. 85.
43. White Paper, ibid., pp. 84-85.



44. News item in the Times of India, February 28, 1979.
45. Vasudev, op. cit., p. 175.
46. News item in the Indian Express, March 11, 1977, p. 5.
47. News item in The Statesman, January 8, 1978.
48. Section 5-B of Part II of the Cinematograph Act, 1952 in Bafna, op. cit., p. 10.
49. Sub-section 3, Clause 3 of Commentary to Section 5b of ibid., p. 12.
50. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
51. Ibid., p. 14.
52. Ibid., p. 15.
53. In this connection, the controversy generated by the Government's recent refusal to allow foreigners to make films in India on sensitive subjects, is important. For fuller details, see a discussion in the Illustrated Weekly of India, December 10-16, 1978, pp. 19-23 and December 24-30, pp. 29-35.
54. Section 1(a) of the New Censorship Guidelines.
55. Ibid., Section 2.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., Section 3 (ii).
58. Detailed discussion in Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, Indian Film, New Delhi, 1963; Orient Longmans, pp. 199-206.
59. India - A Reference Annual 1977 and 1978; Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1978. Chapter 10 - "Mass Communication", p. 132.
60. News Item in the Times of India, December 3, 1977, p.1.
61. Sources : (i) India 1977 and 1978, p. 130.  
(ii) "Facts at a Glance", Audience Research Unit, Directorate-General, All India Radio (31-12-1978), pp. 4-5.
62. Vividh Bharati Programmes in 1976 had 1,43,378 hours and 27' and 1,40,205 hours and 36 mts. in 1977. Sources: ibid

63. Report on the Listening Survey Conducted at Delhi on 21st, 22nd, 24th, 25th, and 26th December, 1972. Audience Research Unit, All India Radio, New Delhi.
64. Commercial Broadcasting Service Audience Research : Time Budget Survey Report; Central Sales Unit, Commercial Service, All India Radio, Bombay, March 1976.
65. A Study of Radio Ownership, Listening Habits and Programme Preferences (with special reference to Vividh Bharati and Commercial Broadcasting Service). A Study carried out for the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi by the Institute of Economic and Market Research, New Delhi, 1976.
66. Cf. pp. 148
67. "Facts at a Glance", op. cit., p. 6.
68. Report on the Profile of Delhi TV Homes and Popularity Rating of TV Programmes. January 1976, Audience Research Unit, Television Centre, Delhi.
69. "Doordarshan : Hangover of Colonial Subservicence" by Bharat Dogra in Filmfare, September 16-30, 1976, p- 41. Also see, Dogra, "Indian TV : In Whose Service?" The Times of India, April 29, 1979.
70. Ibid.
71. White Paper, op. cit., pp. 75-76.
72. H.D. Dhawan, "Financing Indian Television System", in the Economic and Political Weekly, May 3, 1975, pp. 727-30.
73. White Paper, op. cit., p. 77.
74. (1) Cf. John Spraos, The Decline of the Cinema : An Economists' Report, London, 1962, George Allen and Unwin, and Vincent Porter, "TV Strategies and European Film Production", in Sight and Sound, Vol. 43, No. 3, pp.163-165, 175. Porter attributes the decline in cinema audience in Europe to the spread of TV ownership. He builds up an interesting model of economic systems - the market economy, which is the context of the popular cinema, and the planned or command economy which is the context of TV films. Spraos, on the contrary, argues that TV is a factor contributing to the decline in cinema attendance in Britain, but a fute and inadequate explanation. The major reason, he says, is the "coarse vulgarity and social irresponsibility of the bulk of the cinematic product", pp. 165-66.

75. Nirad N. Mohapatra quoted in "Children's Film Society: The Children's Share is Zero" by Kantilal Rathod in Filmfare, September 1-15, 1978, p. 13.
76. This is the case with the British Film Foundation, 70% of the Rupees one crore budget of which is met by film producers voluntarily. Similarly, in Finland, the USSR, and other countries, either Governments or the film industry as a whole contribute to a strong children's film movement. See Rathod, *ibid.*, p. 11.
77. Children's Film Society, India, Catalogue of Films, p. 1.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 1 - 11.
79. This is so with one small exception - the children's Film Society claims to have shown its films to six million children in the course of five months this year, through children's film festivals held in 7 State capitals. Letter to the Editor, the Statesman, by V.B. Aggarwal, Chief Executive Officer, CFS. (The Statesman, July 2nd 1979). For the rest, there are no figures, however general, and audience research is still at the stage of planning and proposal Children's Film Society - pamphlet issued for the Festival of Children's Films in the year of the Child, 1979.
80. On the question of what a children's film ought to be, Cf. Ezra Mir - "Children's Films" in Indian Cinema 1965, New Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, pp. 42-47.
81. Rakesh Khanna, Director, Chanakya Theatre in a letter to the Editor, The Statesman, May 26th 1979. Khanna states that, in one morning show of a Laurel and Hardy film, attended by 70 people, the total box-office earning were a meagre Rs. 103.35.
82. The CFS' own reasoning of this is as follows :  
 "The cost of ticket is, however, kept to a minimum, so that the children can afford it from their own pocket money. This provides some revenue to the Society and also gives chance to the children to see the films in their routine entertainment engagements". (Children's Film Society Pamphlet, 1979, *op. cit.*, p. 2). It is, quite obvious, from this, what kind of audience the CFS caters for.

83. The budgetary grant for 1977-78 to the Children's Film Society. Source : Summary of Financial Requirements, Budget Provision, Appendix II of the Report for 1977-78 of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, p. 90.
84. "Non-Year of the Child" by Amita Malik, in The Statesman (Film Notebook), May 19th 1979.
85. Children's Film Society pamphlet, 1979, op. cit., p.5.
86. Report 1975-76 of the Ministry for Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, Audit Observations and Inspection Report, Appendix I, p. 116.
87. "Anmol Tasveer", A CFS Film, 1978, Director - Satyen Bose (a film in Hindi).
88. Mass Media in India 1978; Publications Division, MIB, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 119-20.
89. Ibid., p. 120.
90. Annual Report 1977-78, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Appendix VI (i) and (ii), pp. 126-27.
91. Directorate of Field Publicity (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) : List of Feature Films in 16mm purchased from 1965 to 1979).
92. List of Documentary films in 16mm purchased from 1968 to 1979, as above.
93. Jag Mohan, Two Decades of the Films Division, Films Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Bombay, pp. 9-10.
94. Ibid., pp. 11-13.
95. Films Division, Catalogue, 1948-72, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1972.
96. Ibid., p. 10.
97. Cf. articles by John Greison, Basil Wright and others in Four Times Five, published in Bombay by the D.A.V.P., Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India in 1969.
98. India 1977 and 1978, op. cit., p. 148.

99. Films Division : Some Noteworthy Films, Bombay, 1972.
100. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, op. cit., pp. 186-199.
101. One critic has referred to the "independent producer" as being capable of more truthful description as a "dependent" producer. Amita Malik, "The Documentary Film in India", in Indian Cinema 1965, op. cit., p. 53.
102. Report 1977-78, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, pp. 26-27.
103. This is obvious from the standard application form for inclusion in the panel of private producers of the Films Division. Also, Cf. Kulwant Singh, "Business of Short Film-making in India", Research Paper, 1968-69, p. 131.
104. Donald R., "The Problems of the Official Films" in Four Times Five, op. cit., p. 9.
105. News item in the Times of India, June 3, 1979.
106. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, op. cit., pp. 213-24.
107. "The Film Finance Corporation" by N.D. Mehrotra in Indian Cinema 1965, op. cit., pp. 85-91.
108. Ibid., pp. 87-88.
109. Mass Media in India, 1978, op. cit., pp. 45 and 138.
110. Report 1977-78, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, p. 32.
111. Darryl D'Monte, "A National Film Policy - Exhibitor is King", in the Times of India, January 4th 1978.
112. One such controversy is that between film maker B. Bhattacharya of the FFC which was carried on into the Letters to the Editor columns of the Times of India, December 13, 1977.
113. Amita Malik, "A Depressing Flashback" in The Statesman (Film Notebook), June 16th 1979.
114. Report 1977-78, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, p. 33.
115. Ibid., p. 32.
116. FFC News Letter, January 1979. "FFC Imports Pick Up Pace".

117. Ibid.
118. C.H. Ghorpade, "Export of Indian Films" in Indian Cinema, 1965, op. cit., pp. 103-05. Also, Mass Media in India 1978, op. cit., p. 47.
119. Report 1977-78, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, pp. 33-34.
120. B.V. Dharap, Indian Films 1977 and 1978, pp. FM-34-35-36, Poona, 1979.

## Chapter 4

THE FILM INDUSTRY

"...the making of movies is both a big business and a popular art. Certainly its financing, its relationships, with banks, boards of directors and stockholders, its distribution and advertising, its problems of markets, domestic and foreign, and its labour relations are all the well-recognized parts of any big business".

- Hortense Powdermaker<sup>1</sup>

"...I don't like calling films an industry, it is something more than that. We do not speak of literature as an industry, why should we talk about film production as we do of the selling of saucepans and motor cars".

- Sir Stafford Cripps<sup>2</sup>

Film is perhaps the only form which, while claiming to be an "art", is so wholly dependent on the commercial factor - on success determined in monetary terms and paid for by people in larger numbers. Unlike painting or sculpture, cinema - even when art - does not lend itself to individualised consumption. It is seen, at once, by large numbers of people - and whether the environs in which it is seen or its actual content are the cause, it is also usually appreciated plurally. The commercial aspirations of cinema, thus, are largely dictated by the necessity of recovering the immense costs of production.

This is evident, above all, in the various characterisations of the film form, especially in its most prolific early phase - the American film of the '20s.<sup>3</sup> The term 'nickleodeon', for

instance, referred to the price (a nickel) for obtaining entry into the 'odeon' (the Latin term for a small theatre where musical and dramatic performances were held).<sup>4</sup> There is, in more contemporary terms, the meaning attached to the word 'pictures':

"...what we in North America like to call pictures - i.e., films designed primarily to entertain, to sell tickets at the box-office and to make money for the backers". (5)

And there is, finally, the popular term 'show biz' (show business) which fits the film more than it does any other form of contemporary popular culture.

There are many economic aspects of the Hindi cinema which demand attention, and which broadly fall under the three basic categories of production, distribution and exhibition. From the point of view of this study, however, only a very few of them have a direct bearing on the argument outlined in the preceding chapters.

The two apparently opposite positions of Government and industry on the question of the content of film calls for a second look. When the efforts of the government to patronise, and even indirectly promote, the commercial cinema - which, on occasions like Film Festivals, is the target of its attacks - is considered, and when, on the other hand, the eagerness of the film industry's most successful representatives to be photographed with ministerial dignitaries and to support the political



campaigns of the moment through their films<sup>6</sup> is also taken into account, the mutual recriminations about taxes (from the industry) and low quality (from the government which rewards it in every other fashion, but through State Awards) appear unconvincing. The mutual supports they afford each other at so many levels are often obscured by the apparently conflicting positions assumed. This is not, of course, to suggest that the criticisms on both fronts are not sincere - it is the motive of self-interest that determines what the spokesmen for either side enunciate from time to time. All that is being suggested here is the manifold nature of the give-and-take that does, despite clamour for more on both sides, take place. It is not a sinister combine of industry and government that is being hinted at - but, rather, a mutually supportive policy that is, being pursued consciously or otherwise.

At each of the three major levels of production, distribution and exhibition of the Hindi feature film - emanating mostly from Bombay and marginally from Madras - there are immense resources and investments involved, large numbers of people and professions, and laws and taxes supervised by various authorities. All these together create a complex situation of evasion, parallel currency and much else in an industry where, since monetary considerations are paramount, the film must cater to an audience already attuned to basically known and tried formulae. The irresolvable paradox is where producers claim to manufacture movies in accordance with the demonstrated preferences of the

consumer, and others claim that consumer preferences have been forced into shape by a certain kind of film, giving rise to a certain clear pattern of expectations.

### PRODUCTION

At the level of production, the most important considerations are those of finance and personnel. Some basic figures related to production in the Hindi film industry deserve to be cited, if only to highlight the magnitude of its dimensions.

Since 1971, India has consistently headed the list of the 50 or so film producing countries of the world. Of an average number of 516 feature films per year (worked out on the basis of 1974-1978 figures) the average percentage of Hindi feature films is 23.42%, as against the language features which account for 76.48%. The majority of Hindi films, of course, are made in colour while language films, due to limited (because regional) markets, cannot afford more than black and white. Thus, of a total number of 606 Hindi feature films (produced between 1974-1978), 586 were in colour.<sup>7</sup>

With the average investment in a colour feature film being approximately Rs. 50 lakhs (five times that for an average black and white film) it is not surprising that the total capital investment in features per year should be Rs. 164.40 crores. The ratio between colour and black and white films being weighted in favour of colour films, this sum would be used mostly in the production of Hindi feature films. There are, besides the large

capital investment, other inputs of an high expensive order, too. Imports, which are a heavy burden on limited foreign exchange reserves include raw film, exposed film, sound recording and projecting equipment, and even chemicals for processing colour film as well as cosmetics - to the total average cost (per year) of about Rs. 654 lakhs.<sup>6</sup> India, despite the establishment of Hindustan Foto Films<sup>9</sup> is still heavily dependent on foreign sources for importing raw stock and other equipment, especially from western Europe and the USA. This technological and monetary dependence has not helped the progress of such a large industry which, even in its present dimensions, requires enough to necessitate the development of indigenous sources. With the stiff import duties on such material, the cost of production is further inflated.

Most of the investment being in the Hindi film industry, it is also, perforce, localised in the region of Bombay city. In 1960<sup>10</sup> there were an estimated total number of 73 studios<sup>11</sup> of which 26 were located in Bombay, the next highest (15) being in Madras. This was, at that time, a concentration to the extent of 35.6%. Similarly, Bombay also possessed, in 1960, 37% of the total number of laboratories in the country at that time. Localization has facilitated monopolistic conditions, and served to strengthen the position of the employer in the film industry. Thus, a state of extreme competition and shortage of regular work leads to much under-employment and unemployment, and a reduction in the bargaining-power of workers, which

has an adverse effect on their wages and living conditions. All this takes place while the "star system" flourishes and the demands of the box-office enable stars to earn several lakhs each (80% of it in black money) for a single film, while workers get paid in two or three figures. Given the 276 crafts<sup>12</sup> traditionally believed to be employed in film-making, and subtracting from these the handful of well-paid personnel - the director, the lead stars, the music director, playback singer and perhaps the choreographer and dancers, that still leaves a large number of technicians and others, who are not comparably paid, and the largest number of less-skilled craftsmen, workers and 'extras' who earn very meagre allowances.<sup>13</sup> The decline of the old contract system has proved immensely beneficial for the stars, who can quote astonishing figures for signing acceptance and can capitalise on their popularity at the box-office as they progress from film to film. But, for the other workers in the industry, the security of belonging on a regular monthly wage, to a particular film company or studio, has been taken away. And there are practically no associations or unions that can effectively articulate or press demands for a better deal. With a casualty rate of 70% (per year)<sup>14</sup> among producers and distributors, and a small constant of these continuing in the field over the years, the situation becomes more difficult. With new producers invading the film industry every year in the hope of making a box-office hit and rarely lasting beyond one or two films, companies fold up very frequently. Workers and technicians are driven from studio to studio in

search of employment of which there is, quite simply, not enough. Apart from the financial dimension, there is also the aspect of personal hazards and risks, especially for 'doubles' and stuntmen. The recent case of a young stuntman<sup>15</sup> who died in the course of a dangerous shooting only highlights the point that not enough precautions are taken to safeguard life, and the stuntmen are, of course, paid immeasurably less than the star in whose name and for whose image, they perform daring feats.

In addition to all this, working hours are upto an average of ten hours a day, and working conditions poor. In spite of laws concerning industry as such - the Factories Act, the Payment of Wages Act, the Workmen's Compensation Act, the Industrial Disputes Act, the Industrial Employment Act, the Trade Union Act and the Employers' State Insurance Act, among others - which also apply to the film industry, none of these are particularly rigorously imposed. The film industry, is treated as an industry only by those who run it, in an environment where the profits are supremely important. There is often, from among the ranks of the producers and financiers, the complaint that Government does not treat film on par with other industries in terms of providing incentives, finance, etc. when, however, laws controlling taxation are imposed, there is a clamour, from the very same ranks<sup>16</sup> for an enlightened view of entertainment, and pleas for a relaxation in taxes, and surcharges in view of the great service being rendered by the film industry in providing amuse-

ment for the millions.

From the point of view of the workers, unionization could help towards improving conditions, but this has been less than successful for many reasons - among them, the fact that there are any number of weak unions representing the same ranks, but not united enough to fight together. A table of the membership of various associations in the industry in 1960 shows that the Motion Picture Producers' Association, the Film Chambers of Commerce and Exhibitors' Association have many more members than do Extras' Unions or Character Artists' Association.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, it is rare, in film industry journals, to come across references to these less glamorous ranks of those who actually make films. The producers' associations and individual stars are the stuff of which headlines are made.

The basic input into production, however, is not talent acting or directorial, nor even technical skill. It is finance. Not for nothing has the film industry (for many years) been ranked the eighth largest industry in the country.<sup>18</sup> Any industry which employs, on the whole, an estimated number of 2,02,812 people including personnel staffing Government film units in the spheres of production distribution and exhibition, is truly large. An industry, moreover, in which the capital investment per year is Rs. 164.40 crores (for feature films alone) cannot be seen as unimportant.<sup>19</sup> Add to this the fact that the returns from films - though from a very few year<sup>20</sup> - are

enormous and that neither producers' profits nor what is taken by the Government in the form of taxes, are ploughed back into film.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the capital for film-making comes, usually, either from a previous successful film venture, or, more frequently, from outside sources. Private financiers lending to film-makers charge interest at exorbitant rates, ranging from 35-60%.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes, rates of interest are known to have been as high as 85% or even 100%. The terms, too, are exceptionally stiff. Thus, royalties of about 10% are charged, in addition to the interest. The loans often being for relatively short periods of 3 to 6 months, the royalty is deducted each time the loan is renewed. The rigorous conditions in which film finance is borrowed and lent is largely due to two or three reasons. First, there is the fact that, unlike in other film-producing countries like Japan or the USA, the film companies or film producers in India have no demonstrable assets which would show them to be credit-worthy. Then there is the question of returns - which, besides being indeterminate (because dependent on success, which can never be assured in advance) is also very slow. The very process of promoting a film in India often takes from 3 to 180 months, as against its counterparts in west, which can be and are produced in much shorter periods. By the time a film is released, the debts are already quite long-standing, and films take rather long, due to the shortage of exhibition facilities, to obtain a reasonable amount of screening-time. In fact, the popular

notion, in film industry circles, that the actual profitability of a film can only be tested on a re-run, is often quite a reliable index. Thus, repayment can take place, if at all, quite a while after the financing of the film begins - which, in turn, is at the stage of tentative proposals. All these factors serve to enhance the terms, conditions and rates of money-lending. According to Jain :

"The motion picture industry is financed by means of borrowing, and runs mostly on credit, which ultimately results in higher expenditure. So, while the accounts of the producers, in most of the cases, continue to show a state of insolvency, their living standard continues to present a picture of economic well-being, leaving much of a pretty optical illusion to others. And this illusion makes the credit easy", (13)

All these factors also contribute, in some measure, to the quality of films produced, where previous successes become models to emulate. When the primary aim is to acquire wealth suddenly and in large quantities, quality is understandably at a discount. And, even then, while several hundreds of films bid, every year, for success, few of them actually attain it. They continue, however, to flood the cinemas in large numbers, while the Government continues to finance experimental cinema that never finds an audience in the first place - not even to reject it.

The actual budgeting of film production is, of course, complex and manifold. Jain categorises the major heads of production thus :



"(1) material of the picture - story, dialogue, scenario and lyrics. (2) cast of the picture - main players, character players and extras. (3) staff for production director, assistant directors, technical crew and advisers. (4) music director, orchestra members and playback artists. (5) studio charges - rent and overhead expenses. (6) art and sets - setting, decoration and costumes. (7) sound and photography. (8) raw material. (9) processing. (10) editing. (11) publicity. (12) Overhead charges - transportation, food, shooting tests, black amount to persons and miscellaneous expenses" (24)

The tables he has compiled, on the basis of 1959 figures<sup>25</sup>, offer some interesting comparative insights. In India, 34% of the total cost is assigned to "cast", 19% to studio and overhead costs, 12% to music, 10% to raw material, and less than that for direction, the story and the screenplay. This shows the priorities of the Hindi film producer, and his shrewdness in knowing which aspect of his film is going to be most rewarding in lucrative terms, and where he cannot afford to economise. By comparison, in America, 35% is spent on sets and properties, 20% each for stars/cast and studio and overhead expenses, with 5% each on direction and story.<sup>26</sup> Bombay is, except in small measure, no different from Hollywood, turning out "prefabricated daydreams"<sup>27</sup> for mass consumption.

#### DISTRIBUTION

The financing for these films is often done by distributors, the prosperous middlemen of the film industry. Located strategically between the producers and the exhibitors, they command a good deal of resources. The exhibitors lobby them for films that are predicted to be certain of box-office success, while

the producers are dependent upon them for finding exhibition outlets, in a market where there are more films, and fewer exhibitors. Thus, the distributors dispense considerable patronage, and in their capacity as financiers, frequently dictate what goes into a film and what does not. They have been known to change the very context, and even the ending of films, with an eye to the box-office. The distributor is, indeed, the most important link in the chain that constitute the cinema empire in India.

There is, today a greater diversification - with producers becoming distributors and vice versa, trying to acquire greater and surer economic control. Thus, the compartmentalisation between producer-distributor-exhibitor is no longer as rigid as it was, and the distributor's role of financier, is, today, treated as a common place thing.

Starting out, in 1928, with 11 distribution agencies, the map of India today shows 11 distribution circuits<sup>28</sup>, divided territorially and run by over a thousand distributors. The 6030 permanent cinemas in the country are scattered across 2623 stations, while the 3521 touring cinemas also account for large audiences, in areas where permanent facilities do not exist.<sup>29</sup> In addition to these, there are 27 distribution circuits overseas exclusively devoted to Hindi films, and the limits of the foreign circuit have barely begun to be explored as yet.

The emergence of the distributor as a separate and formidable entity in the film industry/<sup>is</sup> of post-1947 vintage. Prior to this date, and prior to the sudden influx of 'black' money into the industry during the war years, the industry was functioning on a much healthier basis, with organised film companies that arranged for the exhibition of their films through fixed distribution channels, and fixed theatres, which only showed films from particular studios. But that was the time when films were sold solely on the label of the company, when the value of a film was pre-judged on the basis of this label, and not by the names of stars and music directors. The unity in the three branches (or production distribution and exhibition) that obtained, at this time, was largely due to the fact that companies like the Prabhat Talkies and the Ranjit chain were family-owned concerns, which had their own distribution arrangements for at least one or two territories. These distribution offices - never more than two - operated as branches of the studio itself. Once the established studios declined, after world war II, and a large number of new producers entered the industry prospecting with 'black' money, the speculative dimension emerged and became progressively more pronounced. The distributor and exhibitor suddenly became more important, especially as their careers were relatively more secure and permanent, as compared to those of the producers.

Subsequently, three major patterns of distribution agreements<sup>30</sup> were evolved which are, even today, the basis of

producer-distributor negotiations :

(i) Outright : This is an arrangement where the distributor purchases the entire rights for the film. There are, of course, variations - as, for instance, when a distributor buys out the negative itself or, on the other hand, when a distributor obtains 'exploitation' rights only for a specific period and/or territory. In either case, for the time and region in which the 'outright' agreement operates, the producer can make no claim on the profits reaped by the distributor. The risk, of course, is also entirely that of the latter. This arrangement is normally considered suitable for a small producer and a big distributor.

(ii) Advance : This was a popular system in the pre-1947 days, when established studios hired distributors purely as agents, giving them a small commission for their services. Such financial aid is given to the producer by the distributor in instalments and treated strictly, as a loan - not as part-payment as under the 'outright' arrangement. Here, the publicity is, as usual, the responsibility of the distributor who arranges for the release of the film, and starts recovering the profits from the box-office. If the film is a failure, the producer has to, somehow, pay back the distributor. If, on the other hand, it is a success, the distributor recovers his investment and the publicity costs, takes his commission, and hands over the balance of the profits to the producer. In some cases, they even share the profits. In this system, the producers' risk is

great. Today, this is a relatively unpopular arrangement, primarily because there are very few reliable producers who can be trusted to return 'advance' money, and also because producers themselves usually prefer to keep their profits to themselves. It is not surprising, then, that only a few producers of the old order, like V. Shantaram, still go in for agreements like these.

(iii) Minimum Guarantee : This is the most common and currently popular basis of marketing films. In this, as in 'advance', a certain amount is fixed, which both producer and distributor feel certain the film will be able to commercially recover. Of this, some money is kept aside for publicity, with the rest being paid to the producer in instalments, given at various stages - at the signing of the contract, on the completion of a certain number of reels, on the delivery of prints and so on. Once the film has been released, the producer does not get any money, till such time as the distributor has recovered the entire amount paid by him, plus service charges (usually at the rate of 20% of the Minimum Guarantee amount). Thus, the producer normally ensures, in advance, that he quotes and gets a figure that covers his costs and still leaves a margin of profit. It is, perhaps, the element of shared risk and responsibility in this arrangement that makes it so popular today. There is, also, another variation on this, which many producers and distributors prefer. This is the system called "Royalty", in which the film is sold to the distributor at a lower price,

with the responsibility and the expense for taking out prints being entirely his. Here, if a film is sold for a Royalty amount of Rs. 20 lakhs, and grosses about Rs. 40 lakhs at the box-office, the profits are shared as follows :

"the distributor will first recover his money (Rs. 20 lakhs), then the money he has spent on the prints (say, Rs. 3 lakhs), then the money he has spent on publicity (say, Rs. 4 lakhs), then his commission (at the rate of 25 per cent = Rs. 5 lakhs). This would make a total of Rs. 32 lakhs. The surplus is Rs. 8 lakhs and this is shared fifty-fifty. So the producer gets Rs. 4 lakhs and the distributor gets Rs. 4 lakhs. The distributor has made a total of Rs. 9 lakhs, and the producer makes Rs. 4 lakhs". (31)

It is evident from these forms of agreement, that the distributor occupies a critical role in the film industry. With a high rate of producer-mortality, the distributor cannot afford to risk capital investment in an uncertain venture. He, therefore, always makes sure that the story and stars, the music and the film itself have box-office elements, and are likely to succeed. The ultimate criterion, here, becomes the distributors' judgement<sup>32</sup> of his territory, of the places where his theatre outlets are situated, of the kind of audiences they command, and the right timing (festivals, seasons, etc.) when a particular film is most likely to succeed.

Thus, it is not surprising that when films with new cast, and untypical stories do well, it is usually when they are backed by the ownership of a production-distribution-exhibition chain. A case in point is that of the Rajshris who have frequently launched great successes (Dulhan Wohi Jo Piya Man Bhaaye,

Ankhiyon Ke Jharokhon Se, Sunavana, etc.) at the box-office by releasing them on morning/afternoon shows in their own smaller theatres, and then depended and waited for word-of-mouth publicity to draw crowds.<sup>33</sup> The fact that they succeeded in doing so is almost certainly due to the fact that they do not need to depend on anyone other than their own not inconsiderable resources. But ownership of all three branches is relatively rare.

Publicity is a very important component in the marketing of a film. Apart from the huge investments made in this, it is a carefully-planned process that starts even before the film reaches the studio-floor, and continues till well after the release of the film. The methods used to promote films are not always entirely honest - as, for instance, when the producer/distributor buy up all the available tickets for the first two weeks of a film's run, and then depend on the impact of the 'House Full' boards to draw people for many successive weeks. The allocation for publicity in the film-making budget is normally between 15-25% and sometimes even upto 30%.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, a table of the gross collection - over 60 weeks - of the film 'Sangam' (produced by Raj Kapoor) at one Bombay theatre, shows that of the Gross Collection of Rs. 23 lakhs, Rs. 10 lakhs and Rs. 7 lakhs were paid towards Entertainment Tax and Theatre rental respectively, leaving Rs. 6 lakhs to be shared between the producer and the distributor. Of this amount, Rs. 2,56,000 was spent on publicity. Rs. 2,94,000 was appropriated

by the distributor, leaving the producer of the film with exactly Rs. 50,000.<sup>34</sup>

The distributors' profits, like those of the producers, and like the taxes appropriated by the Government, are rarely re-invested in the film industry. And, like all non-Governmental film finance, the money invested in films is usually drawn from unaccountable sources<sup>36</sup> other than banks or industry. The distributor is at a most strategic position to dictate what goes into a film, if he buys the rights for the film at what is known as the 'proposal' stage. Usually, distributors have stakes in two or three films simultaneously - for, perhaps, the publicity of one; the advance for another half-completed film; or the financing/initial advance for a third, only at the 'proposal' stage. While producers resent the interference of the distributor in the making of the film, distributors complain that the films are never completed on schedule and delay their payments of instalments accordingly. An important avenue of corrupt practices by distributors is the making of 'Dupe' Negative out of a positive print, and thus circulating it for release, and reaping profits on it, which are not shared with anyone as the profits on the prints bought directly from the producers are.<sup>37</sup>

Of late, there has been a notable trend towards sharp increases in the prices of films. Thus, films with a multi-star cast and, therefore, with an exceptional chance of doing well at the box-office, are sold at exorbitant prices. As, for



instance, the film 'Kranti' (to be released) which is being sold for over Rs. 60 lakhs per territory, as against the previous films of its producer-director (Manoj Kumar) which sold from between Rs. 10 to 15 lakhs some years ago. Now, Rs. 40 to 50 lakhs is a common quotation for a large-scale venture, of which - needless to add - there are many.<sup>38</sup> It is this trend that has encouraged producers themselves to go in to distribution and vice versa. There are, also, several actors investing their money in film distribution, usually in partnership with other established distributors.<sup>39</sup>

The role of the distributor vis-a-vis the exhibitor is also important. The exhibitor, charging a fixed rental as opposed to a percentage cut in the profits, is in a fairly secure position, financially and in an even better situation to bargain for further profits. Given the shortage of cinema facilities in relation to the number of films produced, the exhibitors are happily placed where bargaining is concerned. Moreover, distributors are usually responsible for paying for the protection of the theatre against possible damage, if the films inspires the audience to react in an other than quiet and orderly fashion.

#### EXHIBITION

As of March 1978, there were 6030 permanent and 3521 touring cinemas in India.<sup>40</sup> Given an average capacity of 400 seats (in permanent cinemas), and of 600 seats (in touring cinemas),

the estimated total daily attendance would be in the region of 1,05,54,600. And yet, while being the world's most prolific film-producer, India's permanent cinemas account for only 2.3% of those in the world.<sup>41</sup>

This figure, given India's population, is particularly low by international standards. UNESCO's computations, for instance, show that there are, in India, on an average 5 cinema seats for 1000 people - which is the lowest figure, even among other developing countries in Asia. Among the cinemas that do exist, moreover, there is sharp regional imbalance, that provides a valuable index to how much of India can actually be presumed to be affected by the impact of the film. The exposure to the medium, as such, is restricted to the 2585 stations out of 2643 towns/cities that are classified as urban. 5650 permanent cinemas (out of a total of 6030) exist in these 2585 places. Rural India, which accounts for four times the urban population (according to the 1971 Census) has a very limited and sporadic exposure to films of any kind, let alone the popular Hindi film. 78% (4,51,411) of the Indian villages have a population of less than 999 people, which means that no permanent cinemas can or will be constructed there for many years to come.<sup>42</sup> The rural-urban balance is similarly weighted at so many levels of the film - its making, its exhibition, its audience, its content. The "cultural environment" of urban India is the 'culture' of the Bombay film, as much as the cultural context of the film

itself is urban - albeit a glamourised and near-mythical urbanism.

The exhibitors, in their business methods, are remarkably similar to their counterparts in the fields of production and distribution. Even though distributors appoint agents, at cinema houses to tally the accounts of box-office collections submitted to them by the exhibitors, the methods - like buying the first and the last ticket from each counter - are never altogether foolproof. In other respects, distributor and exhibitor work together to maximise returns, by buying out all the tickets for the first week or two, to create a false impression of popularity.

Apart from this system of 'prestige padding', as it is known, there is also the sum for 'house-protection', paid by the distributor to the exhibitor, which serves as a security for an eventuality in which box-office collections may fall below the 'house protection' figure, and the film may have to be taken off the cinema, regardless of the agreement. Exhibitors also often accept 'block booking' or 'blind purchases' from distributors which is risky as films are often sold on the strength of a production number or title alone. But despite risks and insecurities, there are many other ways in which the exhibitor is more comfortably placed than his counterparts in production and distribution, who are never quite inured from risk. One way is the fixed rental, paralleled by an adequate

profit from the collection at the box-office. The recent increase in the prices of cinema tickets in Delhi is an example that illustrates, clearly, the tremendous degree of public outrage such a hike can evoke. The brief period of declining attendance at cinema soon returned to normal<sup>43</sup>, and black-marketeers were only temporarily out of business. The hike of 40% was justified by the National Association of Motion Picture Exhibitors as being, in effect, a hike of only 30% in 30 years (to make up, also, for the Emergency reduction of 10%).

The law covering Exhibition is far from stringent or adequate. The system of issuing obligatory/complimentary passes keeps officials happy. There is no law which certifies the blackmarketing of tickets as illegal. The licensing of cinemas is presented to the competent authority only after the cinema has been built, and not before the actual construction begins, as with other plans for buildings. Thus, the construction rarely conforms to the regulations - one relatively new cinema in south Delhi, for instance, is known to have no proper provision for escape in the event of fire (a precaution that was recognised as essential even in the Cinematograph Act of 1918). But licenses are never confiscated or refused on such grounds, ostensibly because of the already existing shortage of cinema exhibition facilities. Similarly, cinema houses have good and huge arrears of property tax (to the tune of 19,30,600 from 13 cinemas in south Delhi alone),<sup>45</sup> to punish which no fines or

penalties are possible, short of the ultimate weapon of suspension of license, an eventuality that the police authorities are themselves most eager to avoid. There are, finally, obstacles like shortage of personnel in the relevant police department which prevent any law from being enforced effectively.

Exhibition, thus, is as much beyond proper legal control as production and distribution are, and should not be. The major problem in this regard is, of course, that of taxation. Taxation in the film industry can be, and is, of various kinds, imposed by very diverse authorities - local/municipal, State and Central. Thus, there is a profusion of taxes as well as a confused situation of multi-point taxation. Both the imposing and appropriating authorities as well as the heads on which they are levied, are plural. Thus, there is the Entertainment Tax levied by the State Government at rates varying from 70% to 120%.<sup>46</sup> In addition to this, many local authorities impose a Show Tax as well. Rising tax rates (in Delhi, they are said to have risen from twelve and a half per cent in 1947 to sixty percent in 1979)<sup>47</sup> are one basis on which exhibitors justify their own ticket hikes. And, there being at present, no authority (in the Delhi Administration, at least) which is qualified to regulate and control cinema ticket rates, the exhibitors can always move the courts successfully against any attempt to do so.<sup>48</sup>

The confusion generated on the taxation front is largely the cause of the decentralisation still practised in pursuance of the Devolution Act of 1920.<sup>49</sup> In this legislation, the powers of levying and imposing taxes were variously distributed among the State (then Provincial) authorities - and the law has not been since amended. As a result, taxes of various kinds are levied - from personal income tax to property tax, entertainment tax, show tax, and many other indirect taxes. But they are always levied only on the small fraction that constitutes the declared income of the actual profits yielded by the film industry and, even then, rarely paid. A recent proposal to impose sales tax, Central and State, on film industry dealings, was not formalised, because the legislation - the Constitution (49th Amendment) Bill - was not introduced in the Parliament as originally designed to<sup>50</sup>, following representations by many spokesmen of the industry who were assured by the then Finance Minister Charan Singh.

However, the many frequent cases of tax evasion by the industry<sup>51</sup> at all possible levels - from star to exhibitors - are not simply excusable on grounds of high taxation rates. They are, on the contrary, symbolic of a larger problem that is mostly neglected. In spite of much governmental talk of national film policy - always in the process of evolution - this has not gone beyond inexperienced and unconvinced dabblings in the incidentals.<sup>52</sup> The Government's earnest professions of serious intent to redeem the situation have never, curiously,

applied to the chaos that prevails in the film market, that is the film world. There has, admittedly, been occasional talk of nationalization including at the level of that highest legislative forum - Parliament. But then, bills have also been moved in the Lok Sabha with worthy objectives like the reduction of the tenure of the sport of cricket from 5 days to 1. The Government has not, on all available evidence, attempted to regulate the uncontrolled economic malpractices that characterise the workings of the film industry. Thus, the clamour of producers and their kin, for a better deal from government cannot be taken as ringing any truer than their films do.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Hortense Powdermaker, Hollywood : The Dream Factory, An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers, (London, 1951; Secker and Warburg), p. 25.
2. Quoted in L.P. Shah, The Producer of the Motion Picture: A Thesis for an M.A. in Cinema at the University of Southern California, Bombay, 1951, Roopak Publications, p. 10.
3. Nathan Glick, "The Social Roots of American Film", in The American Review, Vol. 23, No. 3, Spring 1979, p. 30.
4. James Monaco, How to Read a Film, New York, 1977, Oxford University Press, p. 200.
5. Michael Spencer in a paper on the theme "Constraints and Regulations" presented at a symposium on 'Cinema in Developing Countries' at the Seventh International Film Festival of India, New Delhi, January 1979, p. 1.
6. Manoj Kumar's films - Upkaar, Purab Aur Paschim, Roti Kapda Aur Makaan, etc. have always focussed on contemporary issues like the Green Revolution, war/nationalism, smuggling, etc. In the last mentioned film, for instance, the hero of the film, Bharat, gets converted away from his profession - smuggling - on hearing a rousing Independence Day speech by Mrs. Gandhi (who was then the Prime Minister).
7. B.V. Dharap, Indian Films 1977 and 1978, Motion Picture Enterprises, Poona, 1979, pp. XX.
8. Ibid., p. XXII. Also, Cf. Rajeev De Roy, "India's Motion Picture Trade", in Vidya, Vol. 14, No. 1, February 1977, p. 50.
9. The Hindustan Photo Films Manufacturing Co. Ltd. (a Govt. of India enterprise) was established in 1960 at Ootacamund. It has a wide range of photographic material, but, in terms of cine equipment, cannot meet even a small part of the requirements of the prolific Indian film industry.
10. As no recent figures are available, the figures for 1960 have, perforce, to be quoted. These are taken from Rikhab Dass Jain, The Economic Aspects of the Film Industry in India, New Delhi, 1960, Atma Ram & Sons, pp. 50-52.
11. There is much ambiguity surrounding the subject. Thus, while Jain maintains a total number of 73 studios in 1960, Dharap's (op. cit., p. XIX) figures show 65 studios in 1979. Since Jain's work is part of a substantial and well-research Ph.D. thesis, his figures are being used here.



12. Jain, *ibid.*, p. 40. Also, Y.A. Fazalbhoy, *The Indian Film : A Review*, Bombay, 1939, Bombay Radio Press, p. 97.

13. In 1955, the government of the undivided Bombay State appointed an enquiry commission to look into the conditions of labour in the film industry. Its report - *The Report of an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour* - paid particular attention to 'junior artistes' or 'extras', the under-employed, freelance workers who were hired through the agency of "extra suppliers" who received a 10-25% commission from them. There were several categories, and commensurate rates for them. Among women :

<u>Classification</u>	<u>Daily Wage</u>	<u>Commission Deducted</u>
Ordinary girl	Rs. 5	10%
Decent, Class C	Rs. 10	25%
Decent, Class B	Rs. 15	25%
Decent, Class A	Rs. 20	25%
Superdecent	Rs. 25-40	25%

Further details in Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, New Delhi, 1963, Orient Longmans, pp. 162-63. Cf. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, "Money Power" in seminar, No. 184, December 1974, p. 26.

14. B.V. Dharap, "Whither Film Industry", a reprint of an article published in his *Indian Films 1973*, Poona, Motion Picture Enterprises, p. 11.

15. Indu Gupta, "A Stuntman's Last Leap", in the *Times of India*, Sunday, April 29th 1979, p. 13.

16. "On the luxury items it purchases, the public may have to pay a heavy tax, but for seeing films (which are today a necessity rather than a luxury) why must it pay as much as 50% tax? This is highly inequitable, utterly unfair". Tarachand Barjatya, owner of the Rajshri Production-distribution-exhibition chain, in *A Handbook Detailing some of the Problems of the Indian Film Industry*, Bombay, 1960, Rajshri Pictures Pvt. Ltd., p. 13.

17. "Membership of the Associations", Table LVI, p. 164 in Jain, *op. cit.*

18.

19. B.V. Dharap, *Indian Films 1977 and 1978*, *op. cit.*, p. XX.

20. As far as Government is concerned, payments of entertainment tax are never re-invested into the film industry. The FFC has very meagre resources at its disposal for financing films. So also the State Governments. Dharap, ibid., p. 10. Similarly, producers' either invest in more stable and secure fields or spend their profits. Jain, op. cit., p. 93. Finally, distributors, in their role as financiers, bring money from outside sources, invest it in films and, if successful, recoup and re-invest the same money elsewhere. Some amount of 'black' money is, in this way, converted into 'white'. On the question of distributors and film finance, cf. Vikas Desai, Role of Distribution in the Feature Film Industry of India, Thesis, Film and Television Institute of India, Poona, April 1969, pp. 41-43, 75.
21. B.V. Dharap, "Whither Film Industry", op. cit. p. 11. According to Dharap, 2% films are complete hits; 13% cover costs, with a small profit; 15% scrape through somehow; while 70% run into losses. Cf., also, Jagmohan Munchra, "Marketing of Motion Pictures in India, Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1973, p. 79.
22. Dharap, "Whither Film Industry ", op. cit., p. 10.
23. Jain, op. cit., p. 96.
24. Ibid., p. 11.
25. In the absence of up-to-date information on this subject, somewhat out-dated statistics and computations have to be relied upon.
26. Jain, ibid., pp. 111-13.
27. Powdermaker, op. cit., p. 39.
28. Dharap, Indian Films 1977 and 1978, op. cit., pp. D-2 to D-5.
29. Ibid., p. XXI and D-5.
30. A detailed discussion in Vikas Desai, op. cit., pp. 19-35. Also, cf. Harmeet Kathuria, "The Distributor is More than Just a Middleman" in Star and Style, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 12, June 15-28, 1979, pp. 26-31.
31. Kathuria, ibid., p. 29.
32. Ibid., interviews with distributors, pp. 27-28.
33. Ibid., p. 28.

34. Bachubhai Patel, Role of Publicity in Feature Film-Making, Thesis, Film and Television Institute of India, Poona, 1969-70, Cf. especially Chapter VI.
35. Vikas Desai, op. cit., p. 84.
36. 'Matka' operators and smugglers are among those who join the film industry as financiers and producers. This is not to cast aspersions on the possible creative talents of smugglers, etc., but merely to emphasise the source of the enormous investments that a film demands, "The Film Maharajas", Youth Times, Vol. III, No. 13, September 20, 1974, p. 44.
37. Jain, op. cit., p. 186.
38. Kathuria, op. cit., p. 31.
39. Ibid., p. 27.
40. Dharap, Indian Films 1977 and 1978, op. cit., p. XXI.
41. Ibid.
42. B.V. Dharap, "21000 'Janata' Cinemas" - a reprint of an article in his 'Indian Films 1976', pp. 3, 7-8.
43. Newspaper Reports in the Statesman, May 19, 23, 26, 31, 1979 and the Times of India, May 31, 1979.
44. News item in the Times of India, December 28, 1977.
45. Dharap, "Whither Film Industry", op. cit., p. 3, also, Vikas Desai, op. cit., pp. 83-84, Survey of 'Milan' at Novelty for 1 week (Gross Collection : Rs. 66,223; Entertainment Tax : Rs. 31,648). Similarly, 'Sangam' at Apsara for 60 weeks (Gross Collection : Rs. 23 lakhs; Entertainment Tax : Rs. 10 lakhs).
46. Advertisement issued by National Association of Motion Picture Exhibitors, op. cit.
47. The increase in prices of cinema tickets in Delhi recently followed a judgement by the Supreme Court which struck down the power of the Lt. Governor of the Delhi Administration to regulate the rates. "Cinemas are ready to rationalise rates" - news item in the Times of India, May 31, 1979.
48. Dharap, "Whither Film Industry", op. cit., pp. 4-7.

49. Lead item in SCREEN, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 34, Friday, May 11, 1979.
50. Important Judgements of Supreme Court of India and High Courts of India on Income Tax matters relating to Cinema Legislation, Chapter 23, pp. 1-58, in C.L. Bafna, Law Relating to Cinemas in India, Jaipur, 1976, Bafna Law Publishers.
51. Father Gaston Roberge has a more radical interpretation of the government-industry relationship in his book, "Mediations" (forthcoming). He argues that the first function of the film being money-making and the first function of the businessman the same, government thereby ensures that the businessman is able to do so unhindered. But the checks imposed in the form of censorship ensure, further that the businessman does not overdo "the formula", as that would lead to an unfavourable response, mean a loss for the businessman.
52. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas in Seminar. Also, A Gopalakrishan, op. cit., pp. 25-26.



# If you think you are paying too much for a cinema ticket...

## we owe you an explanation.

Did you know that cinema ticket prices consist of a basic admission price plus entertainment tax.

Fact is, many do not realise that.

Over the years, it is the entertainment tax which has been increasing, and not the basic admission rate. This has not had even a marginal increase in the last 20 years.

### Fact : High Entertainment Tax

1947—121%  
1979—60%.

An exorbitant rise, which means a more expensive ticket for you.

This chart will explain the difference at a glance.

Year	Cost of Tax	Total Cost
1947	Rs. 2/-	Rs. 2.25
1979	Rs. 2/-	Rs. 3.20

Operational costs have risen tremendously but there has been no increase in the basic admission rate whatsoever.

### Fact : Rising Electricity Costs

1965—10 paise per unit.  
1979—55 paise per unit.

Electricity costs have risen by 450% in the last few years.

An air-conditioned cinema which paid an electricity bill between Rs. 7,000 and Rs. 10,000 in 1965 is now paying anywhere between Rs. 30,000 and Rs. 45,000.

### Fact : Wage Increase

1965—average wages paid per cinema house : Rs. 7,000—Rs. 9,000 per month.

1979—average wages paid per cinema : Rs. 18,000—Rs. 23,000 per month.

The salaries in both cases included the basic, D.A., additional Dearness Allowance, linked with cost of living index, employers

contribution to P.F., Employees State Insurance Scheme and Bonus.

In addition, employees are given summer and winter uniforms, 15 days salary by way of Gratuity for each completed year of service.

### Fact : Exorbitant Increase in Property Tax

1965—121%  
1979—35%.

With the rateable value being increased every year, the result has been an increase by 2000%.

### Fact : High cost of water.

1965 — 78 paise per kilo litre.

1979 — Rs. 2/- per kilo litre.

It's amazing how such a necessity like water, which is so much a part of everybody's life, has risen by 150%

### Fact : Rise in machinery and spares.

1965 — Cost of 35 mm projector — Rs. 60,000.

1979 — Cost of 35 mm projector — Rs. 1,50,000.

The overall costs of machinery and their spares have increased between 400 and 500%.

The same has been in the case of air-conditioning plants and spares.

### Fact : Increase in printing and stationery.

1965—Cost of printing 1000 tickets — Rs. 2.25.

1979—Cost of printing 1000 tickets—Rs. 10.00.

A sharp increase of 300%. Stationery too has been going up.

### Fact : High cost of advertising.

1965—Cost of average newspaper advertisement—Rs. 1,000.

1979—Cost of average newspaper advertisement—Rs. 4,000.

Newspaper advertising has increased by a staggering 300%. The cost of displaying hoardings has also gone up by the same amount.

### Fact : Expensive Cinema Carbons.

1965—Rs. 220 per hundred.

1979—Rs. 475 per hundred.

A staggering increase by 115%.

### Fact : Capital expenses have gone up.

1965—Cost of erecting an AC cinema with 1000 seats—Rs. 25 lakhs.

1979—Cost of erecting the same—Rs. 75 lakhs.

There has been a phenomenal increase in capital expenses when building a cinema. An increase of 300%.

In fact, new cinema houses have suffered heavy losses due to high capital investments and low returns.

Annual returns have been as low as 6%.

Indeed, a paltry figure when you compare the bank financing rate of 15% interest per annum.

### Now consider !

We've put everything across.

The facts.

The figures.

Ask yourself one searching question.

"How much extra are they really taking from me?"

Here we are giving you an actual break-up of the 1947 costs per ticket vis-a-vis 1979.

	1947	Nett.	Ent. Tax.	Gross
Box	4-0-0	0-8-0	4-8-0	4-8-0
Balcony	3-0-0	0-6-0	3-6-0	3-6-0
Upper Stall	2-0-0	0-4-0	2-4-0	2-4-0
Front Stall	1-0-0	0-2-0	1-2-0	1-2-0
1979				
Balcony	3.60	2.15	5.75	
Upper Stall	3.00	1.80	4.80	
Middle Stall	2.25	1.35	3.60	
Front Stall	1.50	0.75	2.25	

To further explain our point, we are giving herein an

example to show you where the money is going.

### Where the money goes

(Ticket in 1947)

Entertainment Tax 12 1/2%	
Producers & Distributors	
Electricity	Printing and Stationery
Wages	Advertising
Property Tax	Cinema Carbons
Water	Interest
Machinery and Spares	

(Ticket in 1979)

Entertainment Tax 60%	
Producers & Distributors	
Electricity	Printing and Stationery
Wages	Advertising
Property Tax	Cinema Carbons
Water	Interest
Machinery and Spares	

Return on investment \*

On March 13, 1968, the rates accepted by the District Magistrate were Rs. 2/- on an average excluding entertainment tax.

Today, a rise of 25-30% after over 10 years cannot be considered unreasonable. You have saved for yourself

\* The return on investment on most cinemas is below 6%, in fact, in the newer cinemas, there is no net returns.

the cost of living going up. In the same way, our operational costs have been going up.

It had become difficult for us to operate. Consider, dear patron. We know you understand. Give us a chance.



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- (b) Symposium on Cinema In Developing Countries, held on the occasion of the 7th International Film Festival of India, 1979 (also Cf. Reports in Communicator, Vol. XIV, No. 2, April 1979.
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