

*Mantras of the Metropole: Geo-televisuality and Contemporary Indian Cinema*

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This doctoral work scrutinizes recent popular Indian cinemas (largely Hindi cinema) in the light of three epochal changes in the sub-continental situation since the early nineties: the opening out of the economy, the political rise of the Hindu right, and the inauguration of a new transnational electronic media universe. It is argued here that contemporary Indian films should not be read in terms of a continuing, agonistic conflict between polarities like ‘modern’ selves and ‘traditional’ moorings. Instead, the thesis demonstrates how, in popular Indian films of our times, an agrarian paternalistic ideology of Brahminism, or its founding myths can actually enter into assemblages of cinematic spectacle and affect with metropolitan lifestyles, managerial codas of the ‘free market’, individualism, consumer desire, and neo-liberal imperatives of polity and government. This involves a social transmission of ‘cinema effects’ across the larger media space, and symbiotic exchanges between long standing epic-mythological attributes of Indian popular cinema and visual idioms of MTV, consumer advertising, the travel film, gadgetry, and images of technology. A discussion of a new age ‘cinematic’ in the present Indian context thus has to be informed by a general theory of contemporary planetary ‘informatics.’ The latter however is not a superstructural reflection of economic transformations; it is part of an overall capitalistic production of social life that is happening on a global scale in our times. This dissertation attempts to make two important contributions to the field: it opens out the Eurocentric domain of traditional film studies and suggests ways in which studies of Indian films can enrich a global understanding of the cinematic; it also offers a possible explanation as to how, in the present age, a neo-Hindu patriarchal notion of *Dharma* (duty, religion) can actually bolster, instead of impeding, a techno-managerial-financial schema of globalization in India.

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## PREFACE

This doctoral work scrutinizes recent popular Indian cinemas (largely Hindi cinema) in the light of three epochal changes in the sub-continental situation since the early nineties: the opening out of the economy, the political rise of the Hindu right, and the inauguration of a new transnational electronic media universe. There is of course an obvious homogenizing trap in using an umbrella term like 'Indian' to talk about a very rich and diverse cinematic tradition divided along the lines of ideology, production, language, and region. However, the signpost Indian can be understood in a non reflective or non-representative sense, as one that merely designates a sampling of films that in myriad ways discursively pose the concept itself as a problem. Hence, the films included here are Indian not because they reflect truths about an Indian essence, but because they, in largely popular formats, attempt to speak about, draw, or trace an 'India' in the world. Mantras of the Metropole: Geo-televisuality and Contemporary Indian Cinema attempts to argue that contemporary films in such a terrain should not be read in terms of a continuing, agonistic conflict between polarities like 'modern' selves and 'traditional' moorings. Instead, in popular Indian films of our times, an agrarian paternalistic ideology of Brahminism, or its founding myths can actually enter into assemblages of cinematic spectacle and affect with metropolitan lifestyles, managerial codas of the 'free market', individualism, consumer desire, and neo-liberal imperatives of polity and government. This involves a social transmission of 'cinema effects' across the larger media space, and symbiotic exchanges between long standing epic-mythological attributes of Indian popular cinema and visual idioms of MTV, consumer advertising, the travel film, gadgetry, and images of technology. These strange, 'outlandish' departures, which often take place without any obligation to narrative continuity or the unified milieu, are developed in the dissertation as a theory of 'geo-televisuality'. This concept is grounded in a global arena of concern, involving questions of mediatization, informatics, power, and sovereignty. Apart from Indian cinema proper, it is elaborated in relation to a critique of three lynchpins of western film theory: a subjective phenomenology of realism, structuralist linguistics, and psychoanalysis. These critical postulates are evaluated not just through discursive engagements with scholarly works on Indian cinema, but also in the light of

alternate ways of seeing, philosophical world views and aesthetic forms in the Indian traditions, like the cosmologies of schools like the early *Samkhya*, or *Madhyamika* Buddhism; the *Rasa* aesthetics of Sanskrit drama; the expressive forms of *Parsee* Theater, the Nathawara School of Painting, the *Rasalila* plays, or the grand nationalist themes of the turn of the century novelistic traditions.

The dissertation aspires to make two important contributions to the field: it tries to open out the Eurocentric domain of traditional film studies and suggests ways in which studies of Indian films can enrich a global understanding of the cinematic; it also offers a possible explanation as to how, in the present age, a neo-Hindu patriarchal notion of *Dharma* (duty, religion) can actually bolster, instead of impeding, a techno-managerial-financial schema of globalization in India. One can begin this discussion by assembling a little more detailed picture of the post-globalization situation in the subcontinent. Here is a brief account, sectioned under three headings pertaining to liberalization, *Hindutva*, and media expansion.

### **From Nehruvian Socialism to Free Markets**

According to experts, it was in 1991 that the Indian economy, under the stewardship of Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, began to decidedly discard its core feature of Nehruvian socialism and open itself out to global processes of liberalization. This is a process frequently seen in terms of curative measures and neo-liberal 'reform' that is, of course, still in a process of continuation. The project set its goals in terms of making the rupee fully convertible, lowering tariff walls, and in time, opening up Indian markets completely to international investment capital and consumer goods.

Nehruvian socialism can be described as an ensemble of 'mixed' governmental ideologies and tasks: democratization and parliamentary representation, industrialization of the feudal-agrarian countryside, state monopoly of macro-economic formations, regulated development of a licensed private sector that is protected from international competition

and supported by public monetary institutions, and a quasi-socialist distributive justice<sup>1</sup>. Launched with the first five year plan of the republic in 1951, this system, with its heady combination of tempered capitalism and state paternalism, posed itself as an ideal model for post-colonial economies of the third world<sup>2</sup>. This original Indian experiment constituted a governmental apparatus that has been described by Rajni Kothari as an ‘intermediate aggregation’ in which “the centre-periphery dimension of nation-building in an old and plural society was crystallized through intermediate subsystems that provided linkages between a relatively homogeneous, modern centre and a widely dispersed, both traditional and newly emerging peripheries” (Kothari 45).

The twilight of the Nehruvian paradigm was called into being by various shifts in the politico-economic landscape in the decades preceding the nineties. Such transformations of course were not prompted merely by ‘internal’ factors like those of national unity and consensus, governmental functioning, economics, and security. They were swept in by

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<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, this was a political experiment that sought to combine western liberal democracy with Soviet style large scale public enterprises and the Chinese pattern of rural and agrarian development. Nehruvian socialism dominated Indian state planning for over four decades (roughly from 1951 to 1990). After Jawaharlal Nehru, it took a more centralized, autocratic form in the regime of his daughter Indira Gandhi (Prime Minister of India from 1966 to 1976 and then again from 1980 to 1984) and finally a pronounced pro-liberalization turn in the time of his grandson Rajiv Gandhi (1984 to 1989). In terms of domestic policy, Nehruvian socialism carried within itself contending impulses. On one hand, it involved rapid nationalization of core infrastructural and heavy industries, large public sector undertakings like dams, steel plants (these Nehru called the ‘temples of the future’) and meeting the deterioration in foreign exchange reserves, increase in the spending on imported arms and the need to double food grain imports through the adoption of a series of radical developmental strategies emphasizing agrarian reform, land ceilings and the organization of co-operatives in the Chinese model. On the other hand, one can also cite instances like the controversial PL 480 agreement with the US government signed in 1956. According to this, India paid for food grains imported from the US in the form of loans to US multinationals in India and to private enterprises marketing American goods. See Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> See Sukhamoy Chakravarty, Development Planning: The Indian Experience (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), Pranab Bardhan, The Political Economy of Development in India (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

greater winds of change blowing in from without. Nevertheless, one of the most important domestic factors in this was the gradual erosion of a loose and syncretic consensual assemblage of the nation famously conceptualized by Kothari as the 'Congress System'<sup>3</sup>. This formulation is based on the unique, variegated functioning of the Indian National Congress as an always unstable, always morphing coalition between different aspects of elite power, based on class, caste, religion, language and region. It was this catastrophically maintained, perpetually micromanaged ruling block that dominated Indian parliamentary politics for over four decades. A 'real' 'working' Nehruvianism in the world was thus seen as a blueprint of a bourgeois revolution that failed to consolidate its abstract values into social institutions *completely*. Unable to fully and legitimately command the architectonics of power, it remained a series of graduated hierarchical mediations between feudal quarters and liberal polity, between postulates of tradition and those of modernity, and between a centralized 'mixed' economy of private/public forces and a diffuse and discontinuous network of fiscal sultanisms. Arvind Rajagopal has reminded us that the state centered modernizing mission that Nehruvianism proposed actually featured less planning than many western economies<sup>4</sup>.

The unraveling of this elite agglomeration became visible for the first time in a major way with the split of the Congress in 1969. This happened in a general climate of strong polarization of political energies: the Maoist Naxalite movement spread like wildfire in the north east; in the center, the Indira Gandhi led government took a decisive turn towards a populist socialism that began with the nationalization of 14 major banks in 1969, that of the coal mining industry in 1972, and the issuance of the Industrial Licensing Policy of 1970. The privy purses and all other privileges of India's erstwhile aristocracy were taken away. The disassembling of forces became all the more pronounced during the 1975 declaration of

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<sup>3</sup> See Rajni Kothari, Politics in India (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), also Partha Chatterjee, "Introduction", Wages of Freedom.

<sup>4</sup> See Rajagopal, Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India. Especially 43-51. Rajagopal, like Prasad and Chatterjee, understands the Nehruvian 'fragile' consensus in line with the Gramscian concept of the Passive Revolution.



a state of internal emergency by the Congress administration led by Indira Gandhi. The splintering of forces and the ensuing parliamentary clamor had given rise to a situation in which a statist intelligence divined that the only manner in which a constitutive Nehruvian legacy could be protected was through exceptional and unilateral application of bureaucratic policing. The agenda of commanded development, incarnated in the bonapartic figure of the leader itself, had to be taken to the people 'directly'. However, the only way in which the 'people' as a concept could be abstracted in this case was by separating a noisy, unruly population -- divided along the lines of class, caste, region, and language – from their constitutional rights.

In little more than a decade following the two year emergency period, the break up of the 'congress system' became more evident with the rise of regional political parties like the Telegu Desam, DMK the Akali Dal, the spread of identity based secessionist movements in places like Kashmir or Punjab, and the coming into being of other contenders for national hegemony like the Janata Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). What was thus coming apart from the seams was a historic block that, according to Partha Chatterjee, was created during a moment of nationalistic maneuver against the British Raj, when traditional, affective, and local energies were connected together on a pan-Indian political plane of the colonial 'population' state<sup>5</sup>. The Congress did get a thumping majority in the 1984 elections, riding a sympathy wave created by the assassination of Indira Gandhi, but that was, till date, the last formation of a single party majority in the national parliament. The hung parliaments of the 1989, 1991, and 1996 general elections created the ground for a plurality of interest bearing forces to enter and exit provisional parliamentary alliances. These moves were accompanied by frequent outbreaks of scandal and the formation of a generally disheartening atmosphere of corruption, populism, and political bartering. Escalating militarization of the north-west, both by the state and insurgent forces, and rising tensions with Pakistan also contributed to the overall specter of waning sovereign power.

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<sup>5</sup> See Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986). Also Chatterjee, "Introduction." 14-15.

Liberalization of the Indian economy began in the eighties itself, with the major signpost being the Rajiv Gandhi administration's New Economic Policy (NEP), which was modeled on the lines of Reagan and Thatcher<sup>6</sup>, and launched in 1985. This effected tax concessions to the upper-middle classes and corporations, and salary increases in the top echelons of the public and private sectors to stimulate growth in consumer markets. The figures of progress, at first glance, were indeed spectacular. The Indian economy went on a hyperdrive during the late eighties, witnessing a growth rate fluctuating between 8 to 22 percent in the consumer durable sector alone. Overall, it consistently stayed above 5 percent, compared to a 'sluggish' 3 to 3.5 % between 1950 and 1980. But the flip side of the picture was the consistent rise in public and commercial debt to underwrite tax breaks, and rising government expenditures and import bills primarily associated with consumer goods. A substantial part of the external debt, which rose from 7.9 billion in 1975 to 70.1 billion in 1991 (making India third in the ranks of debtor nations, after Brazil and Mexico) can be attributed to the latter<sup>7</sup>. The US led first gulf war resulted in a sharp rise in oil prices, withdrawal of foreign currency deposits, and a fall in inflow from the Indian expatriate population in the Middle East. In October 1990, the World Bank issued a report advocating 20 % devaluation in the rupee to remedy the balance of payments. (Rajagopal 38, 303). In 1991, the Indian Government took its second significant IMF loan (earlier, in 1981 it had borrowed \$5 billion) to meet the demands of a rising foreign debt and an unmanageable budget deficit<sup>8</sup>.

The reform process inaugurated an era of steadily increasing, financial and political exchanges between the Indian state and the World Bank, along with other Bretton Woods

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<sup>6</sup> The *Wall Street Journal's* editorial on Gandhi's 1985 budget was titled "Rajiv Reagan". Cited in Rajagopal, *Politics After Television* 308.

<sup>7</sup> Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema: New Revised Edition*. 28-29

<sup>8</sup> See C. T. Kurien, *Global Capitalism and the Indian Economy* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1994), T. J. Byres, "Introduction: Development Planning and the Interventionist State Versus Liberalization and the Neo-Liberal State: India, 1989-1996," *The State, Development Planning and Liberalization in India*, ed. T. J. Byres (New Delhi: Oxford, 1997).

organizations. This new dispensation effectively dismantled the Janata Party government's 1978 Foreign Exchange Regulation Act and the prescriptions of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission, that had lead to the virtual termination of licenses to Coca Cola, IBM and other multinationals in the late seventies. These companies returned, along with newer ones like Pepsi, which started operating in the Indian markets for the first time. Throughout nineties, there was a series of measures taken up ostensibly to reduce the fiscal deficit, like disinvestment of state owned enterprises, encouragement of foreign direct investment ( with the foreign equity limit now being 51%) and portfolio investment by the state, and allowing the entry of private players in core infrastructural sectors like power, telecommunications, mining, and roads<sup>9</sup>.

### **The Rise of *Hindutva***

The early years of the 1990s saw the rise of right wing *Hindutva* in the domain of Indian politics, propelled mainly by a urban, petit-bourgeois ultra nationalism. It would however be a mistake to limit the understanding of this phenomenon to matters of parliamentary representation. Political outfits like the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Shiv Sena, who are declared bearers of this ideology in the sphere of representational politics, have in fact been only moderately successful in terms of pure numerical domination of the pan Indian electoral scene. The grass root organizational might of these parties, drawn from a host of extra-parliamentary formations like the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajrang Dal, and the Rastriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS), became strongly apparent in the national stage during the incidents leading up to the demolition of the Babri mosque on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1992. A series of genocidal pogroms, primarily targeting Muslims, followed in the aftermath, and were intermittently unleashed throughout the nineties and after. In the 1996 General Elections, the BJP emerged as the single largest party in Parliament, with 161 seats, compared to Congress's 136. The center-right Congress led coalition, that had been in power since 1991, was replaced by a conservative-right one headed by BJP, which, falling short of majority, was defeated in a vote of confidence after 13 days. The short lived BJP

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<sup>9</sup> See Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema: New Revised Edition. 28-29

government was replaced by an unstable center-left multi-party coalition which was lead first by H. D. Deve Gowda and then by I. K. Gujral. The Gujral ministry collapsed in 1998 and fresh elections brought into power a BJP led coalition called National Democratic Alliance under A. B. Vajpayee. The NDA government in turn, was voted out of power in 2004, being replaced by once again a center-left coalition headed by the Congress, with Manmohan Singh assuming the chair of the Prime Minister<sup>10</sup>.

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to launch into a consummate genealogical elaboration of political Hinduism. As a matter of fact, it would be difficult, nigh impossible, to extricate a molar trend of 'secular' Indian nationalism in the last hundred and fifty odd years that is free of a normativity qua the Hindu. As a matter of fact, the coming into being of the former almost coincides with the epistemological founding of the latter as a colonial demographic category in the first half of the nineteenth century. The entity Hindu is thus a grand Brahminical monotheistic re-coding of a many armed tradition of beliefs, ranging from idol worship to agnosticism. It did not exist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Sibaji Bandyopadhyay Bangla Uponyashe Ora, 44)<sup>11</sup> as a demographic segment of the population state. The Indian National Congress, as the flagship organization for the historical unfolding of anti-colonial nationalism, itself started as an elite Brahminical vanguard in the 1880s whose first agenda was to procure a ban on cow slaughter from the British administration. Mainstream nationalistic literature, from its earliest essays in the hands of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay<sup>12</sup>, and the beginnings of its patriotic maneuvers and publicity in the form of

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<sup>10</sup> See Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema: New Revised Edition. 29. For a more detailed, historical overview of the rise of *Hindutva* ideology see Rajagopal (2001), especially 51-73, Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar Tapan Basu, Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of Hindu Nationalists (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), Walter K. Anderson and Shridhar D. Damle, The Brotherhood in Saffron (New Delhi: Sage, 1987), Christophe Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India (New Delhi: Viking, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> See David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" Comparative Studies in Society and History 41.4 (October 1999) and also chapter 3, entitled "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity" of Romila Thapar, Interpreting Early India.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak's popularization of *Ganesh Chaturthi* and *Shivaji Utsav* in Maharashtra, also followed Hinduized tropes, hagiographies, and models of ritualized vernacularization. The mass movements stewarded by Gandhi in the decades that followed were also cast in an epic symbolic register drawn from a Brahminical scriptural tradition. Indeed, it was Gandhi who first floated *Ram Rajya* as a pan-Indian political concept, in the form of an indigenous agrarian diagram of patrimonial governance – a Tolstoyan vision of Kingdom of God on earth<sup>13</sup> -- against the urban industrial modernization of the Raj<sup>14</sup>. It is only that in recent times, this basic impulse of publicity has been conducted by the Hindu right far more successfully than any other power. The movements of the 80s and 90s leading up to the demolition of the Babri Mosque, like the countrywide *Ram Shila Puja* sponsored by the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in 1989, BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani's *Rathayatra* of 1991, and the frenzied *Kar Seva* programs are instances of this. Perhaps the most effective installments of spectacular public *Hindutva* came in the form of two 'Hinduised' versions of the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata that were telecast on the national network during the late eighties<sup>15</sup>.

What is now identified to be the nodal stream of a historical mobilization of *Hindutva* energies began with formations like the Hindu Mahasabha (1915) and the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (the RSS, 1925). The founding of the former coincided with the announcement of separate electorates for the Muslims in Punjab by the British

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<sup>12</sup> In this context, apart from the works of Chatterjee (1986, 1993), see Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, Bangla Upanyashe 'Ora' (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> See Raghavan Iyer, "Introduction," The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, ed. Raghavan Iyer (New Delhi: Oxford, 1990). 7 - 20.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance M. K. Gandhi, "World Federation, Democracy, and *Ram Rajya*," The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, ed. Raghavan Iyer (New Delhi: Oxford, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> See Rajagopal, Politics After Television, Dasgupta, Professions of Faith, Gupta, Switching Channels, Ananda Mitra, Television and Popular Culture in India: A Study of the Mahabharat, and Romila Thapar, "The Ramayana Syndrome".

administration. Unlike the Congress, which was a historic block of antagonisms isomorphic to the delineations of the colonial population state, the Hindu organizations based their ideology on an ethnic Germanic model in the lines of Herder, Schlegel, or Fichte. Early Hindutva developed through interiorized workings of fraternal organizations; the affective build up and circulation of conservative, upper caste patriarchal values took place in emphatically re-domesticized avenues guarded from the hum of the national political theater, and thus largely unsullied by internecine tribulations of class, caste and religion (See Dasgupta, Professions of Faith 74-8)<sup>16</sup>. There was no frontal encounter with the colonial state, although cadres were allowed to join ‘political’ parties like the Congress. Both the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS refrained from active participation in Gandhi’s Quit India Movement of 1942. The Hindu thus became figurable in a state of distraction, as a desire that percolated the public realm rather than entering it on the basis of urgent political points of national engagement related to enfranchisement, citizenship, and rights.

The earliest ‘political’ stir from a general attitude of splendid Brahminical isolation began only between 1937 and 1942, when the Mahasabha assumed a different public role under Veer Savarkar. This was prompted by the coming into being of the two nation theory and the imminence of partition. The Ram Rajya Parishad (1948) was the other ‘Hindu’ political Party to join the sphere of parliamentary politics after independence from the British in 1947. These groups proposed a largely rural economy for the new dispensation, with the prohibition of cow slaughter and alcohol. The Hindu brigade however suffered a tremendous setback after the assassination of Gandhi by the RSS Hindu fanatic Nathuram Godse on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1948. The RSS was banned and its *pracharak* Madhav Golwalkar, along with the Mahasabha’s Sarvarkar, was investigated for abetting the murder. Many members of the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha joined the Jan Sangh, which was formed in 1951. This party was once again restricted to the upper echelons of a North Indian feudal

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<sup>16</sup> For a discursive diagram of early *Hindutva* that posed the ideology as an interiorized compendium of values without a frontal encounter with the colonial state or the subsequent Nehruvian republic, see V. D. Savarkar, Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu? (Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969), Madhavrao Sadashiv Golwalkar, We, or Our Nationhood Defined (Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1945), Deen Dayal Upadhyay, Integral Humanism (New Delhi: Jagriti Prakashan, 1962/1992).

community. The only efforts towards a national address were restricted to strapping up memories of partition and expressing populist sentiments against Pakistan. The movement from a rooted, agrarian formation to contemporary 'postmodern' *Hindutva* cutting a global circuit of finance, spectacle, free market lifestyles, and technology is indeed a discontinuous one. Even as late as 1984, Jan Sangh's successor party, the BJP published an election manifesto for the national elections that called for a village based, paternalistic Gandhian socialism (See Rajagopal, Politics After Television 51-63). Despite these overtures toward a patrimony of Brahminical stewardship of benevolence, the rise and development of political *Hindutva* actually followed an urban, modernist diagram of national self definition, often cast in the American rather than an organic, continental model of Europe<sup>17</sup>. In the present age, it is an assemblage of an eclectic and flexible dogma of 'tradition,' a circuit of transnational finance, and an animated sphere of global electronic publicity that has given rise to a decidedly new age, 'metropolitan' ultra nationalism of the Hindi kind.

The web of *Hindutva* built itself and spread sporadically in the decades following independence. The student organization Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) was formed in 1948; the labor union Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh in 1955. In 1964 the Hindu Mahasabha created the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to spread awareness of Hindu resurgence abroad. The latter organization subsequently grew to be one of most globally connected and moneyed blocks in the *Sangh Parivar*, as the combine of *Hindutva* based organizations is known. The VHP built up a loose and ideologically flexible network of relations that was not necessarily dependent on membership and other protocols<sup>18</sup>. By 1973,

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<sup>17</sup> The best example of this would be of course Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's dream of defining the Hindu as authentic monopolizer of the political in the Indian national context along the lines of the Anglo Saxon race in the United States of America in *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, it was, for some time, getting tax deductible contributions through various charity organizations affiliated to The United Way and the AT&T rewards program in the U.S, till lobbying by activist groups ceased both efforts. (Rajagopal, Politics After Television 240). Events like the 1993 Global Vision 2000 at Washington DC raised millions of dollars of donation money from the Indian diasporic community in different parts of the world. It was also VHP that was the first in the combine to make *Hindutva* public in a determined manner, in the way of ritualistic undertakings like the *Ekta Yatra* (Unity Journey) in 1983.

the RSS too had grown from its humble beginnings to a vast network of over 10,000 branches within the country. In 1977, when the organization was enduring strict censorship in the middle of the Emergency, RSS sympathizers the Friends of India Society in London. It soon became Friends of India International, with branches in over 40 countries.

By the 1970s, the diagram of *Hindutva* had thus already intersected with that of transnational flows of sponsorship. The banning of the RSS during the 1975-77 state of emergency declared by the Congress administration of Indira Gandhi brought about an effective de-territorialization of structures that actually allowed *Hindutva* to enter the realm of mass politics<sup>19</sup>. The organization went underground and underwent a morphological transformation more suited to grass root marshalling of forces. The familial, self imposed, disciplining enclosures of *Hindutva* were thus opened up and globalized, its energies were allowed to spread more readily as a osmotic flow of affection across communities, ideological units, regions, linguistic groups and other forms of affiliation. This created the fertile ground for an incorporeal transformation of values, and the spectacular mass mobilizations of the 80s and 90s.

In the aftermath of the Emergency, the Congress was routed in the 1977 elections. For the first time in its electoral history, the Jan Sangh got more than ten percent of votes in the national count; it joined splinter groups of the Congress system, like the Lok Dal, the Congress (O), and the Socialist Party to form the Janata Party. The Hindu faction of the Janata Party broke back from the Janata Dal to form the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980<sup>20</sup>. The general elections of 1985 almost wiped the latter party off the charts, but by

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<sup>19</sup> The student wing of the Jan Sangh, ABVP joined the Nav Nirman (New Construction) movement in Gujrat and also the popular agitation in Bihar towards land reform and cleansing the state bureaucratic machinery of corruption. In interestingly, the latter was lead by the veteran socialist leader J. P. Narayan. What perhaps made possible this merging of powers from the right and the left under the declared banner of 'Sampoorna Kranti' (Total Revolution) was that the order of words and things in political discourse was still epistemologically grounded in the Nehruvian paradigm of development. The semiological oscillation of key categories was largely restricted to a spectrum of binary assemblages like tradition and modernity, Gandhian agrarianism and Nehruvian urbanity, reformism and revolution.

<sup>20</sup> See Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema: New Revised Edition. 28-29.



then, a process of dramatic realignment of forces in the Indian context had already begun. The first of these can be said to be the gradual intersection between an affective-ideological assemblage of Hindutva and a transnational, metropolitan diagram of finance, technocracy, and the free market. This was of course accompanied by the rapid dissolution of the 'Congress system' into myriad forces splintered along class, caste, regional, linguistic, and religious lines. The task of an urgent Hindutva-nationalist re-coding of a fluid-mosaic polity was a daunting one; it involved gathering the plural, multi-directional energies of the Vedic and counter-Vedic traditions into a monolithic axiomatic of a Brahminical, primarily North Indian Hindu. The perpetual incompleteness of this project of socialization is perhaps most apparent in the denominations of caste. In the realm of parliamentary politics, the BJP never managed to effect a 'total' translation of the field of forces into its hegemonic project; however, it proved to be capable of entering dynamic and flexible assemblages of power and brokered partnerships with the unlikeliest of allies like the lower caste bulwark Bahujan Samaj Party and the regional, anti-Brahminical Telegu Desam, towards the latter half of the nineties. This was possible because the overall pluralistic loops of interest -- defined by complex interactions between discourses of globalization and metropolitan development, national security, and a complex array of fragmented representational interests -- were increasingly informed by an emphatic but flexible localization of the Hindu as a normative qualifying power. That is, an ontological transformation of sign systems by which all aspects of publicity -- enfranchisement, rights, merit, development, welfare, security, terror, and an abstract configuration of an India in the world -- become oriented to, with ease, or restless hostility, to a diffuse linguistic ecology of *Hinduness*. More than the violent mass spectacles of the nineties and after, or the election triumphs of the BJP as the moderate, representational face of right wing mobilization, perhaps the danger of a becoming *Hindutva* in our times is thus how, in a metropolitan production of social life itself, it becomes immanent by inhuman procedures of saturation, densification, and percolation. That is, in the manner in which *Hindutva* as an inhuman intelligence and productive power, works itself not by a successful re-writing of the book of the world, but by strategic manipulations of linguistic potentials, by already stipulating the relative value of signs and categories in any discourse or any act of publication. This is when the force of *Hindutava* transcends the dramatic play of molar identities, inside-outside demarcations, and becomes a power of

habituation in of itself. This is the grotesque point of absolute liminality when one, in a given realm of massified political language, is condemned to *think* only in terms of the Hindu, even when s/he is thinking or working against the human forces which ostensibly represent it as a human ideology or fascist practice.

This study of contemporary Indian cinema, which, in extension, is inevitably a political understanding of the philosophies of the cinematic, is always, already a study of fascism as a habit. Just as a serious study of the latter cannot be reduced to representational questions (the parliamentary fates of the BJP or the Shiv Sena) of mass politics, it cannot be simplified, in the realm of cinema, to how often and why the human face of the Hindu fascist flits across the screen. Rather, the study of films in this case has to be a study of the socialized powers of habituation, of which cinema is a part, and which makes the cinematic possible in the first place. In other words, the powers of Hinduization, along with the manifold minoritarian energies that resist or dislocate it, has to be located in the very instrumentalization of language that brings about the everyday, the innocuous formulas, clichés and affects of film. An investigation of fascism beyond the fascist would thus involve queries about how the qualities of the former are retailed beyond the simple paraphernalia of the human subject and his works – the headband, the t-shirt, the bumper sticker and other such stuff of conscious, neo-traditionalist advertising that Arvind Rajagopal has so assiduously documented and investigated in his enlightening book (64). It would pertain to a historicity of language, practices, desire, and *potentia* that must be brought to bear in an understanding, in this case, of films. Secondly, such questions about the Hindu as a proposed being of the nation have to be located in a historical field of problems beyond the comforting boundaries that separate the home from the world. It would be a gross mistake to account for *Hindutva* as a sovereign power that is limited to the geo-politics of the nation state, in being a parochial, prejudiced formation that constantly inserts itself and departs from an incoming, homogenous Americanization of culture and politics in the world. Rather, it is an aspiration of state power that can be seen to be irresistibly global. As a particular mobilization of affections devoted to the nation state, it is part of a transnational

governmental impulse which has the United States as its major, but by no means singular terminal<sup>21</sup>.

## **The Electronic Transformation of the Public Sphere**

The decade of the nineties witnessed the rapid induction of the Indian media space into a gradually blossoming global network of satellite communications and electronic information. Television had appeared in India in 1959 on an experimental basis, under the patronage of UNESCO, the US government, and Philips<sup>22</sup>. At the beginning, the technology was envisaged through the lens of a general Nehruvian view, as a promoter of its developmental schemes like the green revolution. Interestingly, it was when the consensual climate of Nehruvianism was showing the first major signs of turbulence that the Indian scientist Vikram Sarabhai outlined a utopian plan for a nationwide television hookup in 1969. This was seen as an urgent pedagogical measure that would bypass sedentary historical barriers of communication, underdeveloped print capitalism, literacy, culture, and language, and tele-localize the landscape in one stroke. In as much, television was to continue the nation-building role previously played by the Films Division of the Information & Broadcasting Ministry, which ran a virtual monopoly on documentary film production in India.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Bové has pointed out to us that perhaps the single most distinguishing factor that separates contemporary American power from previous imperial formations is that it has given rise to global institutions of power, finance, and militarization that can morph, proliferate, and prosper without the direct, agential ministration or even the presence of America as a nation state.

<sup>22</sup> Initially, it was restricted to a weekly half hour service beamed to 180 'teleclubs' within a radius of 40 kilometers around Delhi. The program primarily targeted school going children and also informed the peasantry in the rural hinterland about modern agricultural measures, health, and hygiene. See Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema: New Revised Edition. 26-27 and 92. See also Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "Beaming Messages to the Nation," Journal of Arts & Ideas 19 (May 1990).

<sup>23</sup> The Films Division was making close to 200 shorts, documentaries and newsreels annually during the first three decades of the new republic. Each of these films had about 9000 prints in circulation; they were dubbed

The television service was made daily in 1965. A second broadcasting station was set up in Bombay in 1972, followed by Srinagar in 1973 and in Calcutta and Madras. By the eighties, thirty nine other beaming centers were operating across the country by and a pan-Indian network was in place. *Doordarshan* became the official title of state-owned television in 1976 after it was disassociated from the All India Radio (*Akashvani*) and set up as an independent corporation under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Color programs were introduced on the eve of the 1982 New Delhi Asian Games, as part of a larger effort by the Indira Gandhi administration (which returned to power in 1980) to secure an affective mass support for itself through a quick, highly centralized electrification of the public sphere. This was done by launching INSAT 1A and with further satellite assistance from the USSR, integrating all prime time throughout the country into the New Delhi telecast<sup>24</sup>. In 1983, the INSAT 1 B, India's first telecommunications satellite was launched as part of a special plan for extension of the national television network. This expansive drive made terrestrial broadcasts available to almost three quarters of the Indian population within a remarkably short period of time. In 1985, as part of an overall Reaganite re-ordering of the economy through Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's New Economic Policy (NEP), *Doordarshan* went commercial in the proper sense. The controlled flow of sponsorship and advertising revenue that had been allowed since 1977 was escalated, even as the country opened up its borders to international consumer goods<sup>25</sup>. New Delhi became the centre for a daily 'national

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into 18 languages and were exhibited through compulsory block booking in every cinema hall in the country. See Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema: New Revised Edition.96.

<sup>24</sup> 1982, incidentally, was also the year in which the Indian government took its first sizeable loan, amounting \$ 5 billion, from the International Monetary Fund. See Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema: New Revised Edition. 27-28.

<sup>25</sup> Advertising revenue for *Doordarshan* touched Rs. 10 billion in 1987, with about 65% of it coming from six multinational companies. (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 28, 92). Television ownership also increased dramatically within a couple of years, jumping from 2.7 million in 1984 to 12.5 million in 1986.

program' that dominated prime time viewing<sup>26</sup>. Apart from film music based programs like *Chitrahaar* and weekend feature films, *Doordarshan* started selling 30 minute slots for independently made serials. The most prominent of the latter were Kumar Vasudev's Mexican style developmental soap opera *Hum Log* (*We, the People*, 1984-5) and of course, the 'Hindu' epics *Ramayana* (Ramanand Sagar 1986-87) and *Mahabharata* (B.R. Chopra 1988-90).

The Indian skies opened up beyond the span of *Doordarshan*'s control in the early nineties. This came in the wake of an overall liberalizing drive inaugurated by the epochal budget of 1991, and a second significant IMF loan. In 1992 the Hong Kong based STAR TV Cable network (subsequently bought by Rupert Murdoch) made an appearance in the Indian scenario, posing the first significant corporate-multinational challenge to the state monopoly of television. It heralded a major boom in commercial satellite channels, both in English and Hindi. In 1993 STAR-TV acquired 49.9 % shares in the Hindi ZEE-TV network; between 1993-1995, the proliferation of cable channels spread to other languages (Malayalam with ASIANET, Tamil with SUN) depending on a parallel, mainly multinational satellite services industry (Pan American Satellite 4, Asiasat etc.) which provided increasingly cheaper beaming facilities over the south Asian footprint. By 1995 Murdoch had announced a new 'pay TV' channel in Hindi, the first cellular networks had been launched in the major Indian cities, and CNN had inaugurated a news channel in partnership with *Doordarshan*. The Indian government tried to retain control over the media space through occasional legislation like the Bill to regulate Cable TV in 1993, and the ordinance passed to the same effect in 1994, but the government's political control was effectively challenged when a Supreme Court ruling on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1995 declared the air waves to be public property. In response to the changing scenario, *Doordarshan*

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<sup>26</sup> *Doordarshan*'s monopoly over electronic advertising and information dissemination was often challenged, primarily on the grounds that the ruling party used it as a propaganda tool. Legislative efforts to curb state supervision of the public media began as early as 1979, when the Janata Party government introduced the Prasar Bharati Bill, but it did not create any significant structural changes towards autonomy. It was only in the nineties that this centralized hegemony was effectively dismantled.

opened the commercial Metro Channel in 1993, DD-3 in 1995, and several regional outlets, but the state's market share in the electronic communications industry kept steadily declining throughout the decade. (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, 28-29). The modernist project of televisual pedagogy was thus superseded by what in common parlance is called a postmodern coda of 'infotainment', involving big corporate media, international advertising, entertainment, fashion and travel industries, consumer products, and brand culture. In 1997, India signed the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) of the World Trade Organization, paving the way for a phased reduction in import tariffs on IT products.

The overall transformation of the visual universe influenced the film industry in the avenues of form, technique, and business and marketing. India had become the largest producer of motion pictures in the world as early as 1971, when, with an annual output of 431 feature films, it overtook Japan. Following that, the agreement between the Indian government and the Motion Picture Export Association of America was allowed to expire, resulting in a steady decline in number of foreign films released in India, from 114 in 1972, to 38 in 1973, and 26 in 1974. (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 26). The number of indigenous films however, continued to grow, topping the 700 mark in 1979. This growth, apropos the mainstream sectors of the cinema industry, was largely achieved with out state patronage (except for the state governments of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Orissa) and despite an impeding tax structure<sup>27</sup>. Much like the rest of cinemas in the world, the commercial feature film industries in India went through periods of crisis in the eighties and nineties, with the

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<sup>27</sup> The Central Government had set up a Film Finance Corporation in 1960, in accordance with the suggestions made by the S.K. Patil Film Enquiry Committee Report (1951). FFC came under the control of the Information & Broadcasting Ministry in 1964 and extended loans to 'films of good standard', which was then re-articulated in 1971 as a nationalist-pedagogical effort to "develop the film in India into an effective instrument for the promotion of national culture, education, and healthy entertainment by granting loans for modest but off-beat films of talented and promising people in the field" (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 162). In 1980, the FFC was integrated with the Indian Motion Pictures Export Corporation (IMPEC) and renamed as the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). Rajadhyaksha and Rajadhyaksha and Willemen point out that "both in terms on which the loans were granted (usually requiring collateral from producers) and the limited distribution outlets, exacerbated by the FFC/NFDC's apparent inability to build its own exhibition network gave their films a reputation for lacking 'financial viability' (162).

expansion of television and the advent of video. The latter developments were aided by New Economic measures like the 1981 liberalization of import licenses for color television and video parts. Nevertheless, the expansion and technologization of the public sphere, along with its increased dependence on private finance also opened up other avenues of growth for the cinema industry. The chief among these was the audio cassette revolution that witnessed an unprecedented, fourteen time increase in record sales over a period of just one year, from 1987 to 1988 (Rajadhyaksha, "India: Filming the Nation," 688). With the average commercial film carrying at least five songs in its dominant format, this proved to be a most lucrative scenario for filmmakers. The expansion of television too accorded cinema with manifold revenue opportunities, primarily through a host of film based programs. Apart from the usual staple of feature film broadcasts, these included the consistently popular format of stringing together songs from different films, as in *Doordarshan's* Chitrahaar or Superhit Muqabla and private channel programs like Zee Antakshari and Saregama. Besides song and dance sequences, television software is also produced by thematically assembling select scenes from different films, as in programs like Showtheme and Kya Scene Hai. All this of course comes in addition to multifarious film based programs involving celebrity interviews, trade talk, gossip and reviews. It was also during the late eighties and nineties that Hindi cinema consolidated distribution markets in North America and Europe (primarily in the UK) apart from its traditional overseas strongholds in North Africa, the Middle East, and South East Asia. The sizable diasporic Indian population in these countries facilitated this expansion<sup>28</sup>

## The Project

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<sup>28</sup> The trade specialist Taran Adarsh for instance points out that in early 2004, a topline Hindi film was being released in 150 to 200 prints in the overseas market, compared to the numbers of big budget releases of the early nineties, like Toofan/The Storm (Ketan Desai, 1989 – 12 prints), Jaadugar/Magician (Prakash Mehra, 1989 – 17 prints), Agneepath/Path of Fire (Mukul Anand, 1990 – 12 prints), Aaj Ka Arjun/The Arjuna of Today (K. C. Bokadia, 1991 – 20 prints) and Hum/We (Mukul Anand, 1991 – 17 prints). See February 1 2004 <<http://www.indiafm.com/factoid/jan04/index.shtml>>

The first chapter of the dissertation elaborates the basic points of query, essaying out from Shankar's 2001 film Nayak-Asli Hero, where the visible paraphernalia of finance, technology, and development are brought to a state of mythic orchestration. In this film, the figure of the urban 'educated' Chief Minister hero Shivaji and his secular technocratic tasks of development are invested with epic dimensions of memory and accorded with godly name giving powers. Shivaji the efficient 'manager' thus becomes inseparable from the historical Hindu icon Shivaji (the Maratha Chieftain of the seventeenth century) and Shiva – the creating-destroying godhead in the Hindu pantheon. The diagram of sovereignty that is created by this cinematic coming together of new age entrepreneurship, a Hindu paternalism of mythic proportions, and the image of communicative technology itself, is singled out for special attention and discussed in relation to law, exception, information, and the thorny question of fascism.

The second chapter is an elaboration of the philosophical concept of geo-televisuality in relation to a mode of production one can provisionally call *informatics*. The former is a postulate that is cast against a Hegelian understanding of totality that in many ways impels the worldly projects of the modern, while the latter is elaborated here as a form of technologization of populations that perhaps to an appreciable extent dismantles the power/knowledge architectures of modern disciplinary societies. Such theoretical excursions are the outcome of examining films like Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost/My Friend Has Come From Mumbai (Apoorva Lakhiya, 2003), and Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani/The Heart is Still Indian (Aziz Mirza, 2000). The concept of geo-televisuality is then discussed in greater detail, against a historical relief of popular Hindi cinematic instances.

The third chapter is a genealogical outlay of some key tropes that could be pertinent to any discussion on Indian cinema. It begins with a consideration of realism as a paramount, dioptric perceptual model of the modern and then gives a brief account of the critical debates concerning the global career of this aesthetic coda and the multiple devotional and mythic impellings of Indian films. Two aspects of the latter – Rasa as a non-subjective aesthetics, and that of *Dharma*, as a non-subjective theodicy – are picked for special elaboration. The latter half of the chapter is a discussion of how it was a modernist



epistemological ordering of discourse (centered around a textual projection of Bhagwad Gita as the spiritual core of Indian-ness) that created the very picture of tradition, with the multiple flows of *Rasa* or taste, or the many armed postulates of Dharma or duty being telescoped toward a patriotic stance of *bhakti* or devotion towards the national state. This nineteenth century project of recoding the diverse energies of devotional practice and belief into a monotheistic edifice of Hindu-normative patriotism is something that animates the post independence popular 'All India' film to a large extent, but it is also in these films that one also glimpses the ruins of such monumental enterprises.

Chapter Four is a continuation of the genealogical concerns of the previous one. Here after a critical evaluation of seminal works of scholars like M. Madhava Prasad, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Geeta Kapur, and Ravi Vasudevan, an alternate understanding of Indian cinematic formations is offered. It is suggested that the semiotics of such films can be seen in terms of *assemblages*, or conglomerations of particle signs of modernity and fragments of epic memory. This notion of 'assemblage', in which various pressures of meaning converge and deviate constantly, is subsequently attach to the concept of geo-televisuality elaborated in chapter two. It is also hypothesized that a critical understanding of popular Indian cinematic formations could focus on assemblages of spectacle and desire that come in between narrative propositions. That is, one could concentrate on the errant movements and erotics of signs that occupy intermediary spaces between problems and resolutions, between agonistic battles among announced tropes of tradition and those of modernity. It is in this vein that features like stardom (Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan), formula (lost and found films), and female figures (in relation to the rape film or the marriage musicals) are discussed, not so much as anthropomorphic forms and consciousness models, but as flexible diagrams of visibilities, affections and articulable statements.

The Fifth Chapter is an examination of the historicity of the lyrical element in Indian cinema. It visits three films of South Indian auteur Mani Ratnam to demonstrate how the often non-narratological song sequences are not decorative in an empty Hegelian sense, but are assemblages of disjunctive powers, at once impelled toward the state and retracting from it. In their groundless transportation of bodies, ushering in of non-obligatory geo-televisual

sign erotics and pure, uncharted spaces, the song sequences exert a de-territorializing force that often reveals the historical partitions of 'selves' caught between various diagrams of the local and the global. A critical appreciation of such expressive powers once again calls for a thinking in assemblages, one that does not consider narrative to be the primary ethical instantiation.

Chapter six is an elaboration of Mani Shankar's 2004 neo-mythological Rudraksh. The discussion begins with a consideration of Ashish Rajadhyaksha's thesis, that the birth of the secular 'All India film' during the third and fourth decades involved an interesting shift, in which an ontology of the mythological was extended to other genres, particularly the social. As a result, the mythic icon could be formally replaced by a structure of national narration, with an authorial horizon of truth and meaning kept in place. What is nevertheless interesting is that the mythic impelling of cinema (which is created by a coming together of the technical apparatus of film and the audience and its devotional beliefs) could be potentially directed towards new and radical directions. This is what happens in a film like Fattehulal and Damle's 1935 Prabhat mythological Sant Tukaram, where it is indeed the medieval poet saint himself who becomes the author of the film, only to re-script the world as a perpetual miracle of unalienated labor. In Mani Shankar's Rudraksh however, the battle against a mythic resurgence of evil becomes inseparably entwined with a statist administration of terror and crisis. The language of a purported Hindu constitution and destinying acquires profound powers of translation here, imbibing the manifold technological and financial wonders of the world into its fold.

The Last chapter is a continuation of some of the themes outlined in the previous one. It is proposed that the general temporality of the secular all India film is a curved one, with the profane lineage of the here and now being perpetually bent at both ends toward the utopian by the impress of a mythic past and a future already foretold. This mythic temporality is not something that can be chronologically mapped; it can only be 'recalled' groundlessly, at key moments of elevation and crisis. But the nature and earthly consequences of this recall may not be the same all the time. If the mythic impress of time is able to abolish the profane in a single stroke, it may do it in infinite number of ways. It is from this understanding that this

chapter seeks to theorize the matter of repetition and difference in popular Hindi films. This takes the form of an investigation of key instances of filmic ‘re-telling’ of the story of Mehboob Khan’s Mother India (1957), particularly in Deewar/The Wall (Yash Chopra, 1975), Shakti/Power (Ramesh Sippy, 1980), down to its new age, nineties’ incarnations in Aatish/Mirror (Sanjay Gupta, 1994), and Vaastav/Reality (Mahesh Manjrekar, 1999).

The dissertation ends with an Appendix entitled “A Critique of Cinematic Reason: Indian Cinema and Classical Theories of Film.” This part contains some critical reflections on the three lynchpins of what can be broadly called a western theory of film: a phenomenology of consciousness, narrative as a primary arbiter of signification in the linguistic unfolding of the classical film, and a psychoanalytic model that ultimately harnesses desires and drives to a Oedipal horizon of meaning. This part questions the Universalist presumptions of this terrain and attempts to point out its historical limitations by bringing it into critical adjacency with Indian cinematic formations. The effort here is to demonstrate how the loose assemblages of realist narration and ‘pre-modern’ ceremonial attractions in Indian films can combine diverse ontologies of truth, memory, and modes of seeing. In this vein, the discussion broaches the *Samkhya* philosophical tradition of dualistic, but non-subjective perception, and the Buddhist ‘Middle School’ concept of *Avidya* or positive ignorance (as opposed to the Hegelian notion of totality). This excursion is informed by a historical elaboration of indigenous artistic forms in India that contributed to the formation of a unique cinematic style, like the Nathawara School of Painting, the *Rasalila* form of theatrical representation, or the turn of the century novelistic traditions. The objective behind this is not to posit a pure, untainted Indian essence untouched by modern knowledge systems, but to suggest ways in which studies of Indian films can enrich a global understanding of the cinematic.

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Pittsburgh,  
April 20, 2005.

# **1. Sovereign Power and Informed Heroism of the Epic Kind: Shankar's Nayak and the Allegory in Contemporary Indian Cinema**

## **Introduction: A Story of Mumbai**

The title of Shankar's 2001 film Nayak – Asli Hero/Nayak – The Real Hero proposes a new protagonist for the times. The film is about the genesis of such a figure, from his nondescript middle class origins to his spectacular transformation into a leader urgently called for by ground realities of the state-of-the-third-world -'market' in a general sense, as well as common folk interests in the Indian state of Maharashtra. But this is no ordinary story; the title qualifies the hero, quite emphatically one might add, with the epithet 'real'. The image of *Nayak* (that is the word for 'hero' in Sanskrit and several North Indian languages) is thus invoked in a position of splendid isolation amidst numerous other examples of stellar heroisms in the pantheon of Indian mass cinema. The promise here therefore, is that a unique 'real' aspect of this personage will single him out from a host of 'reel' based pretenders. However, this attribute of realness can neither be accounted for in terms of a mimetic logic of representation nor of reflection. The filmic life and works of *Nayak* are actually not 'realistic' in a humdrum, phenomenological sense by which one is habitually prone to evaluating a 'truth' content of cinema. On the contrary, his actions are quite supra human and miraculous, often beyond the finite capabilities of the human, and frequently assuming epic proportions.

The *Nayak* performs the Herculean labors of navigating the inert and mundane social dredges of an underdeveloped context and stringing together scattered signs, symptoms, icons, and concepts -- like MacDonald's, World Bank, Unemployment, poverty, development, third world, shanty town, housing, clean water, corruption, politics, publicity, citizenship, conjugality, value, ethics, or even the proper name 'India' -- into a dynamic and

synergetic world picture<sup>29</sup>. From this complex scenario, one can isolate three transformative features that have manifested themselves with high drama, brimming passions, and insidious intensity in the subcontinental situation since the nineties: the opening up of the economy to transnational finance capital, the induction of the Indian media space into global systems of electronic publicity, and a crisis of sovereignty and the contiguous political rise of the Hindu right. Essaying out along the trailblazing path of Shivaji (for that is the name of the person invested with the title of *Nayak*) will hopefully allow an amplification of this discussion to larger concerns about Indian cinematic institutions of the nineties, and their complex dealings with discourses on cultural and political modernity, globalization, nationalism, and fascism.

### **The Traffic Jam**

The life of Shivaji Rao takes a turn towards the extraordinary when he finds himself armed with a video camera in the middle of a rush hour traffic jam in Mumbai city. This employee of the Q-TV news channel is on his way to work when the hold up begins all of a sudden and quickly ensnares the city. A Maharashtra State Transportation bus does not stop at a designated bus stop and is chased by an irate group of people. The pursuers catch up with the vehicle at the next red light and confront the driver Sakharam Selke. However, the arrogant and impetuous Selke not only refuses to apologize, but also seriously injures a student by pushing him out of the bus. Within minutes, an agitated mass of passengers and a quickly gathered group of bus operators poise themselves for a showdown in the middle of the crossing. It is from this point that the accidental correspondent Shivaji Rao picks up his camera and starts filming. What is of critical interest here is that from the onset, Shivaji's 'on the ground', guerilla style newsgathering fosters a diagnostic perspective of the situation which either intersects with, or punctually corresponds to a transcendental global perception of cinema, that comes with the latter's usual industrial omniscience and godly editorial intelligence. As if by magic, Shivaji always arrives at the right place and at the right time to

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<sup>29</sup> Nayak – Asli Hero is a Hindi remake of Shankar's earlier Telugu/Tamil film Mudhalvan.

record, in proper sequence, the islands of clarity that open up amidst the bedlam. A compact between these local and global standpoints gives rise to a utopian will to narration that tends to induct into its propulsive drive all floating signs and dispersed bodies in the cinematic universe of *Nayak*. Later in the film this unique gift -- one that he acquires quite magically and the fruits of which he relays to the world as urgent and conscientious information -- is what bestows onto Shivaji wondrous powers of speech. He is able to address the world, or rather enunciate it afresh and call it properly into being by addressing the chaos.

Matters escalate to serious proportions very soon. Selke, who identifies himself as a functionary of the ruling party, is a minor figure who arrives into and soon vanishes from the narrative solely as an unmediated force of schizophrenic disruption. After throwing the student out of the bus without any provocation, he sneaks out of the melee that ensues to make a phone call and engineer a statewide strike in protest of his own fictitious molestation. A couple of top angle aerial shots subsequently suggest that within hours the traffic snag has not only throttled large segments of the city's roadways, but has spread to the countryside as well. A feverishly filmed and rapidly cut montage, with a surreal rain of paper sheets floating into the frames from the out of field, imbues the scenario with a tragic affect. The critical-anthropological eye of cinema -- warmed with its selective gaze for detecting, recording, ordering and signifying -- assembles bodies and movements into symbolic and diagnostic perspectives. These relate largely to a world picture of an urban, third world middle class denied mobility: the student who fails to appear for his exams, the man who cannot make it to a job interview, the bride who is stopped from appearing for her marriage, the heart patient who dies in the ambulance. In contrast, Selke and his brotherhood of drivers appear in the pro-filmic city space as pure pathological animations from a lumpen, proletarian 'outside', without biography, history, or ethical habitat. They, in their inhuman coldness and cruelty, are not only incapable of a minimum amount of conformity and voluntarism demanded from the citizen, but are also viciously hostile to a basic imperative of metropolitan life: that of keeping money and laboring/consuming denizens in circulation. Their violent and seditious figures are the only ones in the crowd that become disjointed from verbs and predicates that denote value and legitimate practice, like education, occupation, or medication.



Shivaji does not miss any incident that becomes important in the task of following a dominant grammar of plausibility in narrative cinema, and donating sense in the process. He captures Selke on camera while the latter is making that insidious phone call, and also records all other revealing episodes that follow, including one involving the baiting of an Islamic constable, which introduces a communal angle to the conflict. Meanwhile the unrest quickly translates into riots and looting of consumer goods from the shops in the precinct. In the middle of the mayhem Shivaji films two other calls, both made by the police officer in charge to Balraj Chauhan, the Chief Minister of the state of Maharashtra, asking for permission to use force in dispersing the crowd. Chauhan expressly refuses to allow the use of tear gas, bullets, or any other measure to diffuse the situation. The reasons he gives makes his interests as a political functionary amply clear: caught between four voting constituencies (the students, the workers, the ruling party, and the opposition) that are presently in loggerheads, the Chief Minister is unable to make a “decision<sup>30</sup>.” A resolute application of sovereign will is thus seen to be foreclosed by a perpetual impasses between interest groups and syndicalist factions of a third world parliamentary democracy. The jam by then has already become a ruinous dispersal of energy, value, and property that is in dire need of being reconstituted as a ‘city’ of homogeneity and consensus. In such a situation of emergency, law preserving forces are prevented from re-establishing a monopoly of violence precisely because Chauhan the Chief Minister remains mired in liberal parliamentary protocols of ‘endless conversation’<sup>31</sup>. He is unable to uphold a charter of rights concerning civic life and property and answer to an exceptional situation because he is always caught at the dead center of things. He treads a finely calibrated, centrist line between a narrow spectrum of left-right politics and is thus unable to pronounce a categorically dictated friend-foe identification appropriate to the situation. The weak machinations of a democratic

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<sup>30</sup> The disgusted police officer mutters “Kya chair paise ka CM hai...koi decision nehi le sakta” (What a cheap CM....can’t even take a decision).

<sup>31</sup> The allusion of course is to Carl Schmitt’s critique of parliamentary liberalism, in its incarnation in the Weimar Republic. According to Schmitt, the protocols of endless conversation and a liberal imperative of ‘consensus’ divide the polity into a plurality of force interests and forestall sovereign power from coming into being. See Carl Schmitt, The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy.

polity can be exercised in this case only by a suspension of sovereign power; Chauhan can numerically maximize votes only by maintaining a catastrophic status quo in the battlefield.

Later in the film, the body of evidence mounted by Shivaji's camera is used during a televised public interrogation/trial of Chauhan. The young cameraman is asked by Q-TV bosses to step in as anchor of a program called *Amne Samne* (Face to Face) and interview none other than the Chief Minister. The discussion, telecast 'live', follows a line of inquiry oriented to a very specific and focused notion of good governance that 'educated' citizens like Shivaji expect from the office of the premier public servant. After pointing out the fact that rich are getting richer and the poor poorer under the Chauhan administration, Shivaji produces a bunch of reports from the IMF, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the World Bank to show that the Chief Minister has failed to provide adequate managerial stewardship in the most important area – development. The World Bank report is shown to declare that the latest installment of a loan has been cancelled because the last one never reached the people. It had been gobbled up by a circuit of bribes and embezzlements in the Chauhan ministry. Cornered by these disconcerting questions, Chauhan throws a radical challenge towards Shivaji: he offers to use a constitutional provision and make the young man the acting Chief Minister for twenty-four hours for the world to see if he can do any better.

Shivaji accepts the challenge of being a one day premier after a lot of soul searching. A remarkable segment of the film depicts how he carries out his duties in a manner that shakes the government completely. The day is begun with the launching of a massive cleaning up process of the state bureaucratic machinery. Following that, Shivaji solves the intractable housing problem in one of the largest shanty towns in the city, and other allied matters through a series of quick and decisive suspensions of personnel, like the chairman of the Housing Development Committee, a government rations contractor, a doctor, and two police officers. The general tempo of decisionism and instant enforcement of sovereign will achieves a spectacular dimension when Shivaji single handedly fights and neutralizes a group of goons and political contract killers. Towards the middle of the day, he sends out a televised message to the public, asking them to collect receipts of purchase from merchants

in order to ensure the collection and accounting of sales tax revenues. The Chief Minister also warns unscrupulous businessmen that strong action will be taken against them unless they declare and submit their past dues. Within hours, the government coffers swell with a sudden influx of tax money. Before sundown, the same money is deployed to provide jobs and income opportunities to the 20,000 families of the aforementioned shanty town, who by then has already been re-located to proper government funded living quarters. Shivaji then completes the cleaning up process within the allotted time by suspending more than 45,000 corrupt government functionaries and ministers of a dozen state departments who have complaint files against their name. The latter list also includes the name of Chief Minister Balraj Chauhan, who is arrested at the stroke of midnight.

### **The Cleaning up of the Cinematic City**

The entire segment featuring Shivaji as the Chief Minister for one day is interspersed with stylized fast motion and iconic friezes akin to visual styles in MTV television capsules. Movements of bodies through diegetic time and space are hastened by disjunctive editorial splices. Shivaji and his entourage, as attributes of the cinematic in a special sense, are set to an affective-symbolic rhythm of movement that easily overwhelms the limited cartography of filmic Mumbai. A corrupt police officer, for instance, is seen to be sitting at his office desk in full uniform when Shivaji informs him over the phone that he is being suspended. After an instantaneous ellipsis in diegetic time, the officer is shown to be sitting at the same desk and in the same posture, but symbolically stripped of his uniform. The unfolding of cinema here is thus of an inhuman acceleration of bodies and things by which narrative time breaks out of its normative metrical flow and acquires an epic dimension. The organization of space too is no longer constrained by the geometry of a determined milieu; spaces arrive as sheets afloat in a new messianic temporality of cinema, in the form of immanent stages for epic actions already foretold.

This episode thus achieves a thickening of time and a particularization and dynamization of space that is out of bounds with a normative economy of segmented narration largely identified with classical Hollywood cinema. A detailed discussion on the diverse and rich

vein of theoretical arguments in this terrain must be postponed till the third chapter of this dissertation. However, for the present, one can posit a determinate formal abstraction of the classical Hollywood schema -- as a dominant prototype of film aesthetics -- against which different instantiations of the cinematic are frequently measured and evaluated (the thorny question of realism being paramount here). This prototype accords a few conventions to filmic narration: a faithful contiguity and seriality of time, space, and movement, a synthetic part-whole relationship between the frame and out-of-field, and a punctual cause-effect arraying of events of perception, affection, and action<sup>32</sup>. The schema can be said to correspond to a proposed horizon of perceptions and imaginations of the human subject made figurable in a line of western metaphysical thinking since Descartes. The machinic eye of cinema inasmuch has to faithfully intersect with or run paralogous to the cognitive mappings of the human individual, the earthy limits of his movements, and his general being in the world. An anthropologism of cinematic signification, and an anthropomorphic cast of action are therefore deemed essential for the production of meaning. As an imitation of life itself, this prototype of 'classical' narration necessitates that diegetic time and space should be an indirect expression of 'real' chronometric time and metrically calibrated space. Hence, for any undertaking, the volume of work done, the time taken to do it, and the mortal limits of human agency should be bound together into a symmetrical relation of plausibility. Insofar as the 'cleaning up' sequence in Nayak is concerned, the normative prescription would thus be that there should be a sense of phenomenological adequation between the formal desire to clean up a monstrous governmental machinery, the time allotted (24 hours), and the locomotive, affective, and intellectual powers of the human. In other words, with all its formal or cultural dalliances, the sequence would have to, in the last instance, conform to a basic imperative of a secular humanistic aesthetics of cinema: the creation of a world picture devoid of miracles.

But what is witnessed in this sequence of Nayak is a utopian hyperbolic re-coding of real time by a cinematic temporality out of bounds. As soon as the figure of Shivaji enters a thickened realm of cinematic time, he achieves a lightness of being bereft of the lugubrious

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<sup>32</sup> In this context see Gilles Deleuze's understanding of what he calls the Movement Image in classical cinema in Cinema 1: The Movement Image.

burden of third world historical conditions. The finite human attributes of his persona are heightened *cinematically* and transformed into an immanent image of *Nayak* – the messianic hero in the city. It becomes a manifest leaderly will that can be dispersed immediately and universally throughout the milieu, facilitating an instantaneous and decisive communication between the horizontal, multi-directional flows of social life and the immanence of the state. Shivaji can be *seen on screen* to always arrive at the right place and at the right time to solve problems precisely because his body is *cinematic* in a special way that is not anthropomorphic-representative. He is not a reflection of a presiding human subjectivity; rather, an epic dimension of filmic time, as an expressive power of an epic *will to sovereignty*, is the only subject here. It is this temporal order that brings about dynamic compacts between man and milieu (Shivaji and shanty town, Shivaji and bureaucratic corridors), and man and objects/instruments (Shivaji and telephone, Shivaji and the fax machine that instantaneously circulates letters of suspension). The figure of *Nayak* is thus an ensemble of humanoid (figure, attire, gait, speech, discourse, signs of education, class etc.) and machinic (special effects, an editorial intelligence that vanishes metrical space from beneath his feet and transports him to the thick of action without slow, navigational procedures of human intelligence) attributes. Perhaps all cinematic figurations are such, but in this case, the profile of the human and the machinism of ‘cinema’ can no longer be hierarchically applied, with the first humanizing and concealing the second. Shivaji is thus always a cinematic android in anthropomorphic drag, one who is not able to present a consistent human aspect like Superman does, by relegating his mythical superpowers to otherworldly, but anthropomorphic origins of ‘scientific fantasy’.

*Nayak*’s cinematic figuration can indeed be adjudged to be an ‘incomplete’ humanization of mythic/machinic powers and qualities -- an instance of cine magic unbound from practical historical limits -- from the perspective of a broad based, cognito-scientific aesthetics of realism. As briefly mentioned earlier, the question of realism has always been part of critical discussions on Indian cinema. It merits serious attention because it is always irresistibly entwined with a dominant discourse of political modernity. Madhava Prasad points out that until recently, western film studies operated largely with a set of presumptions that linked the genesis of cinema to the historical dynamic of North Atlantic modernity. More

specifically, as an art form, cinema was seen to have an emblematic quality that pre-oriented it to realist representation; the technology was thus seen to be serving an already existing cultural necessity -- that of punctually documenting and reflecting the progress of a postwar developmentalist humanism<sup>33</sup>. The basic problem here, as far as most Indian popular cinemas are concerned, is that they often display certain mimetic qualities that do not lend easily to realist registers. These attributes are thus accounted for as mythic rather than historical features, as enunciative modes that approximate Parsi and classical Sanskrit Theatrical traditions, litanies, *Ramlila*, *Jatra* and other primitive-folk elements, rather than originary forms of European modernism, like romantic melodrama and naturalist theater. A Euronormative, progressivist diagnosis for this absence of an organically developed rational/realist idiom of representation would suggest that it is symptomatic of a land where the conditions of production are only formally subordinated to capital, and where there is an arrested conjugation between a feudal, organic essence of the nation, and a formal, bourgeois artifice of the state. As per this logic, the classical realist narrative cannot assume an exemplary, hegemonic function for itself in a milieu missing the modern nation state as a consolidated secular totality, a properly working civil society with all its pedagogical institutions, and the self-conscious enlightened subject as citizen. Popular Indian films would thus be seen to be *reflecting* an agonistic, 'not yet complete' artistic and ideological struggle between various contending forces over the state form. Such films would inevitably harbor disparate enunciative impulses, with the epic-primitive perpetually counteracting, contaminating, or flowing into the realist-modern. Hence, as Prasad states, students of Indian cinematic institutions, working within the paradigm of western film studies, often encounter a pre-emptive critical force that already designates such films as a 'not yet' cinema -- a formation symptomatic of an 'incomplete modernity'<sup>34</sup>.

Seen from this perspective, *Nayak* would be a mishmash of realist cinematic paraphernalia (psychological characterization, shot reverse shot, continuity editing, 180 degree rule etc.) and a primitive motorization of those same devices to an absurd level beyond historical finitudes of the human. The so called 'real' hero would thus actually be only a pretender -- a

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<sup>33</sup> See Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* 1-3.

<sup>34</sup> See Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 2. See also Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* 22.

vehicle for unscrupulous wish fulfillment through bad faith -- who still lacks the historical qualification necessary to be able to address the world in an 'authentic' manner. Unlike the camera of Cartesian humanism that always has to open out to the world in a state of doubt, the cinematic camera that aligns a global perspective with Shivaji's line of vision is always imbued with mythic pregnancies of already there meanings. But perhaps, if one were to try to understand it in its own terms, Shankar's film should be seen in a different light altogether, without the overbearing presence of subject, unity, and law as infallible founding ideas. As a configuration of powers and qualities of the image, Shivaji can therefore be understood as an immanent movement of thought in cinema, an autonomous force with a social reality of its own, rather than as a faithless reflection or representation. A few questions can be posed at this point. What is the historicity of the cinematic that *Nayak* instantiates? Under what conditions of epistemology, technology, and social relations of production (of discourse, of cinema, of ideology etc.) does such an image-of-the-leader become possible? How is such a cinema immediately, and not mediately, related to questions of the state, sovereignty, law, and other relations of power?

### **The State of Information**

The entire span of Shivaji's one day tenure as Chief Minister is broadcast live by Q-TV. As soon as the camera is switched on, it seems the state itself is inaugurated in its proper form with the manifestation of an already there consensus that awaits no further communicative gesture: the people watch the leader watching over the people. This synergy of points of view recasts the body of Shivaji as that of the leader directly and luminously incarnating the will of the people. He assumes the mantle of Nayak the leader as a bundle of energy and intelligence that harbors no obscurity in the spotlight. There is indeed no dark side to this leader. Shivaji is at once an icon of transparency and a source of illumination that unravels every intrigue, uncovers every secret, and renders everything crystal clear. The aspect of the common man that Shivaji displays is a force of rigorous re-familiarization of exceptional situations; when his face is inserted into the madness of things, it comes across as a part of a semiological power that immediately accords strange and new objects of the world with already designated, endearingly familiar profiles. It is this ontological power of informed

and informing governance that right away connects signs to their referents, dissolves complexities of history to the 'already said' or already remembered, and actually reduces language to pure functions of mass transmission. Hence, categories of human thought and political action, like rights, law, or truth are set to a trans-contemplative, accelerated application of cogent administration, without any interval for investigating, knowing, legislating, or judging. This is why in the cinematic transformation of Shivaji to *Nayak*, usual agents of political or juridical intelligence, like the ministerial cabinet, house members, or judges need never appear. The *Nayak*'s emphatic decisionism is able to take place without the sloth of institutional procedures and the clamor of parliamentary conversations precisely because both his actions and the sufferers of the same are caught 'live' on camera. *Nayak* as sovereign power is thus an aggregate of forces, both human and televisual, that *informatizes*, rather than dialecticizing, the passage from the nomos to law, from faith to science.

From a messy, historical landscape, Shivaji recasts the city as a flat screen of transparent visibilities. To that end, he does not have to pronounce a new, constitutive world view that is strikingly different from Chauhan's. As a matter of fact Shivaji measures himself and the corrupt incumbent CM in the same evaluating scale of managerial capabilities and speed. They are distinguished only by their differential efficiencies and commitments towards a chronicle of development already foretold. Politics for Shivaji is not a battleground of thought and action pertaining to combative readings of the world or old historical conflicts. It is rather a constant facilitating and secure management of value circulation as, and only as, capital. Hence, Shivaji's 'educated' and youthful governance does not extend to a questioning of World Bank proposals on the basis of the concern that he himself states at the beginning, that the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. He does not draft a new social contract of rights and duties; rather he establishes a visual one of transparency and efficiency. However, this 'visual contract' is not so much suited to communicative actions and rational arguments among the public about different value systems and ways of life; instead its chief objective seems to be instantaneous detection, containment, and a perpetual suspension of disorder. That is, a relentless warding off of disturbances which always seem to vex a never ending process of socializing capital's command. Instead of inaugurating a cognitive-communicative bridge between the self and the world or the subject and the



object, the visual contract binds the denizens of the city into a subject-subject cycle of sovereignty<sup>35</sup> that, for the 'live' moment, can connect statements of suspension immediately to visibilities of 'corruption'. The principle of seeing and been seen achieves an amusing application when a group of criminals watch the vigilant activities of Shivaji with a lot of relish, till the mise-en-scène on screen start looking familiar to them and they realize that the crusading premier is actually approaching the neighborhood, in a bid to nab them.

The instantaneous gathering of information as image -- as what is "already shot through with explanation"<sup>36</sup>, as Benjamin once so memorably put it -- is that which allows the *Nayak* to operate decisively, without delay, bypassing the disabling dialectics and plural interpretations of liberal polity. When Shivaji suspends dishonest functionaries 'on the spot' and in the presence of a live television camera, a livewire circuit of immediate consensus is produced that is predicated on both -- a faith in the epic voluntarism of the leader, as well as an unquestionable devotion towards the sufficiency of a social technology of information in itself. This is not because the televising camera does not lie, as the old postulate about truthful scientific representation would suggest, but because in the uninterrupted stream of direct transmission (which is seen to legitimately monopolize the social flow of meaning itself), it has had no *time* to lie. The *Nayak* thus becomes immanent through the very process of a violent compression of time and space, by which gaps between the private and the public, the law and the fact are informatized. He is thus a part of the cinematic image of information itself, and not represented in it. As Shivaji keeps reminding the perturbed Chauhan during the dramatic television interview, one has to answer to facts -- the live telecast is *on*, the *people are watching*.

In Nayak –Asli Hero, one sees a diagram of cinematic melodrama intersecting with the technological diagram of what can be called a new metropolitan will to power. This

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<sup>35</sup> See Michel Foucault's critique of the Hobbesian notion of the social contract in Michel Foucault, Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France 1975-76, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003). Foucault talks about a subject-subject cycle of modern sovereignty on page 43.

<sup>36</sup> See Benjamin, "Storyteller" in Illuminations, 89.

technological diagram of social bodies and social machines can be provisionally called 'informatic governance'. This form of power does not operate through dialectical syntheses between opposites or traditional symbiotic exchanges between war and politics; instead it works by way of forceful micro-management of tendencies, data inflows, and variables<sup>37</sup>. This also means that the screen-city couple can accommodate only precepts which are already predicted; it cannot harbor or recognize the *event* as the unforeseeable 'return' of history, as that which the leader has not already talked or warned about. As a result, in such a dispensation, there can be an almost total abridgement of protocols of investigative knowledge gathering, or contemplative movements of the human from the home to the world (qua globalization for instance). The screen-city couple redraws the old striated landscape of uneven temporalities into a smooth global one of "perpetual presents"<sup>38</sup>; in such a space there can be no historical intelligence to effect an ontological transformation of values, but only technical *innovations* that can keep repeating, illustrating, and calling into being what the managerial monologue has already divined or forewarned. The *Nayak's* management is thus deemed efficient not because it *knows* best (since historical or political knowledge is belated anyway and can only contribute to the database, a table of logarithms, the World Bank report, or the museum), but because it can *report* best and *act* the fastest. Unhappy struggles of history, pertaining to class, caste, gender, or religion can appear on screen only as fungible mathematical attributes of statistical or demographic concern, just as individuals great and small can only climb onto one or many of the designated, on screen profiles of massification: the criminal (the contract killers, Balraj Chauhan), the unemployed or the homeless (the dwellers of the shanty town), and the 'people' (the hordes who come to request Shivaji to run for office). Informatics via Shivaji thus consists of the state's

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<sup>37</sup> It needs to be made clear that the diagram of power elaborated here does not amount to a systems theory qua modern epistemes. Rather, this mode of power is akin to what Lyotard says about 'postmodern' knowledge systems, where increase in knowledge can actually lead to more uncertainty and lowering of performance. Control therefore, in such a situation can instead be exercised more efficiently through a regulation of chaos – that is, by a performative management of instabilities and variables rather than a negation of uncertainty through metaphysical invocations of truth. See Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge 53-60.

<sup>38</sup> The allusion of course is to Fredric Jameson's understanding of Postmodern temporalities. See especially the 'Introduction' to Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.

pharmacopic actions on such bodies, through measures of development, aid, medication, schooling, or policing.

In Shankar's film, the passage of the figure of Shivaji into the iconic aspect of the *Nayak* happens precisely when in the image of the 'direct' telecast, the camera of cinema becomes indistinguishable from the camera of information. But despite the obvious presence of the Q-TV camera, informatization, as a diagram of power that envelops the city, is not restricted simply to instruments of media technology like radio, television, or print; just as the creation of *Nayak* as sovereign power extends beyond the simple compact between the screen and the astute, conscientious voluntarism of Shivaji as man-on-screen. Rather, informatic power pertains to a micro-social distribution of sovereign will and calls for a novel form of habituation and conformity in what is a new managerial environment. Later in the film, after Shivaji contests the state legislature elections and becomes the Chief Minister *de facto*, he sets up complaint boxes for public use throughout Maharashtra with the promise that action would be taken within twenty-four hours to address the concerns of every letter dropped. This circuit of intelligence later proves crucial in dealing with a moment of danger. When the criminal stooges of Balraj Chauhan plant four bombs in different corners of Mumbai city to disrupt the law and order situation, Shivaji comes to know of the plot well in advance, through voluntary information provided by a network of citizens. As such, informatics emerges as a social-technical horizon where the immanent monadic consciousnesses of the people instantly meet and correspond with the transcendental wisdom of the leader.

### **Iconic Genealogies**

There are further dimensions to Shivaji's thespian transposition which require a patient understanding. The mantle of *Nayak* is not the result of a mere formalization of capital's command over signifying processes, or of the making global of a neo-liberal grammar of governance. It is not constituted simply by bringing together structuralist precepts of tech-financialization and efficient modalities of execution. As expressive power of the image, the iron aspect of *Nayak* holds many more non-directional energies of aura and affect which

impart to him an aspect of love and familiarity. It is this crucial component that prevents him from becoming a cold universal, accords him with name giving rights (as the one who calls the spade a spade), and the exceptional ability to stand outside the law and announce that no one can be outside the law<sup>39</sup>. These powers and qualities beyond managerial functions give Shivaji the *Dharmic* position of the *sutradhaar* – the one that is able to string together scattered concerns of life and finance into a constitutive, cosmic drama of development<sup>40</sup>. The new leadership of *Nayak* thus becomes possible not only by an

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<sup>39</sup> See Giorgio Agamben's elaboration of sovereign power and the rule of exception in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> The *Sutradhara* is the figure of the director in ancient Sanskrit dramaturgy. See Bharata Muni, *The Natyasastra: A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy and Histrionics*, Vol II, 227. As the last chapter of the second volume of the treatise establishes it, the *Natyasastra* of divine intellectual origin. Bharata himself is a celestial intelligence who, at the behest of the gods, comes down to cohabit with mortals and have earthly sons. The beginnings of *Natyasastra* is traced to the mythic moment when Lord Indra, the king of the pantheon of gods, asks Brahma, the preserver figure in the Holy Trinity, to essay a form of enunciation that is both audible as well as visible. The purpose was to achieve a form that could be used to disseminate divine wisdom amongst the general people, since the Vedas were forbidden to the lower castes. It was then that Brahma combined the four arts of speech, song, dance, and mime to create the *Natyaveda*. Bharat Muni's treatise is a descent of that heavenly form to earth, one that achieves a noble degradation when his sons mix *natya* with popular bawdy forms like the *Prahasana* and are cursed by the sages for that. They are however restored from an imminent lowly, *Sudra* existence by the gods who declare that *Natya* (as an inseparable compact between speech, dance, music, and mime) should be a form of worship. The *Sutradhaar* in that sense, is an intelligence that 'strings' together *Sattva* (light), *Rajas* (energy), *Tamas* (reified matter or inertia) – the three attributes of primordial matter or *Prakriti* – and casts them as manifold ripples of Being as One Brahman. Its etymology can be drawn from the Vedic notion of the Cosmic String or *Sutra*, as delineated in Book X, verse 90, line 12 of the *Rig Veda* (See Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1999). King also points out something else that may be pertinent to our discussion. Indian formal logic, as in traditions like *Samkhya* or *Nyaya*, predicates itself on grammar, not mathematics. The Universe therefore conforms to the grammatical structure of the sacred language of the Vedas. Sanskrit, which does not have any punctuation marks, is thus *Akhanda* or indivisible and ultimately refers to a single monistic reality, the *Sabda Brahman*. *Sutra*, as thread or strand that traces a temporal and earthly textualization of the Brahman in time is thus a provisional *vivarta* or illusory unfolding that has to be submitted to the history of the universe as one sentence (*Vac*), one play, and one film. (See King, 47-50).

epistemological sufficiency of Shivaji's statements, but also through an ontological *certitude* of his word. The latter force allows for a special operation of language, whereby global prescriptions for production and law keeping are socialized in the local realm through procedures of ritualistic vernacularization. It involves the evocation of a mythic memory of *Nayakdom* that seeks to naturalize Shivaji's worldly concerns and render them holy.

One can begin with the name itself. 'Shivaji' triggers remembrances of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Marathi chieftain who battled against the Islamic Mughal dynasty and has been subsequently lionized in dominant late nineteenth and twentieth century nationalist discourses as the modern founder of a tragically evanescent 'Hindu Rashtra'<sup>41</sup>. The short form 'Shiva', by which the hero's parents and dear ones address him, recalls the creator-destroyer figure in the holy trinity of the Vedic pantheon. In diegetic terms, Shivaji's journey from common man to anointed leader involves several stages of gestation, in which his body keeps accruing particle signs from disparate televisual and mythic sources. After completing his one day tenure as Chief Minister, he is attacked by Chauhan's goons. He manages to fight them off in a digitized, hyper real combat sequence featuring high-wired bodies strikingly reminiscent of the Walkovsky brothers' 1998 film *The Matrix*, but his clothes are burnt off and entire body covered with mud. A group of quotidian city dwellers discover their leader the next morning and bathe him with milk, as it is customary to clean the *Shivalinga* during the festival of *Shivaratri*. Later, when Shivaji goes to the countryside, the farmers recognize him and offer him the first grains of their harvest, an offering reserved for the gods. It is thus through non-linear, extra-constitutional modes of ritualistic vernacularization that the educated, westernized Shivaji becomes an earthy 'postulate' for divination and deliverance. The word postulation can be considered here in the etymological sense of 'prayer'. Shivaji's epic dimension thus assumes the form of an extra-anthropomorphic answer to the impossible yearnings of the third world common man.

Apart from these mythic registers, there is also another stratum to the *Nayak's* legitimate stewardship. Mr. Bansal is an honest state bureaucrat who takes a lot of pleasure in working

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<sup>41</sup> For a detailed analysis, see J. J. Roy Burman "Shivaji's Myth and Maharashtra's Syncretic Traditions" and Malavika Vartak, "Shivaji Maharaj: Growth of a Symbol."

with Shivaji (“an opportunity to work for an *educated* Chief Minister for a change”) during the latter’s one day clean up drive. In trying to convince the reluctant hero that he should enter the political field on a full time basis, Bansal complains that it is due to a selfish dereliction of state managerial responsibilities by an urban intellectual class that the country is in such a bad shape. The exemplary names he invokes to encourage Shivaji are indeed remarkable in their proximal application: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Thomas Alva Edison, and Alexander Graham Bell. According to Bansal, the world would have been far worse off if these luminaries had decided to stay at home and confine their life activities to meeting individual and petty interests. In his passionate articulation, these names appear as a panorama of signifiers freed of any historical location. They are particularized bits of an urbane ‘quizdom’ -- semiotic pulses mobilized to create a de-differentiated specter of intellectual vanguardism and middle-class meritocracy. Shivaji is thus invited to enter the murky domain of ‘politics’ as an entrepreneurial saint-provocateur who is the bearer of the *Dharmic*, rather than a mere human expert in administration. He is inserted into what is purported to be a sphere of multi-party parliamentary procedures as an ‘outsider’ who is at once mythic in an otherworldly sense, as well as endowed with pragmatic technical and meritocratic credentials<sup>42</sup>.

### **Shivaji as an Instance of the Cinematic**

Shivaji, thus can be considered to be a machinic assemblage of authorial signatures: Shivaji the hero, Shiva the god, Gandhi the national leader, or Graham Bell the innovator; he is a flexible, fluid-mosaic compact of bits and bytes, drawn from a host of secular and faith based intelligences. In him, the attributes of management and mythical agency are

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<sup>42</sup> Unlike the archetypal Indian politician clad in traditional *khadi* attire (as in the iconic paradigm created during the Gandhian-Nehruvian moment of nationalist mass mobilization), Shivaji is always dressed in suits and ties. As a new age leader (here we could recall that Chandra Babu Naidu, the present Chief Minister of the state of Andhra Pradesh, habitually refers to himself as the CEO of the state) who is Mr Clean incarnate, Shivaji is seen as a legitimate and moral force of intervention precisely because his managerial intervention steers clear of ‘politics’ in a banal sense.

indeterminately present, without synthetically resolving their mutual tensions<sup>43</sup>. It is therefore 'real' not because it either faithfully copies or escapes from (as in many 'commercial' fantasies of reel heroism) what is 'out there', but because it claims to be able to order what 'should be there' into being, as a commanding cinematic picture of national destinying. The-image-of-the-hero is one with a life of its own; it does not assert itself with a borrowed vitality from the material universe. Rather, it is matter itself (the cinema machine as part of an overall technologization of social life) with a significant presence in the world. *Nayak* is cinematic precisely because it 're-scripts' the world, orders its visibilities and statements into social relations of power, and in the process, brings the world to judgment.

A few questions can be broached at this point, towards a further understanding of the historicity of what we are calling the cinematic element in Shankar's film. Since Shivaji flexibly moves through democratic corridors as well as agrarian-feudal social structures of power -- because he acts as the manager as well as the high priest in order to ensure circulation of value -- does it necessarily mean that the sovereign project of *Nayak* is that of a catastrophic 'incompleteness'? That is, is it essentially a visual syndrome of a half baked sovereignty caught between irresolvable dualities of the tradition/modern, the agrarian/industrial, or the feudal/bourgeois? The line of query become clear when the cinematic figure is considered in constellation with some diagnostic ideas about the Indian polity in the discursive domain of history. Partha Chatterjee has described the variegated

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<sup>43</sup> As an instance of figural thought, Shivaji is not to be understood by notions of 'hybridity,' 'excess' and 'mimicry' that abound in contemporary post-colonial discourses. 'Hybridity', as an organicist concept, presumes a progressivist dialectical resolution to historical/narratological conflicts between east and west or tradition and modernity through a libertine intercourse between the master and the slave giving rise to a new, revisionist phenomenology of the postcolonial. The trope of 'excess' on the other hand imparts a strict modular character to classic imperial forms -- the manager as a structural, closed proposition of the 'modern' therefore in this case *exceeded* by *Shivaji* as the 'traditional' name of the father. Similarly, 'mimicry' as a category subsists on the assured regularity of power protocols guaranteed by the imperial sway of the integrated subject in the world, and a consequent, Hegelian-psychoanalytic distinction between the self and the other. In this case of course, the other subversively 'reflects' the self. Such designations would propose Shivaji only in terms of a representational schema of truth, mired in a humanist mimetopolitic of the west.

ruling bloc in Indian polity as an unstable coalitionary formation characterized by a protracted 'war of positions' between different contending forces<sup>44</sup>. Another Gramsci inspired reading by Ranajit Guha describes this ragtag ruling group as one that that exercises a catastrophically balanced domination, without properly formed hegemonic apparati of state and civil institutions<sup>45</sup>. Both these formulations can be read as analyses of force relations in society that avoid vegetative-essentialist typologies like tradition and modernity. In a similar vein, avoiding such positive polarizations, Prasad has said that 'tradition' in fact can be explained as a concept emanating from the flux of two conflicting ideologies of modernity itself, "one corresponding to the conditions of capitalist development in the periphery and the other inspiring to reproduce the 'ideal' features of the primary capitalist states"<sup>46</sup>. This 'peculiar' nature of the Indian polity is therefore the outcome of a situation where the conditions of production are only formally submitted to capital.

In relation to such understandings of the Indian context, the cinematic instance of *Nayak* (as part of the overall production of social life itself) would be one in which these conflicts of forces are not solved in a scientifico-realistic manner, but re-publicized in a different realm of value. The narratological impulse of Shankar's film is clearly not geared towards a positive sociological evaluation of problems in their 'true' forms; it does not culminate in proposing a 'real', scientifically tenable solution to the ills of development in the Indian context. Rather, it is an affective terminal of discourse through which diagnoses of historical disciplines onto myth, class fantasy insidiously achieves the visible status of a violently positive utopia, and scattered propositions of science and technological paraphernalia are ontologically claimed by an unbound faith based vision of national *becoming*. It is precisely this operation that qualifies to be cinematic in a special sense. That is, it is a discursive

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<sup>44</sup> See Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse, 48-50.

<sup>45</sup> See Ranajit Guha, "Dominance without Hegemony and Its Historiography," Subaltern Studies, ed. Ranajit Guha, vol. VI (New Delhi: Oxford, 1989).

<sup>46</sup> Prasad, Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction, 55.



power that can append statements and visibilities into affective courses of movement. In doing that, cinema may not ‘reflect’ the world and its legitimate disciplines of truth; rather, as it is in this case, it may, autonomously, and ambitiously, invent a whole new universe of its own. There are undeniably good and bad instances of the cinematic; one need not wallow in an ineffectual relativism of the spoilt aesthete to be able to say that. But it is also true that a perpetually alive critical evaluation of good and bad is greatly harmed when it tends to itself ossify into a moral dogma of good and evil. In order to avoid that, perhaps one can begin by considering the cinematic of Nayak as power and quality in its own terms, that is, not in terms of a universal aesthetic scale of realism that stretches from the classical to the not yet.

As Deleuze and so many others have suggested, a study of the unique aspect of any cinematic has to begin with the moving of the image itself. The efficacy of this form of power/publicity therefore must not be gauged in terms of an abstracted, frozen architecture of propositions; that is, how *Nayak* studiously reels concepts into a *constitutive* edifice of the nation in the world. To critically judge the cinematic in such a manner would be, literally, to ‘kill’ the film. This is because a phenomenological reduction of movements of melodrama and affect to instances of the Hegelian ‘concept’ would call for a primary separation of the image from its movement; that is, a consideration of the film as a series of snapshots. The positive creation of the concept in the Hegelian sense calls for the subjective consciousness to absolve the object of its vital motilities and produce its corpse in a timeless theater of historical inquiry. In his brilliant foreword to *Grundrisse*, Martin Nicholas elaborates on the formative conditions of the Hegelian concept in the following manner: “To have a ‘concept’ (*Begriff*) in the Hegelian sense means to ‘grasp’ (*Begreifen*) or ‘grip’ the thing mentally, to get hold of it and render it still as appropriation. (*Werke* XVIII in *Geschichte der Philosophie* I, p. 305, 325). Lenin’s comment in *Philosophical Notebooks* (*Collected Works* XXXVIII, p. 259-60) can also be cited in this regard: “We cannot imagine, express, measure, depict movement, without interrupting continuity, without simplifying, coarsening, dismembering, strangling that which is living. The representation of movement by means of thought always makes coarse, kills – and not only by means of thought, but also by sense perception, and not only

of movement, but every concept. And in that lies the *essence* of dialectics.”<sup>47</sup> In contrast to this form of evaluation -- which produces the concept only after an entity is absolved of life and movement, reduced to a snapshot, and produced in a timeless theater of historical inquiry -- one can say that perhaps the power of the cinematic in *Nayak* lies precisely in the quality of *movement* that the filmic image brings to the world. That is, not in how adequately it arranges propositions (like World Bank, India, Development, corruption etc.) in synthetic forms, but how it affectively marshals them in desirous rhythms of cinematic orchestration. That way, one would no longer be underestimating cinema as a lesser art -- a half baked discourse with scientific pretensions -- the power of which can be unmasked by first reducing it to stable propositions and then submitting it to superior analytical disciplines of philosophy or aesthetics. The cinematic power of Nayak lies in the concert itself, in how he lends tempo and style to statements and visibilities, bringing them to a cosmic dance inseparable from the dancing entities. The cinematic therefore is not constituted by a series of conceptual snapshots cast in a dizzying, illusory motion, and therefore subject to be read in terms of such analytical units, in *post mortem*, when it is deprived of animation, and produced as a series of propositions and arrested pictures. Rather, the heart of the cinematic lies in the *movement* of the image itself.

These concerns converge and point to a basic question regarding the historicity of the moving image. Or perhaps to the image of history itself that one must presume before evaluating this or that image in the world. A quarrel with the comprehensive Hegelian vision stated above can begin with the fact that it pictures history as a dialectical process that ordains a state of equilibrium as the norm. In this idealistic schema, the promise of a final deliverance from the anarchy and disturbance of interacting forces is the divine benediction of a self-conscious spirit of history. As far as the latter is concerned, the dance of a ‘not yet’ cinema, with its anarchic flows, unexpected shifts in cadence, and accompanying sound and fury of natural states, must one day come to a happy and rational conclusion. Also, it is from this majestically projected telos that the dynamic, unruly movements of matter, bodies,

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Nicholas, "Foreword," Grundrisse/Karl Marx, 28.

energies, and affects should be retroactively reviewed. For Hegel of course, that 'end' happened with the 1806 battle of Jena itself, and the subsequent consolidation of the Prussian state. For Francis Fukuyama, his Kojevian disciple of our postmodern times, the end took place on a more global scale, with the final victory of neo-liberal ideology and market economics over international communism after the collapse of the Berlin Wall<sup>48</sup>. Such priestly pronouncements, with all their denominations of tragedy and farce, should not be of interest in this excursion. However, what is pertinent here is a basic narratological impulse (history as psychobiography of the rational state, or a scrupulous unfolding of an enlightened Being) that has resonated in many dominant discourses of modern historicism. Epistemologically speaking, such sciences of the historical bear relations of isomorphism and ontological affinity with classic geometrical formalisms of the 18<sup>th</sup> century physical sciences of Europe, or with Darwinian evolutionary blueprints<sup>49</sup>. This powerful cosmic positivism of modernity is indeed difficult to exorcise, as it has been in the Indian context<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Avon, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> For a form of historical thinking that does not posit the Hegelian human subject as a center of agency, see for instance Manuel De Landa, A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> There is a long standing debate about whether British colonialism actually facilitated (Marx's infamous thoughts about the Asiatic Mode of Production looms large here) or interrupted a historical process of Indian modernity. More than the diagnostic statements, what is interesting here is the status of the modern itself, as a strife-ridden, agonistic, but ultimately unavoidable mode of becoming. It is this notion that seems to bring in a general specter of 'incompleteness', both when Indian history is accounted for in terms of the failure of an elite to position itself into a stance of hegemony, as well as in terms of subaltern voices that have been repressed by both, the colonial state, as well as the post-independence one over which the bourgeois exercise only formal control. For a rich and stimulating sounding out of this debate in relation to Subaltern Studies, see for instance Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspectsof the Historiography of Colonial India," Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000), Rajnarayan Chandravarkar, "'The Making of the Working Class': E. P. Thompson and Indian History," Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World," Sumit Sarkar, "The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltertudies," and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Radical Histories and the Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies*." See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).and the chapter on "History" in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999).

A few questions can be introduced at this point. Should the network relations between a transnational neo-liberal system of economy and scientific management, an ascendant Hindu fundamentalism, still operative feudal hierarchical structures, and an emphatic publicity of 'tradition' that we see in *Nayak*, be comprehended as being an irrational and unholy nexus, fraught by ultimately irresoluble *contradictions*? That is, should one seek comfort in the presumption that such alliances between secular instruments of technology and finance, and irrational dogma will never be condoned by a rational process of history? Or is it a new form of power that flourishes precisely because it germinates internal tensions at every step and operates through a dynamic distribution and productive deployment of those very tensile energies? It is indeed a frightening thought when a human profile cannot be accorded to the enemy, and the efficacy of his power cannot be gauged or analyzed merely in terms of truth or subjectivity. But in this moment of danger, when a carnivalesque and genocidal violence of the state has been long since let loose in the Indian context, perhaps the challenge lies in taking the irrational in history seriously. That is, in learning from it, understanding it as a machinic dynamism of forces that might not operate through foundational humanistic motivations towards truth, peace, and equilibrium, and through that understanding, forging new weapons of thought.

So far we have been talking about two figures in Shankar's film: *Nayak* the informatic sovereign -- comprising telematics, financial intelligence, and traditional voluntarism and responsibilities of the human -- and Shivaji, the human ingredient of *Nayak*, whose figure is also a repository of epic memories pertaining to the Hindu King and the Hindu deity. There is perhaps nothing surprising about that because we have known all along that kings have two bodies: the man himself and the iron deathmask of power that he wears. The distinction between the two is a fundamental one that Marx makes between the "mediocre and grotesque" protagonist and the hero's part he assumes in the farce so cinematically depicted in *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*<sup>51</sup>. But how does the topicality of *Nayak*-Shivaji's enterprise in the Indian situation of the nineties intersect with, or depart from fascism as a historical diagram of power? It would only be fair to separate the ardent liberalism of Shivaji

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<sup>51</sup> See the Second Preface to Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* 144.

and his assuring human visage from the monstrous architecture of power we have described as a sovereignty of informatics. One can begin that by asking exactly why it is *Nayak* the assemblage of power that animates Shivaji's sovereign expressions, and not the other way round.

### **A Brief Treatise on Informatics as a Technology of the Social, or Nayak After Philosophy of the West**

It would be pertinent to recall Heidegger's concern with the lure of modern technology that causes *Dasein* to lose itself through a massified familiarity with the world. Mass technology in that sense, becomes a "A Being-with-one-another [that] dissolves one's own *Dasein* completely into the kind of Being of "the Others", in such a way, indeed that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the "they" is unfolded"<sup>52</sup>. This Heideggerian anxiety about an increasing erosion of distance between the earth and the sky can be related not just to the obsolescence of being in the world, but also to a different issue. This is a question that seems to have resonated in various conceptual forms in the works of a long line of western thinkers, from Antonio Gramsci to Gilles Deleuze: how was it possible that modern technologies of mechanical reproduction and electrification of public communication should produce European fascism as one of its first, grotesque world historical spectacles? The paradox, as it is expressed in Benjamin's 'Work of Art' essay, can be outlined as follows: from the perspective of the enlightenment humanist one could say that mechanized mass culture in the twentieth century was supposed to 'de-auratize' the work of art and make it more democratically available; but what Benjamin notices in his time is a disturbing incursion of aesthetics into politics, rather than the politicization of art that could have been possible. This, for him, constitutes a 'violation' of the technologies of mass culture, by which the "Führer cult" produces its ritual values of aesthetizing war and destruction (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 234-35). Benjamin formulates the problem as

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<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, Being and Time 164.

belonging to a society not yet “mature” enough to “incorporate technology as its *organ*” (“Work of Art” 235).

This statement comes under considerable duress and loses its positivistic, idealistic charge if located in the overall context of Benjamin’s oeuvre. The historical landscape of politics, aesthetics, and culture this great German thinker draws up in his major works -- pertaining to Baudelaire’s Paris, the German *Trauerspiel*, the works of Kafka and Brecht, or a possible philosophy of history -- is one of ruins. Indeed, it is akin to the historical ground beneath Shivaji’s feet -- the very field of forces that the hero reinvents in the form of an epic synchronicity of images. The historical modernity of west that one sees in Benjamin’s work is not spirited by an otherworldly and inevitable Hegelian impulse of progress -- as an ongoing chronicle of *constitution* already foretold. Society in that sense is not a vegetative mass that builds itself relentlessly by *subsuming* the fall of heroes and other tragedies; it is perpetually giving rise to and destroying institutions that are at once pillars of civilization and those of barbarity. A situation of the historical as such is always fraught with anarchic fragmentations, discontinuities, and with the event as unforeseen catastrophe. There is indeed an inhuman quality about the very process of *figuration* in Benjamin’s thinking – in the helpless movement of the angel of history blind to the future and caught in tempestuous circumstances, in the welter of shock and distraction (rather than contemplative stances of the human) of moving traffic in Paris and of the moving image, or in the past that indeterminately *strives* to turn towards a rising sun in the historical sky like a flower induced by a secret heliotropism. These concept metaphors of *supra-normalcy*, machinism, mysticism, and a magical naturalism that abound in Benjamin’s work are features that can be located in a general temper of disenchantment in western thought between the great wars – one that pertained to a rigorous questioning, after Husserl, of a unified phenomenology of the subject, of closed scientifico-propositional systems of logic, and evolutionary positivisms of historical progress. Benjamin’s work, in that sense, can be placed alongside Marcuse’s return to Nietzsche and Freud, or Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis of the culture industry and instrumentalization of reason. The logic of this grouping does not lie in proposing a common, methodological home for these thinkers, but in a historical understanding that fascisms in the world, more than ever, render philosophy absolutely homeless and in dire

poverty. The greatness of these thinkers lay in the fact that in their examination of mediatization and reification, degradation of aesthetic and intellectual culture, and a corrosive Weberian rationalization of society into bureaucracies and markets, they chose to be in a perpetual state of critical exile, without seeking assuring, administered shelters of the subject, unity, and law.

Gilles Deleuze has re-articulated Benjamin's argument about the work of art and technologies of mass reproduction by transposing it from its organicist parabasis into a sub-human, machinic, and molecular-pragmatic one. This invocation of Deleuze in conjunction with Benjamin is not an attempt to harness them, with their obvious methodological differences, into a synthetic metacommentary<sup>53</sup>. Neither is the objective that of proposing a dynastic continuity that could eclectically house them in a peaceful philosophical tradition of the west. Indeed, there can be no bridge of 'truth' between them. The purpose on the other hand, is perhaps to do violence to pieties of propositional logic and bring the two discourses together in a constellation, or a catachrestic assemblage. In other words, to read them historically as powerful theoretical fictions which disrupt habits of the commonsensical. They are instances of thinking which are, at once, political, and taking place in a moment of danger. Such a critical, but disjunctive bringing together of Benjamin and Deleuze would recognize and take into consideration the shifting epistemic configurations of knowledge and power in the world, locating the former in a scenario where the great edifices of Newtonian geometry, the moral subject of Kant and Hegel, and the evolutionary certainties of the previous two centuries are in a state of ruinous dispersal, while placing the latter in a universe of Heisenbergian uncertainties.

According to Deleuze, the discourses of fascism, as one of the dominant myths of our time, establish themselves by an imperial-linguistic takeover of a whole socius of expressive

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<sup>53</sup> The point, perhaps, is to commit a disciplinary sacrilege. A political departure from the comforts of metaphysical and ontological truths should not lead to a professional-academic hermeneutics of sanitized repetition, or to a domestication of thought into neatly separated and hermetically sealed categories like modernism and postmodernism.

potentialities. The latter, for him, constitutes an immanent field of particle signs, of matters, perceptions, and memories that become attributes of consciousness models (like in the phenomenology of the subject) and deictic enunciations (like that of the Nazi mythology) only on a secondary level. In other words, the relationship between a diffuse semiotics and a molar semiology is always one where the latter is a part of the former, and not the other way round (for instance, it is not an essential, organic act of national narration that imperially and *categorically* imparts meaning to all signs), and the relationship between the two is always that of either catastrophic balance or antagonistic movement. That is not to say that we have languages without language systems, but that language systems exist only in relation to the expressive non-linguistic materials that they continually transform<sup>54</sup>. What is also important here is that the latter entities always harbor potentialities to constantly transvaluate and alter the former. Without sharing Deleuze's occasional impulses toward a transcendental empiricism or an acosmic vitalism, one can find in him a consistent effort towards thinking the battleground of language in terms of perpetually altering disjunctive assemblages, rather than in those of synthetic, organicist propositions pertaining to culture, nation or narration. The 'maturity' of society, as per a Deleuzian critique, can be understood to be a perpetually dangling holy carrot of western style modernity that promises a moment of synthetic arrival -- an ideal state of perpetual peace when the organs of culture are no longer abused, but incorporated into the being and destiny of the national, or even the world spirit as a whole.

According to liberal historicist imaginations which take social maturity all too seriously, the basic fault of the Nazi party would simply lie in the fact that they proposed an 'inauthentic' founding myth of the state, in the form of the psychobiography of the white Aryan male. The root of the error thus was only in the content, in Adolf's perversion and lies, and not in the *technological* form of the proposition or its social relations of production. The money-technology assemblage of propaganda, as such, is therefore taken to be value-neutral – it is only the voluntarism of the human that decides its deployment between truth and falsehood, between good and evil. It is the same historicism that proposes that the present global

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<sup>54</sup> See Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 28-28, 264-70.



dominance of neo-liberalism has at last created the post historical moment of a finally naturalized episteme<sup>55</sup> and a union devoutly desired between the earth and the sky. It is, in other words, a historicism that announces its own dazzling and spectacular death, and in the process tries to foreclose historical thinking in *toto*. As a result, unlike the inauthentic rampage of the Nazi pretender's war machine, the founding violence of a neo-liberal, transnational sovereignty in the world, from Rwanda, to the Middle East, to the Phillipines, is seen by such an ideology to have a totalizing legitimacy drawn from the jealous and vituperative religiosity of a Capitalist Market Being. It is in the auspices of such a naturalized episteme, when state language becomes global to a degree unprecedented in history, that the category 'information' assumes a special 'postmodern' status, in contrast to traditional and modern ways of reading the world through revelation, grace, discovery, or knowledge.

Deleuze on the other hand leads us towards a machinic understanding of fascism, rather than one that diagnoses the body politic in terms of sickness and health. In such a conception, Adolf does not feature as the madman who abuses technology, but is himself a grotesque, spectacular production of technologism itself. There are different forms of life and expressive energies in any situation of the historical which are capable of generating multiple instances of thought, imaginative actions, creative impulses and wills to art. Fascism destroys such pre-signifying and pre-linguistic energies of the world, extinguishes pluralities, and replaces them with a monologue of power that saturates space with, and only with, the immanent will of the dictator. This is the moment in which the language system sponsored by the sovereign is at its most violent; it seeks to efface historical memory by denying its constitutive or legislative relation with non-linguistic energies of life and the *socius*; it casts itself and its monologous doctrines as absolute and natural. For Deleuze, this is a psychomechanical *production* of social reality, more than an organicity of community torn asunder by human alienation and the incursion of reactionary ideologies, false consciousnesses, and agents. Not that the latter do not exist, or are unimportant

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<sup>55</sup> The allusion of course, is once again to Francis Fukuyama's Kojevian-Hegelian thesis in The End of History and the Last Man.

components in this world picture, but that this technology of power cannot be seen simply as a value-free arrangement of tools misused by evil ones. The figure of the dictator is therefore not that of the aberrant individual madman, but a psychological automaton that becomes insidiously present in all, in the technology of massification itself. The images and objects that mass hallucination, somnambulism, and trance produce are attributes of this immanent will to power<sup>56</sup>. The hypnotic, fascinating drive of fascism is seen to paradoxically operate below the radar of a moral and voluntaristic consciousness of the human subject; fascism becomes a political reality when knowledge based exchanges between entities of intelligence give way to a bio-technologism of *informatics*. The elaboration of the latter term requires caution and patience.

In Benjamin, this is articulated in terms of a situation in which forms of storytelling (which are at once educative and exemplary to the citizen for his cosmopolitan education, and also amenable to his freedom of critical interpretation and judgment) are replaced by a new form of communication which he calls information. The first characteristic of information is its erasure of distance -- it is its near-at-hand-ness that gets information a “readiest hearing” and makes it appear “understandable in itself” (“Storyteller” 88-89). The dissemination and reception of information is thus predicated on the production of the event as ‘local’, as “already being shot through with explanation” (89). For the conscious subject, this also entails the disappearance of a temporal interval required for movement within the faculties from cognition to understanding and then finally to knowledge. Information is that which is accompanied by the entropic violence brought about by a supercession of the commonplace, and a reduction of language into clichés. It is therefore in the ruins of a constitutive or legislative language that the instantaneous circuit of the commonsensical comes into being. Understanding this technology of massification (which is today increasingly dominated by corporate behemoths of the ‘free’ market) will perhaps help us to appreciate the valence of fascism as a historical diagram of power in our neo-liberal situation. Hopefully this theorem will lead to a sober view of matters like ‘manufacturing consent’ without disabling effects of paranoia or humanistic lament.

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<sup>56</sup> See Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 263-69.

What can be of paramount interest in Deleuze's work is that he does not try to enfigure Hitler in the contours of the human. That is, as the irrational apex of the suicidal state, or the pathological Goebbelsian liar who perverted the tools of human communication into mass propaganda machines. Hitler in that sense, would not simply be the mediocre and grotesque figure that uses or abuses technology (apart from that, he of course is long dead and buried beneath the dazzling obscurity of a sanitized spectacle – a museum piece of mass culture). Rather, in his latest neo-liberal incarnation, he would still be a proper name for technology itself, but not as the figure of the psychopathic *individual* who simply imprisons the human in enclosed spaces like the death camp or exercises a Faustian domination over him through arborescent structures like the Nazi war/propaganda machine. The 'postmodern' technology of information can be drawn up in relation to Hitler as a mere proper name is neither external nor internal to the human individual; it is one that is a part of the latter's self-making as well as that of the bio-anthropological environment he lives in. Hitler enters us through a socialization of life itself, through a technology of habituation that involves our willingness to be informed. It is a diffuse modality of power that perpetually communicates between the inside and the outside, erasing distance between them. It is in this context that Deleuze's statement, that there is a Hitler inside us, modern abjects of capital, becomes particularly significant. Hitler, as per this formulation, becomes an immanent form of sovereignty that is bio-politically present, percolating individuals and communities in an osmotic manner. Hitler as information is not the addressor who speaks to us while we listen. It was only Adolf who did that in the old days, as the anachronistic caricature of the sovereign who had not yet had his cut off, but had simply 'lost it'. Information on the other hand, is a metropolitan habit of instant signification; it is an administered social automaton that does not presume a contract between the speaker and the hearer. Since it has no point of origin other than the person informed, the instance of information is thus always one where the self listens to the 'they-self', to the point where the two become indistinguishable, and unavailable as separate instances of an agonistic self-other psychodrama of the integrated western subject.

Thinking, knowledge, and communicability (which is different from technical acts of communication) become foreclosed in such an order of power because one cannot really say anything that the social habit does not designate as already thought of and pre-judged by the dictator. The publicity of fascism is one where friend and foe alike are seen to be engaged in tauto-talk, repeating what the dictator has already said or warned about. Benjamin calls this an eclipse of the order of cosmological mystery and secular miracles that the European humanist sciences of self and nature, and an enlightened novelization of the arts sought to delineate and solve. There can be neither secrecy in fascism, nor anything unknown. Conspiracies in that sense, can only be manifestations of what is already foretold and waiting to be confessed. The SS (or sometimes, the CIA) can of course procure and store ‘classified information’, but it can never say anything that the Fuhrer does not know better. Information therefore becomes an incessant and emphatic localization of the global will of the dictator; in its seriality and movement, it can only keep repeating, illustrating, and reporting the self-evident truth of the dictatorial monologue<sup>57</sup>. For Deleuze, it is in this sense of the immanent dictatorial will that Hitler becomes information itself. Also, it is precisely because of this that one cannot wage a battle against Hitlerism by embarking on a battle of truth and falsehood without questioning, but taking for granted, the very parbasis of information and its social relations of production. Hence, “*No information, whatever it might be, is sufficient to defeat Hitler*”(Deleuze, Cinema 2 269).

Adolf the rabid anti-semiter does not exhaust the figure of Hitler as sovereign power, just as Shivaji the diligent humanist is not able to absolve it. The latter, it must be made clear, neither *abuses* power in a subjective sense, nor does he *hold* it as a supreme enlightened despot, as the agent who makes history exactly the way he likes it. Instead, he enthusiastically lets his body be animated by Nayak as an overall movement of governance. The latter is undeniably energized by a preponderant middle-class ideological fantasy of a complete technocratic overhauling of a static third world milieu, but is not restricted to that. In Shankar’s film what becomes manifest is an image of a total coming into being of sovereign

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<sup>57</sup> In this context see Hannah Arendt’s brilliant elaborations in The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt-Harvest, 1973).

intelligence; the glimpse of an ultimate adequation between a cynical Hobbesian visual contract between citizens who see and are seen on the screen-city, and paradoxically impelled by the same process, a romantic Rousseauistic invention of the people itself. In the auspices of this consummation devoutly desired, capital, as a final axiomatic of relations of production, and a complete technological informatization of society, is seen to ensure a giddy and total mingling of diverse desires in the horizon of the state.

It is important at this point to clearly understand that informatics is not a process facilitated by capital; it is capital in of itself. It is not the mere creation of the news or picture to be exchanged between individuals or communities; human beings have been doing that since time immemorial. Rather informatics pertains to a situation in our times in which the highways and alleys of public communication are increasingly brought under the command of molar, transnational instruments of capital (the big media conglomerates, the satellite) and their allied interests of ideology, culture, indoctrination, education, advertising, managerial communications, and consensus. It becomes immanent as a totalizing instance of power when the command of finance capital is extended to all avenues of the social and the market. The entire gamut of the social production of images therefore tends to be cursed inexorably with the circuit of money as capital, unmediated by institutions of culture or the welfare state. Informatics is the technology which capitalizes and translates different visibilities and phenomena into value as information. It is the circulation of different kinds of words and images across global distances, *in the least amount of time possible*. This feature is of primal importance because the mechanism of *value* in such a turnover is computed according to a digital architecture of temporality, where time *is* money. Informatics therefore creates value not in terms of veracity of knowledge (which is settled through rational debates between experts), but in terms of abridgement of reporting time. Hence, it is not reliant upon modern cognitive-representational prejudices (the camera does not lie), but a machinic coda of efficiency (the camera has had no *time* to lie). This is where informatics differs from what can be called news in an older sense. The latter can be accounted for as a secular verification of rumor, a process of expert scientific recoding of the world, absolving the latter of miracles and magic. Informatics on the other hand is a pure force of circulating commonsense, in which the temporal logic of the bomb and that of the image, or that of the

crime and that of punishment coincide. Like capital, informatics tends towards the abolishment of *circulation time*; it is, in fact, capital itself (and not a reflection of it) precisely because it acquires a 'life of its own' by the virtue of being value in serial flow<sup>58</sup>. Marx makes this important distinction between money as simple medium of exchange, as in Aristotelian economics, and money that becomes capital precisely because it is in circulation.

The relation between informatics and capital that is being proposed here is not that of a superstructural aspect of public culture reflecting the machinations of the economic base. In the general capitalistic production of social life itself, informatics does not mirror realities, but produces them. Informatics as such becomes possible when money as capital increasingly becomes immediately socialized value, without going through formal mediating circuits of society, law, and culture. Apart from Antonio Negri's thesis in Marx Beyond Marx, Guy Debord's observation can be broached in this regard -- that spectacle is capital accumulated to the point of image<sup>59</sup>. Hence, in speaking of an immanent flow of capital qua informatics, we are not suggesting that money is translated into image-commodity on the screen and subsequently returned to its original form as televisual revenue. Rather, the movement is that of money through and throughout. In the Grundrisse Marx makes a very important distinction between money and coin that may be instructive here: "Money is the negation of the medium of circulation as such, of the *coin*. But it also contains the latter at the same time as an aspect, negatively, since it can always be transformed into coin; positively, as *world coin*, but as such, its formal character is irrelevant, and it is essentially a commodity as such, the omnipresent commodity, not determined by location." (Grundrisse 228). Hence, both the coin that goes into the making of the image, and the image itself, are only different moments of money as value in continuous,

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<sup>58</sup> The "tendency of capital is *circulation without circulation time*"; hence also the positing of the instruments which merely serve to abbreviate circulation time as mere formal aspects posited by it (Karl Marx, Grundrisse 228).

<sup>59</sup> See Antonio Negri, Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons from the Grundrisse, trans. Michael Ryan et al. (New York: Autonomedia), Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 24. .

‘omnipresent’ circulation. Marx calls money a “mental relation” (*Grundrisse* 191) that can be seen to be emphatically *in currency* all the time, regardless of perceptual transformations from coin to image and back to coin again, in capital’s conditions of command. It is in this sense that money does not stop being money once the image is produced; as Goddard puts it, there is always money “burning on screen”, or as Fellini says about the ancient curse of money on cinema, “when the money runs out, the film will be over.”<sup>60</sup>

Such an unbridled pre-eminence of interest bearing capital in all walks of life of course has serious consequences for human acts of publicity and politics. But a nominalist denunciation of mediatization, based on categorical notions of ‘rights’ and ‘representation,’ is akin to a wishful critique of ‘capitalism’ from a checks and balances perspective of liberal humanism, that is, a critique of predatory capital without a critique of wage labor or the money form. To go back to Deleuze’s formulation, such an effort would be to revise and reform Hitler with information itself, when no amount of the latter can be sufficient to defeat him. In nominal terms of the liberty that the so called ‘free’ market brings, there actually can be no vertical installations of power or spaces of enclosure (the factory, prison, gulag or concentration camps in their classic carceral incarnations, Hitler in his paradigmatic human figuration) to prevent the subaltern from speaking. It is an entirely different matter that she cannot speak because it either takes money to do so, or because the speech itself has to accrue value in terms of global *interests* of money. The meritorious communicative actions between publics and counterpublics are thus always informed by the great monologue of power, in which money alone speaks to itself. The worldly interests of global neo-liberal capitalism are hegemonized through statistical maximizations of certain statements and minimizations of others, through maneuvers of expansion and rarefaction, advertising or damage control. In an immanent, multifarious global domain of bodies, statements, practices, lifestyles, and ideologies, it is the circulating logic of capital as informatics that increasingly determines the telegenicity and newsworthiness of each. Undeniably, it is indeed also the radically innovative and revolutionary nature of capital that allows for a global panorama of activities without the graduated, hierarchical mediation

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<sup>60</sup> Cited in Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77-78.

of the priest or the king. The internet and the diverse minoritarian energies it has precipitated across the globe is certainly a case in point. The digital revolution in video has also given fresh impetus to creative, radical film making efforts that had begun with the advent of the Super 8. It goes without saying that in the open playground of the 'free' market, capital breeds its own antagonism, just as it productively gives rise to newer realities. However, the head of the sovereign that was cut off now appears in the currency note. As a result, the battle against the globally rampant interests of a transnational corporate-statism stands the constant danger of being out paced, out distributed, and out-funded. Nominally, in a postmodern theater of 'post-industrial' capital, everyone can play the game of representations, since all beings great and small, including the 'subaltern', has money. It is a different matter altogether, one that has not much to do with the language games of neo-liberal economics and ideology, that increasingly, to a degree unprecedented in history, some have a lot more of it than others.

### **Sovereignty as Melodrama**

What has been just described is a theorem of informatics as fascism that no longer works through molar instruments of repression, or historical walls of division, but through micropunctual moves of densification and rarefactions in a massified plane of thought. This formulation should be called a theorem precisely to acknowledge its geometric limitations; it may not be accorded the imperial status of truth, but posed as a determinate abstract diagram of power that enters and inscribes itself into complex formations without claiming them in a total sense. In the Indian context, this theorem has valid bearings in terms of a few transformative events, apart from the gradual incursion of finance capital in the production of social life in of itself. Apart from a general corporatization of the electronic public sphere, it also has to do with a reduction of possibilities for producing the socialized image as artistic expenditure or even modernist pedagogy. As far as the latter is concerned, one can cite here, very cynically perhaps, the erstwhile role of the welfare state as the collective capitalist-patron in government sponsored 'art' cinema in the sixties and seventies, or the increasing obsolescence of state sponsored television and its tasks of democratic 'representation', consensus, and enfranchisement. Further, this theorem of informatic



fascism can point towards a pressing danger of our times, when the modalities of inventing and managing a population<sup>61</sup> shifts from a power/knowledge paradigm of modern western societies to a vectorization of affects, clichés, and myths of fundamentalism. This is precisely why the morality, thoughtfulness, and education of Shivaji are not identical to the instantaneous administration of *Nayak* as the man-on-the-screen. Apropos the ‘peculiarities’ of the Indian situation, this non-totalizing theorem of fascism could also facilitate critical understandings of the rise of the *Hindutva* ideology through global applications of finance and electrified publicity in the last two decades, that allowed it to emerge as an incarnation of transnational sovereign power, from its traditional agrarian-regionalist moorings in the North Indian cow belt.

The line diagram of informatics is thus neither a positive hermeneutic, nor an enclosed, all pervasive system; it is rather an instance of managerial intelligence that is always open to variables and complexities. It enters realities in an osmotic manner, without ossifying into stable structures and offering universals amenable to heuristic readings. The diagram of informatics (which is an impossible dream of capital, like the disappearance of circulation time itself) can enter the cinematic only as a myth rather than a structure, through complex melodramatic assemblages with humanistic affections, pictures of welfare, and visions of terror and violence. Shankar’s film offers a glimpse of this as an image of information that merges with an operational principle of sovereignty. Shivaji, in lending his body to the monitoring informatics of *Nayak*, indeed plays with fire. His assiduous humanism nevertheless fails to humanize the latter’s visage completely. As he discovers, it is a basic ‘exceptional’ nature of sovereignty itself that cannot really make it a sum of all developments, humanitarian concerns, and an emphatic administration of transparency. As a matter of fact, sovereign power detaches itself from the simple management of things and

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<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault has suggested that the modern western form of sovereignty, which he calls bio-political, emerged with an accompanying historical shift in modern configurations of power, when the older territorial state was substituted by a ‘population’ state. See Michel Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics," *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, vol. I, Essential Works of Michel Foucault (New York: The New Press, 1997), Michel Foucault, "Security, Territory, and Population," *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, vol. 1, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault (New York: The New Press, 1997).

comes into its own only when such a picture of happy cohabitation is disrupted. Much to his horror, Shivaji understands that in order for the culture of information to intersect with an ideal of sovereignty, a scope has to be created for the exceptional. In other words, along with the creation with a Calvinistic city with walls of glass, grounds have to be prepared for the sovereign entity to step out of those very walls and make itself apparent by the privileged administration of secrecy. This is the very non-televised space where it can be declared and ensured that everything should be televised.

Matters come to such a pass when the entrenchment of the state as one that is alive to facilitating 'development' and free circulation calls for a fierce application of law making force, as the 'final', exceptional act of violence that is outside the law. It is when the workings of *Nayak* extend to a basic question of life and death. This singular incident takes place a short while after a tragic incident in Shivaji's life. By this time, he is already the elected Chief Minister of the state. The young idealist's dream success as the bona fide premier forces his evil rival Balraj Chauhan to resort to extreme measures. The latter plants a bomb, but inadvertently kills Shivaji's parents while the young Chief Minister himself escapes unhurt. Chauhan also plants four other bombs in different parts of the city, but they are diffused by the dynamic Shivaji with the help of a network of citizen spies. These incidents of crises are followed up by heated press activity. During a press conference the crafty Chauhan issues a televised statement that highly perturbs and demoralizes Shivaji. The former premier alleges that it was Shivaji himself who had planted and diffused the four bombs in the city to gain cheap popularity; not only that, he had gone to the extent of killing his own parents to gain popularity.

It is at this point that Shivaji realizes for the first time that information on television, as a continuous movement of massified commonsense, is an aspect of power that has nothing to do with any metaphysical essence of 'truth'. There may come a time when the scepter of the man on TV may be snatched from him. The perpetual iconography of the dictatorial mask, telecast 'live' amidst the ebb and flow of human fortunes, is a catachrestic figure of human and inhuman qualities; it is an unstable conglomeration of forces which de-territorializes and re-configures from moment to moment, as it flows from head to head. In this case, it is

Chauhan the dishonest intelligencer who threatens to rob him of the spotlight. Realizing that the former's illegitimate power drawn from muscle, bribery, and feudal tribute is too overwhelming to be fought with the logic of transparent governance alone, a desperate Shivaji devises Chauhan's own petard. He lures the latter to a private meeting and tricks him into a state of incrimination. Shivaji pulls out a gun, fires into his own arm and then throws the weapon towards the bewildered Chauhan who catches it by reflex. On hearing the gunshot, the bodyguards of the Chief Minister barge into the antechamber. Seeing Shivaji injured and Chauhan in an incriminating posture, they shoot the latter down without much ado. The proximity between the armed figure of Chauhan and the wounded head of state creates an inalienable dictation of *faith*, by which the only way the spirit of the law can be seen to be protected is by a suspension of the law itself. Chauhan is established as an agent of intrigue that the state cannot *immediately* diffuse in order to wrest back its own monopoly of violence by going through juridical proceedings of apprehension, trial, and justice.

Shivaji's decisionism acquires a whole new dimension with this incident. The private room that Chauhan had unwittingly entered becomes a space of sovereign secrecy and *exception* the camera of information is not privy to. The administration of secrecy that takes place here later creates a new visibility of Chauhan's 'redhandedness' in broad daylight when the doors open and the incident is made public, to the functionaries of the state, the people, as well as the press waiting outside. After this founding act of violence, cinema is once again seen to resume the perpetual citation of the geo-televisual contract of the screen-city couple as the normative. The television cameras are switched on again and live telecast of the leader in action carries on after a brief interruption. But by then, the elimination of Chauhan has already served an important function in terms of a melodramatic narrativizing of the *becoming* Nayak of Shivaji. It proves to be of larger significance than the removal of an unredeemable but powerful irritant. The erasure of Chauhan as a spectacular scapegoat creates the melodramatic clearing for a 'groundless' removal of visual signs of underdevelopment. The affections of melodrama, as a powerful orchestration of signs, bodies, and statements, prepare the ground for a utopian cinematic transformation of the third world mise-en-scène in Shankar's film. It is that which is capable of exerting an

ontological pull that is able to take the visibilities of old Mumbai city to a different realm of metropolitan arrival altogether. What exactly is at stake here?

All along, the aspect of love that Shivaji brought to *Nayak* as an iron death mask of power indeed promised the world to the 'people'. The qualities of this love becomes immanent in the film chiefly through depictions of Shivaji's disarming earthliness, his devotion towards his parents, his communitarian conscience, and his love for the rustic village belle Manjari. The complications on the way are many, not only in the personal front, in terms of convincing Manjari's father, who has a timid common man attitude towards the big, bad world of politics. Throughout the film, melodrama involves an agonistic navigation through Shivaji's feelings of anxiety and humanistic concern about individual and communitarian fates in the face of an indispensable but cold pragmatics of *Nayak*'s management. At every point, we see images of a national 'self-ethnography', like that of the idyllic village in which Manjari lives, being penetrated and imperiled by flows of communications, money, and violence from outside. It seems that a global tele-localization of different avenues of indigenous communal life is always under way through innocuous and terrible modes. It begins with the handycam Shivaji uses to film his girlfriend frolicking in the lap of nature, and continues with the cell phone Manjari is given to communicate with her busy Chief Ministerial paramour. These playful flirtations with, and wistful, alienating usages of the toys of modernization soon gave way to the incursions of larger forces. During an archetypal romantic song and dance sequence that consolidates a picture of national conjugality between the educated, city-bred man, and the rustic village belle, the scarecrows in the countryside are suddenly animated by nefarious, alien forces. From being naturalistic motifs of a timeless landscape, they are suddenly revealed to be camouflages of a host of assassins hired by Shivaji's enemies from Malaysia. A plethora of explosions dot the scenario as Shivaji's bodyguards battle it out with the killers. Signs that were enjoined organically into a composite picture of agrarian repose are suddenly scattered as crops are burnt, humans, cows, goats, and chickens blown up into the air, and huts burnt.

The idealistic agency of Shivaji and its agon of pleasure and pain can thus be located in that tumultuous interstice of *becoming* between the home and the world, between the inside and

outside. The accumulation of tragic and anxious affections, which reaches a peak with the death of Shivaji's parents, however, stand the danger of opening up graver propositional questions of development itself. A melodramatic cohabitation of Shivaji's tragic endurance and *Nayak's* relentless measures of policing and management is always a delicately poised one. That is because both Shivaji as activated energy of the common man, and that of *Nayak* as state intelligence, are figures lent to an endlessly constituting myth of development: that capital will one day truly arrive as a universal compendium of values. The very process of affecting a melodramatic assemblage between the ardent altruism of Shivaji and *Nayak* as the intractable intelligence that the world has to inevitably bank on, poses a disconcerting question of violence. How can a new order of sovereignty assert itself without an accompanying application of law making violence? Can there really be a wholesome squaring between the agrarian paternalistic instincts of Shivaji and the often ruthless imperatives of capitalistic management? In this monumental transformation, by which the local becomes inscribed by the global, will there be no sacrifice of bodies? How can an incumbent Brahminical specter of capital absolve itself of the trauma of continuously generating the *Dalit*<sup>62</sup>, the infant (as in the Greek *in fans*, or beings without language), the woman, the poor, or the unemployed, as entities that slip into that fuzzy borderline between a fading away natural law and a *capitalist* coming into being of civil law?

An epic melodramatic organization of visibilities and statements in Shankar's films tries to gather social *antagonisms* directed against a fast corporatizing state into profiles of criminality and delinquency: the pathologically evil bus driver Selke and his lumpenized underclass brethren, political assassins, corrupt stooges, and political functionaries. Chief among them is of course the arch villain Balraj Chauhan. It is this dubious distinction that makes Chauhan a profound, albeit negative ontological force in the melodramatic dispensation. It seems that during his exit from the narrative, he is able to draw into his being all the downbeat energies standing in the way of a utopian coming together of a spiritual paternalism of the nation, and a productive machinery of the capitalistic state. The figure of Chauhan cinematically harnesses in itself all distressful affections and sorrows of

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<sup>62</sup> A person of low caste.

underdevelopment and evacuates them from the world picture in *Nayak*. This is precisely where the cinematic lends itself to a secret theology of capital. In being affectively earmarked as the supreme, all consuming ontos of underdevelopment, Chauhan the anti-Christ dies to pave the way for the pure cinematic removal of the poor, the dispossessed, and the slum in a momentous and supra-historical transformation of the city into the metropolis. This is also the point where the visuals of scientific management are freed of the lumberous yoke of history and pass onto the realm of myth. After that, cinema can stop limiting itself to a presentism of informatic vigilance and affect a daring leap of faith towards the visual securing of a permanent miracle of development. The killing of Chauhan, as the honest bureaucrat Bansal, puts it, was the last act of 'politics'. After that, a seductive montage begins on screen featuring Shivaji at the head of a group of new age managers who are symbolically marching forward. No vacancy signs in front of office buildings change into job postings as armies of fresh college graduates run towards them in slow motion. Nothing but a falling dry leaf enters a now empty public complaint box. The film ends with a cinematic lap dissolve that magically transforms the pockmarked cityscape of suburban Mumbai into a digitized picture of a downtown first world metropolis, complete with numerous high-rises and helicopters dotting the skyline.

### **Nayak as Allegory**

The traffic jam initiated a certain process of the cinematic as a symbolic machine. It was then that the city appeared for an instant in a dissolved state – the *tanquam dissoluta*. But the jam was symbolic not because it reflected, in a realm of truthful subjective representation, an endemic state of affairs, but because as a cinematic bringing together of visibilities and statements, it had tried to set up an accord. This accord was between an anarchic dispersal of signs and an ideological signifying process that designated the state of the traffic jam as a diagnostic. We are drawing this formulation from a fragment from Benjamin. It would be instructive to quote it here: "The object of a symbol is imaginary. A Symbol means nothing, but is, in accordance with its essence, the unity of the sign and the intention that fulfills its object. The unity is an *objectively* intentional one; its object is imaginary....We may not ask what the meaning of the symbol is, but may ask only how, in a realm of what objective

intention and what signs, it has come about” (Benjamin, “Outline for a Habitation Thesis” 269).

The objectivity that Benjamin refers to, can be considered as a material relation of power in the world, and not as a transcendently imposed dictation from a sovereign *human* subjectivity. It has, in other words, no organic roots, or an imperial rational status of truth in terms of a unified phenomenology, but is an instance of instrumentalization of language. The latter effects an efficient, technical communication between scattered signs on screen, and ideological diagnostic statements about the condition of the country -- a picture of the world out of joint, and an entrepreneurial exasperation about static third world realities. The only materiality, once again, is thus that of a subject-subject visual contract of cinema. It is therefore neither an organic general intellect of a community of subjects, nor a contractual ‘tacit content’ of equal shareholders of language as power that designate the symbolic as such. Rather, it is the visual contract, which is indistinguishably a power contract, that produces practices of viewership and viewer judgment that make the symbolic possible. A contemporary Hinduization of culture in the Indian context is not an organic resurgence of a national Being, but the result of specific assemblages, affinities and constellations between forces of urban technocracy, finance capital, and ideology. Hence, unlike Hobbes or Locke, one can begin with the contract itself, rather than a natural subject with a ground level consciousness (or a presumed real or virtual viewer of the film) that, in accepting the jam as a *true* symbol, chooses to enlist in the cinematic city. That way, instead of trying to forge an anthropological understanding of why citizens, in their naiveté or wisdom, might agree to accord something with the status of a symbol, one can try to examine how specific relations of the symbolic machine of cinema propose signs as well as the subjectivities that fulfill them – the city under duress as well as the middle class messiah who rescues it.

The contentious question of national allegory in third world culture becomes difficult to avoid if this impulse of the symbolic is generalized and associated with an overall style of narration in Indian popular films like Nayak<sup>63</sup>. But perhaps allegory can instead be proposed

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<sup>63</sup> See Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism," Social Text 15.Fall 1986 (1986). Jameson’s thesis was of course virulently attacked by Aijaz Ahmed on grounds of imposing an

as a non narratological trope, as part of a rhetorics of cinema that always brings about a tension between the noun and the event, rather than a linear mapping of them in a schema of historicism. Considering allegory in that sense allows one to highlight and understand precisely those moments of rupture when a developmentalist grammar of cognition and plausibility *fails* to command errant sights and sounds of a developing world. Allegory in that sense would not presume or judge cinema in terms of ‘real’ relations with the world and its ardent teleologies of progress, but would itself be an instance of the cinematic as catachresis. It would be an image of ruins, where both the film and its historical setting have merged in terms of a historical situation of power (Benjamin, Origins of German Tragic Drama, 178-79)<sup>64</sup>, and, to recall another expression made famous by Benjamin, the documents of civilization can no longer be separated from monuments of barbarity. There is no longer a conceptual hierarchy between fictitious analogies in cinema and ‘true’ matters of the world, but an examination of the allegorical in terms of how powers of images, and dominant understandings of reality are both parts of a historical field of problems. Cinema as such is a non-holistic inscription on the face of things; it lends itself to allegory precisely because it has become an amorphous fragment, in which the “false appearance of totality is extinguished”.

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imperial homogeneity on third world literature in Aijaz Ahmed, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and National Allegory," In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures (Delhi: Oxford, 1992). M. Madhava Prasad has defended Jameson's thesis in M. Madhava Prasad, "On the Question of a Theory of (Third) World Literature," Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, & Postcolonial Perspectives, ed. Ann McClintock et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), and Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction 9. Prasad suggests that Jameson's controversial argument, that third world narratives are ‘necessarily’ allegorical, has a ‘kernel of truth’ in it. According to Prasad, films, like other forms of cultural production in the Indian context, have an allegorical dimension to them precisely they register, in various ways, a continuing struggle over the state form.

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin's notion of allegory is grounded on his critique of the romantic symbol. This disperses the paradox of the theological symbol that proposes a unity between the material and the transcendental object, but substitutes it with a relationship between appearance and essence (Origins 160). The disenchantment of the baroque allegory that Benjamin investigates offers an landscape of ruins where even gods have become concepts (225).



In a narrative style that proceeds through unceasing exchanges between realism and myth, between images of metropolitan pragmatics and those of sorrow and discord coming from a tremendous 'backlog' of history, the allegorical in Nayak in fact becomes acutely manifest only for an instant. It becomes so as an imagistic constellation of incommensurabilities, when the propositional, cause-effect dialectic of the narrative is at a standstill. This is when the discourse of cinema decidedly departs from a phenomenological pretension of faithfully representing the world and instead becomes a pure ontological force that aspires to donate sense to the world itself. Here cinema quotes its own powers as part of an expressed non-technical *faith* in the miraculous powers of technology over and beyond the enervating inertia of history. In the mythic stratum which houses the final montage of the film, the educated, technical governance of Shivaji, is no longer bolstered or supplemented by trickeries of film; rather, it becomes indistinguishable from cinema as *special effects*. The montage therefore adds a new dimension to the bringing together of seemingly insurmountable problems in the underdeveloped milieu and a mythic promise of "special effects" in the form of urban, educated, technocratic governance. It is in this unique moment, when Chauhan has expired, and an unbound faith in technologism is left free to leap out into the world as a manifest image of sovereign desire, that Nayak becomes allegorical in the sense designated here. In the final shot of the montage, allegory becomes figural at that moment of the cinematic *dissolve as special affects*, when the vanishing slum eaten cityscape of Mumbai is allowed to exist, inseparably, for an instant, with the emergent metropolis being superimposed.

## 2. Geo-televisuality and Contemporary Indian Cinema

### **Another Story: The Metropolis Comes to the Village**

Apoorva Lakhiya's 2003 film Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost/My Friend Has Come From Mumbai depicts another story of arrival, but this time in a rural landscape besieged by the slings and arrows of an outrageous history. A voice over at the beginning announces the milieu to be a small village in contemporary Rajasthan, which is one of half a million such rural enclaves in present day India without electricity. The film begins when a rare event takes place, in the form of the community's ardent desire for modernization being voiced on the national television screen. A veteran folk artist from the village is officially honored by the central government. During the country wide telecast of the ceremony, the genial old man expresses a wish to see life in his village improve with the blessings of electricity. The minister present at the proceedings immediately grants the request and shortly afterwards, the village becomes a brightly illuminated spot in a nightly aerial view of the landscape.

Days after this momentous transformation, there is yet another novel import in the traditional environment of the place. Kanji, a young son of the soil who had moved to the big city of Mumbai in search of livelihood, returns for a vacation with a television set and dish antenna as presents for his grandfather. The instrument is set up in the front yard of Kanji's old ancestral home so that everybody in the village may get to watch it. When the TV is switched on for the first time, a roaring lion appears on screen. The people gathered in the vicinity scream and scatter in panic. The terror here is a primal one, but it is assuaged very quickly and a normalcy of viewership established in a short period of time. The brief spurt of terror is indeed a cinematic depiction of a historical encounter; it is an affect that is produced when a perpetually receding naturalistic primitivism of the world is seen to come into a momentous but historically inevitable contact with a globalizing, sublime luminosity of television. Soon after that initial uproar, terror is replaced by wonder.

The entire community is quickly influenced by the new universe of sights and sounds. Hari, the village barber, becomes obsessed with a desire to throw his razors with the same dexterity and accuracy of cinematic cowboys handling six shooters. However, rather than through classical or spaghetti westerns of the west, this aesthetic of machismo reaches him mediately, in the form of alluring indigenous visuals of 70s style 'curry westerns' like Khote Sikkay/Counterfeit Coins (Narendra Bedi, 1974) and Kalasona/Black Gold (Ravi Nagaich, 1975) popularized by actor-director Feroz Khan. Similarly, Abdul, another villager, lends his body movements to a cinematic style of slow motion action choreography, a compact of wired martial arts in Hong Kong cinema and digital animation, most famously seen in The Matrix trilogy. But like Hari, Abdul too inherits this transnational chic from a local loop, in the way of Jani Dushman – Ek Anokhi Prem Kahani/Intimate Enemy – A Wondrous Tale of Love, a 2002 supernatural Raj Kumar Kohli film based on the snake-man transmutation myth. Hari and Abdul thus become quixotic figures, zapped by a coda of magical animation beamed to them from the skies. Their body movements are locked in an indeterminate zone of adventure, between a primitive, earthbound rusticity, and an electrified horizon of desires, with the latter presenting a seemingly limitless scope for self invention. Others in the village are also taken up by different vistas of being in the world and a vast repertory of toys and lifestyle signatures. Bodies thus venture out from a composite, organic constitution of the agrarian community and surreptitiously or publicly flow into the many global fictions that appear on screen. The French kiss and the strip tease install, for the first time, the private as an epistemologically possible space for nucleated conjugal desires.

The cinematic narrative in the early part of the film can be considered to be a short narrative of televisuality. The affections of curiosity and laughter that mark the awkward rites of passage from a pre-historical state of nature to a pure, performative sphere of the post-historical are indeed quite profound in their larger implications. But what is remarkable about this cinematic account is that the image of 'history' -- that is, history in a humanist sense, as an irresistible coming to self consciousness -- that had dramatically manifested itself with the terrifying roar of the lion is actually extinguished rather quickly. The village community does not have to go through agonistic battles or historical parleys of self making,

education, or labor before emerging as (modern) viewers. They reveal a wonderful lightness of being in shifting their affinities from earthly moorings to traveling visions from the sky. This cinematic passage is entirely playful and requires no pain or high drama involving the dead weights of tradition, taboo, psychobiography or culture. That is because the village-in-cinema, in the first place, had no troubling self-other relationship with television-in-cinema. To put it rather blandly, the village was never 'real' in terms of a cinematic phenomenological claim to 'truth'. It was always already proposed by cinema as televisual in of itself. That is, as part of a meditation of self origins of a television-as-subject, when the latter posits a mythical landscape to narrativize its own coming into being in the world. The images of the telegenic village, as well as images of television-in-the-village, are thus cinematic parts of a conversation of a special televisual power in the world with itself.

Televisuality, in this sense, has *essentially* nothing to do with the instrument called television. It involves the social production of the various cultures and practices of viewership, dissemination of images and sounds through various technical means like television, as well as accompanying transformations in habits, existential attitudes, and psychologies of peoples. But more than that, it has something to do with architectures of visibilities which are immediately, and not in a mediated sense, applications of power. By the simple term televisuality (as it is with telephonicity), one could mean a simple mechanism of projecting and receiving visibilities and sounds across distances. It is in this basic form that the telescope or the postcard is televisual. The invention of the former was one of the signal events that created the human as postulate of a global modernity; indeed, the European anthropos was a sublime creation that emerged from a Pascalian horror at seeing an interstellar space without the face of the Holy Ghost hovering over the martins. The disenchanted birth of the modern European self was coincident with the twilight of the starry sky which was a map of the epic world; it was, in other words, a genesis of a novel and secular cosmology itself, one that could be understood through cognitive functions of the transcendental human subject rather than through a patient wait for revelatory happenings. Televisuality in this abstract sense, has something to do with the primary epistemological tasks of the modern human subject – that of reading his godless, degraded universe in terms of a world historical whole. It is to be located in the very interstice

between the home and the world that multiple strands of western philosophy after the Greeks have tried to reconcile in different ways. Televisuality becomes geo-televisuality in certain conditions of production and technology during the modern age, as part of a godless, worldly aspiration towards totality. It is however never a wholesome projection of the subject into the world; quite the contrary, the power of the geo-televisual becomes apparent precisely when incursions of visibilities and statements destroy and open up constituted notions of the self.

The village in Lakhiya's film is a mythic one precisely because it offers us an impossible glimpse of the origins of geo-televisuality, as that which *becomes historically immanent only with the advent of the technology of television and a certain stage in planetary financialization*. Hence, as far as the village is concerned, history itself, as a primordial reckoning of planetary processes and a placing of the self in the world, begins as a modern process with the first roar of the lion on screen. As such, the community inhabiting this rural space is strange to television not just because it has never *seen* one, but because it has no geo-televisual concept of the instrument called television, despite being inexorably tied to the city through modes of production and migrant labor. Television therefore enters their lives in an event of pure arrival, without any cognitive or epistemic foreboding whatsoever. The picture of the pastoral here is thus remarkable in the rigorous precision of its limits of memory and cognitive scope: it is a pure mental image of the primitive. What however 'redeems' this *absolute* picture of primal innocence is that the import of television and electricity reveals this to be nothing but degree zero of what can be called *geo-televisual informatics*. In other words, not only do the villagers exhibit a noble enthusiasm for the task of exposing the self to the world and learning from it, but they do so strictly in line with what has been described in the previous chapter as a circulation of capital as socialized image. Their frippery of visual practices, prejudices, or lack of guile do not come in the way of the basic dictum of capital publicity – that money burnt as image on screen should immediately become socialized spectacle.

These terms need further clarification. Geo-televisuality, as has been proposed, is not inevitably informatics, just as all forms of making in the world need not necessarily take

place within the auspices of capitalist production. The latter is just one way by which the state and the corporation re-code manifold desires and energies of geo-televisuality in the world. Informatics is the technology which capitalizes and translates pluralities of televisuality qua geo-televisuality into value as information. Moreover, all denominations of value in such a turnover (pertaining to communicability, culture, language, practices, and social transformation) are overcoded by the many global interests of socialized capital (finance, politics, entertainment, security, advertising etc.) and mapped according to a digital architecture of temporality, where time *is* money. Informatics therefore creates value not in terms of veracity of knowledge (which is settled through rational debates between experts), but in terms of abridgement of reporting time, efficiency of infotainment value, and density and span of market reach<sup>65</sup>. This is where informatics differs from what can be called

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<sup>65</sup> This is not to say that informatics or the flow of information has nothing to do with institutions of truth, culture, representation, or art. Simply put, the forces of global informatics ‘report’ such events whenever and wherever they happen by instantaneously translating them into value in circulation (screentime = money time). For instance, there are many ways of claiming ‘authenticity’ for the art work, one of them being the originality of inscription in conjugation with the originality of the substrate. As per this logic, the piece garners auratic value only when the brush stroke of Van Gogh, as a geometric, tactile, or formal inscription, is seen to be in assemblage with the original substrate used (the paint, the canvas). The camera and print capitalism detached the two in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as Benjamin so astutely observed, when copies were produced by the mechanical substitution of the canvas and paint with ink and paper --- in other words, by changing the substrate while keeping the abstract diagram of the painting intact. The work of art, in becoming capable of democratic dissemination, acquired what we have been calling a televisual potential in the simple form. But today, it becomes properly informationized when its abstract diagram is electronically inscribed upon, circulated, and then erased instantaneously from a substrate of pixels or digits in order to make room for the next one. It is in this sense that cinema or video -- media that involve leaving lasting impressions on permanent bases like celluloid -- are, industrial recording technologies which are not informatic, but ones that can be subsequently informationized. The camera of informatics on the other hand, can ‘scan’ one thing after another --- the sunflowers, the Taj Mahal, a film by Rossellini, an advertisement -- translating them into the same pulsating substrate of information, just as capital liquefies everything by translating them into money in transit. The Age of Information is indeed one in which all things solid melt into pulses and copies proliferate without originals. Different forms of artistic, cultural, social, and political activities, various bodies and objects, are all potentially informatic, but only in differential degrees of “newsworthiness” and other forms of commodity value. In concrete terms, this has much to do with the increasing corporatization of the public

news in an older, 'modern' sense. The latter can be accounted for as a secular verification of rumor, a process of expert scientific recoding of the world, in order to absolve it of miracles and magic.

The innocence of the villagers is thus constituted not only by their limited access to dominant flows of news, and conceptions of state and polity, but because, in a total sense, they are shown to be devoid of any geo-televisual memory or what might be called historical consciousness. In that, they constitute an ambiotic mass of affections amidst which a momentous coming into being of television is conceived and switched on. But this spark of 'history' need not be dramatically developed in the way of thunder and lightning because the cinematic primordial-ness of the agrarian community does not call for any extended process of *becoming* in order for them emerge as viewers. The advent of television and its otherworldly images does not result in any ontological transformation in tastes, cultural attitudes, ways of life, and practices of labor. The villagers very quickly prove to be adept telephiles because their romantic innocence proves to be nothing other than a pre-historical waiting for the rights to a post-historical consumption of the image. They can thus easily become cinematic images of people who watch images on television; as such they are themselves constructs of a televisual anthropology that unfolds on film. The rustic people become part of television's fabrication of its own pre-natal origins. The terror and agon of inhabiting a historical situation that had flared up all of a sudden with the roar of the lion therefore disappears in no time. With the consummate arrival of viewership, modes of labor in the village are dispersed into motions of ethnography and attributes of the museum as an intelligible patterning of things. All functions of life after that can attain a visible status only under the light of the spectacular that emanates from TV and redresses the world. When the young man Kanji does what has been forbidden for generations and falls in love with Kesar, the beautiful sister of the cruel overlord of the area, the song sequences celebrating their amour recruits their bodies into televisual idioms pertaining to designer ethnic ware advertisements, tourism, and cottage curiosities.

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sphere and the gradual obsolescence of institutions of public culture, 'art' or pedagogic cinema, and public television like the BBC, the ABC, or *Doordarshan* that the postwar developmentalist welfare state invested in.

The abridged movement from pre to post history is already chronometrically marked in the film because Kanji is on leave for thirty days. But it is not that there is no image of history in Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost. Signal events in a decade and half of the career of Indian television are telescoped in that short span of time. The villagers watch the teleserial Ramayana<sup>66</sup> in the beginning; by the end of the film, they are avid watchers of the Mahabharata<sup>67</sup>. Memories from bygone days also insurrect themselves dramatically in Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost, such as the cinematic flashback and old grandfather's testimony from which Kanji learns that his father was killed by the *Thakur*. But apart from this heroic city dwelling young man who now seeks vengeance, no other person in the community is ready to translate the passions of remembrance into struggles towards historical transformation. Later in the film, it is once again television that inaugurates a social tribunal for justice in the wilderness. When the revolution takes place, it is thus a chronicle which is already foretold on TV; it is not an *event* because the villagers (precisely because they remain cinematic constructs of a cutting edge 'human interest' geo-televisuality) cannot give it any other course apart from what is pre-dictated by an already there hermeneutic of metropolitan development.

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<sup>66</sup> Ramanand Sagar's *Hinduized* television adaptation of the epic *Ramayana* was primarily based on the Tulsidas's version of the epic story written around 1624. It ran for 78 weeks, from January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1987 to July 31, 1988. It was subsequently telecast on National Television in Mauritius in 1989, BBC 2 (1990-92) and Trinidad. See Vijay Mishra, Indian Cinema: Temples of Desire. Mishra provides an insightful genealogical account of the emergence of a modern iconology of Rama in line with a scriptural tradition -- centered around the Tulsidas-I Ramayana -- that attained a pan Indian discursive status during the 19<sup>th</sup> century consolidation of a mainstream Hindu-normative nationalist discourse. See also Nilanjana Gupta, Switching Channels: Ideologies of Television in India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), Arvind Rajagopal, Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), Sudeep Dasgupta, Hindu Nationalism, Television, and the Avataars of Capital (Veenendaal: Universal Press, 2001).

<sup>67</sup> See Rajagopal, Politics after Television. B.R. Chopra's television adaptation of *Mahabharata* was telecast on the *Doordarshan* for a period of 91 weeks, between 1989 and 1991.



The entry of television disturbs a long standing agrarian order of power in the village. The priest notices that people have stopped coming to the village temple and paying tributes for his upkeep. When the villagers stay away at the usual hour of worship, he goes to spy on them. The priest, much to his surprise, discovers that the villagers are actually engaged in the act of worship. They are watching, with reverent silence and awe, an episode of Ramayana. The viewers therefore have been claimed by a new diagram of protestant electrification that has removed, in a fell swoop, the traditional protocols of *Darsana*<sup>68</sup>, through graduated, hierarchical mediations based on class, caste, and gender privileges. The priest complains about these recent perversions to the feudal overlord who lives at a distance in splendid isolation, removed from the quotidian realities of the village. The *Thakur*<sup>69</sup> however is unable to appreciate the gravity of the situation; he sees no threat to the status quo because he too has a television set at his mansion. The patriarch however does not understand that he gets only two terrestrial channels of the government owned *Doordarshan*, while the villagers have access to the multi-channel, private sector geo-televisual universe that was inaugurated in the Indian skies in the early nineties. It is this information gap that proves decisive in the final conflict of the film.

The carnivalesque and libertine interregnum of free consumption is interrupted when the *Thakur*, on getting to know about Kanji's relationship with his sister, draws the villagers into a tribalistic war of honor. After a lot of tribulation the timid villagers at the end decide to fight a decisive battle against the powers that have oppressed them for centuries. But this revolutionary motivation is not just the result of people suddenly becoming aware of their

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<sup>68</sup> Madhava Prasad and Ravi Vasudevan have forwarded an understanding of the *Darsanic* as a mode of looking in which the devotee is permitted to behold the image of the deity, and is privileged and benefited by this permission, in contrast to a concept of looking that assigns power to the beholder by reducing the image to an object of the look. See Madhava Prasad, Ideology of the Hindi Film, 75-76. See also Ravi S. Vasudevan, "The Politics of Cultural Address in a "Transitional" Cinema: A Case Study of Popular Indian Cinema," Reinventing Film Studies, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds) (London: Arnold, 2000).

<sup>69</sup> A person belonging to the Kshatriyas or the warrior caste. Usually *Thakurs* comprise the feudal landed gentry in heartland India.

rights and rising to revolt. This is not to suggest that images of anger, desire, or senses of privation among the villagers are unimportant constituents in the melodramatic unfolding of this cinematic event. Rather, in Lakhiya's film the image of popular uprising is also the outcome of interactions between two temporalities of televisuality, perhaps more than a coming into consciousness of a sovereign human subject. Not that the picture of the revolting peasant does not exist in the film, but it is a cinema of a transformed geo-televisual relations in the world that makes the insurrection *figurable* in a larger schema of things. A wondrous thing happens as a result. It is the army of slaves who are able to connect their energies to global registers of law, justice, and statehood, leaving the myopic master far behind. This is rendered possible precisely because it is actually a power diagram of televisuality that recruits armies, gathers strength, and settles the war.

Unbeknownst to the *Thakur*, even before the battle, the information odds and the balance of power had already shifted away from him. This process is accelerated when a television crew from Star News arrives from the city in order to film a 'human interest' story on the latest coming of television technology to the boondocks. After that, the villagers are able to see self-images on screen as imminent information. The journalists smell a bigger scoop in the ongoing intrigue and go to interview the *Thakur*. The arrogant despot unwittingly declares his malevolent intentions in front of the camera and heckles the crew while the *live telecast* is on. He thus grossly underestimates the new diagram of metropolitan information that has already inscribed itself into his own domain. The *Thakur* is under the illusion that he can take care of the crew as well as the villagers in the same manner in which he has warded off the city and the republican revolution of 1950 so far, through a terrestrial war of barriers and besiegements. The *Thakur* confuses the camera of Star News with that of the old *Doordarshan*<sup>70</sup> that he is familiar with. The camera of *Doordarshan* was largely a recording instrument for the archival, developmentalist state, mired in the latter's sedentary maneuvers in slow historical time, its bureaucratic impasses and fatal compromises between ruling groups. Such a camera, like all other formations of a 'half baked modernity', could

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<sup>70</sup> State owned public television in India.

thus be enclosed and beleaguered within the village as a *bordered* space of absolute sovereign control.

Thanks to Star News, the *Thakur* is already 'reported' by the time he attacks. He thinks the battle to be waged will be at a time of his choosing, and at a space where he controls the flow of visibilities and representations through supreme prohibitions and licenses. But he does not know that a different temporality of geo-televisual power has already reduced him to an information image on the national television screen: that of a suicidal 'backlog' of old history. It is the power of a new, instantaneous temporality of televisuality that turns the *Thakur's* clear and present actions into already *belated* anachronisms. This is exactly why, at this point, he can only be the untimely sufferer of the just violence of a liberal revolution that has already been televised. The state in this case merely has to 're-run' to catch the culprit. Informatics is thus seen to efface the historical gap between the constitutional law of the weak liberal democratic state apparatus (stuck to an abject formal status in the Indian context), and the 'fact' of feudal oppression. As a result, police jeeps are already under way to bring the tyrant to book even as the latter approaches the village with his goons.

This early departure has profound implications in terms of political analyses of standard popular Hindi cinema narratives. Madhava Prasad has argued that the formal status of the constitutional state apparatus in the Indian context is symbolically resonated in Indian cinematic narratives by the late arrival of the police (Ideology of the Hindi Film 95). The devoutly desired, idealistic union of the nation with the state, and a concomitant execution of sovereign, law preserving violence are perpetually deferred by a distance that always opens up between the word of the law and the fact of the crime. The police, as the bearers of the law can thus formally claim the body of the incriminated only after the violence of justice has run its due course in the hands of the national community. This late arrival of the men in uniform is a recurring feature in the formulaic outlay of especially the cinematic revenge sagas of the seventies, like Yash Chopra's Deewar/The Wall (1972), Prakash Mehra's Zanjeer/The Chain (1971) or Ramesh Sippy's monumental curry western Sholay/Flames (1975). A temporal and spatial gap between law and justice becomes regularly manifest in these films because the state and the community are seen to follow

different tracking operations; the first proceeds through secular modalities of observation, argumentation, and proof, while the truth of justice for the latter is already immanent at a level of epic certitude. But what is interesting about the new diagram of sovereignty in Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost is that it allows for an instantaneous equation between the law and the fact and for a change, enables the police to leave early. But this adequation of visible connections between the *Thakur's* self-incriminating bombast and the legal bureaucratic machinery is not made at the plane of a human self-consciousness; rather it is the outcome of an inhuman electronic intelligence of power.

The separation between the legal pronouncement and the execution is only a metrical one now (the distance police jeeps have to traverse in order to reach the site of conflict). It is no longer a historical one pertaining to the peculiar Indian situation, where the formal state can claim the proceedings of justice as a paramount question of life and death only as an afterthought, without being able to monopolize it. Meanwhile however, the meek villagers are scared and reluctant to resist the initial onslaught. They refuse to stand up for their rights, despite the fact that with the empowering blessings of television, they have won a war of representations against the *Thakur*. The combined weight of superstitious fears and 'timeless' memories of abjection and powerlessness proves to be an arresting mind block for them till television accords them with a new profile. This vital event takes place when Kesar, in a bid to exhort them to battle, asks a profound question, "What have you learnt from TV?"

If the answer to that question was limited to an inventory of consumer objects, a boundless universe of desires, and a general knowledge of a distant and alienating constitutional state, the villagers perhaps would not be galvanized into action. But it is precisely at this moment that the otherwise calendrical time architecture of television intersects with a messianic temporality. The television was on, as it always is, while all of this was happening. An episode of B.R. Chopra's celebrated adaptation of the epic Mahabharata was being shown. By divine providence, Kesar's utterance coincides with a special moment in the telecast of Krishna's enunciation of an ethical cosmology to Arjuna, just before the commencement of the titanic battle of Kurukshetra. Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu himself on earth,

utters those memorable words from chapter 4, verses 7-8 of *The Bhagwad Gita* while goading the Pandava prince to a just war: "*Yada Yada Hi Dharmasya/ Glanirva Bhavathi Bharatha/ Abhyuthanam Adharmasya / Tadatmanam Srijami Aham/ Praritranya Sadhunam Vinashaya Cha Dushkritam/ Dharmasansthapnaya / Sambhavami Yuge-Yuge*" (When righteousness is weak and faints and unrighteousness exults in pride, then my spirit arises on earth. For the salvation of those who are good, for the destruction of evil in men, for the fulfillment of the kingdom of righteousness, I come to this world in the ages that pass)<sup>71</sup>.

After this oracular pronouncement, the villagers are stirred to take up arms against what they had earlier thought to be an insurmountable sea of troubles. This is because the televisual-in-TV in this case does not remain confined to technical information of the earthly kind; it has entered a cosmic compact with a divine wisdom. The picture of television in the cinematic world of Mumbai emerges to be an impossible union between the earth and the sky, when the state can be dissolved into the image of god. From being the instrument for transmitting knowledge related to law, rights, news, life styles, and consumer desirables, television becomes that which is capable of revealing an unquestionable *theodicy*<sup>72</sup>. That is, in an epic move, it closes the interstice between the mortal word of jurisprudence and a cosmic ontology of justice.

The *Thakur* is vanquished at the end. The police arrive just in time to prevent Kanji from taking the law into his own hands and finish him off for good. But this time, unlike the classical instances outlined by Prasad in his definitive thesis, the formal arrival of the men in uniform signals the closure of a process of policing that was already underway, facilitated by a vigilant camera in the frontiers. A 'live' epic-informatic compact between the functions of

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<sup>71</sup> See The Bhagwad Gita, 23

<sup>72</sup> See Georgio Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive, 18. Agamben reminds us that we should never conflate juridical categories with ethical categories. The law is for judgment, not justice. An emphatic coincidence between a hermeneutics of law and an ethical ontology of justice can only give rise to a Theodicy. The figure of Spinoza is important here; Ethics for him is the art of happy life, not guilt or responsibility. The latter two lie in the domain of the law.

the juridical state and a *Dharmic* order of justice enunciated in the Gita had produced a spiritual *uniformity* that could claim all bodies, with or without formal attire, as soldiers. There can be no distinction between cops and plainclothesmen at this point, since all view the world in the same plane of viewership.

Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost is an instance of allegorizing the nation-in-the-globe in the sense elaborated in the first chapter. As cinema that is at once a socialized ensemble of interactive images, it stages a battle between sign systems. It makes immanent the discursive process by which bodies, objects, landscapes, and other matter enter and depart from curves of statements (democracy, feudalism, dharma), oscillating between the absolute dicta of a feudal countryside, and the clamorous prose of the liberal city. The film synchronizes anxious feelings generated by globalization with propositional models of development in the way of mythically extending the metropolis as image machine to the horizon of the primitive as image. If Nayak was an allegorical casting of Mumbai the third world city into the diagram of the metropolis, Lakhiya's film is about the induction of the village into same network of power. It needs to be clarified that the metropolis is not the same as the modern city. The latter had evolved a few centuries ago, through the creation of avenues and alleys of production, labor and communication *in between* the great feudal estates, surreptitiously or dramatically cutting the bonds of filiality and rentiership. The metropolis on the other hand, is an abstract diagram of an urban value system that informs the city, recasting the latter as a center for managerial, technocratic, and military governance. It is thus a site for news, surveillance, security, advertising, entertainment, consumer choices, products, marketing, spying, war, and communications. When the diagram of the metropolis redraws the city, it sketches the latter as a center of financialization rather than industrialization. Hence, the metropolis, as a figure of thought, should not be considered in an empiricist manner, in terms of hard, territorial geographies; it is a perpetually globalizing sprawl of urban power that has no firm frontiers. It spreads, infects, percolates, and germinates through globalized relations of debt, terror, militarization, spectacle, and consumption. Real cities like San Francisco and Bangalore are merely dense, topological assemblages of money, technology, and goods in such a worldwide web of urbanity. This is also why the latter can be called the silicon valley of India, as a terminal of power that is different from its

counterpart in the west only in terms of degrees and intensities of value laden happenings. This is also the driving logic that increasingly redresses all urban formations in the world, in differential degrees, like rich and poor cousins of Las Vegas.

The titular *dost* (friend) in Lakhiya's film is indeed television. It does not simply set up a historical bridge of communication between the big city Mumbai and the village. Instead it inscribes both into what may be called a metropolitan map of informatic sovereignty. It is important to note that this diagram of the metropolis is an abstraction precisely because it irresistibly tends towards the impossible in its recoding ventures. It being a force of immanent socialized capital and in implementing a virtual schema of value as such (the dollar standard, international debt relations, inhuman tectonics of the stock market that punish third world electorates when a socialist government comes to power), it seeks a total invention of the variegated space of history as a monotheistic hub of managerial action and marketing. Which is why, according to this cartography, there can be no political citizens in the modernist sense in a city now reserved for denizens, because the worker engaged in class struggle and the conscientious Kantian legislator would be simply anachronistic figures – displaced refugees momentarily trespassing into prime real estate. If the latter figure is gone for good, the former is relocated, with the classical factory itself, in the 'third world' elsewhere<sup>73</sup>. The metropolis therefore is always arriving; it is the fruition of that unattainable dream that we have seen being cinematically manifested in Shankar's *Nayak* -- the city without the shanty town. But the allegorical aspect of *Mumbai* lies precisely in the fact that the cinematic village in the film becomes a catachresis -- as that which compounds antagonistic sign pulses within its body. As soon as electricity and television appear in the village, the metropolitan frontier (that liminal space or twilight zone where the abjects of

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<sup>73</sup> One has to be careful here; the category 'third world' is not being proposed in a positive territorial sense. The relation between the globalized third world and the metropolitan diagram as planet city is a dispersed, micropunctual one that infectiously erodes classic inside outside divisions: country and the city, the east and the west, the home and the world. The international division of labor is a useful determination to make, but not in categorical terms or molar identities like nationhood.

spectacular capital, including the negro, the primitive, the woman, the *sudra*, and the worker, perpetually recede to) envelops the village and moves to an 'elsewhere' beyond it.

This 'elsewhere,' as a trope of territorialization, needs to be understood with patience. It must be acknowledged, first of all, that the picture of metropolitan in Lakhiya's film must not be considered only in a negative manner. After all, in the milieu of the film, the arrival of such a form of power is seen to corrosively destroy many priestly pieties of the local and open up a world of desires. In as much, it is a movement of capital as value that is undeniably revolutionary in its transformative qualities. But the radical metamorphosis of the underdeveloped village to an outpost of the global-metropolitan is a cinematic event that also has another important aspect to it. A happy triangulation -- between a mega process of financialization, a still to be consolidated national sovereignty, and naturalistic rural energies -- is rendered possible by a special procedure of filming that demands critical attention. The picture of an enabling 'viewership' that finally takes care of all problems in the milieu of *Mumbai* is made possible only through a cinematic process that brings about a gradual but consummate vanishing of labor from the *mise-en-scène* of the film. The imbibing of strange, otherworldly visuals into the heart of the community takes place through affections of familiarization and laughter. But this can take place only when cinematic temporality reaches a pervasive equation with televiewing time. Hari the barber becomes cinematic when he leaves his sedentary occupational duties and rides a donkey with his twin razors slung across his waist. Abdul's fascination with slow motion motorizes his body in a manner more conducive to picking quixotic fights than his toils as a peasant. Other figures too, in the course of their diurnal duties, enter the frame only after being absolved of the dirt and grime of labor, as part of the ethnographic ensemble or cinema as museum or arcade. This special utopian instance of the cinematic, that merges watching television and becoming televisual, draws from an ontological force (like the unquestionable aspect of god) that saturates both, the frame of the filmic screen as well as the frame of the television screen inside the screen. It is this force that renders all questions of the world (pertaining to rights, lordship, law, slavery, gender, class or caste) indistinguishable from the right to consume information and at once be information. Cinema in this case enframes the world itself in a particular cast of the geo-televisual. It does not achieve this by a cautious



navigation between the frame and the out of field, or a perpetual mediation by a camera opening out to the world in a state of Cartesian ‘doubt’, but by an affirmed faith in technology as informatics. It is this faith that, amongst other things, evacuates the out of field altogether as a historical battleground of the laboring process.

### **The Twilight of People’s Television**

Both Nayak and Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost are allegories of development and telematics in the nation. The dramatic tensions between global and local forces in these films are allayed through epic postulates (prayers) of different kinds more than movements of dialectical syntheses. In the next chapter we will try to connect this feature to larger questions of form in Indian popular cinematic traditions. In other films such as Aziz Mirza’s Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani/The Heart is Still Indian (2001) and Goldie Behl’s Bas Itna sa Khwab Hai/Such Are My Small Dreams (2002), the affections of anxiety -- apropos an uneasy coexistence between democratic enfranchisement and global electronic publicity -- are more pronounced. In the former film, an unholy nexus between two new age television news channels and a group of corrupt politicians sets up the possibility of a spectacular incursion of television into a zone of sovereign secrecy of the modern state. An innocent common man called Sharma has been unjustly incriminated and publicized as a terrorist, and is slotted to be hanged. Chief executives of the two channels approach the nefarious Chief Minister of the state with an unheard of offer. They want to telecast the execution ‘live’, as a sponsored event. A new conglomerate of money and power are thus seen to enter an erstwhile forbidden sphere for the ‘secret’ administration of violence<sup>74</sup>. The juridical questions in the way are waylaid by the CM’s exercise of executive exception, and a drumming up of populist support by the two media houses. But this ‘fall’ to a state of barbarity is ultimately prevented at the nick of time by acts of supreme moral voluntarism

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<sup>74</sup> In other words, television threatens to publicize and dismantle that very space of exceptional violence of the state that, according to Foucault, forms the conceptual basis of modern disciplinary and juridical societies. The instrument of capitalized mass dissemination of images thus tends towards doing the unthinkable – making a spectacle of secrecy. See Michel Foucault, Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977).

by individuals. Two crusading new age television journalists risk everything to save Sharma and uphold what, in the semiological universe of the film, comes across as a basic propriety of the 'Indian heart'. They do this by bringing about a temporary, humanistic 'takeover' of a machinic assemblage of money and electronics. The direct telecast of the hanging, as a richly sponsored event, and the consequent equation of screentime and moneytime is disrupted when the protagonists enter the control room of one of the stations and illegitimately broadcast the 'real' recorded statement of Sharma. This changes the scenario of general consensus instantly. The public that was waiting with bated breath in front of television screens for the perverse spectacle has a change of heart. The people come out to the streets in droves and march to the prison to prevent the execution.

The melodramatic-ethical universe in Mirza's film does not extend to a questioning of either the death penalty as part of the state monopoly of violence, or basic juridical procedures of incrimination. The emotionalism of anxiety and disenchantment instead is concentrated on the picture of a cold and alienating western mechanism of profit (the heart of the matter that is not Indian) flowing into a quasi feudal political leadership of the 'not yet modern'. As a result, the television camera on the cinematic screen is able to assume a life and intelligence of its own and organize a mass witnessing and cannibalization of privileged visibilities of sovereign execution – one that the human citizen is not privy to. The social taboo in this case therefore does not pertain, in essence, to the fact that the state exercises juridical violence on the plane of life and death; rather, it has to do with a perverse opening up and a globalization of a civilized architecture of visibilities. A television of socialized capital threatens to light up that diffuse zone -- where the immanence of democratic life ends and the exceptional dictatorship of the state begins – in such a manner that the first is extinguished and the latter assumes an absolute territorial presence. Money power, massified desire for spectacle, and supra-legitimate political muscle thus threaten to re-code both the liberal democratic state, as well as an intoxicated public into a singular axiomatic of profit extraction. This extreme consolidation can be prevented in the universe of the film only by a fantastic come back of the morally conscious human subject of history. Melodrama prepares the ground for that, by harnessing energies of interest into good and bad profiles of the human, and allowing epic archemidian opportunities to individual forces

to stop the motor of the world and briefly suspend the 'live' flow of television as immediately socialized value.

Melodrama is thus a force of ritual transfer that familiarizes the complicated symbolic and financial machines of the world; at a crucial moment of danger, it is able to preserve an imperiled image of justice by *re-sacralizing* technology in the world as an instrument of heroic humanism<sup>75</sup>. It begins with the employees of K-TV allowing their former colleague Ajay to march to the very heart of a gigantic network of informatic intelligence – the control room. The epic moment in the film is therefore the one at which the human protagonists are seen to realize an ideal dream of inhabiting, by a pure application of voluntaristic consciousness and agency, the inhuman perspective that belongs to the visual architecture of power itself. When the hero Ajay stands in front of the hijacked camera inside the broadcasting station, renders an impassioned speech and then presents Sharma's videotaped statement, he achieves that Herculean feat. But this is made possible not just by Ajay's fortuitous stance in front of the camera, but by an ontological cleansing of television of its historical contaminations. The revolution in this film begins to be televised not because Ajay is allowed to speak for the subaltern, but because he is able to have a heart to heart communion with the 'people' in the mythic plane of "Indianness". It is a moment that is all the more magical since this address is characterized by an absolute frontality of presence and speech that is shorn of the diffuse energies, and massified distractions that mark what can be called a bio-political aspect of informatics<sup>76</sup>. That is, it is suddenly the people as a *wholesome* entity that comes into being under the spell of a constitutive address of the heart and is galvanized into action, and not segmented consumer groups and demographically targeted viewers of multi-channel informatics. Ajay the moral individual, by speaking on

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<sup>75</sup> See Peter Brooks' understanding of melodrama as a moral occult that perpetually re-sacralizes the world while it endures a degradation of traditional value systems and hierarchies of meaning during historical transformations. See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

<sup>76</sup> In the previous chapter it has been already suggested that informatics, as a diagram of power in our world, works through diffuse, micro-punctual distributions of affects and images among the population as a gargantuan body of distractions and awry energies. That is, instead of an *organ* of idealist culture that addresses the self-conscious individual or the *people* as an ethical congregation of citizens.

TV, is thus able to call the people into being, as a part-whole, metonymic extension of himself.

This distinction is an important one to make. It is only the 'people' as a non-numeral figural expression of power that can stop the unquestionable, law preserving violence of the state in this case. A demographic interest group, or a usual segment of numbered viewers, no matter how large, would only be a recalcitrant 'population' subject to counsels, proscriptions, detentions or extreme punitive measures regularly doled out by the state. In Mirza's film the utopian coming into being of people is emblematically established in the *mise-en-scène* by shots of empty streets being flooded by 'non-numerable' bodies as bearers of a constitutive will of the Indian heart. That is, the bodies in this case cannot be accounted individually; they become instead that powerful manifestation of popular will that can altogether suspend the demographic arithmetic of the formal state. When the police encounter the 'people', they lower their guns, disobeying the shooting orders issued by the corrupt Chief Minister. But what is of special interest in this melodramatic figuration is that this event of supreme emergence is preceded by an equally utopian, diametrically opposite vision – that frightening moment of danger when the people were seen to be altogether missing from the streets of the *civitas*. They had been transfixed in front of their idiot boxes that time, waiting to gleefully partake in the necrophilic ritual of a televised hanging.

The emergence of the people thus takes place only after cinema offers us an impossible, monstrous image of *financed* television -- as that which harbors the terrifying potentiality of globalizing spectacular state violence to such an extent that it destroys a modernist separation between the public and the private and reducing a body of citizens to an abject, numerical population of televisual denizens. This fascinating yet grotesque aesthetics is not only able to put aside all moral, legal, and cultural barriers aside and begin to televise the hanging, but also saturate the phantom public sphere with absolute ritual values that render the entire urban mass a captive audience. The screen-city couple becomes *figurally* absolute in the *mise-en-scène* of the film when everybody -- apart from Ajay, Riya – the heroine, Sharma's wife, the convicted and the executioners -- are seen to be glued to the screen. When cent percent viewership is seen to be concentrated on the joint offering by the two

media conglomerates, cinema offers a glimpse of not only an axiomatic of monopoly capital, but also the image of a total supercession of money power as producer of values, practices, and desires. It is at this moment of danger that the intervention of the hero and the heroine introduces an unsponsored direct telecast of a different kind in the film<sup>77</sup>. The obvious irony in all this of course has to do with the fact that the totalizing plane of dissemination that makes a frontal, epic address to the nation possible is in the first place generated by an extreme application of the spectacular forces of capital. Ajay and Riya's non-profit organization of forces is thus fundamentally dependent on an otherwise normative Informatization of society.

### **Geo-televisuality and the Human Subject**

The constitutional state is thus at first imperiled by an assemblage of corporate power and a boundless sovereign will, and then restored by a 'people' instantly created and vectorized by a direct televisual address. Both are able to take place because an exceptional situation gathers the otherwise monadic, dispersing, and fragmentary consciousnesses in the metropolitan plane into a temporary, constitutive stratum of rapt attention. The melodrama of fear this, in terms of an optimistic understanding of history as a rationally unfolding process, pertains to the fact that this platform can be used by demons as of the netherworld well as by archangels of 'progress'. Nevertheless, in Mirza's film, ultimately a humanizing force *cinematically* reclaims the schema of geo-televisual informatics for the myth of the integrated subject. The question however is, how can this hearty intersubjective communication between Indians be designated as a mythic one? How exactly do subjectivities configure in the diagram of geo-televisual informatics elaborated so far?

The bio-political aspect of geo-televisual informatics, in terms of 24 hour, multi-channel television for instance, addresses the population rather than the individual as subject, or the people as an organic composite of the subject. The individual, one must remember, cannot

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<sup>77</sup> That is, Ajay's revolutionary intervention takes place precisely at that unique moment in the career of television when it temporarily absolves itself of the screen time = money time nexus and emerges as a pure instrument of the volunteering human.

watch all the channels at once; as a model citizen, he has to eat, sleep, propagate, and reproduce his labor power. The man of reason, or endowed with an *Indianness* of heart, can always switch off the instrument and walk away, motivated by aesthetic, ideological, or biological demands. It is the population, as a host of pathological forces, desires, consciousnesses, prejudices, and intelligences that keeps the television on all the time. Unlike the encyclopedia, television, in the particular form we have elaborated, does not produce a book of the world with finite limits. It can neither be closed, nor switched off, because the population, like the metropolis, or the bank, never sleeps.

The human subject can thus never imperially survey a landscape of television amenable to positive cartographic knowledge. It can only inhabit it as a diffuse ecology of pluralistic energies, de-territorializing and re-territorializing sign systems, and fragmentary functions of desire that cannot be cognitively mapped to a total reading of the world<sup>78</sup>. It is because of this that the elusive being of television cannot be encountered frontally. It can only be glanced at, seen with the blinking eye that is perpetually an opening up and a loss of vision. Benjamin, as we know, has compared the ‘tactile’ and ‘distracted’ reception of cinema to that of architecture. His analogy connects a mass habituation to cinema to a diurnal appreciation of buildings that takes place through use and perception, by touch as well as by sight. Cinema, with its “shock” effect, seems to meet a similar “aperceptive”, distracted mode of reception “halfway” (“Work of Art” 233). In present times, perhaps the comparison with wayfaring in the city is more apt for a geo-televisual informatics as a diagram of worldly power. The latter is that which shoots along the interstice between the home and the world, and unlike the classical cinematic apparatus, is not confined to a contractual enclosure of time and space. It engages the population in their day to day ‘distracted’ movements through the lanes, by-lanes, and buildings of the metropolitan map, producing social meanings through micropunctual inputs and applications that could be normal, schizophrenic, or even somnambulist in nature. It is this dispersion of public participation into scatterings of demographic energies that we may recall, was understood

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<sup>78</sup> See for instance Jameson’s meditations on the lost sense of totality in postmodern spaces and the possibility of cognitive mapping in Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping,” Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

by Jean Paul Satre in his Marxist existentialist meditations as a gathering danger that could eclipse both, the figure of the people, as well as the individual subject. Television, for him, was part of that instrumentalization of society that produced a top ten list of *nobody's* tastes<sup>79</sup>.

It is in the light of this distraction that the mythic scope in the images of rapt attention, and a frontal address to the soul of the nation becomes clear in Mirza's film. The artistic value of the film lies precisely in its utopian, melodramatic *ruining* of positive sign systems, and in its groundless bringing together of 'realistically' unsustainable assemblages of matter and memory. The allegorical character and its paralogous and symbolic modalities are not dependent on how the film manages to put the subject in front of the camera in a *constitutive* realm of truth, but on how ventures forth powers of the false, and re-designs forces of the cinematic in order to bring about such a mythic return. Goldie Behl's 2001 film Bas Itna Sa Khwab Hai is also one such instance where *samskara* or tradition, a new age coda of entrepreneurial excellence, protocols of parliamentary representation, corporate television, and issues of the family and the nation are brought to a melodramatic orchestration along similar lines. The film is a transcreative retelling, with corporatized media instead of real estate being the central issue, of Raj Kapoor's classic national allegory Shri 420/The Gentleman Cheat (1955). The young citizen of is once again caught in the middle of antagonistic forces pertaining to community ethics, law, and money. This eternal story achieves the form of a sexualized melodrama in which the figure of the hero lends itself to familial as well as forbidden curves of desire which are emblematically cast as female personifications in Kapoor's film – the woman as *Vidya* (knowledge) and the woman as *Maya* (illusion). The lure of money and media in this case emerge as cosmetic, ultimately feminine differences in the way of a continuous artistic restoration of the nation's epic form. The paraphernalia of globalization, the worldliness and opening out of forms of life are thus agonistically revealed, after complicated, heroic navigations through realms of just and illicit

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<sup>79</sup> See Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, I, 642-54. See also Richard Dienst's consummate reading of the television phenomenon in Richard Dienst, Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) and his discussion of Sartre between 8-12 .

desires, to be, in the final instance, ripples of the same event – the perpetual expression of the nation as ONE Being.

The philosophical and narratological implications of this will be discussed in the next chapter. For the time being, attention can be focused elsewhere. So far, three contemporary Indian films have been discussed in which information-power appears as a dramatic image with a cosmic ontology of its own. However, it needs to be understood that the latter as a flexible mode of producing realities through distributions, concentrations, and saturations of visibilities and statements, does not have *essentially* anything to do with organic conceptions of culture. The complex web of pluralities that informatics gives rise to is also not something that is controlled, in a genitive sense, by a cabal of conspiratorial capitalists or any other form of human intelligence and agency. Indeed, in diverse situations, the powers of informatics may work for or against a wide spectrum of ideological forces. It is now time to see the cinematic workings of geo-televisual informatics beyond simple allegories of television-in-society.

### **Geo-televisuality and Contemporary Indian Cinema**

Madhava Prasad has distinguished the heterogeneous mode of manufacture of Hindi cinema from the serialized form of Hollywood production. In the former, the standard commercial feature is made by assembling together self contained segments of spectacle, drama, music, action, and other attractions into a loose ensemble in which the play of cinematic attributes is not always under the vertical control of the narrative<sup>80</sup>. These segments (or ‘Highlights’, as Manmohan Desai, one of the most important *auteurs* in the annals of popular Hindi cinema once put it) often have self contained aesthetic protocols and logic of production, involving specialized authorial inputs from dance directors, music composers, fight masters, and lyricists. Indeed, mainstream Indian films have been produced in that manner for a long time now. However, what can be initially stated, as a primary observation about Indian films in an age of global electronic publicity, is that

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<sup>80</sup> See Prasad, Ideology of the Hindi Film, 42-51.



increasingly, the making of these episodes are informed by market imperatives of autonomous, segmented distribution. This is especially true of the song and dance sequences, which regularly appear as self-sufficient television software much before the actual film is released. They also continue to have an independent shelf life in video, cable, and DVD circuits, not to mention the huge audio products industry, long after the film completes its run in the theaters. These sequences seem to often detach themselves from what can be called relations of 'obligation' to the filmic whole, and follow what can be called an 'indifferent' logic of 'geo-televisual' production and dissemination. In being aligned with 'other' image worlds of the travel documentary, the designer apparel, figurations and statements of lifestyle, a transnational idiom of advertisement, and technologies of the self of various kinds, the production modes of song sequences are often partially or completely separated from any notion of 'value' ontologically derived from a founding act of narration. That is, they acquire a separate value precisely at the point of rupture, when their powers disturb or cross the thresholds of all classical enframing devices of narrative cinema. Geo-televisuality thus often brings about a perverse, fragmented retailing of visibilities that undermines the totalizing sacredness of enunciation. Simply put, the song sequences, for instance, can arrive without any relation to the story being told on screen; they can invoke bodies, spaces and objects jetting in from any metropolitan source whatever, without allegiance to the characterization process and the determined milieu of the narrative. In accommodating them, the principle of contextual rootedness of cinema only assembles with, without acquiring an imperial command over, a globality of the musical-televisual image. Visual and aural 'particle' attributes can be seen to enter the curve of the enunciative statement or 'reach' the moment of 'national' cinematic narration, like errant, transmigrated souls -- after a gestative journey through various zones of electronic publicity, in a state already imbued with semiotic 'retro affects' gathered from other geo-televisual image worlds. The integrated life of the film is thus always informed by the pre-life and afterlife of images. The fascinating aspect about figures and spaces in a contemporary urban Indian cinema is that they are always, as a result of such 'assemblages,' repositories of *non-narratological* memory and potentia. The figure of the village bumpkin or *dehat* can instantaneously, groundlessly, pass on to that of the dancing music video artist or the transnational tourist, or reveal an inherent, mythical comfort with worldly technological

gadgets, musical instruments, weapons, or images of desire. These will soon be studied in greater detail, after a greater elaboration of the concept of geo-televisuality in relation to Indian cinema.

The expression *geo-televisuality*, in a basic sense, pertains to the projection and reception of images, sounds, and words across global distances, across territorial, cultural, linguistic, and religious borders. In as much, as said earlier, it has nothing *essentially* to do with the instrument called television. Rather, geo-televisuality, in various technical forms, in various situations of priestly and monarchical mediation, has always been a primary task of human beings engaged in the task of reading their godless universe. In the continental, primarily Germanic philosophical tradition of the west after Kant, this perpetual commerce between the local and the global assumed a particular form pertaining to a desire for a 'totality' of worldly knowledge. In perhaps the most memorable articulation of this philosophy in the twentieth century in the hands of the Hungarian Marxist George Lukacs, this aspiration to a 'world historical' consciousness was profoundly attached to a notion of international revolutionary praxis<sup>81</sup>. It is in this spirit that Fredric Jameson forwards his notion of 'cognitive mapping' as an effort on part of the denizen of the postmodern, 'post-industrial' city (now bereft of Lukacs' revolutionary proletariat, which has increasingly been relegated to the 'third world') to navigate and connect the bits and bytes of information beamed to him into a constitutive world view<sup>82</sup>. A makeshift philosophical understanding of geo-televisuality has a bearing on the present study. In the age designated as one of information, the incursion of many vistas of the global in cinematic situations often happens without 'organic' procedures of synthesis or mediation<sup>83</sup> with postulates of tradition or indigenous

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<sup>81</sup> See Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," trans. Rodney Livingstone, *History and Class Consciousness* (New Delhi: Rupa, 1993).

<sup>82</sup> See Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping."

<sup>83</sup> For a greater elaboration on the theme of geo-televisuality in an electronic age, see Anustup Basu, "The Human and His Spectacular Autumn, or, Informatics after Philosophy," *PostModern Culture* 14.3 (May 2004).

selves. The interchanges between a so called cinema of the 'self' and the shock and welter of worldly information in the Indian context of the nineties make a dynamic process no longer devoted to producing the world as a constitutive book or window (as the eighteenth century encyclopedia was). Rather they constitute an amorphous mass of fragments (information that is cinematic or cinema that is informatic) where the particle signs of the entrenching global mingle indeterminately with those of the now uprooted local. The manifold visual modes that intersect with and contaminate each other do not add up to a constitutive perspective of any subject (the world view of the ephemeral 'Indian self' or his alter ego, the European *anthropos*). Instead complex movements and meshworks of an inhuman 'database intelligence' of a transnational metropolitan order are generated, in which random visions and memories of desire, terror, and ideology float into and depart from each other. In other words, while events of geo-televisuality are certainly not new to our world, the degree to which they become *informatic*, that is the extent to which they have become aligned to the speed and intensity of capitalist circulation certainly is. Which also means that geo-televisual informatics needs to be understood as a dispensation of power not from the existential point of view of a subject (that is purely in terms of effects of alienation, accessibility and cognitive processing powers), but in terms of how it *subjects* minds through forces of image as matter and memory as a social production.

This is of course not to suggest that geo-televisuality is in some sort of way unique to the popular Indian films. Rather, what this study aspires to is an investigation of the modes in which this metropolitan order of visibilities and instant communication intersects with long standing formal and thematic diagrams of such cinemas. What is produced thereby are complex patterns and assemblages that cannot be analyzed in terms of available binaries like the global and the local, or tradition and modernity. For the moment, some illustrative moments can be cited from a random sample of recent films in the Indian context, noting how geo-televisual features can readily inhere in some established narratological formats of popular Indian cinemas -- like loose aggregations of epic-melodramatic storytelling and realist expression, ceremonial or ritualistic departures interrupting continual flow of happenings, or non-linear characterizations.

In Kuku Kohli's 1995 mafiosi thriller Haqeeqat/Reality, the main characters happen to be a mob hitman turned garage mechanic and a young, impoverished music teacher. The entire action takes place in Mumbai city, particularly at the slum where they live. However, the 'dream' based song sequences featuring the couple and their fantasies take place in Alpine Switzerland, with both of them dressed in designer western suits. Guddu Dhanoa's 1997 film Ziddi/The Stubborn is another crime saga set in the dark and violent bylanes of Mumbai; here too a couple of song sequences take place in a snow capped European location, as touristic, disjunctive prostheses of televisual value embedded into the narrative. The upper torso of the street criminal hero is left bare in a few shots in what is visibly a sub-zero environment. In Vimal Kumar's 1997 film Tarazu/Scales Caribbean bodies arrive from an ontic source (a Deleuzian any space whatever) beyond the milieu of the story and are set to music with the lead pair on a sea beach. In Jamai Raja/Son-in-Law (A. Kondandarami Reddy, 1990), the feudal melodrama involving the overbearing mother-in-law and the newly wed couple is interspersed by non-obligatory departures, by which the sphere of private, nuclear desires becomes immanent in a setting of Sergio Leone style spaghetti westerns. A similar escape takes place in Shankar's Jeans (1998), where the couple, imperiled by traditional prohibitions, is temporarily rendered afloat and free in a space of international travel featuring the Seven Wonders of the World in the sumptuously shot "Ajooba Ajooba" ("Wonder, wonder") song sequence. In Shankar's Nayak (2001), a song sequence depicts the conflict between hero's public role as Chief Minister and his private duties towards his girlfriend. Here, the couple is first transformed into the fairy tale figures (the king and the poor peasant belle) and inserted into a digitized mise-en-scène of snakes and ladders, where visages of friends and foes alike assume reptilian features. This remarkable episode ends with a series of shots showing the protagonist in traditional attire of Hindu kings, presiding over what is, in terms of synchronized movement of digitized figures, a modern day military march past and show of arms. The bodies animating the marching blocks however, are those of European medieval knights in full armor. The perspective in such sequences, is thus only partially of the protagonist-as-subject (the patriotic-patriarchal figure of *Indianness*); the character-in-the-story is seen to largely evacuate his/her body of biographical moorings and lend itself as pure image, an alluring effigy of machinic 'star-talent', to the dynamic of the song and dance as spectacle. However, as we shall soon see, this does not mean that these

sequences have no relation to narrative progress whatsoever; the relation is simply not dialectical-synthetic, it is *disjunctive*. This means that the commerce between narration and the song and dance has to be seen in terms of flows of affect -- a percolation of semiotics -- rather than through a serial arrangement of propositions (can a virtuous Indian woman dance in such attire or with such 'immoral' abandon?).

Speaking about a process of resignification of traditional narrative forms, and that of the lower caste *dalit* body in Shankar's Kaadalan (1994), Tejaswini Niranjana and Vivek Dhareshwar describe the "Muqabla Muqabla" sequence as

A pastiche on spaghetti Westerns, the sequence opens with the hero, his hair and beard bleached blond, straddling a horse with a noose around his neck and the bad guys about to shoot the horse. The heroine gallops into the frame with a gun and shoots off the rope to liberate the hero. Then begins the dance, performed with great élan by Prabhudeva. The sequence itself is a strip of narrativity very much in the MTV genre, and has no apparent link to the larger narrative of the film. The song/dance sequence in Indian films has always been a relatively autonomous block, one of the requirements of the dominant form of manufacture rather than a diegetic necessity. This tendency of the song/dance sequence toward autonomy has been intensified in recent years by the competition of television and the MTV genre as well as by the market opened up by them. So elaborately orchestrated dance sequences, each representing an autonomous strip of narrative, have become an imperative for the survival of the film industry (192-93)

According to Dhareshwar and Niranjana, in an age of proliferating avenues of electronic visibilities, the body of the film has to disperse, and let itself be 'cannibalized' in multiple social modes of the trans-cinematic, without submitting to organicist ideas of unity and self defining integrity<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> See Vivek Dhareshwar, and Tejaswini Niranjana, "Kaadalan and the Politics of Resignification: Fashion, Violence, and the Body," Making Meaning in Indian Cinema, ed. Ravi S. Vasudevan (New Delhi: Oxford, 1999).

Strictly speaking, non-narratological travel, or import of visual insignia of ‘foreign-ness’ are not new to the formal dynamics of Indian cinema. As a matter of fact, examples would be too many to enumerate. One could begin by citing some early instances, like the New Theatres Judeo-Christian departure in the form of Yahudi ki Ladki/The Jew’s Daughter (Premankur Atorthy, 1933) that extended a Parsi melodramatic diagram to an ‘outlandish’ setting, or Homi Wadia’s Lal-E-Yeman/Son of Yemen (1933) that translates the geopolitical referent of Yemen into a pure imaginary projection. Yves Thorawal has described Nadia, the prime star of the Wadia Movietones’ stunt spectacles of the late thirties and early forties as a “half Welsh, half Greek” female figure who was a synthesis of “Zorro, Tarzan, and John Wayne” whose exploits were set in milieus of the Indian western, like the Diamond town in Diamond Queen (Homi Wadia, 1941)<sup>85</sup>. Even in the fifties, when such attractions of fantasy, spectacle and stunts were largely overcoded by a melodramatic-realist idiom of a predominant national aesthetics for the new republic, one sees examples like Bimal Roy’s Yahudi/The Jew (1958), which was a ‘toga’ epic set in imperial Rome<sup>86</sup>. Shakti Samanta’s 1969 film An Evening in Paris promises a touristic romance set in the European city (the ‘evening’, as spelled out in the title song, refers to the time we spend in the theater watching the film, and not to the time span of the narrative). The film however moves freely to and fro from the geo-specific location of the French capital to Switzerland, Germany, and stages its climax in the Niagara Falls in North America. Similarly, in Ramanand Sagar’s Aankhen/Eyes (1970), when the hero is captured by a group of enemy spies, his comrades devise a plan to locate the place where he is held. They go around Beirut (where the action is taking place) dressed as disabled beggars singing and asking for alms. A receiving device is hidden inside their paraphernalia which is set to intercept signals emitted from a transmitter concealed inside the incarcerated hero’s body as soon as he is within a certain radius of distance. The search for the hero is depicted in the “*Tujhko rakhe Ram tujhko Allah rakhe*” (May Ram preserve you, May Allah preserve you) sequence which begins in Beirut and its vicinities and then moves to an unspecified South East Asian location and then back to

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<sup>85</sup> See Yves Thorawal, The Cinemas of India (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2000). 35.

<sup>86</sup> Both Atorthy’s and Roy’s films were based on a famous and often filmed play by Aga Hashr Kashmiri (1879-1935), the leading playwright of the Parsee tradition.

Beirut again before the receiving device starts to beep. In Manmohan Desai's 1977 costume epic Dharam Veer/Dharam and Veer, the loose, eclectically composed milieu combines elements of the Japanese *Samurai* tradition, the warfare of medieval English knights, the cinematic high sea swashbucklers of Hollywood, and Roman gladiatorial contests.

Nevertheless, in suggesting that contemporary Indian mainstream cinema has developed a special geo-televisual character, what is being attended to is an intensification of such transports, by which the arrival of signs, the vectorizing of bodies into any spaces whatsoever<sup>87</sup> can happen instantaneously, without procedures and rituals of legitimization qua a dominant national ethos. The latter practice marks a priestly monitoring of movement in classical post-war Indian cinematic narratives of the 50s and 60s, generically characterized by Prasad as 'feudal family romance'<sup>88</sup>. Journeys across the nation in such films, especially in the song sequences of innumerable romantic melodramas of the sixties, often encompass the length of the geographical nation, from the vales and lakes of Kashmir to temples, gardens, rivers, and beaches of the south. The lyrical transportation of bodies in these cases creates impossible spaces of urban desire between the feudal household and a state of nature. These segments often take place in spots of touristic attraction like the Taj Mahal or the Vrindavan Gardens, which become spectacular zones of conjugal privacy (imbued with an auratic semiosis of legend and romance, as in the case of the Taj) by being magically emptied of both, the curious vision of an international public, as well as an otherwise omniscient, monitoring gaze of the national-feudal community. Travels within the nation in such films are largely interiorized into a grand domestic conversation of the nation with itself, by which the *landness* of the land passes from a geographical aesthetic into a political concept.

Similarly, forays into foreign shores usually possible only after traditional rites of passage, when professional compulsions or touristic and libidinal desires are properly blessed and

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<sup>87</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 1: The Movement Image, Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1986): 108-11.

<sup>88</sup> Prasad, Ideology of the Hindi Film, 64.

sanctified by universal interests of the feudal joint family. The couple in Raj Kapoor's Sangam/The Confluence (1964) can go to Europe and its playground of urban desires only after marriage, with their bodies all the time being encurved by stipulations of tradition: the honeymooning twosome never kiss in public, white people in the background do. In Manoj Kumar's Purab Aur Paschim/East and West (1970), the journey is in the opposite direction, towards a melodramatic re-familiarization of the woman's body through a shredding of alien accessorial markers. The hero meets and courts the heroine in Europe; her body is then claimed by the narrative as ethical instantiation of a core Indian-ness by progressively de-marking it of the blonde wig, the dress, and the cigarette. Similarly, Raj Kapoor's Chaplinesque urban tramp 'Raju' becomes cinematically manifest in Sri 420/The Gentleman Cheat (1954) when persona traits of a post-war socialist internationalism (*Mera Joota Hai Japani/Patloon Englishthani/ Sar pe Lal topi Rusi/Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* – My Shoes are Japanese/My trousers from England/ On my head is a Russian cap/ But my heart remains Indian) conjoin, through graduated priestly mediations of national culture, with statements of an optimistic Nehruvian socialist dream of the young republic. The rebellious Shammi Kapoor star persona of the sixties becomes apparent only when the dancing Elvis Presley like apparition is ethically rooted in the indigenous community, as *naturalistic* signs of libidinous eccentricity to be eventually cured by traditional coupledness as in Jungle/The Wild One (Subodh Mukherjee, 1961), or as feigned madness in the face of deep conspiracy, as in Rajkumar/Prince (K. Shankar, 1964) or Teesri Manzil/The Third Floor (Vijay Anand, 1966). It is the same graduated aesthetics of 'exposure', of an India-in-the-world, that we see in narratives of patriotic love in Pramod Chakraborty's Love in Tokyo (1966), H. Pachchi's Duniya Ki Sair/Around the World (1967), and Manoj Kumar's Purab Aur Paschim/East and West (1970), and patriotic espionage in Ramanand Sagar's Aankhen/Eyes (1968) or Dev Anand's Prem Pujari/Worshipper of Love (1970).

Such classic images of becoming modern through a calibrated 'internationalism' of bodies and insignia, can be contrasted with some contemporary cinematic moments featuring what can be called a de-domesticized, global circuit of images. In a sequence in David Dhawan's Chal Mere Bhai/Lets Go Brother (2000), the hero starts driving a car in a busy street in Mumbai; by the time he stops, the car is in a Swiss landscape, where the next development



in the story takes place. The two spheres are of course not categorically separated from each other by designated proper names India and Switzerland; nor is this method of splicing together footage shot in different continents new in the annals of cinema. This form of transfer geo-televisual can be called geo-televisual precisely because it does not allow for any naturalistic anchoring of signs, or a persistent and integrated cinematic invention of the localized milieu. If that were the case, the Swiss landscape or any other for that matter, could cinematically participate in the determined milieu of Mumbai only through a semiological procedure of selection, enframing, ordering, and familiarization under the perspectivist control of the realist narrative. This is how, to take a stray example, London's Pinewood Studios and other English locations cinematically *become* tropical Vietnam in Kubrick's Full Metal Jacket. In Dhawan's film what we see instead is a metropolitan image machinery that creates disjunctive global assemblages of desiring bodies, vectorized time-space modules and life style ideas in a manner by which these sets can 'zap' instantaneously, in an inorganic manner, from dust to snow, from the tropical maritime shores to the alps, from signatures of third world poverty to a profusion of western consumerism, and from a host of brown bodies the background to a host of white bodies in the background. Cinematic space in this case is thus no longer under the lumberous yoke of the 'real' as geo-political; it is constituted by a metropolitan virtuality that is out of bounds of the old city and its historically limited scenarios. The geo-televisuality of movement pertains therefore to an abstract map of spectacle-as-on-screen-value that recasts the historical battleground of the world into what Fredric Jameson has called a global landscape of perpetual presents. Rather than a determined milieu, what is seen is a semiotic blend of particle signs, an osmotic multiplicity, occasionally presenting pure dancing bodies that have slipped out of characters<sup>89</sup> and their milieus.

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<sup>89</sup> This discontinuous passage of meaning, that happens through insidious osmotic flows, rather than through broad statements and their dialectical exchanges, pertains to a long standing western debate about semiotics and semiology in cinema, as we see in the works of thinkers like Pier Paolo Passolini, Peter Wollen, Sol Worth and of course, Christian Metz. It is not possible to connect this discussion to this rich, variegated terrain. We will elaborate on this more in the next chapter. For the moment, we can restrict ourselves to an important point made, in relation to commercial Indian cinema, by Tejaswini Niranjana and Vivek Dharieswar. In discussing the cinematic re-inscription of the lower caste, Dalit body in *Kaadalan* that is reconfigured with the

Connecting these cinematic instances to overall winds of change that have swept the Indian situation since the nineties does not amount to flagging a positive birth moment for an Indian cinematic geo-televisuality. An origin can indeed be posited, but in a Benjaminian sense that is not susceptible to mathematical averages of historicism. Origin, in that sense, would be an entirely historical category, but only as a moment of brilliant illumination when geo-televisuality, as a particular dream of globality that was always there in cinema, enters a realm of ideas (Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, 45). Such osmotic flows of desire objects, passion postulates, spaces and temporalities indeed have profound effects on, and set up challenges to molar forms of ethical narration in the Indian context. Sometimes bodies themselves have to multiply in order to recompose an anarchic proliferation of energies into figures of polarized affections, just as in Evening in Paris the female body is doubled into good and evil figures of twin sisters separated at birth. It is only then that an ethical diagram of Brahminical tradition can be torturously preserved while lending the woman's body to worldly ensembles of allure in a foreign land: the swimsuit, the exotic bar dances. The geo-televisual image is that which globalizes the body in a manner that has the betrayal of the 'self' (as a national-local precept of being) as its limit. In that, it always slips away into an elsewhere when subject to interpretive hermeneutics of cultural anthropology. A more contemporary example can be cited in this regard. In Ram

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visual insignia of MTV, Dhareshwar and Niranjana very usefully suggest a critical move beyond the structural impasses of narratology: "As Christian Metz....argues: 'Enunciation is the semiological act by which some part of the text talks to us about this text as an act'. ...Metz rightly claims that the cinematic enunciation is reflexive rather than deictic....And yet Metz seems confused about how to clarify the nature of cinematic enunciation without inheriting the anthropomorphism of a linguistics of deictics. He inherits this confusion, or so it seems to us, from the linguistic monism of semiology. Gilles Deleuze, who opts for Peircean semiotics precisely to avoid this confusion, offers a diagnosis of the confusion inherited by a semiology of cinema: "We....have to define, not semiology, but "semiotics", as the system of images and signs independent of language in general. When we recall that linguistics is only part of semiotics, we no longer mean, as for semiology, that there are languages without a language system, but that the language system only exists in its reaction to the *non-language material* that it transforms. That is why utterances and narrations are not a given of visible images, but a consequence which flows from this reaction"". Vivek Dhareshwar and Tejaswini Niranjana, "*Kaadalan* and the Politics of Resignification: Fashion, Violence and the Body". Making Meaning in Indian Cinema. Ravi S. Vasudevan ed. (New Delhi: Oxford, 2000): 212.

Gopal Verma's Daud/The Run 1996), the couple is on the run from the law as well as the Mafiosi. Their journey through a sometimes realistic, often utopian Indian landscape is frequently punctuated by song numbers that turn their bodies loose into fragments of metropolitan fantasies, those of highly sexualized and orientalist adventures in a Tarzanesque jungle. In the "*O Bhawanre*" ("O bee") sequence, the twosome is suddenly transported to a scenic landscape in New Zealand. In this, the woman is attired in a two piece suit which can, in terms of a global proliferation of meaning beyond the locality of narration, be justifiably read as the attire of the sado-masochistic mistress peculiar to an eighties metropolitan lifestyle practice in California. One would of course flout a tortured absolutism of national cultural authorship in taking meaning 'elsewhere' in such a manner. But the difficult point apropos this elaboration of geo-televisuality in popular Indian cinema is that if bodies are subject to a playing of the cinematic, they are so as toys -- as entities cast outside a strict, contextually rooted sociology of the *given* -- which are amenable to the many global fictions they flow into.

### 3. Myth and Reality: The Manifold Tropes of the Cinematic

#### Cinema and a Modernizing Vision

A genealogical chart of Western cinematic realism can begin with a broad aesthetic-epistemological transformation in the major European visual cultures. Roland Barthes has called this the historical supplantation of a Pythagorean link between acoustics and mathematics by that between geometry and theater. (“Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein” 172). The consequent valorization of the *dioptric arts* and an aesthetics of representation happened in a general temper of critical disenchantment that marked the enlightenment. The birth of a modern humanistic perspective arrived with the formation of secular disciplines of knowledge, the philosophical inauguration of the doubting Cartesian subject and a Newtonian Nature, the coming into being of capital and modern European empires, and the imaginative positing of a godless process of historical advancement that, in its myriad forms, both departed from and ran analogous to the Christological narrative. Cinema can be said to have entered this grand schema of renaissance focalization (after the multiple perspectives of the Greek stage) only at a certain stage of technological ‘advancement’ that qualified it as an adequate mechanism for industrial public representation<sup>90</sup>. Jonathan Crary has pointed out that with its multi-veined beginnings, film technology initially found it difficult to find a place for itself in this grand lineage. He points out that the camera obscura had actually collapsed as a model for the functioning of human vision very early in the nineteenth century. The aperture, as a singular point of entry to an inner sanctum of representations, gained supercession only gradually, in a particular intellectual environment of the scientific ‘modern’, with the epistemological high gear of Euclidean geometry, Newtonian optics, and a philosophy of the subject. But more than such developments in machine technology, it was in fact with the development of the biological sciences that the location of a modern critical eye came to be housed within the individual observer and his metabolism. Crary

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<sup>90</sup> See Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” (1986).

cites the work of Gustav Fechner and the mathematics of stimulus-response theory to chart a complicated genealogical coming into being of a bio-political, Pavlovian line of 'truthful' vision that could at last command the status of being 'in-camera' in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lockean sense, that is, of being within the chambers of a judge or adjudicator of reality<sup>91</sup>. But as the research of scholars like Anne Friedberg and Vanessa Schwartz have shown, even in terms of this idea of the secular individual gaze (the retina as an infallible window to the world), early cinema, compared to other industrial schemas of worldly representation like the panorama, the diorama, or the pleorama, was not considered *realist* enough<sup>92</sup>. What becomes conceptually elaborated in their works is thus a diagram of what may be called the *cinematic* in a perfunctory sense of the modern. The cinematic is a special configuration of power and knowledge -- an architecture of perceptions, truths, subjectivities, ideologies, and governing ontologies of being and destiny -- that lays claim on given institutions and apparatus of film without being *essentially* identified with them. The cinematic therefore is that ordering of visibilities and statements that seeks to judge manifold instances of the *filmed* and calibrate them according to differential measures of value. It is that governing principle of not just aesthetics, culture, and truth, but also of production and marketability, which determines what is worthy of being called cinema and to what extent. In the case of the west, it was thus about two decades after the technology was invented and publicized that a European bourgeois 'cinematic' began to inform the workings of film.

It is of course necessary to understand that such diagrams of the cinematic always fan out to assemble with other expressive powers to produce different constellations of license and truth, veracity and fanciful departures from it, and of postulates of 'high art' and imperatives of low, commercial dream-merchandise. Hence, if a discursive sketch of post renaissance perceptual humanism has to be assembled with the manifolds of national temper (German expressionism, Russian formalism, Italian neo-realism, French avant-garde) and mass

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<sup>91</sup> See Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision" (1997).

<sup>92</sup> See Anne Friedberg, "Cinema and the Postmodern Condition" (1997) and Vanessa R. Schwartz "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris" (1997). For a more comprehensive view, see also Friedberg's Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993).

industrial machineries (Hollywood), what becomes critically important is the manner in which the former tries to recode the latter aspects in an often tortured diagram of value. The terrain of the cinematic is thus always a complex ensemble of strata of messy signs held together by a weak ontological pull of a purported 'modern', one that is perpetually imperiled in its singular status by the anarchy of worldly commerce, and the polyphonic clamor of the metropolis that is constantly altering shape in the twilight of the idols, letting in newer bodies and voices, and rendering prior ones extinct. The thought that in a never never planetary republic of images it is ultimately a singular point of view of humanism that grants constitution to errant pluralities, evaluates and separates the truth that is 'in camera' from falsehood, is in itself a determinate abstraction. It does not refer to a stratum of truth at the ground level, but is to be understood as a powerful mechanism of value that in the case of 'World Cinema,' seeks to evaluate -- after a host of self conscious reckonings, mediations, and provisions -- the global plenitudes of film in terms of differential and deferential relations with 'realism' and realist narration. That is, in terms of a world picture suited to a scientific industrial age in which the gods are either dead or in dire states of recession, one in which there can be only facts and no miracles.

When the cinematic of humanism claims instances of the *filmed*, it is this perceptualist and aesthetic diagram that is layered onto the body of the film and the latter is reinvented as an anthropological tracing of the other in images of the self, and as a continuity, a regularity and focus of knowledge. Quite simply, it is a powerful process of habituation and common sense that is worth taking notice of in this discussion because it is precisely that lens of learning which critically abstracts the 'Japanese-ness' of Japanese cinema and of course, the 'not-yet-ness' of Indian cinema<sup>93</sup>. To put it rather blandly, it is from this state of being 'in camera,' -- an infallible chamber of urbane truth -- that one can perform the commonplace tasks of lovingly or impatiently designating popular Indian filmic forms as quaint (the colorful song sequences), pre-modern or superstitious (the magical transformations), or plagued by an absence of historical becoming (lengthy and cumbersome narration punctuated by decorative poise and spectacle).

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<sup>93</sup> See Chapter 1 of Prasad, Ideology of the Hindi Film.

However, the invocation and partial elaboration of a classic 'cinematic' of humanism cannot be accomplished without wistful irony in the present occasion frequently designated as a 'postmodern' one. In the latter, a post-historical diagram of 'play' seems to have overcoded a cinematic of humanism. As a result, one can frequently hear the early announcements of an all new schema of evaluation that states that Indian cinema is not yet modern precisely because it is already postmodern. That is, in a unipolar, global landscape evacuated of history by a chronicle of financialization foretold, there seems to no longer be any cultural necessity to narrate the protracted genesis of the increasingly anachronistic form of the nation state. 'National allegories', by that logic, can only be parodic repetitions with cosmetic differences, devoid of any world-historical valence whatsoever. The cinematic text can no longer enter into a socialized participation in the ideological battles of the old world (involving class or gender struggles, rights, representation, welfare or citizenship) or aim at an ontological transformation of values. They are therefore already affiliated, as part of a general commoditification and re-totemization of the artwork, into a transnational museum of images. The standing of the song sequence in popular Hindi cinema, for instance, undergoes an interesting transformation in this altered perspective. It can actually impart commodity value to the film, as a marker of ethnic difference, and as a feature in many ways unique to Indian cinema, just as a specialized style of martial arts choreography is to Hong Kong action flicks, or, in terms of high art, magic realism is to a kind of Latin American fiction. In a 'post-political' cornucopia of the free market, the song sequence, seen as such, thus stands the danger of becoming a mobile, non-directional, but eminently consumable *eccentricity* in the smooth space of planetary capital.

The elaborations of these two 'modern' and 'postmodern' diagrams of the cinematic will be pertinent in understanding not just early or classical cinematic formations in India, but also to gauge recent transformations. That is, this critical interface will enable one to track, in a historical field of problems, the newly immanent scopes for hitherto incommensurable commerces between 'tradition' and 'technology' or between an ideology of Hindutva and military-financial powers of a planetary statism. The task at hand will be to see how these highly pertinent western diagrams of the cinematic interact and intersect with 'Indian' diagrams of visualization and value. What has been seen in the previous two chapters are

instances of a contemporary filmic orchestration of such cinematic worlds, a setting up of affective liaisons, non obligatory juxtapositions, and 'informatic' relations between the eternal values of 'home' and the pulsating geo-televisuality that the world seems to always throw up. A more detailed appreciation of this new age, metropolitan publicity that overcodes the self-other battles of the old historical world and re-publicizes them in a newer realm of value, must be prefaced by another perfunctory, non-totalizing elaboration of an 'Indian' cinematic and its affiliations with other, critically adjacent discursive mappings of nationhood, culture, and Being. Admittedly, such a conceptual project can advance only with a prior awareness of its violence and of the rites of 'purification' it entails; for the 'traditional Indian' is never distilled into an essence – it is always already contaminated, recast, described, categorized, and ordered by the myriad global projects of the modern.

### **A Theorem of the 'Indian' Cinematic**

In the turn of the twentieth century Indian milieu technical instruments of photography and cinema were predominantly deployed towards non-realist purposes, usually to embellish or accentuate an already existing iconographic or symbolist mode. As Ashish Rajadhyaksha notes, photographers often joined bazaar artists at the temple town of Nathdwara to collaborate in what was a composite artistic invocation of divinity. In such artifacts, pictures of pilgrims were freely pasted on drawings of the deity (Rajadhyaksha, "Ray Films and Ray Movie" 12-13). Even in different traditions of portrait photography in India, the basic inscriptions on film were often decorated by hand drawn flourishes. There were of course cinematic institutions before the apparatus that functioned without the image as inscription on celluloid. For example, in the *Prabhuji Ke Par* tradition of Rajasthan, entire heroic sagas were painted on large screens. During the nocturnal litanic renditions of these narratives that took place for several hours and over a few days, the screens were lit in segments. Similarly, an aesthetics of photographic verisimilitude could not fit into a tradition of Bengal's *Patua* scroll paintings (this school exists to this day) that depicted heroic and mythical legends in a series of frames that held the deity in frontal, ceremonial postures. The colorful and stylized *pats* were also exhibited as a sequential unfolding of segmented visions, with the accompaniment of a musical narration.



Both photography and naturalistic landscape or portrait painting began their careers in India largely as documenting forces for the colonial bureaucratic state, and the Europeanizing indigenous elite. The first major aesthetic bridge between oil paint and indigenous forms was achieved by the late nineteenth century painter Raja Ravi Verma, who endowed the mythic figure with an anatomical contour characteristic of the late European renaissance, but in line with a *frontal*, depthless scope of Tanjore glass paintings<sup>94</sup>. In the same vein, cinema -- as an emblematic, austere recording of the world that, in its alchemy between the filmic base and the exposed world of the profane, allowed only limited mediation of the artistic devotee -- had to undergo transformations to enter this multivalent but primary visual culture of worship. In a general tradition of mythological representation geared towards inspiring *Bhakti* or devotion, the realism of cinema had to experimentally work itself into the culture before being considered evocative enough.

Apart from painterly story telling traditions, the other worlds of theater and performance that early Indian cinema borrowed from were also dominated by non-naturalist, mythic impulses of spectacle and ceremony. Some of these diverse genealogical components were eclectically drawn from Parsee Theatrical traditions, folk idioms like the *Jatra* of Bengal, the *Ramleela*, the *Tamasha* in North India, or *Theru* of the South, apart from international idioms of classical Hollywood, Europe and Soviet socialist realism. In the case of Hindi cinema (which was the first to acquire a pan Indian status in the post-independence years), these attributes entered into a highly flexible mix with literary forms of Bengali modernism, the Marathi reform novel, and a sonorous, high flown rhetorical structure of Urdu poetry. The outcome was a complex, multi-layered, and highly flexible format that housed variegated circuits of knowledge, historical memory and expressive form. Rajadhyaksha for instance points out a persistent feature of ‘double orientalism’ in the works of the early twentieth century pre-eminent Parsee playwright Aga Hashar Kashmiri. According to him, Kashmiri’s adaptations of Shakespeare, like Sufaid Khoon (aka White Blood, an adaptation of King Lear), Khwab-E-Hasti (aka Grandiose Dreams loosely based on Macbeth), or Said-

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<sup>94</sup> See Geeta Kapur, “ Representational Dilemmas of a Nineteenth Century Painter: Raja Ravi Verma” (2000).

E-Havas (aka Greed based on King John) display a western look towards the east, but via Persian, Arabic, and Moorish legend, through their orientalist variations in the European baroque<sup>95</sup>.

According to Rajadhyaksha, the replacing of the mythological by the social as the dominant genre in the sound era, the toning down of musicals, and the graduated elimination of miracles and magic that dominated the popular stunt genres of the thirties, was a process in which a *frontal* iconic presence, as the stabilizer of meaning, was replaced by a narrative format<sup>96</sup>. That is, an iconic metaphysics of mythic omniscience was kept intact in the social milieu, as an authorial 'looming' across a sky of worldly meaning, but without the formal, diegetic administration of the icon. The realism of the 'social' therefore emerged only as one of many styles of telling stories before the idol. The resulting form, which Rajadhyaksha calls Epic Melodrama, was one over which the secular constitutional state and the industrial, educated middle-class could exercise only a limited authority<sup>97</sup>. It was thus not *adequate* to what Christine Gledhill has theorized as the emergence of a pervasive, trans-generic mode in Hollywood that could naturalize bourgeois ceremonies of the private and the public (Home is Where the Heart is, 6)<sup>98</sup>. This specter of 'incompleteness' pertains not only to the weak epistemological predominance of an aesthetics of realism, but also to what Prasad has called the valorization of mercantile capital in Indian cinema – the quasi-feudal 'dictatorship' of a distributor/rentier class after the end of the studio era in the late forties (Ideology of the Hindi Film 32-33).

## The Ray Moment

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<sup>95</sup> See Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "Epic Melodrama: Themes of Nationality in Indian Cinema" (1994): 64 and also the entry on Aga Hashar Kashmiri in Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema, 123.

<sup>96</sup> See "Epic Melodrama" 56-57.

<sup>97</sup> See "Epic Melodrama."

<sup>98</sup> See Prasad's re-articulation of theories of women's melodrama by Pam Cook, Mary Ann Doane, Marcia Landy, and Christine Gledhill in Ideology of the Hindi Film (1998) 56-59.

In essay written in 1958 -- three years after the completion of the Nehru administration's first Five Year Plan, and two years after his film Pather Panchali/Song of the Road created an upheaval at Cannes and put India in the 'map of the cinematic world -- Satyajit Ray meditates on the quandaries faced by the Bengali film maker. Essaying out from a general, well nigh universal problem of squaring artistic intents to the ostensibly business-industrial format of the medium, Ray explores the possibilities of artistic avant-garde experimentation in the Indian filmic context. He sees the market and the culture being dominated by "well trodden paths" of the mythological and the devotional, which, in the absence of wide spread literacy, seem to be the predominant generic casts suitable for attaining a surefire mass reach. What then should be the task of the 'serious' film maker? "Should he accept the situation and apply himself to the making of *serious* mythologicals and *serious* devotionals, keeping the popular ingredients and clothing them in the semblance of art? This is obviously a way out of the impasse, but it raises an important question: can a serious film maker, working in India, afford to shut his eyes to the reality around him, the reality that is so poignant, and so urgently in need of interpretation in terms of cinema? I do not think so....For the truly serious, socially conscious film maker, there can be no prolonged withdrawal into fantasy. He must face the challenge of contemporary reality, examine the facts, probe them, sift them and select from them the material to be transformed into the stuff of cinema." (Ray, "Problems of a Bengal Film Maker" 40-41).

Ray's statement is quite emphatically motivated and pressed by a set of primary aesthetic moorings and proclivities. To him, the popular formats of the devotional and the mythological do not seem amenable to *serious* artistic aspirations precisely because they automatically posit an otherworldly ontology -- one that already forecloses *reality* and well as a socially conscious expression of it<sup>99</sup>. The miraculous and fantastic powers of these

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<sup>99</sup> Towards the middle of Ray's 1955 film Apur Sansar, the protagonists Apu and his young bride Aparna are in a film theater. In Biswas's reading, "We are taken right into the screen without any warning, so that it takes us some time to realize the camera is framing another film. As the camera pulls out and reveals the illusion we feel we should have known, since what we saw on the screen could not have been a scene in Ray's films. It is visibly different in style. The couple has come to watch a *mythological* about the child saint Dhruva replete with fire breathing demons, calendar gods, indoor forests and early optical tricks" (Historical Realism 140).

genres seem to inform the world with a deceptive patina of ‘untruth’, preventing a candid and certain cognitive contact between the camera and nature. They are thus *formally* condemned as having either an inexorable ideology of conservatism or a naïve artifice of belief, both of which are out of sync with a changing destiny of the modern nation. As Ray puts it later in the essay, when it comes to a fundamental objective of wedding art to ‘truth’, the mythological and the devotional seem to be poor aesthetic choices in terms of both, a cognitive-representative felicity, as well as a historical pertinence of formal application (42-43). In his understanding, it is largely the absence of a constitutive, ‘modern’ pedagogy of the new republic that seems to create a situation where the historical emergence of the self-conscious ‘reader’ is forestalled by the acolyte, and a novelized understanding of reality is blocked by a delusional but comprehensive fullness of epic grandeur. What is thereby arrested can be called a seminal and essential moment for the installation of a (modern) philosophical discourse – the separation between mythos and logos.

The question of realism that Ray raises has haunted understandings of Indian cinema from its very inception, in disciplinary and professional fields of criticism, journalism, and also various ‘artistic’ and ‘commercial’ modalities of film making. M. Madhava Prasad has shown that the various contesting strands of cinematic realism in post-independence India were prompted in multiple ways by an over-riding aspiration for a western style cultural modernity that could be ‘homed’ in the new republic<sup>100</sup>. These realist strands can be listed in terms of a few principal schools of expression, notwithstanding their internal differences and multiplicities: the epic melodramatic register of the Bombay film (developed most prominently in the studio products of Bombay Talkies during the 1940s); the IPTA inspired diagram of socialist realism in the early fifties’ that inflected the auteuristic films of Raj Kapoor, Mehboob Khan, or Bimal Roy; a liberal humanist vision of Ray himself; a developmentalist realism sponsored by the state (the Films Division documentaries and the

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According to Robin Wood, this film within the film is “Ray’s brief artistic testament...succinctly defining his own position in relation to the commercial Indian cinema” (*The Apu Trilogy*, 80). It is this absolute demarcation between Ray and the rest of the Indian cinema that Biswas challenges in his thesis.

<sup>100</sup> See Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*.

Shyam Benegal features of the seventies); and a recent technological will to realism that primarily came into being with the flourishing careers of the first few batches of trained directors, cinematographers, editors, and sound crew that graduated from the Indian Film and Television Institute in Pune. This complex aesthetic terrain of realism (with all its intersections with and departures from a commercial Hollywood format or a dialectical internationalist idiom of socialist art) however did not yield what could be seen to be either a consistent bourgeois mass form, or a radical instantiation of the popular that could also be fanned out into a global conversation of the revolutionary kind. Geeta Kapur, in contrasting the Indian situation to postcolonial cinemas of Latin America, describes this process as a *weak* modernism that has developed without an *avant-garde* -- a modernism “without a history of interrogation and change; a conservative or at best a reformist modernism” aligned with an overall emergence of the Indian situation as a passive revolutionary one in the Gramscian sense (“Cultural Creativity in the First Decade: The Example of Satyajit Ray” 18). Kapur’s complaint pertains, amongst other things, to the failure of an aesthetic machinery of bourgeois subjectivism to affect a proper industrial transcoding of cultural expressions -- a revolutionary de-territorialization of feudal ideologies and a simultaneous impelling of indigenous forms towards a civic transformation of values.

### **Realism and Indian Cinema: Ray Contra Ghatak**

The complex and multifarious impulses of realism that rippled across the many open veins of culture and aesthetics in the Indian cinematic context yielded various mutually antagonistic manifestoes for a national form. This was an arena in which radical experimental tendencies of aesthetic modernism engaged in a productive battle of ontologies with streamlining, instrumentalist tendencies of *modernization* as an ideology of bourgeois progress on the one hand, and with a feudal hegemonic control over ‘tradition’ on the other. Commitments to the real thus could be mapped in terms of differential degrees of antagonism, with Brechtian experimental questionings of the given often seeking to de-territorialize conservative, cognitivist habituations of the ‘real’ in various ideological and priestly quarters of the political spectrum. The different calls toward mimetic verisimilitude

often yielded realisms beyond realism -- that is, expressive outrages against both, a national paternalistic mythography impelled by Brahminical spiritualism, as well as the fatalistic imperatives and commonsensical truths of the market. Moinak Biswas, for instance, has conceptualized the realist project in Indian cinema during 1940-60 in terms of a style that functioned as a synchronic 'mediator' between different cinemas<sup>101</sup>. For him, the realist idiom is not so much a universal coda of cognitivist-scientific representation as it is a disaggregated paradigm comprising of different motivations – naturalism, lyricism, and psychological posturing. It is an expressive mobilization of signs that, in working in tandem with various regional, linguistic, cultural and ideological currents, could often corrode the dominant Brahminical-feudal diagram of popular Indian cinema. Drawing from Franco Moretti's theorization of the novel form as some sort of a world system of the literary and Raymond Williams' notion of *extended* realism, Biswas postulates a variegated and baroque cobbling of realism that is the result of the 'modern' and various encounters with the modern (Biswas 15). He echoes the arguments of thinkers like Karatami, Roberto Schwarz and Neil Larsen in proposing that in terms of a recurring feature of post-colonial situations, it can be said that when classical European realism enters a gravitational field of the 'other', it is often absolved of its imperial-occidental impulses and acquires a rich heterogeneity of its own.

It is possible to understand Biswas's ardent proposition as an invitation to a realism that is a polemical-experimental dismantling of domains of truth. Taken in that spirit, realism would be a supple and fluid mechanics of expressive powers and language; it would indeed be a practical marshalling of cognitive functions, points of view, epistemological statements, secular myths, and ontologies, but without an imperial, sweeping overture towards an emphatic, unity of law or the subject. In other words, this would be realism as a power of contaminations and outbreaks – one that destroys pieties of habit and static notions of being instead of installing peremptory regimes of euronormative truth. In that sense, realism would be a figure of critical thought rather than a formal hermeneutics of phenomenology and representation; it would be a Brechtian principle of constant testing and abandonment rather than a singular coming into being of a world historical subjective consciousness. It

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<sup>101</sup> See Biswas, Historical Realism: Modes of Modernity in Indian Cinema 1940-60 especially 9-35.

would not pertain to an agonistic struggle for defining the self in relation to the other as postulates of a Hegelian metaphysics, but would instead relate to practical intellectual efforts directed towards a transformation of values in a complex field of the historical. It is thus important to think the realism of Ray himself as assemblages of human and inhuman historical *intelligence*, rather than as a subjective, deterministic authorial intervention of a liberal humanist moralism. That is, as a cinema machine that combines ideological postulates (what Ray considers to be the ‘task’ of the film maker) with particles, signs, variables, and intensities of a culture, that disparately give rise to cinematic milieus, bodies, landscapes, melodies, and communal memories.

Biswas’s argument of course needs to be seen in the light of a decade long animated conversation about cinematic realism that was centered on the distinguished styles of two pre-eminent filmmakers of the post-independence ‘art’ cinema in India – Ray himself and Ritwik Ghatak. This debate achieved a high level of theoretical sophistication in the late eighties, in the hands of a group of intellectuals belonging to the Journal of Arts and Ideas combine, especially Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Geeta Kapur, Ravi Vasudevan, Kumar Sahani, and Madan Gopal Singh. The marshalling of critical energies, principles, values, and aesthetic manifestoes around the different cinemas Ray and Ghatak yielded an unintended schema or pattern of utterance that, though regularly disturbed and complicated, can be functionally invoked here. Ray followed a cinematic style that, as per his own writings, derived from postwar developmentalist-humanist traditions of the west, not just Italian neo-realism, but also New Deal Hollywood<sup>102</sup>. Much felicitated, much awarded, and much admired, he remains, to this day, arguably the most internationally recognizable *auteur* figure in Indian cinema. Ghatak on the other hand, assembled a unique and marvelously eccentric cinematic style, drawing from indigenous mythic traditions, folklore, and communal expressive forms that were forged with Jungian notions of collective unconscious

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<sup>102</sup> Ray worked with Jean Renoir when he was shooting The River in Calcutta during the late forties. His aesthetic affinities with the Italian neo-realists are well documented. He was also an avowed admirer of Billy Wilder and John Ford.

and memory<sup>103</sup>. He has largely been ignored by the west. The polarization of Ray and Ghatak in critical evaluations of Indian cinema seems to be marked out along a set of concerns about the efficacy of a nerveless anthropologism of cinematic documentation on the one hand (bereft of revolutionary aspirations and frequently lapsing into angelic ironies, feeble play, or humanist lament) and the search for a Brechtian model of the ‘fighting popular’ on the other. Within the auspices of ‘Alternative’ Indian cinemas, this critical diagram of course extends beyond the individual figures of Ray and Ghatak to the works of their ‘disciples’ and ‘followers’ as it were, like Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihalini (who are said to have inherited the lyrical humanist model of Ray and transformed it into a statist developmentalist realism in the seventies) and Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahni (who are direct students of Ghatak and are said to have kept alive an experimental avant-gardist vein identified with him). The point here, however, is not to launch an aesthetic-political evaluation of this Ray-Ghatak dialectic and gauge exactly the degrees to which their works conform to or retract from each of these poles, but to visit this body of discourse and look for certain regularities of conceptual utterance. In other words, one can endeavor to understand the weight of different values proposed, appreciate discursive densities and orientations, and appreciate larger, international affinities of signs and systems invoked in order to draw up a critical genealogy of ideas concerning modern Indian cinema.

In an essay titled “Satyajit Ray, Ray Films, and Ray Movie”, Ashish Rajadhyaksha argues that the ‘neo-realist’ style adopted by Ray in his celebrated films (the *Apu* trilogy in particular) forwarded a universality of humanism on one hand, and an ideological defense of Nehruvian modernization in the Indian milieu on the other. Ray’s intervention, in the historical immediacy of the completion first five year plan of the new republic in 1955, is seen by Rajadhyaksha to be part of an overall cultural-political project toward an

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<sup>103</sup> See Biswas, “Her Mother’s Son: Kinship and History in Ritwik Ghatak” (2004). See also Bellour, “The Film We Accompany” (2004), Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Amrit Gangar ed. Ghatak: Arguments/Stories (Bombay: Screen Unit, 1987), and Ashish Rajadhyaksha’s book length study Ritwik Ghatak: A Return to the Epic (Bombay: Screen Unit, 1982) for more critical elaborations on Ghatak’s work. Some of Ghatak’s own writings on film and culture are compiled in Ritwik Ghatak, Rows and Rows of Fences (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2000).



ontological transformation of values. That is, it is inexorably linked to a grand schema of re-coding the multifaceted iconic and symbolic tendencies of the Indian milieu into the geometrical, propositional and statistical knowledge modules of the governmentalist state. Realism in Ray is thus conceived by Rajadhyaksha along the lines of a classic bourgeois hegemony, as an overarching ‘panther dialect’ that aspires to transcode a sea of expressions into a constitutive language of national-statal being<sup>104</sup>. Rajadhyaksha notes that this was also the period during which Nehru invited the Italian *auteur* Roberto Rossellini to make a film on India, and the celebrated French architect Le Corbusier to design the city of Chandigarh as a benchmark for new age urbanization. Ray’s realism is seen by him to be the model that adequately met the demands for a realist pedagogical cinema for the nation state, as expressed by the 1951 report of the government nominated S.K. Patil inquiry committee on the conditions of the film industry in India. For Rajadhyaksha, the political problem with this realist project does not lie in whether and to what extent it allowed for a ‘true’ look into the abject third world conditions, but in the manner in which it partook in an overall modernist-epistemological re-coding of desires, cultures, becomings, ideologies, and laboring processes. Calling this cinematic format the ‘Ray movie’, Rajadhyaksha says that it was the one that was mobilized in later decades by filmmakers like Shyam Benegal (in films like Nishant/The Signal (1975) and Manthan/The Churning (1976)) to give birth to an emphatic realism of ‘development,’ concerning a set of immediate statist pragmatics of administration, bureaucracy, rural reform, and governance<sup>105</sup>.

What can be derived from Rajadhyaksha’s exposition is an abstract diagram of the Ray movie as a particular instantiation of modern power/knowledge. The ‘Ray movie’ as such is historically located by him in a national milieu in which the legal order’s hegemony is not naturalized, but in a process of perpetual constitution amidst challenges of other powers. The formal apparatus of ostensibly detached, rational observation inaugurated in the heraldic moment of 1955 in Pather Panchali thus actually ushers in a secret onto-theology of liberal humanism that increasingly begins to ring strident tones of moral outrage as the

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<sup>104</sup> The echo is to Dante’s project in Eloquence of the Vernacular here. For an illuminating contemporary exposition of this text see chapter two of Terry Cochran, Twilight of the Literary (2001).

<sup>105</sup> These films were largely funded by state institutions like the Film Finance Corporation and NFDC

Nehruvian project of revision and reformation runs aground. “After Mahanagar Ray started adopting a more and more formulaic character (or event) that, at a certain point in the film, injected a virtual social cancer into its comfortably naturalist world. In Seemabadhdha (1971), news of the rejected consignment from the hero’s company leads to a sequence of top angle shots and fast cutting, on one occasion even a long zoom into the telephone wire that connects the hero with his corrupt personnel manager” (“Ray Movie, 15). The Ray diagram, for Rajadhyaksha, becomes visible for the first time as an agrarian-naturalistic assemblage of the village Nishchindipur-in-camera, in which the cinematic milieu is a degree zero of the historical. It is within the auspices of this cinematic that film itself, as a conceptual category, can be engrafted onto the immanent movements on the screen as the humanizing eye that provides a pure, untainted and undisturbed perception of a singular dynamic of history. It is thus in this assemblage that statements can claim absolute authority over visibilities, and realism can conceal its own “subterfuge” – the fact that it is actually “a means of weighing certain kinds of symbols of the contemporary with certain kinds of [bourgeois] desires and apprehensions” (“Ray Movie” 12). As a result, the symbolic, in such a frame of reality, becomes one with nature itself; the cinematic here can propose ‘symbols’ (like the train darting through the countryside as an emblem of the incoming modern) as unmediated meanings emanating from a unique sky of becoming, without announcing the discursive conditions in which the particular relations of symbolism are made possible in the first place.

This diagram of realism, that combines the camera in a splendid historical repose with a primordial innocence and inertia of the land (poverty, the diurnal fatalism of death that claims Apu’s sister Durga), becomes de-territorialized as soon as it enters the city, as, according to Rajadhyaksha, it happens in Mahanagar/The Great City’s contemporary urban milieu. Removed from the site of its pastoral naissance, the realist diagram inevitably generates a symbolic cinema of moralism precisely because the erstwhile pristine symbol enters the messy gravitational field of the ‘historical’ here. The symbol in this case has to declare the conditions in which it has been made possible because it can emerge only after a navigation of the city in ruins, marked by scary signs of missing moral voluntarism (corruption), avarice (the dream sequence in Nayak/The Hero in which the protagonist

drowns in a quicksand of money), and dire inequality. A cinema of the *anthropos* thus turns increasingly moralistic and vituperative in an urban environment where the constitution of the human subject is still missing. In such moments, a formal apparatus of realist cinema is reduced to an outraged witnessing act, when it sees the historical mise-en-scène as a relentless destroying of its own mythic ontology.

For Rajadhyaksha, the diagram of the Ray movie becomes figurable exactly at that historical juncture, when it passes from an idealistic impulse of Kantian voluntarism to that of an emphatic commandeering mode of the state. “The bourgeoisie that had ‘come of age’ with the Discovery of India now demanded an increasingly fascist state intervention, leading to the Emergency (1975)” (15). It was during this tumultuous period of the seventies that despite Ray’s own strong and unqualified denunciations of the emergency itself that the model of a new statist cinema coincided almost punctually with the aesthetic diagram of the Ray film. “The Film finance Corporation for instance was instructed by a parliamentary commission to only fund films that demonstrated ‘1. Human interest in story; 2. Indianness in theme and approach; 3. Characters with whom the audience can identify; 4. Dramatic content’” (“Ray Movie” 16). Rajadhyaksha suggests that this outline, which guided state censorship as well as sponsorship during the Emergency years, matched well with a normative parabasis that could be abstracted from Ray’s critique of the experiments in the ‘New’ cinema movement<sup>106</sup>. The resultant abstract diagram of the Ray Movie is one that combines an ontology of humanistic progress and a belief in representable ‘truths’ and ‘reality’ with a violent formalism of the state. It is an already regulated plane of power/knowledge -- a stratum of sovereign urban middle class common sense that transcends the individual ideological proclivities of Ray himself. An appreciation of this undeniably important critical diagram of realism and its historical career in the Indian cinematic context can of course take place without the more banal question: did Ray ever make a Ray movie himself?

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<sup>106</sup> See for instance Ray’s readings of Kumar Shahni and Mani Kaul’s work in “An Indian New Wave?” and “Four and a Quarter” in Our Films, Their Films.

Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, in talking about the ‘memory game’ sequence in Ray’s other film Aranyer Din Ratri/Days and Nights in the Forest (1970), casts it as an instance of a denotative cinema that always speaks in the present tense<sup>107</sup>. This, according to him, leads to what Barthes would call the naturalization of the cultural (“Ray’s Memory Game” 27). The realist film maker thus becomes a jester precisely because he has abjured the whole. The ritual of the memory game is played among the tourists in the forest at a heightened moment of intrigue, when a simmering body of tensions has already been formed and poses the danger of exploding bourgeois decorum and spilling out into the open. It indeed constitutes a moment of realism, but one in which the text is reinvented as a pure, immanent surface of ‘texturous’ play, absolved of the turbulent depths of a petrifying forest now being toured by denizens of the technocratic city. What the realism of play glosses over is a historical inequity of this encounter. Arriving at this crucial juncture, the memory game, according to Bandyopadhyay, is that which *habituates* the passional, reins it within a loop of repetition and makes memory itself amnesiac. This process of naturalization reveals its inevitable historical bond -- a “blending into” -- with a moralism of the humanistic tradition. The latter movement is consolidated in the film in the form of a gentle rebuke from Rini, the principal female protagonist. The visitors in the forest (precisely that space which is an ‘outside’ to the civilization of Vietnam, the Maoist Naxalbari movement, and the generally turbulent Calcutta of the sixties) can thus utter the names Marx, Tagore, or Kennedy in their ‘play’, only after evacuating these signs from the morally unbearable weight of historical remembrance. The play is thus precisely that ritual of urbanity that streamlines the myriad ‘geo-televisual’ pressures of such invocations into a regulated concert of an unchanging ‘self’. That is, a self that refuses to expose itself to names and visions of change and conflict in a rapidly changing world outside the home. Hence, for Bandyopadhyay, the problem with this form of documentation lies in its nihilistic abdication on part of an urban middle class (a switching off of consciousness) of a historical responsibility towards social transformation. His complaint comes close to that of an ‘incomplete’ *voluntaristic* anthropologization of the subject (the curse that, in differential degrees, invests both, the educated urban tourists as well as the tribal people of the forest, precluding both parties from

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<sup>107</sup> See Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, “Ray’s Memory Game” (2001).

the sphere of a Kantian cosmopolitan citizenship) who is finally unable to take stock of the historical project of the modern at hand.

The diagram of realism that Bandyopadhyay unfolds in Aranyer Din Ratri is one in which the subjective takeover of the *mise-en-scène* by a worldly camera vision (that of course is part of a grander Hegelian dream of a complete humanization of nature) remains incomplete. It refuses to embellish and inflect all bodies, memories, and events with the irresistible urge of a historical beckoning. Instead of that, the subjective machinery withdraws into a zone of decorative play and lapses into an aphasic and stultifying historical silence that is laced by a verbal architecture of pure information that blocks out the primordial space of the forest. What should have been a Lukacian attempt toward a self-conscious enunciation of the whole is retracted and congealed into a moralism of conjugal interiority. Rini loses the memory game on purpose when the yuppie corporate executive Ashim begins to feel disconcerted at the prospect of being defeated by a woman. Later, in private, she cites all the names correctly to Ashim to shame him for his male egoism. The moment of remonstrance is also that of consolidating the coupling pact that would be pursued on returning to the city. After this sobering lesson Rini gives Ashim her phone number on a 'symbolic' promissory note, in the absence of any other sheet of paper. The carrying home of the moral is also a retirement to the city as a familial space sheltered from possible guilt that may arise from a 'conscious' acceptance of the erotics and phenomena of the forest as historical: the sexuality of the tribal women, the renting of a state bungalow through bribery, and the woods themselves as an alluring yet anxiety ridden figuration of an 'outside' to a middle class sense of being, as a pure space of animism, alcoholism, and ritual play. The failure of realism lies in a cinematic that inducts the forest as a plethora of signs into an economized 'mystic writing pad' of the urban, educated 'subjective psyche', a 'passing through' that is accomplished as soon as memory is rendered amnesiac. The moral rebuke of humanism is rendered acceptable only when the forest, as a cinematic formation, is revealed to be nothing more than a repository of homely fears and carnivalesque adventures. Since it is always the city that besieges the forest through a subjective enterprise that seeks to engulf and interiorize the world itself, the order of discourse is left intact. Bandyopadhyay points out that this is underlined in the film through the famous adage

quoted by one of the characters: “Foresters are beautiful in forests; children in mother’s arms” (“Memory Game” 15).

Unlike Rajadhyaksha’s critique that was based on an ontological question of form (one that condemns a humanist realism for its inevitable alliances with the career of the modern state and a supplementary cultural dominance of the bourgeoisie), Bandyopadhyay’s elaboration charts a diagram of realism in which the formal cognitive-representative modes of cinema are categorically inscribed by a psychic economy of a class subject withdrawn from the world historical. This critical model however, in the last instance, views cinematic realism as essentially a cognitive phenomenological machinery of an *integrated* humanoid consciousness, perhaps potentially that of a revolutionary class rather than the bourgeois individual. Cinema can thus be only in a dualistic relationship with the world – a subject-object reflective interface -- in which the arrival of information (Kennedy, Gandhi, Tagore) without a mediation of the subjective diagram (which must necessarily aspire towards totality) creates a profound crisis. It reveals a ‘gap in the symbolic’ which can be filled only by laughter and gaming, thus demonstrating the limits of the bourgeois constitution. But furthermore, this dualistic parabasis from which Bandyopadhyay’s own critique is launched also reinstates the inevitable necessity for a canopy of subjectivity, without which there might be an absolute reversal of civilizational fortunes, by which the forest itself -- as pure matter, energy, animism, and a gargantuan body of originary impulses – threatens to invade the city. The question that can be left pending for the moment pertains to whether a political understanding of realism is possible without resorting, in the last instance, to a constitutive phenomenology of the subject.

Ravi Vasudevan forwards a different understanding of the Ray moment in his essay "Nationhood, Authenticity and Realism in Indian Cinema: the Double Take of Modernism in the Work of Satyajit Ray." In line with Geeta Kapur’s identification of three lynchpins of an anti-colonial discourse of Indian aesthetics -- an aristocratic folk paradigm emerging from the romanticism of Tagore and the Santiniketan artists, the canonical, craft aesthetic of Ananda Coomaraswamy, and the artisanal base of Gandhian ideology -- Vasudevan suggests that Ray combined the influences of the first with other modern traditions of the

novel and cinema. The amalgam was then qualified and shifted to a middle class sense of conscience and destiny that was intimately tied to modern nationhood. What Ray gave rise to, in the process, was a *destinying* narrative that was capable of critically meditating on both, its ontological-universalist moorings in the European traditions, as well as the tragic suppression of a former, evanescent self of difference. The result is thus an often critically charged modernist, humanist *lyricism* that is capable of setting up its own wistful dissonances with and romantic blockades of affect against a positivist industrial spirit of the age. This, for Vasudevan, is an artistic ‘double take’ that, at its best, is capable of a profound modernist retrospection, a perpetually ‘pending’ morality of thought, rather than the aggressive moralism of Ray’s last films.

The memorable train scene from Pather Panchali – the first film of Ray’s celebrated trilogy based on the life of Apu, a poor Brahmin boy who grows up in a village in Bengal– has been read by many as the arch allegorical celebration of the entry of the industrial modern into the primitive agrarian landscape. In this segment Apu and his sister Durga go a little distance from the village to see a train pass by for the first time. Vasudevan points out that the scene harbors a ‘dissembling naturalism’ by which a realist formal equipoise is actually displaced by a series of rude cut aways and a disconcerting swish pan. Cinematic affects are concentrated and dispensed in line with awestruck character perspectives and disruptive emotions (Durga trips and falls while running and is never able to see the train go by) rather than a consolidated mise-en-scène of a momentous ushering in of history. The editorial intelligence in this case is thus not that of a vanishing mediator, in which camera angles and movements, and the dynamism of altering shots and perspectives are *subjectivized* to approximate a dominant anthropocentric point-of-view. In Vasudevan’s reading, the milieu of Pather Panchali presents a symbolically endowed landscape (that comes from a camera violently at unease with its setting) rather than a positive industrial phenomenology of development that can be seen, for instance, in the Nehruvian Films Division documentaries by Sukhdev (62). When the train appears again in Aparajito/The Unvanquished (1956), the second film of the trilogy, it is a moment of profound pathos because Durga has already passed away. The train here is a vehicle for refugees that takes the family, now deracinated from their ancestral village, along an uncertain journey towards the future. Vasudevan

therefore reads the filmic account of Apu in terms of a mise-en-abyme rather than an integrated mise-en-scène; the great coming into being is never really that of the citizen. The lyrical expressivity of Ray's style is what can be called a musical *de-territorialization*, an affective questioning and suspension of certain core postulates of bourgeois becoming. In Apur Sansar/The World of Apu (1959), the third film of the trilogy, Apu scatters the pages of his novel, his own *bildungsroman*, before taking *Sannyas* or a renunciation of the world. For Vasudevan, such destinyings perpetually remain within the ambit of what Sudipto Kaviraj, in his transposition of the Hegelian term in the modern Indian nationalist context, has called "Unhappy Consciousness" (Kaviraj, 1995). Here the movement of modernity is paused and critically arrested in the tragic, lyrical, and wistful spaces that open up between the inside and outside, or the home and the world. Vasudevan proposes that the cinema of narrative integration that Ray has been associated with has always been combined with a *cinema of attractions* (as it is apparent in the montage sequences that close his two other films – Charulata (1964) and Aranyer Din Ratri (1970) ("Double Take" 72-73). In the latter film, the climactic montage that intercuts with the developing intrigue between the three sets of characters with a tribal dance is a filmic device that disturbs a punctual coming together of a moral horizon with the dance of bodies as well as a bodily weltering of an inhuman cinematic. If one calls this a power of affect, one can do so only by denying a traditional phenomenology of Cartesian humanism that privileges the mind over the body. Affect is thus an intelligence of the body, that, when described in words or propositions, becomes a "copy in sound of a nerve stimulus"<sup>108</sup>. A critical understanding of affect, as Deleuze has suggested, involves a radical parallelism between the mind and the body, instead of a normative according of superior status to the former. An intellectual recognition of lyricism, pathos, or attraction in the classic realist narrative format of Ray is thus a momentary acknowledgement of a cinematic body beyond the imperial scope of a subjective horizon. It is the registering of a precise moment when the body offers us a glimpse of its unremitted *body-ness* outside the linguistic prison house of a universalizing anthropomorphic soul. In Vasudevan's reading therefore, the lyrical naturalistic expressive powers emerge when the

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<sup>108</sup> Cited in Cochran (2001, 240). In his elaboration of the figural, "Words are not initially products of a masterful consciousness but are born out of interactions and result from nerve stimuli, out of the purview of a controlling human mind".



camera, in its 'double consciousness,' is no longer attuned to the world. The realist-phenomenological camera instead forwards a relentless battle between an enveloping, imperial subjective perspectivism and bodies of errant signs, passions, expressions and musicality. The latter are often not enclosed into the curve of the subjective statement or psychoanalytic-ideological moorings of a stable architecture of perceptions. Such affective powers are ones that remove the film Aranyer Din Ratri from the positive integrity of the Ray movie as a critical concept. The 'body' therefore, as opposed to agent or persona or protagonist, is that volume of human or inhuman qualities which is able to fork the singular dispensation of the subjective horizon.

Speaking in a similar vein, Moinak Biswas points out that a persistent lyrical element in Panther Panchali subverts (with the trope of play), an inherently anthropological drive of the classical film apparatus. Lyricism, he says, is a familiar aspect of Ray's cinema that "comes to gain its own relative autonomy within the realist totality. Instead of looking upon lyricism as a mode of extending the individual realm of feelings to the environment, one can see how, in relation to the sensible space, it can function as a *mark of life independent of the individual*"<sup>109</sup> (Historical Realism 166). Growth, in terms of the cinematic *bildung* of Apu, is accompanied by a radical feminization of space, and the evocation of non-directional energies of affection, like the *Karuna rasa*, that disrupt the punctual unfolding of a modernizing self-consciousness<sup>110</sup>. The latter concept requires an attentive elaboration, since it must not be confused with sentimentality in the European bourgeois novelistic traditions of the enlightenment. According to Biswas, a poignant moment in which *Karuna Rasa* is inserted into the phenomenological framework of realist narration, as a 'bodily' volume of the passional, comes on the eve of Apu's return to Calcutta after a short return to the village Nischindipur to visit his now widowed mother Sarbojaya. Apu, now a young student in the big city, is full of the wonders of Calcutta; he fails to notice his mother's muted and feeble attempts to draw attention to her illness. He goes to sleep, telling his mother that she has to

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<sup>109</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>110</sup> See Biswas, Historical Realism: Modes of Modernity in Indian Cinema, 171-187. See also Darius Cooper, The Cinema of Satyajit Ray, Between Tradition and Modernity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 15-74 for a recent attempt to read the Apu trilogy in terms of Rasa Theory.

wake him up in time to catch a train. The perennial sadness of Sarbojaya -- that comes from a longing for her now distant son, and her own premonition of death -- is translated momentarily to a profound 'shock' when she touches the bare body of her grown up son. Biswas underlines the dramatic emphasis here: "she touches him, cut to an empty frame by the door, her figure recedes back into the frame. Apu gets up and chides her for failing to wake him up." (Historical Realism 178).

The evocation of *Karuna Rasa* is thus at that interstice between the coldness and cruelty of a son already formally committed to a 'universal' *bildung* of the citizen and the inscrutable touch of the moribund and lonely mother. A realist historical assessment of the situation stipulates that the growing up of the former (and its attendant imperatives of education, worldliness, and production) is also inevitably a growing away from the latter. The unbearably candid contact between the two worlds that sparks this moment is of an inscrutable physicality that is not amenable to readily available psychosexual hermeneutics of Oedipalization, or the 'suspicion' thereof. According to Biswas, "An 'excess' of the kinship bond is already suggested here in the action, [in which] sexuality overlaps with dimensions of the unknown within that bond" (178). *Karuna Rasa* is thus created as a diffuse environ of affects between the tragically contracted social dimension and the inner world of the mother and son. It is an unclaimed body of passions that is at once cruel and wistful, and is not under the control of either tradition's name giving powers, nor socio-historical diagnoses – the call of the age that allows Apu to abandon his ancestral occupation of priesthood and go to get a modern education in the city, or as Biswas suggests, the fact that Sarbojaya's death could have been caused by malnutrition and lack of medical care.

It is precisely in this realm of a critical, affective disruption of becoming that Biswas finds a common ground of negotiations between the wistful romanticism of Ray and the epic melodramatic stagings of multiple selves in Ghatak's work. That is, in the pronounced animism, the primordialism of nature, and in the epic trope of non-sexual incest (as that which simply oversteps the non-constituted symbolic, in an expansive scenario of exile devoid of civil institutions) that abound in the latter's oeuvre. The latter becomes cinematically manifest in Ghatak's Subarnarekha (1962) precisely at the moment when the

epic cosmology of the film collides frontally with the fatal ‘reality’ of a historical situation that encumbers a family after the Partition of 1947 and the deracinating mass movements in its aftermath. This happens when the old, dejected, and suicidal protagonist Ishwar enters a brothel after a night of saturnalia, only to be ushered into the room of his sister Seeta, from whom he had been separated by necessities of survival and caste bigotry. The resultant shock is that of a grotesque transformation, by which the love between brother and sister, that had been mythically endowed by memories of lost community, kinship, and the pain of a historical rootlessness, suffers an abject sexual *literalization* in the realm of the banal. As Kumar Shahni and Willemen and Rajadhyaksha have noted, the profound aspect of such a collision and irreparable parting of worlds is registered by a sudden escalation of cinematic language to highly conventionalized codes of melodrama<sup>111</sup>. The epic love between brother and sister, which groundlessly sustains a utopian temporality (underlined in the film as a running leitmotif of a promised house beside the river Subarnarekha), thus becomes illuminated more than ever at the exact moment of its abomination, when chance and the erratic shocks of the historical make it enter the profane and genital economies of the political and the sexual. This too can be considered to be a cinematic instantiation of *Karuna rasa*.

### **Rasa as a Non-subjective Aesthetics**

In Biswas’s reading of Ray and Ghatak a conceptual force of the ‘Rasa’ curves into a realist format and an epic melodramatic dispensation of cinema. But if *Karuna rasa* can be recognized as a copy in sound of a nerve stimulus, how can it be *translated* into a phenomenological language of subjective recognition? Why exactly is it not merely ‘sentimentality’? What is the nature of the aesthetic universe that is broached here? What might it have to do with the disassembling lyricism that Vasudevan notices in the work of an avowed realist humanist like Ray? If these postulates point to an unaccounted for ‘outside’ to the agon filled, but supposedly indispensable critical apparatus of classical realism, what could be the nature of such a thought of the outside? Can Rasa be developed as a critical

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<sup>111</sup> See Shahni “Dossier” (1986) and Willemen and Rajadhyaksha Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema (1999): 375.

concept that can *enfigure* this thought of the outside without bringing in a totalizing claim of its own? The status of Rasa theory in relation to popular Indian cinema has been a very contentious one, although in the ‘vernacular’ dispensations of these films, it very much exists as a ready at hand semiotic environment. Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel have suggested that the occasional critical imports of this aesthetic model of classical courtly literature in Sanskrit to modern institutions of urban public culture (of which cinema is a part) that germinated in the nineteenth century remain “unconvincing” (Cinema India 28). Sumita S. Chakravarty’s astute archaeological understanding of Indian cinematic realisms is however free from such an overarching subjective schema of judgment, one that would arbitrate according to an infallible coda of ‘conviction’. Noting that cinema has only been “partially integrated into notions of an Indian visual aesthetic” (National Identity in Popular Indian Cinema 29), Chakravarty outlines a complex realist impulse that oscillates not only between an Aristotelian mimesis and a Lukacian elevation of consciousness, but is also pregnant with what she, following Ananda Coomaraswamy, calls a ‘Hindu world view.’ In this metaphysical dispensation, the phenomenal universe becomes “the reflection of reality in the mirror of illusion” (82). It is because of this myriad assembling potentia of expressive powers and ontologies that a turn of the republic realist *auteur* like Bimal Roy can append a global apparatus of realist representation (including its socialist and classical principles) to the Vedic metaphysical postulate of *atmanam bidhdhi* and to Rasa aesthetics<sup>112</sup>.

A critical understanding of Indian cinematic instances in the light of Rasa aesthetics can take place only when thinking proceeds without holistic imperatives of generating stable subjective structures of feeling or conviction. Vijay Mishra has situated Rasa as a spectrum of affects between the dual afflictions of Goethe’s Werther: *Weltschmerz* (unease with the world) and *Ichschmerz* (unease with the self). In his understanding, Rasa emerges precisely as that body of expressive powers that is not punctually commanded by given diagrams of either a home-in-the-world or a self (Bollywood Cinema 25). The relationship is also by no means a case of categorical *difference* in terms of sealed off, self sustained notions of culture. Rather, the interaction between postulates of Rasa and modern architectures of perception

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<sup>112</sup> Cited in Sumita S. Chakravarty, National Identity, 87-88.

are *dividual* ones of intersection, semiotic osmosis, and transvaluation. Rasa would be pertinent in the discursive regimes of Indian film (or any other nationalist cinema) as only one of the many interacting powers of expression in the world that enter and exit from worldly multiplicities of the cinematic. It can be invoked only as a discontinuous and multilayered project of memory and aesthetics – an unclosed tracing of thought more than a consistent picture of the Indian self. This is indeed what makes Rasa not a parochial postulate, but part of a possible cinematic of globality that in itself is an opening out of an anthropocentric world view of post enlightenment Europe.

It must be understood that we are attaching the concept of Rasa to a body of affections that corrode the realist-narrativising cinematic paradigm of the west in a non-categorical manner. That is, Rasa in this case is not invoked as part of a self enclosed, total cosmos of Indianhood that is distinguished from others, but as one of many possible names in the world to acknowledge the pressures of ‘nerve stimuli’ unaccounted for by a normative constitution of the modern. Rasa, in this sense, is not a positive postulate of tradition, but a pure force of difference -- an ‘unthought’ of the very modern that perpetually attempts to invent tradition in its own image. Rasa, in this sense, is thus a tracing of errant energy, of signs taken as wonders that are not ‘external excesses’ to the modern constitution, but are eruptive and obstinate singularities that reside in the very ruins of such a constitution. Rasa is therefore not a positing of essence lost due to the violence of colonial translation, but a figuration of that very violence. This is precisely why it is a postulate of globality whose critical pertinence derives, amongst other things, from the very differential of power that forbids its planetary application; that is, to the very order of discourse and structures of ‘subjective feeling’ that foreclose its ‘impertinent’ application to Flaubert or Balzac for instance. It is this dual schema of the modern -- that temporally (no longer valid in our time) and spatially (it has no ontological bearing in the life of the city) distances Rasa from the sphere of the subject, and at once reclaims it as a deontologized carcass for ethnographic study, or as decorative marker of national ‘tradition’ – that makes Rasa *geo-televisual* to modern institutions of the ‘Indian’ self. This is precisely why one can propose a study of Rasa in relation to Indian cinema without installing a self same ‘home’. Just as in the case of Ray’s Apu or Ishwar, the unfortunate protagonist of Ghatak’s Subarnarekha, the

emotional intelligence of Rasa becomes immanent at the very moment of exile, when all dreams of finding a home are extinguished.

There is however another reason why Rasa, as a non-subjective aesthetic schema, could be pertinent to this project about geo-televisuality and contemporary Indian cinema. An elaboration of Rasa aesthetics as such would not provide an infallible scientific hermeneutic for interpreting truth, but would simply accord this project with a figuration of an intellectual process in which the individual is no longer at the center. This reckoning is of utmost political importance in our times, in which power is increasingly exercised not through disciplinary protocols of the pedagogic nation-state with the subject in the spotlight, but through a diffuse environment of controlling and re-channelizing myriad emotional intelligences. In other words, not in the way of creating enclosures and walled institutions of study, but in the manner of concentrating and redirecting variables of terror, investment, militarization, and information in a massified plane of thought in the world. A brief elaboration of Rasa could thus be one among many possible studies of how an entire multitude of affective processes and potentia are never the properties of the state; the challenge for the latter, as a major terminal of sovereign power, lies in finding ways to telescope these affections toward itself. That is, it could provide a lens for comprehending, to a certain extent, the powers of the irrational -- how propositional contradictions can often be informatized into constitutive aspects of kingship, how terror and fear of underdevelopment and mythic diagrams of godhead and technology can merge in Shankar's Nayak, or how an electronic animation of the sky can bring back the wisdom of the Bhagwad Gita and reinvent the militant devotee on earth in an age of retreating gods in Lakhiya's Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost. The study of Rasa thus must always already involve studies of other diagrams -- of power, of production of social life, and of cinema -- in order to foster a working notion of how exactly sovereignty, apart from other things, also becomes an aesthetic project, how informatics becomes one of the dominant myths of our times, and how we grow to love or hate the state.

The Natyasastra, attributed to a legendary Bharatamuni<sup>113</sup> and composed sometime between the first and fourth centuries of the common era, can be considered to be the earliest extant work on Rasa poetics. This tradition of aesthetics developed over the centuries through later works like Bhamaha's Kavyalamkara (seventh century), Dandin's Kavyadarsa (eighth century), Dhvanyaloka by Anandavardhana (ninth century), and two significant commentaries on Natyasastra and Dhvanyaloka by Avinavagupta<sup>114</sup>. By the end of the eleventh century there were two other significant schools, founded by Kuntaka and Ksemendra, a student of Avinavagupta. According to Patnaik, later works by scholars like Viswanatha, Mammata, and Jagannatha enriched the tradition without introducing any paradigmatic shifts. The complexities and varied philosophical moorings of these works are too formidable to be exhaustively analyzed within the scope of this argument. What can however be broached is Rasa as a critical tracing of thought that can amount to a questioning of a phenomenological normativity of the filmic apparatus -- one that could be brought into a zone of critical proximity of what has been elaborated as a determinate abstraction of the 'Ray Movie'.

Bharata describes eight major emotions or *Sthayin Bhavas* and thirty three accessory feelings that are called *Sancari* or *Vyabhicari Bhavas* in the sixth chapter of his celebrated treatise Natyasastra. A correspondence between the *Sthayin Bhavas* -- which are pleasure or delight (*Rati*), laughter or humor (*Hasa*), sorrow or pain (*Soka*), anger (*Krodha*), heroism or courage (*Utsaha*), fear (*Bhaya*), disgust (*Jugupsa*), and wonder (*Vismaya*) -- and various human and inhuman energies of the world produces the eight primary rhetorical powers or Rasas: erotic (*Sringara*), comic (*Hasya*), pathetic or compassionate (*Karuna*), furious (*Rudra*), heroic or valorous (*Bhayanaka*), the odious (*Bibhatsa*), and marvelous (*Adbhuta*). But if this is a psychologism of experience, it is so at a cosmic level, beyond the finite eschatology and orbit of experience that defines the modern individual subject. If Rasa is the awakening of various innate states that exist in the mind as latent expressions, these latter essences can be

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<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the last chapter of the Natyasastra, entitled "Descent of Drama on Earth" establishes theater as a form of worship ordained by the gods. Bharata himself is celestial. It is his sons who descend to earth, cohabit with mortal women, and begin to propagate the exemplary artistic form of expressing devotion.

<sup>114</sup> See Priyadarshi Patnaik, Rasa in Aesthetics (1997) 4-7.

understood only as *Samskaras* or *Vasanas* – memories, proclivities, and desires that are derived from past familiarities of the eternally traveled, transmigrated soul. The ideal viewer of art is neither a passive spectator nor an imperial arbiter of meaning, but an active participant in an overall *occasioning* of *Rasa*. As Eliot Deutsch points out, *Rasa* is the process of perception itself; it is an event of intelligence in which the artwork, as the so called object, and the viewer as apparent subject, are only the loci or *asraya* (“Reflections on Some Aspects of the Theory of *Rasa*” 215). The former is thus not the cause but an instrument of gestation, while the latter can only partake in the occasioning by a ‘tasting’ of that which is already there. This is precisely why, as Edwin Gerow points out in relation to the later works of Avinavagupta, the coming together of the artwork and the *Sthayin Bhavas* or the eight major emotions is never a *causal* process that gives rise to *Rasa* as subjective response elicited by the objective splendor of aesthetic beauty. Rather “the *rasa* is what is really there, and has been there; but in ‘normal’ experience, it is determined by the accidents of our daily and personal awareness, rather than in and of itself. This ‘other’ realization is the peculiar capacity of the play, as instrument – but it creates nothing new – it simply reveals.”<sup>115</sup> The revelation is thus a compact of intelligences aligned to both the internal, as well as the external cosmos. It does not presume a Kantian a-priori interiorization of categories like time and space, as a necessary pre-condition of a transcendental unity of subjective apperception.

*Rasa* is thus occasioned by fortuitous alchemy of mind and matter, where the mind is not in a dualistic relationship with the latter, but is an incarnation of it. Patnaik points out that the conceptual origins of *Rasa* can be traced back to the Rig Veda, where it was used to mean ‘water’ (III.48.1), the ‘soma juice’ or the intoxicant of the gods (IX.63.13), and flavor (V.44.13) (Rasa in Aesthetics 16). The Atharva Veda deploys the word to mean “sap of the grain” (II.26.5) and ‘taste’ (III.13.15) (Patnaik, 17). Later, in the Upanishads the meaning of *Rasa* became more metaphysical and symbolic. Before the Natyasastra and the subsequent consolidation of the aesthetic tradition, the Ayurvedic science of medicine recognized six *rasas* as chief constituents in any medicine and *Rasayansastra* or chemistry also moved

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<sup>115</sup> Cited in Eliot Deutsch (2002) 225.



around the apex of mercury or *rasa* (Patnaik 18). An aesthetics of *Rasa* is therefore an abstract tracing of such biochemical processes of health, elemental interactions, flows, and principles of a cosmic balance of forces. After Natyasastra it becomes a cosmic dynamism that inheres in matter, memory, and determinants of time and space without being identifiable with any of these attributes. In Patnaik's understanding, "*rasa* is perceived in a process ('enter') which stretches to the edge where processes and products/objects disappear. Then there is a sudden leap into bliss" (Rasa in Aesthetics 22). He posits the event of 'entering' in a genealogical sense derived from the Kausitaki Brahmana Upanishad, as that momentous instant in which the "fragrance of Brahman", which is the One Being, enters the body (22).

While listing the fundamental *Rasas*, Bharatmuni declares that such postulates are not the product of human understanding or knowledge; it is none other than "the high-souled Druhina (*Brahma*) [that] proclaimed these eight rhetorical sentiments" ("On *Natya* and *Rasa*" 5). It is this same revelatory intelligence that, apart from the eight basic *rasas*, identified the thirty three *vyabhichari bhavas* or the nomadic, transient mental states as well. In the latter set, in addition to commonplace consciousness attributes like pride (*mada*), depression (*dainya*), or inconstancy (*capalata*), Bharata includes abnormal states like sleep and epilepsy (*apasmara*), dreaming (*suptam*), and madness and disease (*unmada*). The set of eight *sattvika* or psychosomatic conditions comprises of "paralysis (*stambha*), perspiration, horripilation, voice-breaking, tremor, change of colour (*vaivarnya*), tears, complete loss of consciousness or fainting (*pralaya*)" ("On *Natya* and *Rasa* 5). The eight *Sthayin bhavas*, the thirty three *vyabhicari bhavas*, and the eight *sattvikas* thus make a compendium of forty-nine affective states that do not presume an already there Cartesian primacy of the mind over the body. As immanent intelligence, *Rasa* is a cosmic process that curves across the feeling mind, the thinking body, as well as the manifold matter, ideas, and forms of the world. Its evocative and tasteful powers are derived from intermixes (*sankaras*), appearances (*abhasas*), and part-whole relationships (*angangibhavas*) pertaining to both diagrams of the self as ripple of the Brahman, as well as a cosmic multiplicity of created nature, phenomenal activity, and eventful artifice. The play is thus an exemplum only insofar as it is able to -- through artistic modalities of *angika* (use of the body), *sattvika* (use of emotions and sentiments), *vacika*

(language), and *aharya* (the external aspects of costume, stage, make up, lighting etc.) – illuminate the flow of Rasa as a perpetually there event that informs the universe.

### **From Santa Rasa to a Modernist Diagram of Monotheistic Devotion**

This immanent field of affections and energies that infect each other in errant ways would require a formidable harnessing mechanism to satisfy a pedagogic imperative of drama. Speaking about classical Indian aesthetics, Patnaik notes that “the rasa experience is a kind of delight that transcends ordinary levels of reality. It is thus that in such a state ego is effaced and a transcendence is achieved. Hence, morality, which is related to our day-to-day reality and to the ego (which does good or bad deeds), does not have a place in such an experience” (*Rasa in Aesthetics* 49). Hence, if the multiplicity of tastes in the world are to be claimed by a common ontological disposition and be dedicated to a comprehensive pointing toward Brahman as singular Being, it would indeed require a powerful re-coding technology to bridge, in the realms of life as well as language, the gap between the immanence of affective processes and the transcendent thought of the One. The entire gamut of adventitious goings on that lie between the poles of pure perception (*laukika*) and pure aesthesis (*alaukika*) would therefore have to be focalized and telescoped by another form of impelling and double articulation. This question becomes especially crucial when the metaphysics of Rasa are inscribed by a modernist diagram of religion, philosophy, and the state, primarily of Hegelian inspiration. How can, in other words, the manifold aesthetic pulses of the world that continually territorialize and de-territorialize forms of subjection be redirected toward an unassailable devotion towards the nation-state? Perhaps two nodal points in the long and complex history of Rasa aesthetics can be recalled here. They can be invoked only discontinuously, and not in line with an irresistible process of becoming, as figures of thought that are often commanded, recruited, and given direction by modern discourses of state and sovereignty.

It is often said that Avinavagupta, the Kashmiri *Shaivite* thinker of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, affected a sort of Kantian revolution in the terrain of Rasa thinking<sup>116</sup>. It was he who proposed, with an extraordinary logical rigor, a ninth primary rhetorical postulate – the *Santa Rasa* – in addition to the eight already described in the tradition. The literal meaning of *Santa* is ‘peaceful’. In Avinavagupta’s work *Santa* becomes a postulate of aesthetic equipoise -- a *rasa* that informs all others, since it is related to *atman* (soul) and *moksha* (that bliss which comes from true knowledge of the *Brahman*) (“On *Santarasa*: Aesthetic Equipoise” 62-66). It is thus that it can be said that “[one] should display the eight *rasas* in the places allotted to the eight gods. And in the centre he should display *santarasa* in the place of the supreme God (Siva)” (71). All other *rasas* like *utsaha* or *rati* thus becomes disparate modes of relish governed by a singular, infinitely resonating being, which “is like a very white thread that shines through the interstices of sparsely threaded jewels” (72). The Kantian revolution here was thus a universalizing move, by which the plurality of the *rasas*, like all other phenomena of the world, were to be oriented to a primal, all consuming impelling of *Brahman*. The latter however, can only be approximated in human thought through figural mediations of celestial bodies like Siva and the lesser gods without necessarily being identified with any of them. In the early Vedic thought, especially after the *Upanishads*, the *Brahman* is a non-anthropomorphic intelligence. This is why it can be argued that the *Santa rasa*, while being a state of meditative repose that continually informs and at the same time abstracts from the bodily and mental functions of varied tastes, is not a categorical attribute of human subjectivity. The devotion to the Idea in this case is thus neither amenable to a Kantian interiorization, nor to a positive idolization of a worldly power like the state. Avinavagupta says that the *sthayinbhava* or basic emotional state of *Santa* is knowledge of the truth that is indeed a knowledge of the Self (the knowledge of any object other than the Self being knowledge of worldly objects). However, the Self that is proposed here, is not the autonomous, reflective individual mind, but the *soul* that is finally able to, in a state of perfect equipoise of thought and humors, see itself as a well traveled, and eternally transmigrated distant ripple of the *Brahman* (“On *Santarasa*” 66). Knowledge

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<sup>116</sup> See G.N Devy’s Introductory note to Avinavagupta’s “On *Santarasa*: Aesthetic Equipoise” (2002) 61. See also Edwin Gerow, “*Rasa* as a Category of Literary Criticism” (1981) 235.

of the Self is thus not attained by the delineation of a Kantian architectonics of subjective faculties and their transcendental categories, but by the thought of the canvas of all projections and processes – the “(wall) in the form of the *atman* which is of an unchanging nature relative to them” (66).

The second signal moment in the varied scholarly terrain of Rasa aesthetics that would be pertinent to this ongoing discussion of Indian cinema and its aesthetic and conceptual moorings pertains to the inauguration of *Bhakti Rasa* as a concept, especially by the Vaishnavist thinkers of Bengal during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this mode of thinking, the panorama of experiential forms is devotionally compelled in the direction of an anthropomorphic god – the Krishna Bhagwad of the *Gita*. The principle text in text in this tradition is Rupa Goswami’s *Ujjvalanilamani*. According to Edwin Gerow, here “the aesthetic framework is used most clearly to explicate the religious experience of transport into Krsna’s presence” (“*Rasa* as a Category of Literary Criticism” 241). The two basic powers of this reconstitution would be a transcoding of all sentiments under the euphoric otherworldly trance of love or *Srngara rasa* and a concentrating of the myriad phenomenal scopes of Rasa to the “single event of Krsna’s life and loves. The divine play becomes the only play, and Krsna the only hero” (241). Hence, Goswami postulates that “Exceptionally wonderful supernatural powers, long-enduring worldly and heavenly pleasures, long and lasting experiences of *Mukti* as *Brahmasukha* (felicity derived from knowledge and realization of impersonal *Brahman*), and eternal and ever-progressive and supreme flow of transcendental felicity (from realization of the supreme Lord) are attainable by Bhakti in Lord Govinda (Krsna), who is the lord of all senses” (Rupa Goswami, “The *Bhaktirasa*” 97). In terms of art, it is only the devotee that can be the poet as well as the connoisseur. The radical powers of the *Bhakti* movement lay in the proposition that in relation to Krishna, all mortals, regardless of caste and creed, belong to a universal community of lovers and acolytes. But this situation is utterly transformed if a modernist discourse recasts Krishna as the divine entity that calls into being the permanent miracle of the state.

When the world is seen through the eyes of the *Bhakta*, it becomes a cosmic incarnate of only *Maya* or illusion that is nourished and maintained by the perpetual magic of the

beloved lord Vasudeva. When this metaphysical diagram of aesthetic love intersects with a diagram of cinema (which, like any other entity in the world, is also *Maya*), what is produced is a cosmic notion of the cinematic that declares all films to be fragments, moments, recallings, and repetitions of the single unfolding picture of the world as the *lilabhumi* (ground of the miracle) of Krishna. It is perhaps in this light that one can partially understand the powerful mythic impulse of Indian *nationalist* cinema. This ontology of *Bhakti*, that appends all errant energies of Rasa to the universality of *Lila* or miracle, is indeed that which allows for the important modernist transformation of cinematic institutions that Ashish Rajadhyaksha talks about. He notes that the shift from the devotional and reformist mythologicals of the first three decades of Indian cinema to a secular “All India Film” format of the social that came into its own in the forties under the studio tutelage of Filmstan and Bombay Talkies was made possible only by an extension of the ontology of the mythological to other genres<sup>117</sup>. The securing of an ideologically variegated middle class Hindu hegemony and a new cinematic pedagogy for the new republic demanded by the 1951 S. K. Patil Film Inquiry Committee therefore followed a complex schema. In this schema, the morphological features of realist representation merged with ontological pulls of already there mythic memories, in the process trying to by and large redirect the *Bhakti* of the acolyte towards the abstract figure of the nation as a compendium of Hindu-normative values, and sometimes towards the formal state. According to Rajadhyaksha, the secularization of the mythic forms involved a substitution of the icon with a narrative structure undertowed by the same mythic impelling. The cosmic, so called other worldly compelling of *Bhakti* thus gave rise to a cinematic ordering of statements and visibilities, faith and phenomena by which the devotion of the acolyte could be directed towards an adoration of the state.

This modernist double articulation of *Bhakti* thus involved a telescoping of devotional energies towards the God, the King (or the statal order) and the star as a hero seeking

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<sup>117</sup> See Ashish Rajadhyaksha, “The Epic Melodrama: Themes of Nationality in Indian Cinema” (1994). A more detailed discussion of this thesis comes later in this dissertation, in chapter 6. Rajadhyaksha’s other essays on early Indian cinema, like “The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology” (1987) and Neo-traditionalism: Film as Popular Art in India (1986) are also important to this discussion.

vendetta or reform. This overcoding process can be related to what Madhava Prasad has called the modern invention of tradition<sup>118</sup>. According to him, the so called traditional and modern poles in Indian cinema can be considered to be discursive formations emanating from the flux of two conflicting ideologies of modernity itself, “one corresponding to the conditions of capitalist development in the periphery and the other inspiring to reproduce the ‘ideal’ features of the primary capitalist states” (*Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 55). But perhaps this modern organization of discourse can be considered more as a special epistemic ordering of things rather than only a given-ness of consciousness and ideology. This is not to say that the latter two, as incarnations of intelligence, do not exist or are unimportant features, but that they operate with other productive components of intelligence in varying degrees of strengths and weaknesses. Both tradition and modernity are indeed categories of a modernist organization and production of knowledge, of which cinema is a part. But the question is what could be the basic features of such an ordering?

The Aesthetic diagram of Rasa (along with the elite tradition of Sanskrit poetics from which it derives) therefore becomes pertinent to a modern industrial diagram of cinema not because it is able to announce a wholesale paradigm of the Indian self, a concomitant, self sustaining project of memory, and a tradition thereof, but because under a peculiar productive dispensation of the modern, they acquire the powers to assemble with other such powers of the world. This can be understood without recourse to an imperial subjectivity of the modern (against whom the archaic subject of tradition fights a losing historical battle) as a personage that enunciates the world in a frame of totality. Bruno Latour has provided a framework in that direction. In his view, the peculiarity of the modern organization of ontologies, categories, and truths lies in the fact that the moderns have managed to effect a *functional* separation of the spheres of naturalization, that of socialization, and that of deconstruction. All three can have their epistemological privileges provided they remain sealed off from each other (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 5). “When the first speaks of naturalized phenomena, then societies, subjects, and all forms of discourse vanish. When the second speaks of fields of power, then science, technology, texts, and the contents of activities disappear. When the third speaks of truth effects, then to believe in the real

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<sup>118</sup> See Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film*, 54-55.

existence of brain neurons or power plays would betray enormous naiveté....Can one imagine a study that would treat the ozone hole as simultaneously naturalized, sociologized, and deconstructed?" (5-6). If this schema to a certain extent pertains to a diagram of civility, one can say that the modern constitution parcelizes Rasa into a state of naturalism or assigns it to an ethnographic disposition. It can thus be recognized as an aspect of (pre-modern) culture or *difference* thereof provided it does not enter the life of the city or its prevalent evaluating language. The emphatic entitlement of Rasa, as an attribute of dominant Indian culture in the Sanskritic lineage, is thus *categorically* confined to 'tradition' as a produced discourse of the modern. While accounting for Rasa as 'fact' of tradition, one is to exclude it from a scientific language of reality or a narrative language of becoming.

What is therefore denied to Rasa as a postulate in the modernist diagram is its ability to form networks with various sources of intelligence and its ability to seep through and infect several layers of political, scientific, sociological, or narrative discourse. As a trope of eastern aesthetics, it is therefore subject to certain laws of periodization and classification; it can never be seen to enter the scientific discourse of psychoanalysis for instance precisely because the modern constitution considers its orderings of knowledge as value neutral and separate from machinations of power. Rasa therefore becomes an attribute of 'natural history' that, within the auspices of the spirits' journey towards full self-consciousness, can be kept separate from contemporary processes of socialization. The categories 'east' and 'west' themselves belong to such an ordering, being at once geographical facts, anthropological sciences, socio-historical dispositions, and formations in language. The poets, who, by Freud's own admission, had said it all as far as the foundational psychodramas of the modern subject are concerned, were epistemologically gifted, in being participants in a unique European process of becoming human. Their observations could thus be abstracted, distilled and sublimated into universal structures of hard science, while the bards of the east had to go through further mediations – in the form of deconstruction, ethnographic de-coding, and archaeological analyses before finding a place in the archive in *translation*.

According to Latour, the modern process is a relentless one of hybridizations and purifications (We Have Never Been Modern 11)<sup>119</sup>. Nature in such a processing of knowledge is actually always factual, social, and narrated, although at every instance there is an effort launched to separate them into ensealed disciplinary parameters of the scientific, the sociological, and the fictional. Intelligence hybrids are always created between the three spheres, but they become immediate targets of analytical moves that aspire to break them into parts that can be safely ensconced into the folds of nature, society, and language. Hence, to summarize, two things make the modern critical process a peculiar one. First of all, it assigns a space for a creation of these hybrids precisely by the initial separation of the zones. Secondly, it incessantly purifies these hybrids through analysis, abstraction, and classification, assimilating their disassembled facts and phenomena, curiosities and observations, into fortified spheres of the nature that was always there, the society that was always unpredictable, and a discourse that is independent of both nature and society. The critical process in Latour's elaboration is, as a result, always a *subjective* process because it is the subject (the *we* in the title that aspire to be modern) that *pretends* that hybrids do not exist, and simultaneously launches *ad hoc* processes of purification as hybrids regularly manifest themselves. The subject entertains a fantasy of *totality* precisely because it perpetually envisions a situation in which there will no longer be hybrids as errant compacts of natural-social-linguistic intelligence. The Hegelian dream of a complete humanization of nature pertains to that point in history when latter will cease to yield inhuman intelligence that will call for further analysis and purification.

The powers of Rasa are seen to be marginal to a metropolitan aesthetics of cinema because of two reasons. First of all, unlike the Kantian paradigm for instance, they can contribute only *weakly* to what is purportedly a transcendental unity of apperception. This is because the postulates of Rasa combine the so called objectivity of the artwork, the presumed subjectivity of the mind with already announced *hybrids* of inhuman intelligence: the tasting and feeling body, the miraculous cosmos, and alchemy of natural elements. Rasa is thus a schema that does not fit well with a modern diagram because it has not foreclosed an

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<sup>119</sup> One can read Latour's positioning of 'hybridity' as a chemical process rather than an organic one in the Hegelian sense.



interaction of intelligence between the processes of an animated nature, multi-directional energies of the social, and narrations of truth. It is thus not under the imperial sway of the subjective economy that precludes the possibilities of contamination, and relentlessly wages a battle of purification when such disorders take place all the time. *Rasa* is ‘superstitious’ because unlike the modern subjective dispensation, it does not monopolize the rights of divination and accords intelligence to the ‘thinking’ body, as well as to inhuman forces of nature and temporality. Secondly, and due to these very reasons, a subjective, self conscious cinema of the modern can account for *Rasa* when it is already deconstructed, phenomenologically reduced to and classified as an intelligible category of ethnographic knowledge. *Rasa*, in that case becomes enframed as a quotation of de-ontologized ethnic belief, a decorative embellishment, or an attribute of the ceremonial without any historical depth that could potentially extend to the heart of the subject.

### ***Dharma* as non-subjective Theodicy**

The incursion of *Karuna Rasa* in the so called liberal humanist realism of Ray happens in a moment in which a dominant anthropological apparatus of cinema is de-territorialized. In other words, Biswas points out that what is important here is that *Rasa* does not arrive as curious ritual, ethnographic information, or in the form of a traditional *aphorism* that an otherwise overall secular novelization of the world is able to cite without disturbing its basic integrity. The image of *Rasa* on the other hand is one of a profound pre-occupation that pauses, arrests, and wistfully suspends all self conscious perspectives and destinyings of the modern. It is a thought of the outside that, in Madan Gopal Singh’s reading, disturbs the centrality of the image in Pather Panchali. According to Singh, Ray’s early work is construed “almost entirely in terms of the margins of the frame...unleashing an unending relay between the film diegesis, the fictional and real spaces” (“Ray and the Realist Conscience” 48). A so called indexical space like the bamboo grove in the village of Nischindipur thus is able to extend an inhuman but intelligent expressive power (a nature not yet humanized) that “highlights an ontological problem implicit in film-realism, where the non-fictional materiality of nature often assumes an inevitable preponderance. Within the frame, it even becomes a metatext of its own reality completely defying its reduction into

an image of realist balance” (“Ray and the Realist Conscience” 48). The cinematic of *Rasa* is thus not a positive one, but the very process of disconcert between the so called subjective and objective poles that founds a constitutive phenomenology of ‘classic’ cinematic narration.

Elsewhere, Singh locates the problem of realism in the light of an undeniably imperial sway of a horizontal process of worldly humanist perspectivism that came into being after the collapse of the vertical universe of the European Renaissance (“Through the Realist Defile” 87). As a result, when one thinks about cinema within the epistemological configurations and knowledge systems of the present, a normative of western realism, in the last instance, inserts a dogma of the real between a proposed imaginary (infinite) and a proposed symbolic (enclosed/enframed). In particular, Singh reads the work of Christian Metz as an agonistic effort to disengage the cinema object from the imaginary and win it for a symbolic categorically defined in terms of the Oedipal subject. In contrast, Singh’s own reading of Ritwik Ghatak’s *Ajantrik* (1957)<sup>120</sup> proposes that the film is a baroque externalization of an overall, never ending search for a constitutive ‘inside’ narrative, distributed between the pre-realist responses of the child/the anthropomorphic car, the non-realist consciousness of the tribal, and the realist consciousness of the driver.

A critical genealogy of Indian cinematic forms in the light of molar strands of western film theory (the ruptures of which Singh indicates toward) will follow in the Appendix of this discussion. For now, one can concentrate on another matter. As already mentioned, the inhuman dynamics of *Rasa* in the world are often claimed by an ontology and a constitutive diagram of *Bhakti* that appends such errant energies to the figure of Krishna as singular

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<sup>120</sup> Ghatak’s *Ajantrik* (titled *Pathetic Fallacy* in English) explores a romantic form of presenting nature as a metaphor for human emotions. The plot revolves around the eccentric taxi driver Bimal and his battered Chevrolet he calls Jagaddal. Bimal considers his car to be a living entity and is considered mad by many of his peers. The film interweaves many historical themes of industrialization, and capitalization as they appear in the mining town of Ranchi, and its effects on local tribal culture. “Industrialization proceeds relentlessly, sowing discord among the tribals, and Jagaddal creaks down irretrievably. It has to be dismantled and sold as scrap” (Willemsen and Rajadhyaksha, *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* 348).

*Nayak* and his life and works as singular *lila* or play of *rasa*. What is also pertinent in here is the fact that Krishna is not just the repository of pastoral miracles – the cowherd depicted in the Bhagwad Purana<sup>121</sup>. He is also, within the modernist diagram of tradition itself, the warrior poet who is the enunciator of what can be called the *Dharmic*. This is the Krishna seen in the Bhagwad Gita, who, in a moment prior to the commencement of the great battle of *Kurukshetra*, enlightens the vacillating fighter Arjuna on why he should do the right thing by taking up arms against his own cousins and relatives. This feat, by the man who declares himself to be the incarnate of Brahman itself and offers Arjuna the glimpse of his cosmic body that informs the three orders of time<sup>122</sup>, is indeed a profound one in the Vedic tradition.

When Krishna elaborates the manifold statements and visibilities of the world as illusory sculptings in time that are actually attributes of a cosmic Self, he effects a profound editorial achievement. He calls an entirely new ethical world into being. For the first time, the conceptual worlds of ancient Vedic thinking, as in the Samkhya or the Yoga schools that he mentions, suffer a theistic ordering. This is because no other personage or source of wisdom before him had so decisively taken up the task of defining Dharma in such a positive manner. In the Dharmasutras of Apastamba for instance, it is written that “Right and wrong (*dharma* and *adharma*) do not go about saying ‘Here we are’; nor do gods, centaurs, or ancestors say ‘This is right, that is wrong.’<sup>123</sup> Manusmriti, or The Laws of Manu, the text that was adopted by the British colonial administration as the code of ‘Hindu Law’ displays no such singularity of prescription<sup>124</sup>. In the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> verses of the second book, Manu

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<sup>121</sup> The key texts in this tradition are Harivamsa -- a late appendix to the Mahabharata, and the Puranas – Vishnu and Bhagwada.

<sup>122</sup> This is the famous *Viswarupa Darshan* in the 11<sup>th</sup> book of the Bhagwad Gita. Verse 7, in Juan Mascarró’s translation reads: “See now the whole universe with all things that move and move not, and whatever thy soul may yearn to see. See it as One in me” (Bhagwad Gita 52)

<sup>123</sup> Apastamba Dharma Sutra, 1.7.20.6 cited in Wendy Doniger, “Introduction” to The Laws of Manu, xv.

<sup>124</sup> Manu is a personage described in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gita (verse 1) as the son of Vivasan, the father of light. Manu himself is the father of man. See Bhagwad Gita, 22. In their introduction to the Penguin edition, Doniger and Smith mention that at the time of its adoption as the Hindu Book of Law by the British colonists, similar texts by Yajnavalkya or Mitaksara were more widely used in traditional Hindu legal circles. See The

acknowledges the possibility of equivocation: “The knowledge of religion is prescribed for those who are not attached to profit or pleasure; the revealed canon is the supreme authority for those who wish to understand religion. But where the revealed canon is divided, both (views) are traditionally regarded as law; for wise men say both of them are valid laws.”<sup>125</sup> The compendium of Manu, like most such arbitrations, oscillates continuously between *Samacharika* (local custom), *Yugadharma* (tendencies of the times), and Vedic stipulations and generalizations. As *Dharmasastra*, it perpetually abstracts itself from and conjoins with *Srautasutras* (Vedic rituals) and *Grhyasutras* (domestic rituals). Manu’s stipulations thus become an ensemble of prescriptives and purifications; more than a comprehensive and rigorous ethical system, it elaborates and tracks a host of differential perversions, exceptions and emergencies.

The problem begins with the word itself, when one tries to encapsulate its semiotic range in a constitutive edifice of religion, ethics, or law. Dharma is derived from the Sanskrit root *dhṛ*, which means ‘uphold, support or sustain’<sup>126</sup>. It could mean law, custom, justice, morality, ethics, religion, duty, nature, or virtue. “It includes social institutions such as marriage, adoption, inheritance, social contracts, juridical procedure, and punishment of crimes, as well as private activities, such as toilet, bathing, brushing the teeth, food and eating, sexual conduct, and etiquette”<sup>127</sup>. In considerations of animism and nature, *dharma* can assume the form of pure biological properties, just as in *Padarthya Vidya* or the physical sciences, it can mean properties of organic or inorganic matter. Dharma, in relation to proclivities of caste (*srenidharma*), regions (*desadharma*), social groups (*jatidharma*) and families (*kuladharma*), can also mean pure desire and necessitated action unrelated to any governing economy of ethics or morality. In the *Kamasutra*, Vatsayana, while advising kings on how to pick suitable men to guard the chastity of the queens, says that “under the

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Laws of Manu, lx. It was thus during the last quarter of the eighteenth century that Manu became instrumental in the construction of a complex system of jurisprudence in which the ‘general law’ was supplemented by a personal law determined by one’s religious affiliation.

<sup>125</sup> See The Laws of Manu 18.

<sup>126</sup> See Matilal, Ethics and Epics 37.

<sup>127</sup> Patrick Olivelle, “Introduction” to the Dharmasutras, xxxix.

influence of Dharma people might be admitted, and therefore men should be selected who are free from carnal desires, fear, avarice, and Dharma” (141-42). Later, while speculating on the reasons why courtesans resort to men, Vatsayana cites ancient authorities who list Dharma as one of many reasons like love, fear, money, curiosity, sorrow, and pleasure (Kamasutra 150).

Bimal Krishna Matilal has illuminatingly suggested that a proper discussion of Dharma as a moral philosophy can begin in a better fashion with a consideration of the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata (Ethics and Epics 22-3). That is, much more than the Dharmasastra texts<sup>128</sup> -- which are enumerations of duties, ethics, virtues and vices – the moral element in the Sanskrit-Brahmanical tradition can be derived, as a Kantian retrospective gesture of the modern, from its illuminating and exemplary instantiations in the *itihasas*<sup>129</sup>. This is because, as Matilal notes, the ancient Indian *Sastras* are not primers in morality. Neither in the Vedic Brahmana tradition, nor among the recalcitrant *Sramana* sects like the Buddhist, Jaina, or *Ajivika* groups does one find God being referred to as the ultimate authority on Dharma (Matilal, Ethics and Epics 51). In the Isa Upanishad, it is said that The face of truth remains hidden with a circle of gold (The Upanishads 50). The Kena Upanishad too posits Brahman as that which is beyond the known and the unknown<sup>130</sup>. In the Chandogya Upanishad three groups of *Dharma* are mentioned: rituals (*yajna*), study of the scriptures (*adyayana*), and austerities (*tapas*)<sup>131</sup>. Manu himself outlines an eclectic, potentially conflict ridden process of deriving the *Dharmic* from five different sources in his laws: the Vedas, Dharmasastras, virtues cultivated by the Vedic scholars, the good conduct of the honest and satisfaction of the mind. Three ways to purify dharma are ethics, *pramanas* or perception, inference, verbal testimony, and debate as *tarka* or *hetusastra*. He describes Dharma as that

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<sup>128</sup> Matilal’s chief consideration here is a form of ‘shallow’ Indological thinking of the west that

<sup>129</sup> The Sanskrit word *Itihasa* traditionally meant chronicles of the past. It is used in modern critical parlance to mean history. Both Ramayana and Mahabharata can be considered *itihasas*, although the former is often referred to as a *kavya* or poem.

<sup>130</sup> “There the eye goes not, nor words, nor mind. We know not, we cannot understand, how he can be explained: He is above the known and he is above the unknown” (The Upanishads 51).

<sup>131</sup> See Matilal, Ethics and Epics 38.

which is honored by the learned, followed by those who are above greed, and approved by the hearts of people<sup>132</sup>.

More than in the bulk of scriptural prescriptions, for Matilal, the aspect of Dharma becomes more apparent in its epic instantiations, when circumstantial statements and actions of gods and heroes themselves enter complex networks of the profane. In his elaboration, he cites several such occasions. In the *Sabhaparvan* section of the Mahabharata Yudhishthira -- the eldest of the Pandavas and the natural son of no less a personage than the celestial Dharma himself -- indulges in his only vice. He is lured into a game of dice by the scheming Kauravas and is soon stripped off all his wealth and his kingdom. The desperate Yudhishthira then stakes his four brothers one by one, and upon losing them, stakes himself. After losing his own autonomy, Yudhishthira bets Draupadi, the wife of all the five Pandava brothers. When Draupadi too is lost, at the behest of Duryodhana -- the head of the Kaurava clan -- an emissary is sent to fetch her to court. It is then that the angry Draupadi poses the Dharmic question: if Yudhishthira himself was a slave at that point in the game, and dispossessed of everything, including his own selfhood, how could he then have staked her honor? (Matilal, Ethics and Epics 20). Time and again it is established in the Mahabharata that for human beings equipped with limited mortal knowledge and readings of the world, it is indeed difficult to arrive at the proper *Dharmic* decision. Later in the epic, when Dharma, the celestial god and the father of Yudhishthira, comes to test his son dressed as a *Yaksha* or stork, the eldest Pandava replies to the profound question posed to him in the following manner: “There are different Vedas, even the *dharmaśāstras* vary from one another. There is not a single *muni* [teacher-sage] whose view is not different [from that of other teacher]. The truth of *dharma* lies hidden in the [dark] cave. [But] the way [leading to *dharma*] is the one that the *mahajana* had followed”<sup>133</sup> Matilal infers that the contextual meaning of the term *mahajana* in this case could be “a great number of people” rather than “great people”(68). Nonetheless, the rigors of staying in the *Dharmic* path are seen to involve a relentless de-coding of scriptural and recorded intelligence and also a continuous emulation of precedent actions. The battleground of the Mahabharata is rife with haphazard

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<sup>132</sup> The Laws of Manu 17-18.

<sup>133</sup> Cited in Matilal, Ethics and Epics 67.

interactions between human and supra-human, godly or demonic intelligences, one in which it often becomes impossible for individual or even group consciousnesses to distinguish the secret lure of evil from the blessed path of the holy. But it is in this very space that Krishna arrives as a special figure capable of oracular enunciation. This is because when he unfolds the tremendous cosmic scope of the Gita just prior to the battle of *Kurukshetra* to goad the warrior Arjuna to lift arms against his own kinsmen for the cause of Dharma, he calls the world a universal play of illusions and casts himself in that very play as the incarnate intelligence of Brahman itself -- one that encompasses the *Trikaal* or the three orders of time. The immanent humanoid presence of Krishna in the world therefore assumes a spatial and temporal omnipotence that bridges the gap between the sacred and profane, between nature as *prakriti* and Brahman as the transcendent One. In the modern diagram of tradition, this presence of divinity becomes that very force that can occupy the space between the horizontal immanence of customary life and the vertical immanence of the state.

In the *Karnaparvan* of the Mahabharata one encounters another situation that can be delineated in terms of a Kantian antinomy between duty and obligation. Arjuna, the most famous warrior of the Pandava clan, lands himself in a deep ethical quandary when his elder brother Yudhisthira, in a moment of passionate indiscretion, insults not only him, but also his beloved bow *Gandiva*. The bow was gifted to Arjuna by a personage no less than Agni – the fire god; the former had promised to not only hold the weapon dear to his heart as long as he lived, but also to slay anyone who dared insult it. Hence Yudhisthira's harsh words put Arjuna in a position where he had to choose between fratricide and the Ksatriya sanctity of his word. The situation, as Matilal reads it, is clearly indicative of an absent whole, precisely that which would, in Kantian terms, ensure that such existential dilemmas be proved false in a higher realm of truth (Ethics and Epics 25). That is, in the auspices of a genuine ethical harmony, proper moral illumination would render the conflict to be illusory, positing one of the options as duty, and the other as ground of that very duty. In the Mahabharata, Arjuna turns to his friend Krishna for advice. For the edification of Arjuna, Krishna illustrates the *Dharmic* by narrating two parables. The first one is about an innocent

hunter called Balaka, who unwittingly kills a ferocious creature called Andha<sup>134</sup> by shooting an arrow in the direction of the sound when the latter was drinking water from a river. As soon as this unconscious deed is accomplished, the heavens shower Balaka with accolades and he is fetched to heaven in a celestial chariot. In contrast, Kausika, the protagonist of the second parable, happens to be a hermit who is a pathological truth teller. A group of travelers fleeing from some dacoits pass by him and tell him not to divulge their whereabouts. When the bandits arrive and ask Kausika about the travelers, he tells them the truth. As a result, the travelers are caught and killed (Ethics and Epics 26-27). After narrating these parables, Krishna concludes that while Balaka unwittingly instrumentalized himself for a cause greater than himself and was rewarded as a result, Kausika's desire to stick to his code of duty at any cost made him act like a fool, for which he was denied entry into heaven (Ethics and Epics 29). The latter, according to Krishna, was guilty of the supreme crime of folly precisely because he could not attach a primary consideration of the *Dharmic* to a state of exception<sup>135</sup>. That is, Kausika failed to admit a pragmatics of contingency into his pigheaded ethical stance, thus failing to appreciate the fact that the *Dharmic* becomes apparent in a resplendent manner exactly when it departs from the normative, when it assumes the powers of abolishing the everyday rules of the profane in a single stroke.

It is this looming claim to be able to pronounce the *Dharmic* as exceptional in a situation of emergency which allows Krishna to make several unusual ethical decisions for himself and for others in the epic. In order to disarm the old stalwart Bhishma, he urges Arjuna to wage battle against his own granduncle from behind Shikhandi, who was a woman in his previous birth. Since the warrior code of the Ksatriyas prevents one from raising arms against a woman, the powerful Bhishma, on seeing this, lays down his bow and is felled on a bed of arrows by Arjuna. When Drona, the venerable commander of the Karurava army and the teacher of both the Pandavas and Kauravas launches a ferocious assault on the

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<sup>134</sup> See Matilal, Ethics and Epics 29.

<sup>135</sup> Matilal points out in this context that the Dharmasastra of Apastambha says unequivocally that every perjurer goes to hell, while excusable untruths are permitted by authorities like Manu and Gautama (Ethics and Epics 27).



Pandava forces, Krishna motivates the scrupulously *Dharmic* Yudhisthira to utter the only white lie of his life. On Krishna's instructions, Bhima, the middle Pandava, kills an elephant called Aswaththaman – the same name bourn by Drona's son. The latter, on hearing a rumor that Aswaththaman has been killed, goes to Yudhisthira for confirmation, knowing that the eldest Pandava prince never spoke the untruth. Yudhisthira says that Ashwaththaman is indeed dead (the elephant), muffling the last part of his sentence into an inaudible whisper. On hearing this, the heartbroken Drona rests his arms and is felled<sup>136</sup>. As a result of this act, Yudhisthira, whose life long adherence to the path of truth and unblemished *Dharmic* merit made his chariot travel few inches above the ground during war, loses his peerless status. The wheels of his vehicle touch the earth for the first time<sup>137</sup>. Further in the course of the eighteen day war, Krishna instructs Arjuna to kill Karna, another bulwark of the Kauravas, when the latter is in a helpless, unarmed state, with his chariot wheel stuck in the mud.

The question however can be posed differently: if Krishna's pragmatics lack an apparent moral unity, would that also be true of his word as well? The most consistent articulation of Krishna's moral philosophy can of course be found in the Bhagwad Gita, which is actually a small excerpt from the section entitled *Bhismaparvan* of the Mahabharata. The Gita occupies chapters 23-40 of the *Bhismaparvan*, which is the 6<sup>th</sup> of the eighteen *parvans* or sections of the great epic, comprising of 117 chapters in all<sup>138</sup>. Krishna essays the text of the Gita at a dramatic moment prior to the battle of *Kurukshetra*, when the armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas are already aligned against each other in a warlike fashion. It is at this moment that seeds of doubt creep into the mind of Arjuna, the prime warrior on the side of the Pandavas. He wonders whether it is worth fighting one's own cousins and uncles for kingdom, wealth, and other earthly joys of life. It is then that Krishna, his charioteer and mentor, launches into a momentous articulation about the intricacies of Dharma, and explains to Arjuna why it is his duty as a member of the fighting *Ksatriya* caste to fight. The economies of the present project does not afford the scope to enter into a detailed discussion

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<sup>136</sup> See Matilal's comments on this in Ethics and Epics, 87.

<sup>137</sup> See Matilal, Ethics and Epics, 65.

<sup>138</sup> See Arvind Sharma, The Hindu Gita, ix.

about the complexities of the Gita, and the folds of its rhetorical and dialectical movements, but the basics of Krishna's argument can be summarized in a manner suited to the purpose. Krishna begins by speaking about the spirit that wanders from body to body (Bhagwad Gita 10-11). This is why the phenomena of life and death are in themselves ephemeral illusions in relation to the One abiding truth. "If any man thinks he slays, and if another thinks he is slain, neither knows the ways of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill: the Eternal in man cannot die" (Chapter 2, verse 19). The world in itself is thus a cosmic cinema, in which "Invisible before birth are all beings and after death invisible again. They are seen between two unseens" (Chapter 2, verse 28). This, for Krishna, is the wisdom of Samkhya, one of the major schools of Vedic thought in the Indian tradition. The postulate of *Jnanayoga* of Samkhya, which means salvation through rights knowledge, is conjoined by Krishna with that of the *Karmayoga* of the Yoga school, which pertains to the freeing of the spirit through right knowledge. The objective of the composite *Yogi*, according to him, is to curb the many branched and endless thoughts of man and rise above the three GUNAS or attributes of Nature: sattva (light), rajas (energy), and tamas (darkness)<sup>139</sup>. It is a peaceful abdication from hope of rewards or thought of consequences. Krishna says in the 6<sup>th</sup> verse of the 18<sup>th</sup> book: "But even these works, Arjuna, should be done in the freedom of a pure offering, and without expectation of a reward. This is my final word" (Bhagwad Gita 79). Renunciation, for Krishna, is thus neither a categorical transcendence from the realm of profane knowledge, nor does it mean an avoidance of action, since nature condemns all to both<sup>140</sup>. Renunciation is what he elaborates as *desireless action* or *Nishkamabrata* in the third and fourth chapters of the Gita. For Arjuna thus, the point is not to be an actor, as Krishna explains in the 26<sup>th</sup> verse of the third book, but to instrumentalize himself for the *Dharmic* that is already foretold. "All actions take place in time by the interweaving of the forces of Nature; but the man lost in selfish delusions thinks that he himself is the actor" (Bhagwad Gita 19).

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<sup>139</sup> See Bhagwad Gita, chapter 3.

<sup>140</sup> See for instance Book 6, verse 1: "He who works not for an earthly reward, but does the work to be done, he is a Sanyasi, he is a Yogi: not he who lights not the sacred fire or offers not the holy sacrifice" (Bhagwad Gita 31).

Krishna's eloquent unfolding of the universe is interspersed in chapter 11 by a glimpse that is offered to Arjuna of his *Vishwarupa* or cosmic self. This metacinematic moment, which curves across all the three orders of time, is recorded in the celebrated 11<sup>th</sup> verse, which, as the story goes, was uttered by Openheimer on viewing the imposing mushroom cloud during the test explosion of the first atomic bomb: "If the light of a thousand suns suddenly arose in the sky, that splendour might be compared to the radiance of the Supreme Spirit" (Bhagwad Gita, 53). In that Form Infinite, Arjuna sees the entire universe being illuminated. It is that which is without "beginning, middle, or end" (11.19) – a gargantuan, non-anthropomorphic immanence with "many mouths and eyes, with many bellies, thighs and feet" (11.23). On seeing that tremendous outpour of non-temporal visibilities, Arjuna says, "The sons of Dhrita-rashtra [the hundred Kaurava Princes], all of them, with other princes of this earth, and Bhishma and Drona and great Karna, and also the greatest warriors of our host, all enter rushing into thy mouths, terror-inspiring with their fearful fangs. Some are caught between them, and their heads crushed to powder" (11.27). Once Arjuna has experienced this vision of the impending death of his enemies, and understood as a chronicle already immanent in another dimension of time, Krishna tells him that "Through the fate of their Karma I have doomed them [the Kauravas] to die: be thou merely the means of my work" (11.33)<sup>141</sup>.

As many commentators have pointed out, Krishna's discourse in the Gita is inconsistent on many accounts. It could also be described as a series of emphatic and groundless mergings of apparent contradictions, for instance, the harnessing of the attributes of the personal god as well as the impersonal one, the force of immanence and that of transcendence, into a dazzling aspect in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> verses of book nine (Bhagwad Gita, 54). Arvind Sharma has listed a host of theological, soteriological, metaphysical, liturgical, canonical, and ethical antinomies in the "Introduction" to his book The Hindu Gita (xx-xxv). Maya or illusion sometimes becomes a veil to go beyond, sometimes a darkness to be penetrated, and sometimes "etymologically that which is not there tomorrow" (Sharma, The Hindu Gita xiii). The dialectic between *Jnanayoga* (right

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<sup>141</sup> See Bhagwad Gita 54-56.

knowledge) and *Karmayoga* (right action) especially undergoes many complex foldings, with sometimes one emerging to be superior to the other, each leading to the other, and also often one being revealed to be identical to the other (Hindu Gita xxiii). The situation becomes even more complicated after *Bhaktiyoga* (right devotion) enters the picture around the eleventh book. What is interesting to note in such undulations is that right at the end of the Gita, one sees a shift in emphasis from *Karma* (18.41-7) to *Jnana* (18.49-53) to *Bhakti* (18.61-72) before Arjuna, finally declares himself to be free of delusions and ready for battle. It is the affective culmination, rather than a proper resolution, of all propositions into a picture of Bhakti [devotion] that removes all doubts. Arjuna decides to weaponize himself for the Dharmic after he hears the imperative of affirming ‘love’ (18.63), and ‘faith’ (18.71) in Krishna. The latter thus truly lives up to the etymology of his name, which means the ‘attractor’<sup>142</sup>, when he draws a final devotional submission from the warrior Arjuna, by which the latter removes all debilitating dialogic considerations and decides to pick up his *Gandiva* bow.

The Gita has been commented upon by many thinkers, especially in the pantheon of Vedic metaphysics, like Sankara, Madhava, Bhaskara, and Ramanuja<sup>143</sup>. This many armed discourse of ‘tradition’ however underwent a special transcription from the middle of the nineteenth century, by which the spiritual imperatives of the *karmayoga*, *jnanayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* were inducted into a modernist diagram of conscious national becoming. The epic call to the warrior to pick up arms against a sea of troubles thus gradually assumed the form of the political that has to come before the form of the state<sup>144</sup>. A constitutive literary enterprise was launched in the late nineteenth century, to pose the Gita as the *ur* text of

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<sup>142</sup> Arvind Sharma, The Hindu Gita xiii

<sup>143</sup> See Arvind Sharma, The Hindu Gita for a more comprehensive view.

<sup>144</sup> The obvious echo of course is to Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, 19. The political is that parabasis which a primary friend-enemy distinction is made (26). Schmitt is careful to separate this from other criteria of value and identification: aesthetic (beautiful and ugly), moral (good and bad). He reminds us that in Plato ( Republic, Book V, Chapter XVI) real war is a war between Hellenes and barbarians only. Infra-Hellenic conflicts are merely discords. In talking about the Crucades, he reminds that the Christian doctrine “love your enemy” rests on a notion of already there homogeneity. It does not say anything about political enemies.

national becoming, as that one ontological force that could spiritually command a multitude to adopt the warring stance of potential *martyrs*<sup>145</sup>. The Gita thus was a founding text in the nationalist thinking of early nationalist public intellectuals like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, and later day mass mobilizers like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and the peerless Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi<sup>146</sup>. This varied, multidirectional interpretive tradition was indeed a formidable enterprise, especially when it came to defining a principle of national homogeneity that could inscribe often coinciding, often antagonistic molar architectures of power and their regional constituents -- an emerging middle class one and a 'traditional' feudal one. This is because it was difficult to affix the many changeling forms and lores of Krishna himself into an exemplary, monotheistic narrative of national becoming. In the course of the Mahabharata, Krishna is chastised on several occasions for his slippery dialectics and for his groundless suspension of ethical codes<sup>147</sup>. Given his status as an arch manipulator who often defines means by the ends in themselves, and also his image as the promiscuous goatherd of *Vrindavana* who consorted with several thousand wives and had an adulterous liaison with his aunt Radha, it was indeed an agonistic task to not only present Krishna as an incarnate godhead of the ethical universe, but also to append the errant forces of his life and words to a compendium of bourgeois values. The impelling of the mythic figure of Krishna that one sees in the Indian popular cinemas perpetually set up agons and limbos in the courses of becoming. The Krishna effect thus often threatens to fork the erotics of *sringara* rasa in directions beyond the ambit of respectable middle class conjugality. As a mythic postulate of justice and action derived from the Gita, it constantly threatens to detach the sovereign principle from the constitutional state, bringing into the picture a cosmic ontology of justice that in some cases absolutely departs from the word of the law.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's late nineteenth century essay Dharmatattva is an exemplary instance of such a re-coding of devotional energies, in way of a new literary language of

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<sup>145</sup> As Schmitt says, one cannot call upon a person to become a martyr on purely economic grounds (Concept of the Political 28).

<sup>146</sup> See Robert Minor, Modern Indian Interpretors of the Bhagwadgita.

<sup>147</sup> The head Kaurava Duryodhana rebukes Krishna while on his deathbed. The hermit Utanka, who regarded Krishna as an *avatara* of Vishnu also castigates him after the battle at Kurukshetra.

sovereign translation, towards a contemporary deity of the nation. Written in the form of a Socratic dialogue between a master and a disciple, Dharmattatva begins by refuting the notion that the doctrines of the classical Sankhya-Yoga systems elaborated in the Gita are otherworldly postulates that are in fundamental contradiction with a modern impulse of science and reason. The master explains to the disciple that Culture, in the sense explicated by Matthew Arnold, is only an approximation of the *sanatan* (eternal) Hindu Dharma (Dharmatattva 37). Chatterjee casts the latter as a holistic concept that is truly capable of founding the city in such unruly times, if the natural law of mankind is humanism then it is indeed Hindu Dharma that is the perfect, unsullied expression of it (47). The point however is that one has to plumb the morasses of superstition and accumulated false belief that have accumulated during the centuries of Hindu decline, especially during the harsh interregnum of Muslim rule, and discover the true essence of Hinduism. This is why Chatterjee's formidable project involves, at every instance, complex foldings of double articulations. While Dharma is used to spiritualize the formal instrumentalities of science and reason, science and reason are critically invoked to challenge superstitions like the doctrine of rebirth<sup>148</sup>. He says that the exceptional distemper of modern times and an eclipse of Being, in the order of the social as well as a communal plane of memory, cast a veil over horizons of belief. This is precisely why the modern mind can neither be satisfied by the attributeless god of *Vedanta*, nor in the *Advaita* belief that God, the soul and the universe are one. Nor does he think that a resurgence of *Bhakti* be rendered possible by a Spinozist or Spencerian equation between nature and god. For Chatterjee, the revitalization of Hinduism qua Humanism is possible not by the re-positioning of a reclusive metaphysics of salvation, but through a new publicity that combines the modern figure of the individual with a special form of pastoral power demanded by the national form as well as the politics of the population state. The call is thus for a personal god in the form of Krishna (Dharmatattva 55-57). The vertical, monotheistic positioning of divinity in the anthropomorphic form is a rite of passage that remains necessary till the Hindu becomes globally immanent, that is, till one is able to call the world itself into being in a proper manner, by legitimately inducting both Spinoza and Spencer themselves into the Hindu fold (62).

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<sup>148</sup> See Dharmatattva, 44.

The modernist reinvention of Krishna thus combines with a new scientific eschatology of the age, one that refutes the doctrine of rebirth and a theory of salvation beyond the compass of life and *bildung*. It is this special ‘distemper’ of modern times -- that seems to have produced a naturalized rational subjectivity neither satisfied with an abstract god, nor with the hope of redemption in cycles of life beyond the here and now – that creates the discursive scope to unite the world consuming God of the Gita with a nascent vision of a Hindu national state. The coda of salvation delineated by the former thus becomes one with the western principle of Happiness (Dhamattatva, 40-46) that is to be achieved in this life itself. The passion of the *Bhakta* capable of martyrdom is brought into close proximity with patriotism and a readiness to defend the motherland to the death (Dharmattatva, 90-93). The acquiring of *Dharmic* training also melds with a new pedagogy for the future citizen, with oneness with Brahman becoming a state in which one achieves a harmonious concord of faculties rather than their eradication (70). Dharma thus clearly approximates discipline; according to Chatterjee, its notion of praxis (*Anushilan*) is a unique conjunction of science and industry that creates happiness at a fuller level. It is thus the true coming together of *Jnanayoga* (right knowledge) and *karmayoga* (right action) in a knowledge-action package that transcribes the six intellectual domains earmarked by August Comte. The first four branches, the physical sciences like mathematics, astronomy, physics and chemistry, lead to a knowledge of the universe, the last two – biology and sociology – lead to knowledge of the socialized self. However, only the Hindu scriptures lead to a proper knowledge of God (Dharmatattva 141-42).

Bankim Chatterjee’s Hindu intellectual enterprise is from the onset a global one. However, an illumination of the world in the light of Krishna is also at once a refiguration of Krishna himself in a proper mould of worldliness. Krishna thus has to be enshrined anew in terms of a naturalized compendium of bourgeois values and Victorian sexual morality. This is precisely why Chatterjee declares that the new national deity has to be saved from the lustful and polygamous Krishna that one encounters in the medieval *Bhakti* poet Jaideva’s work Geetgovinda (Dharmatattva 57). This is a task he tries to accomplish in a more comprehensive fashion in his other great tract, the Krishnacharitra. Here Chatterjee deploys

a formidable arsenal of historical methodology, philology, pragmatics, and plain ‘common sense’ to excavate the true idol of Krishna as one fit to be the spiritual figurehead of a new peopleness<sup>149</sup>. The natural love between Madana and Rati thus becomes conjugality in Krishnacharitra and the amorous deity of Vrindavana becomes the ideal householder<sup>150</sup>.

This particular textualization of Gita, as the very scope and foundation of national being, is what is seen in innumerable popular Indian films. It is this spiritual automaton of *Dharmic* action that allows the gods and heroes of the secular world to be absolved of their degradations, and illuminate all concepts of the state and of the law to be nothing but often inadequately secularized religious concepts<sup>151</sup>. This discourse of Gita thus serves two functions. As proposed founding myth, it tries to harness a world of pluralist devotional energies and telescope them towards the nation as deity and also, simultaneously, posits the formal state only as an *afterthought* that often must be suspended sometimes in order to be protected. The Gita, by this logic, would be a perfect diagram of national being precisely because it is seen as the sole entity capable of producing homogeneity, and thus fulfill the single most important condition of the modern statist dispensation, by which the political (after Machiavelli, Hobbes, or Jean Bodin), remains resolutely linked to the state just as the polis and politics remain indistinguishably intertwined in Aristotle. Furthermore, the state, in such a situation, would be that which exercises absolute monopoly over the political<sup>152</sup>.

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<sup>149</sup> For instance, he conducts a detailed etymological study of the root verb ‘Rom’ to conclude that the *ratikriya* of Krishna described in the Harivamsa means a form of inspired ‘play’ that is innocent of sexual connotations (Krishnacharitra 458). Later, he sets out to prove that the adulterous relationship between Krishna and his aunt Radha could also be a later interpolation, since only the youngest of the Puranas, the *Brahmabairta*, mentions her (Krishnacharitra 467-475). The mythical figure of Radha is thus generalized as one of *Bhakti* in his hands. “Whoever is a worshipper of Krishna is Radha or Radhika” (Krishnacharitra 475; translated by the present author).

<sup>150</sup> See Krishnacharitra and Dharmatattva 201-206.

<sup>151</sup> See Carl Schmitt, Political Theology 36, The Concept of the Political, 49: “The juridic formulas of the state are, in fact, only superficial secularizations of the omnipotence of God”. The state, according to Schmitt, thus has to be paramount in order to be a state; it cannot be an association competing with other polytheistic associations

<sup>152</sup> See Schmitt, Concept of the Political 19-20.



When the individual is seen to weaponize himself motivated by the *Nishkamabrata* propounded by the Gita towards a national cause, he thus becomes especially endowed with the powers of entering the sovereign diagram, one that, according the Nazi political theorist Carl Schmitt, decides on the crucial question of life and death<sup>153</sup>. It is thus creates a scope of the miraculous precisely because it creates a room for the 'exceptional'; for, in the statist thinking of Schmitt, the exception is to jurisprudence what miracle is to theology. In an age of disenchanting scientific knowledge, when the mind is no longer satisfied by the abstract dreams of afterlife, it is thus only a worldly *Bhakti* in Krishna and his compelling words that can, in a moment of dire emergency, invite a citizen to surrender *this* life for the national cause<sup>154</sup>.

The secular miracle is thus one in which the interests of the formal state can be seen to be protected precisely by a suspension of the very law that such a state propounds. What is however different in the Indian diagram of sovereignty spiritually animated by the Gita is that unlike the Western paradigm that Schmitt was examining, in this case, the state is not a *deistic* one that categorically separates the sphere of the miraculous from that of the secular<sup>155</sup>. The *Dharmic* is thus not something that identifies itself totally with the social; rather it is that which resides above the social, continuously absolving its unhappy profanities. It is because of this that the vision of the Dharmic in popular Indian cinema does not coincide squarely either with the disenchanting phenomenology of individual subjective perception, or with the letter of the law. This is why the formal, godless concept of the people, as a uniform fraternity of citizens, perpetually disintegrates into a differentially privileged body of *bhaktas*. All stories thus tend to become stories of the nation-state precisely because they qualify to be stories of God as Rama or God as Krishna as anthropomorphic intelligence. Paradoxically thus, the feature of an eternal, epic repetition with topological differences in 'formulaic' Indian films is actually part of a modernist effort

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<sup>153</sup> Concept of the Political, 35.

<sup>154</sup> I am grateful to Sibaji Bandyopadhyay for pointing this out to me. The theoretical elaboration on the Gita here owes a lot to his currently undertaken monumental work on the scriptural tradition of the Gita and Hindu nationalism.

<sup>155</sup> See Political Theology, 37.

towards creating a mythos for the Indian state, which only the oracular wisdom of Krishna as *super-subject* can ultimately absolve. It is in the light of a modernist textual focalizing of itinerant energies of thought that Vijay Mishra's theory can be located, that all popular Hindi films are a literal replaying of master mythological texts of Indian culture like Ramayana and Mahabharata. (Bollywood Cinema 4). The latter serve as founders of discursivity in the Foucauldian sense precisely because of a modern environ of textual production that, with colonial knowledge apparatuses and print capital, relentlessly tried to produce a mythological edifice that is free from tendentiousness. One behind whose epic surface, as Benjamin would say, the violent thought streams of a many armed, divided tradition have come to a rest.

### **The Cinematic of Dharma**

Despite the best intentions of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the sovereign figure of Krishna however never acquired a spiritual omnipotence that could ontologically consolidate the formal totality of the state. That is, as a theorem of national spirituality, it could not, in a complete sense, procure for itself the singular status that transcends all polytheistic powers. The long standing, variegated tradition of Hindu nationalism, from its distant Herderesque beginnings, through the works of Savarkar, Golwalkar, or Deen Dayal Upadhyay, the discourse of Hindu nationalism posited itself as the unique spiritual force that, unlike the weak economism of the Nehruvian dispensation, could found the political in its proper form precisely by the creation of the citizen as potential martyr. Its invention as a modernist diagram of monotheism was however a perpetually incomplete process. The hegemony of a Brahminical patrimony over and above the representative clamor of diverse linguistic, caste or class based, regional or gender based discourses was frequently organized through a proliferation of Gita effects, a precarious regulation of consensus and habit rather than an installing of a total and unassailable constitution. The popular Indian cinemas are thus animated by many forms of mythic recall, by which the powers of Rama and those of Krishna come to inhere in cinematic bodies for a multitude of purposes and affections. The universe of cinema is thus saturated with epic sides of wisdom cutting into and departing from novelized pluralities of the social and the historical. This is precisely why the mythic

impulse in the Indian cinematic tradition can be invoked for many diverse ends -- frequently to endorse a Brahminical compendium of values, but not always; often to secure a functional peace with the legal order, but not all the time.

In Guru Dutt's memorable melodrama Pyaasa/The Thirsty (1957) for instance, the forbidden conjugality between the alcoholic and idealist poet shunned and exploited by the world, and the prostitute Gulabo is consolidated by a perverse mythic invocation that departs from any notion of Brahminical piety. In the "*Aj sajan mohe ang laga lo janam safal ho jaye*" (Take me in your arms o beloved so that life may be fulfilled) song sequence, the two bodies are brought into close proximity when Gulabo climbs the stairs to go to Vijay in the terrace with the strains of a *Vaishnavite bhajan*, celebrating the mythical, adulterous affair between Radha and Krishna, playing in the background. Through a series of signature tracking shots characteristic of the director, the body of the woman is made to stagger through zones of light and shade before it chances upon the iconic close up. The coinciding of the social outcast and the aspect of the legendary heroine happens after a wistful and agonistic negotiation of the cinematic between the inequalities of a degraded Nehruvian world, and the moral powers of *bhakti* that radically allows love for the deity to be shared by all. The musicality of the sequence, propelled by the song and the camerawork, brings about a powerful assemblage of affections. An erotic *sringara rasa* that has no social attestation finds its destination by groundlessly de-territorializing itself into a boundless love of the universal *Bhakti rasa* -- a total and unconditional submission to the deity that is capable of suspending all man made laws of the familial and the social.

The mythic also appears with ambiguous powers when, on innumerable occasions, it is invoked to illuminate a tortuous and tragic separation between law and justice. In Dharam Aur Kanoon /Dharma and Law (Joshi, 1984), the scrupulously honest Justice Diwan announces the death sentence of his life long friend Rahim, who has taken the law into his own hands and has avenged the killing of his beloved *aka* (sister-in-law), who happens to be Diwan's own wife. A natural order of familial justice is thus brought into an antagonistic relationship with a cold universality of the legal order. The judge declares solemnly that *kanoon* (law) can only pronounce judgment; whether *insaaf* (justice) is achieved as a result,

whether there can be justice at all, is a question only *Khuda* (God) can answer. Diwan thus announces the verdict of juridical intelligence as a perfect instrument of his *Dharm* (duty). The cinematic of melodrama however extends the question of life and death further than the final word of the state. When Rahim Khan goes to visit his friend for the last time at the latter's chamber, he finds out that Diwan has committed suicide before his own verdict can be carried out. The friendship that had been hitherto enfigured in a sacral form of cinematic melodrama by a mythic recall of the alliance between Krishna and Sudama, thus culminates when the guilt ridden Judge separates the seat of Krishna from that of the state. As it happens in a lot of films, he formalizes the sovereign power of the state to decide on the question of life and death by appealing to another possibility of approximating justice, by the extra legal taking of his own life. The apex of melodrama is achieved when the scrupulous functionary of the state extinguishes his incorruptible citizen self in an instant, by a perverse volunteerism of death.

Ram Maheshwari's Karmayogi/The Yogi of Karma (1978) is only one instance in a vast medley of revenge melodramas that saturated the popular Indian cinematic space during the turbulent years of the emergency and its aftermath. The seductive rebellion of the heroic assemblage here assumes a pronounced baroque form, in the shape of a criminal father-son duo who are also atheists. Shankar, the senior patriarch, bears the name of Shiva himself and is a Brahmin by birth; till recently, he was also an affluent but generous landlord who was subsequently taken advantage of by a more mercantile world that has since broken free of his overlordship. Shankar's bitter and cynical response to his misfortunes takes the form of a total and unqualified rejection of a new dispensation of the times, in a manner that identifies the authority of the Gita squarely with the legal order of the state. He takes his son Mohan and walks out on his long suffering, but dutiful wife Durga, who is widely known for her impeccable piety and unflinching faith in the words of the Gita. Shankar and his son Mohan (who of course is named after Krishna himself) embark on careers in smuggling not just to get rich, but to satisfy a pathological drive to overturn the dictate of the Gita that commands one to work without the expectation of rewards. The figure of Shankar as baroque artwork is thus secured through a committed, perverse absolutism that becomes manifest in the film through the characteristically stylized rhetorical bombast of actor Raj

Kumar<sup>156</sup>. The recoil from Dharma as well as the legality of the state thus takes the form of an *ahistorical*, fervently religious eccentricity that departs from the figure of the Brahmin acolyte as well as the individual citizen ready to embrace a new mode of production and socialization. The task of the heroic Brahmin -- disempowered by the leveling effects of a new democratic situation, and at the same time obstructed by the protectionist barriers of Nehruvian socialism -- assumes the suspension of all rules in search for a *form of life worth living*.

Karmayogi is one of many examples in which there is a melodramatic forking of paths between many postulates of subjectivity and desire – the patriot, the devout, the survivor, and the seeker of worldly pleasure. The cinematic of Dharma is a complex process of reconfiguring these energies into modules that often formally submit to the state, and frequently, in the realm of affects, formalize the state in an abject manner. The stylized utterances of Shankar/Raj Kumar in this film, like “You have to hold a knife to the world’s throat, else the world will hold one to your throat” operate as counter aphorisms that reveal the Gita-modern state compact to be only a diffuse ecology of the Dharmic that still awaits a monotheistic re-ordering. The statement of perversity -- that combines at once with a historicity of Brahminical disempowerment, pragmatic problems of urban survival, as well as the allure of unsatisfied geo-televisual desires -- thus perpetually opens up an illusory

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<sup>156</sup> Raj Kumar, a major star for more than three decades, was known for his unique, gravelly dialogue delivery. This attribute often created sound images -- a pure surface of *vachika* or speech -- that became an artwork precisely by extinguishing all depths of personality and historicity. In films like Pakeezah/The Sacred (Kamal Amrohi, 1971), and Mere Huzoor/My Lord (Vinod Kumar, 1968), the Raj Kumar voice and diction were assembled with Urdu poetic powers of melodramatic de-territorialization that dramatized, amongst other things, the decadence of a Muslim aristocracy and the emergence of a powerful affect of new age nuclear desires. In his action films of the seventies and after, the Raj Kumar effect assembled with melodramatic formations of angst and anger directed against the malfunctioning industrial urban Nehruvian order and also the eclipse of traditional paternalistic values in the countryside now taken over by violence and lawlessness (especially in dacoit films like Dharam Kanta/The Thorn of Dharma (Sultan Ahmed, 1982). In Karmayogi, the rebellion of Shankar involves a melodramatic disruption of a presumed ethical whole between the state and traditional society through one liners like the one he utters to his devout, Gita reading wife before leaving her: “God will take care of you, and I will take care of God.”

whole, revealing the state of Dharma as something that is not actually a naturalized constitution, but a precarious, regulated publicity of Gita effects.

The publicity of the state and a modernist diagram of power is thus never the ineluctable coming into being of an organic state of peace, when the novelization of man made law and its manifold interpretations synthetically unites with an epic certitude of tradition as defined by the Gita. On the contrary, it perpetually involves the exercise of control and regulation of devotional energies for and against the state. This in itself encompasses several strata of discourse, for the powers of *bhakti* can be summoned to establish the relationship between the socially outcast poet and the prostitute in Pyaasa that is at once foreclosed by a hypocritical middle class morality as well as by a feudal Brahminical ideology, to conjure up a cinematic of unalienated labor in Tukaram, or to point out an unfreedom of the law as word in a potboiler like Dharam Aur Kanoon.

The electronically energized visual ecology of the nineties ushered in an era in which such agonistic dissonances are translated into a newer realm of value as spectacle and a molecular pragmatics of information. This is what was seen in Shankar's Nayak, where a virtual, purely cinematic incarnation of a Dharmic whole comes together with a compendium of managerial tasks and neo-liberal ideologies. In Mumbai Se Aya Mera Dost, the ethnographic picture of development that involves a national pedagogy affected through a "learning from television" intersects with a mythic and momentous recall of the militant words of the Gita calling the acolyte to duty. The formidably armed, valiant public intellectual enterprises of the literate Bankim Chatterjee and his followers sought to ground the Gita as a monotheistic edifice of national being in a radically novelized world of modern industrial production and amidst the shock and dissipations of urbanity. In contrast, what becomes more apparent in the present Indian situation since the nineties is a proliferation of Gita effects in assemblage with an overall dominance of planetary informatics. Increasingly, it is Gita as information, rather than Gita as literature that awaits priestly interpretations, that seeks to bridge the perpetually opening up crevice between the instruments, productions, and pragmatics of the modern world, and the word of tradition. The miraculous in traditional mythic Indian cinema was that power of the cinematic that

extended the sufficiency of cognitive perception directly to the imaginary of belief, without waiting for a validation from the subjective faculties pertaining to understanding or reason. The Hindu as information on the other hand founds itself by a miraculous connectivity of informatics itself as a postulate of capitalist power -- one that is able to link an immediacy of perceptual adsorption to a mythical horizon that has apparently transcended older historical contradictions and has revealed *Hindutva* to be nothing but a worldly aspect of Capital itself. This habit of thought therefore tends to *informationize* the historical crevice between the *Sastra* as revealed wisdom of traditional spirit and *Shastra* as material weapon or instrument of the modern.

### **The Dharmic Ecology and the Specter of the Muslim**

If one can at all talk about a cinematic of Hindutva at all, it has to be as a machinic coming together and dissimulation of various factors of intelligibility like beliefs, world views, faiths, idioms, styles, forms of life, and language. That is, these fungible powers of the social are perhaps equally, if not more important than molar recapitulations of mythic lore, as in the Ramayana or Mahabharata teleserials that took the nation by storm during the late eighties and early nineties. The profile of trust or suspicion in this metropolitan field is indeed often determined by crude exercises of bigotry (the communal riots would be perfect examples) but also by more insidious tests of the habitual. In a globalized space of the metropolitan, in which bodies are caught up in a vast spectrum of consumer lifestyles and ways of living, the ultimate test of patriotism gradually departs from older nominalisms of caste, gender, or religion; it becomes more of a calibrated measure of potentia that determines to what extent figures can be entrusted to be absolutely impelled by the spirit of the Gita in a moment of national danger. This shift pertains to an altered state in the production of social life in which sovereignty, on a planetary scale, is increasingly being exercised through a micropolitics of power/information, rather than power/knowledge. That is, through calibrated control of speculative stances, distracted affiliations of facts and falsities, rather than sedentary and resident battles for truth. This is precisely why informatic power operates by affecting instantaneous 'populating' of fundamentalisms rather than through sober, conscientious and moral recruitment of Kantian citizens. An understanding of

popular Indian cinema in the age of global *Hindutva* is thus not to be understood merely in terms of crude ‘representational’ or ‘reflective’ strategies. That is, to what extent a dogmatic Brahminical patriarchy asserts itself in a brutal manner, negating or peremptorily overriding all differences of class, caste, gender, and religion. On the other hand, the field of inquiry could be how it simply becomes commonsensical to be Hindu as part of an overall production of social life, and how an environment of information management seeks to submit all immanent wonders of geo-televisuality, the multiplicity of Rasas in flow -- as corrosive visions and signs that constantly de-territorialize all static notions of the self – to the singular, many headed, many limbed, all consuming and terrifying iconic figure of Krishna as information.

Increasingly, after the nineties, the cinematic of Hindu-normative patriotism assumes a special form that is not primarily concerned with how dualities like tradition and modernity, mythic orientations and western technology, the city and the village, poverty and development or Hindu and Muslim are *dialectically* posed, mitigated, reformed or resolved. Rather the chief objective here is to examine how such undeniably important tropes are orchestrated and connected in a hydraulics of image flows and its different strata of semiotic viscosities, currents, and contaminations. This however is not to deny the contemporary relevance of ideological and faith based battles between human communities and social identities or to dismiss their grotesque material consequences. The effort on the other hand is to reconceptualize this stratum of war as a fluid-mosaic, navigational one, instead of a stable architecture of walls, divisions, and classifications. This new compact between power/informatics ensures that stellar oppositions pertaining to the old and the new can actually enter into fungible states of informatic affinity with each other. In terms of cinematic form, this would mean a further liquefaction of the typologies and models proposed by Rajadhyaksha, Prasad, Vasudevan, and Kapur. A new normative of the *Hindu* is a loose but regular, suffused by ideals, but also pragmatically and habitually generated plane of language. The fascistic aspect of *Hinduness* in the age of high media and finance capital is thus not merely restricted to an anthropomorphic game of representations. It pertains to a bio-political aspect of power (of which informatics is a part) that redraws a universe of signs, all errant, non-subjective energies of Rasa, in order to produce *Hinduness*



as a force of custom, habit, and commonplace in the first place. The abominable consequences of that, in terms of genocides of Muslims and other lower class and caste groups perhaps need to be understood in terms other than an identity game between good and bad volunteering humans. They are perhaps outcomes of an insidious, but all the more frightening and grotesque transformation that, while never announcing that it is illegal to be a non-Hindu, emphatically declares that it is only urban or just *normal* to be so. It is an even more powerful and inhuman instance of becoming *Hindu* precisely because it is capable of taking apart, parcelizing, and marketing molar anthropomorphic identities (of Brahminism or of humanism) and textual universes. The contemporary cinema of *Hinduism* is thus first and foremost a cinema of transmissions and particle effects – chimings, mergers, affective tie-ups between dialectical opposites, and an abundant and groundless frequenting between them -- more than total enunciations of the Hindu self (although such crude and mundane examples are also numerous). It is, in other words, first a practice and production of aesthetics and domination, a form of life that overcodes other multiple erotics of the same kind, and only then does it relate to militant, legislative or constitutive efforts that one is used to calling the political.

The titanic battles of becoming -- between the artisanal, agrarian nation of Gandhi and the Nehruvian industrial state, or between a caste based Brahminical patriarchy and the development of secular modernity – have increasingly dispersed into a complex and dynamic techtonics of sign strata. The new environ of *Hindutva* thus envelops instead of conquering; it exerts osmotic pressures and undulations of meaning rather than engaging in a self-other battle to the finish. As a result, increasingly, multiple regionally or communally affiliated discourses of nationalism endure a metropolitan commerce of signs that tends to render everybody a Hindu through graduated measures of national endowment. Conversely, one can say that everybody also becomes Muslim in a differential manner, by always being subject to calibrated movements of social suspicion. It is, as will be seen in greater detail, a grand politics of the customary of which the battle over the state or law is only one form. Apart from affective and informatic passages between erstwhile boundaries like tradition and modern technology, what also demarcates the present order of power from previous incarnations of *Hindutva* is that it is not a strong regional expression of nationalistic power

that aspires for global recognition. Metropolitan *Hindutva* is an already global diagram of power; the proper name assigned to it pertains to a process of telelocalization -- a global production of the vernacular, the regional or the local within planetary circuits of commerce and circulation.

It is perhaps in this light that signal, easily identifiable events in the careers of Indian cinemas during the nineties and after can be gauged to a certain extent. The decade of the nineties, in terms of box office success, was for instance ruled by a trio of Muslim stars – Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan, and Salman Khan. All three of them, in an age that also witnessed the eclipse of genres like the Muslim social, the dacoit film, or the rural melodrama, have strongly urban, Hindu normative screen personas. The only film in which Shah Rukh Khan wears a beard is Hey Ram (Kamala Hassan, 2000), in which he is a (good) Muslim character playing a supporting role in the proceedings. In terms of molar casts of identity this becomes symptomatic of an overall pattern, a regulation of frequency, in distributing markers of the self and the other between the endearing aspect of the neighbor and the spectral profile of the terrorist. The beard, the traditional ‘Islamic’ dress, the Urdu language are attributes that do not always add up to anthropomorphic stereotypes as in the regional (the cowardly Bengali, the comical Tamil or Parsee) and religious figures that populated pictures of ‘national integration’ in mainstream Hindi cinema of the seventies. They, on the other hand, are flexible indices of ‘vice’ that can be attached to or detracted from personages or pure performative bodies (as in the song sequences). This differential regulation of signs creates an ecology in which the Muslim can enter the realm of the normative secular only by shredding his aspect of terror and donning that of the patriot. The induction into the secular is thus possible only when he announces a virulent faith in god, a stance of maniacal commitment that, in this ‘exceptional’ case, renders him capable of martyrdom for the nation-state instead of against it. For the Islamic man, patriotism towards the secular statal order becomes tenable only when it emerges from the same specter of religiosity that otherwise imperils the state. The differential inclusion of the Muslim is possible through a test of fire -- a process of rigorous redemption of other attributes of aviced culture, language, and community -- following which Islam can emerge as a singular instrument that, in the presiding spirit of the Gita itself, can only weaponize

the subject. Increasingly, the indexical habits of Islamism – the beard, the turban, the *soorma*, the *Urdu* language or the *Pathani* attire – can be renounced only when the persona dons the *uniform*. The figuration of the Muslim, in an age of global financialization and terror, is thus largely consolidated by a saturation of effects and distracted perceptions – a density of Rasas as *Bhayanaka* (terrible) or *Bibhatsa* (odious) and a consequent rarefaction of the *Santa* (peace) – in an overall metropolitan ordering of images and aesthetics that increasingly and differentially makes it a matter of ‘taste’ to be a Hindu. Under the auspices of a constitutionally secular state, it is not law, but custom that dictates that the ‘good’ Muslim, in order to be figural and familial, can have no other vocation but a perpetual statist militancy that reaches its apogee -- a perfect deliverance from vice -- only in the consummate moment of death. Being Muslim is thus hardly ever a normal form of life that can subsist in peace (a taste of *Santa rasa*); it attains visibility only in an atmosphere of emergency, in which the dispassionate and ‘secular’ choice between good and bad begins from the same parabasis – the sublime fear of a God that produces at once, the visages of terror, as well as pure bodies that die combating that same terror. The choice has to be made formally precisely because the God in question here does not have a ready identification with the normative theology of the state. The figure of the life sacrificing Muslim policeman and soldier can be seen in some of the most unabashedly Hindu communal-statist films as well as moderate ones of recent times, like Dhal/Shield (Sameer Malkan, 1997), Line of Control (J.P. Dutta, 2003), Sarfrosh/Patriotism (John Matthew Mathan, 1999), Qayamat/Apocalypse (Harry Baweja, 2003), Garv – Praide and Honor (Puneet Issar, 2004) or Kachche Dhage/Tender Thread (Milan Luthria, 1999).

Increasingly, the Muslim becomes figurable and narratable in popular Hindi cinema only in a battleground of terror and militancy, but this is not because he completely disappears from the national frame as a precluded identity. Instead it can be said that the Islamic persona, in terms of a discursive regularity of images and melodramatic dispensations of effect, gradually loses its semiotic resources for appearing in pictures of the social and the diurnal -- in the form of neighborliness, friendliness, or brotherliness -- in occasionings of Rasa that pertain to *hasya* (comic), *karuna* (compassionate) or *adbhuta* (marvelous). In order to understand this overall field that spells *Hinduness* as a metropolitan normative, and includes,

through differential exclusion, the Muslim as an exceptional image of good and bad passion, what is needed is an advanced scrutiny of forms of cinematic language in Indian cinema. As suggested earlier, in doing this, one has to think cinema beyond the auspices of the subject, the unity of perception, the wholeness of law, and most importantly, the pieties of representation that these give rise to. One has to thus think in terms of assemblages.

#### 4. Lyrical Resolutions and Postulated Desires: Assemblages in Popular Indian Cinema

##### Forms of Cinematic Life

Rakesh Roshan's 1995 film Karan Arjun/Karan and Arjuna offers a typical cinematic instance of what has been called a non-subjective theodicy of *Dharma*. This happens early on in the film, immediately after the diabolical Thakur Durjan Singh and his men have hacked Karan and Arjuna -- the two sons of Durga -- to pieces. The distraught and hysterical mother runs to the Kali temple even as the surroundings grow elemental and it seems that nature herself is reacting to this outrage. The sequence inside the temple begins with a Dutch angle close up of the goddess Kali, which of course, is a standard way to show a world off kilter. There is then a cut away to a top angle long shot from Kali's perspective showing the mother rush in. Durga looks accusingly, in a frontal manner, at the goddess and declares that her sons cannot die, since a mother (that is Kali herself) cannot empty the bosom of another one. She then demands the impossible from the goddess -- which is that her Karan and Arjun be returned to her by the latter's grace and justice. This momentous utterance is accompanied by thunder strikes in the sound track. The camera then cuts to a close up of Durga who begins to bang her head on the sacrificial platform in front of the inclement goddess of power. Shots of the bloody blows inflicted on the self by a crazed, yet unwaveringly faith-impelled Durga are interspersed with more Dutch angle close ups of the goddess. A slow use of the zoom, increasing at every shot-reverse shot exchange of looks between the acolyte and the divine, and a rising crescendo of music as if brings the prayer and the inevitable moment of deliverance to a critical proximity. There is a groundless cut away to a hospital this time, to a shot of a doctor delivering a baby. While the nurse encourages the mother in labor, there is a cut away to a shot of lightening strikes filling the sky. This is followed by a cut to Durga still banging her head in front of the goddess. A close up of Kali is then followed by a cut away to the hospital, where the baby is pulled out of his mother's womb. When the baby cries out, a sound bridge carries the wail to the next shot of

Durga in the temple, who lifts her head as if to register a distant miracle outside the integrated realist milieu of her surroundings. Durga looks up at Kali with grateful eyes. The camera executes a tilt up shot of Kali that zooms to a close up. This is followed by another cut away to a different hospital, where another baby is being born. The anarchic play of *rasas* (that began with the *Bibhatsa* or grotesque slaughter of the innocents) in the meantime have gradually ceded to an overall takeover of *Santi* rasa or peace; the bells in the temple begin clamoring of their own accord as the mother folds her hands to thank the goddess. This is precisely when the title sequence begins to unfold in the film.

What is thereby launched is a chronicle already foretold. The two new born babies born to distant, unknown parents inevitably grow up to be the exact replicas of the murdered Karan and Arjun. Compelled by the powerful, uterine call of a memory from another birth, they come to reunite with their mother and also wreak revenge on the evil Durjan Singh. The rest of the film is a run of the mill action spectacular that uses different geo-televisual resources of the world – the kick boxing powers of Karan and an assemblage of western gunfighting and rodeo skills of Arjuna – to bring about a kind of denouement that has many parallels in commercial cinemas of the world. However, it would be useful try to analyze in some greater detail the cinematic mechanisms that can combine standard attributes of novelized spectacle with mythic postulates of the *Dharmic*. The camera work and editorial intelligence in such films sometimes abide by and often also depart from classical schemas of realist narration. The trial here however is not to devise a grammar for such exchanges, but to appreciate the multiple powers and ontologies of such unholy assemblages.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha has theorized a particular ontological/epistemological duality in early Indian cinema<sup>157</sup>. Unlike Bazin, who proposed that the cinematic frame was centrifugal (as opposed to the centripetal frame of the painting), Rajadhyaksha argues that in the early mythologicals of the Indian cinematic pioneer Dadasaheb Phalke the frame had operated neither centrifugally nor centripetally, but as a *holding constant* (Rajadhyaksha, “Neo-Traditionalism: Film as Popular Art in India”, 45). The iconic aspect was thus held in a flat,

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<sup>157</sup> See Rajadhyaksha, “Epic Melodrama” (1994).

diagrammatic surface in a *frontal* manner, without the permissive and voyeuristic deployment of the spectator's point-of-view. The liberation of the narrative, in such a situation, was affected only through dissolves and fades, and a series of trick shots that often coincided with the magical powers of Krishna ("Neo-traditionalism" 38). Here cinema is conceived in alliance with a long standing practice in Indian visual arts in which the frame is scarcely used as a container. As an emblematic unit of enunciation, the frame is instead deployed to pause the narrative flow and regulate its cadence. Rajadhyaksha notes that the dialectic between a tangible but intangible inscription of film and a mythic imaginary of a community of devotees that continuously absolves it, was more or less a static one in the early cinema of Phalke; in later mythologicals like Fatehlal and Damle's Sant Tukaram (1936), it becomes a dynamic fostering of rhythm that can ontologically hold together a cinematic in which the living and the exemplary are rendered indistinguishable. This of course does not happen in a phenomenological plane of individual consciousness, but in a horizon of community belief.

The frame functions more as a coming together of ontological forces that impart a mythic refurbishment to the *movement* of cinema, pulling bodies and vistas away from the degradation of historical processes. The altercation is thus between an industrial-cinematic movement and a painterly arrest of exemplary form and poise. The image becomes real not because of a representational presumption of the medium – a proposed authenticity of its inscriptions – but because what is real are the audience and its desires. The cognitive powers of the community of viewers and the matter of the image in movement enter into a rhythmic exchange of evocation and understanding in a constitutive, cosmic plane of devotional intelligence. The multifarious flows of Rasa in a phenomenal world are thus perpetually compressed into a singular stance of *Bhakti*. This formulation can be linked to Geeta Kapur's about how the emblematic image undergoes a process of *iconographic augmentation* in a film like Sant Tukaram. The iconic, in a non-Piercian sense, is "an image into which symbolic meanings converge and in which they achieve stasis" (Geeta Kapur, "Mythic Material in Indian Cinema" 82). As a result, it is "the legend, the heroic saint himself, [who]

dictated the movement of the film,”<sup>158</sup> affording a picture of unalienated labor as miracle of everyday life. It is precisely this immanent presence of a mythic authority that Kapur distinguishes from the central figure in Ray’s 1960 film *Devi*, which she reads as an ethnographic allegory. In Ray’s film, a feudal lord, waking up one day from uneasy dreams, declares his young daughter-in-law to be an incarnation of the goddess. Here, according to Kapur, Ray’s realist camera, working in an analytic-diagnostic mode, *tragically* denies the figure of the woman precisely the iconic aspect that is noticed in *Tukaram*<sup>159</sup>. The tragedy of *Devi* unfolds at that diffuse zone between a miraculous pre-modern ethnic existence and the stoic but unforgiving science of the camera. The patriarch’s dream becomes a dream amenable to psychoanalytic readings of a revealed ‘depth’ of the unconscious rather than an unquestionable revelation cast in an epic surface. The young bride becomes a victim of intolerable cruelty precisely because she is unable to reveal either a godly aspect, or a human consciousness. She turns to her city educated, rational husband and wonders if she *really* is divine and then subsequently loses her mind when she fails to perform the miraculous act of healing a moribund child. Madness here becomes a part of the figure’s ‘look away’ from the camera, her failure to exhibit herself candidly and wholesomely to the camera as a frontal aspect of the icon that is absolved from both, her confined sensibilities and guilt, as well as a historical out of field of disease, underdevelopment, and death.

The studies of early Indian cinema by Rajadhyaksha and Kapur, along with the perceptive readings of turn of the century photography and Parsi theater by Anuradha Kapur<sup>160</sup> converge on a particular feature of *frontality* in the Indian visual arts. Drawing a genealogy of the iconic cinematic image from the Mughal, Pahari, and Sikh schools of art, and later from the works of Raja Ravi Verma and the Tanjore school (that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>158</sup> Kumar Shahni, “The Saint Poets of Prabhat”, 201.

<sup>159</sup> See Kapur, “Mythic Material in Indian Cinema” 97-105.

<sup>160</sup> See Rajadhyaksha, “The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology” (1987), “Neo-traditionalism: Film as Popular Art in India” (1986), and “Epic Melodrama: Themes of Nationality in Indian Cinema” (1994); Kapur in “Representational Dilemmas of a Nineteenth Century Painter: Raja Ravi Verma” (2000) apart from “Mythic Material in Indian Cinema” (1987); see also Anuradha Kapur in “The Representation of Gods and Heroes: Parsi Mythological Drama of the Early Twentieth Century” (1993).



colonial-photographic milieu, combined a traditional frontal immanence of the divine figure with European Renaissance anatomism), Geeta Kapur focuses on the features of “direct address, flat, diagrammatic and simply profiled figures; a figure-ground pattern with only notational perspective; a repetition of motifs in terms of ‘ritual play’; and a decorative”<sup>161</sup> in theatrical, artistic and cinematic forms. Speaking about *Parsi Theatre*, Anuradha Kapur distinguishes this general coda of frontality from conventions of European naturalism:

turning the body towards the spectator is a sign that there is in this relationship no dissembling between the two: the actor looks at the audience and the audience looks at the actor; both exist – as actor and audience – because of this candid contact. A reciprocally regarding theatre transaction of this kind is substantially different from one made in a theatre that takes an imaginary fourth wall, standing where the stage ends and the seating begins, as its governing convention<sup>162</sup>.

But as Rajadhyaksha notes in his studies, this process of iconographic augmentation -- the extending of a candid contact with the imaginary by using the actor as a *Patra* or repository of iconic postures -- is a cinematic process that is potentially crisis ridden from the onset. The crisis begins with the viewer/acolyte’s phenomenal encounter with the image as a *picture in movement*, whose mythic restfulness and ontological fixity is always threatened by a horizontal movement of film, and a causal, calendrical unfolding of the world as epistemology. According to Rajadhyaksha, therefore, the metaphysics of presence implied in the direct transmission of address, or the ‘candid contact’, was phenomenally contested by the technical operation of cinema as dialogic *inscription*, as a medium that could only *enframe* the world discursively. In other words, a lateral lure of narration always threatened to overwhelm the ontological pull to the static<sup>163</sup>. Spatially, the problem can be understood in terms of the actor’s entering and leaving the frame through a measurable *movement* that

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<sup>161</sup> Geeta Kapur, “Mythic Material in Indian Cinema” 80.

<sup>162</sup> Anuradha Kapur, “The Representation of Gods and Gods and Heroes: Parsi Mythological Drama of the Early Twentieth Century” 92.

<sup>163</sup> See Rajadhyaksha, “The Phalke Era”.

can disturb precisely the ‘holding constant’ of the deity as an eternal incarnate of symbolic meanings. The iconic frame stood to suffer a centripetal dispersal of energies in such cases, and the iconic body had to undergo a novelistic degradation of having to undergo rites of narrative passage in chronometric time and space. Nevertheless, in his detailed analysis of two of Phalke’s most celebrated films – *Raja Harishchandra* and *Shri Krishna Janma* – Rajadhyaksha concludes that in such films “Narrative necessarily means .....a continuing projective identification into the site of the crisis. It means a wish-fulfillment of appropriating the happy ending realized by external intervention (God/us) that finally places us back at the frontal helm.” (“The Phalke Era” 80).

Rajadhyaksha thus reads Indian cinema as a tortured evolute of a primary mythical impulse in a hazardous, chancy, and discontinuous realm of modernity. This is especially true of the cinema of the later decades, when the reformist genre of the ‘social’ replaces the mythological in the studio products of Filmstan and Bombay Talkies<sup>164</sup>. This transfer however, as Rajadhyaksha notes, kept in place an aesthetic bridge between the social and the mythical, by which the presiding deity was replaced by a national narrative format. The citizen was thus always already the devotee, whose secular navigation through the messy paraphernalia of the city --with its alluring toys of consumption, industrial development, parliamentary democracy, and godless historical models of becoming – is mitigated in different degrees by a groundless promise of return. The return however, as it should be in the case of modern narratives of becoming, does not so much posit a home in the form of the nucleated bourgeois couple or the nation state. Rather, it pertains to a final remembrance of the eternal that comes *after* the sometimes intolerable, sometimes irredeemable memories of underdevelopment and the tribulations of an unhappy historical consciousness are alleviated. It involves a promise of a final frontal encounter with an otherworldly horizon of meaning, a constitutive cosmology of justice as *Dharma* over and beyond the myriad realities of the juridical nation-state. In Madhava Prasad’s excellent study of narrative formats in Hindi cinema, this assuring social-mythical message is seen to emanate from ontological fountain springs of a Symbolic Order designated by God, King

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<sup>164</sup> See Rajadhyaksha, “Epic Melodrama”.

and the Star. This “hierarchical mode of address” is transmitted through an assemblage of performative attributes of cinema, which serve as vehicles of transmission, relaying it to the spectator who is the passive receptor of meaning. Prasad contrasts this narrative covenant to the Bazinian social-contractual models of realism, in which the cinematic apparatus works to efface its own presence as machine of inscription, offering a transparent metalanguage that facilitates a full and punctual presentation of reality to be interpreted under the auspices of a liberal democratic viewership<sup>165</sup>. Prasad has named the pre-eminent form of the social melodrama that emerged in the forties, during the dawn of the new republic, the Feudal Family Romance<sup>166</sup>.

Prasad links the notion of *frontality* to the social institution of *darsana* which, in the special sense he invokes, “refers to a relation of perception within the public traditions of Hindu worship, especially in the temples, but also in public appearances of monarchs and other elevated figures. Typically this structure is constituted by the combination of three elements: the divine image, the worshipper and the mediating priest” (*Ideology of the Hindi Film* 75) *Darsana* thus pertains to a way of beholding through permission -- and being privileged and enriched in the process -- in contrast to the look of the empowered viewer subject who has already reduced the image to the object of the look. Prasad suggests that the visual economy of *Darsana* is only one of the many visual styles of enunciation in the process of heterogeneous manufacture<sup>167</sup>. Narrative movement unfolds with a combination of old and new codes -- the serial presentation of events interspersed with moments of static display of iconic figures, when the novelistic ‘gaze’ is arrested, and a dimension of epic totality introduced with the temporary suspension of chronometric time.

The result, seen formally, is thus a highly eclectic string of attractions and evocative, iconic poses interspersed by segments of continuity editing. But in formal and ideological terms, what kind of cinema does that give rise to? Let us consider a few diagnostic observations. In

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<sup>165</sup> See Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* 18-26

<sup>166</sup> See Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* 64-72

<sup>167</sup> On this also see Ravi Vasudevan, “The Politics of Cultural Address in a Transitional Cinema: A Case Study of Popular Indian Cinema” (2000).

Vasudevan's analysis, "The diegetic world of this cinema is primarily governed by the logic of kinship relations, and its plot driven by family conflict. The system of dramaturgy is a melodramatic one, displaying the characteristic ensemble of Manichaeism, bipolarity, the privileging of the moral over the psychological and the deployment of coincidence plot structures. And the relationship between narrative, performance sequence and action spectacle is loosely structured in the fashion of a cinema of attractions. In addition to these features, the system of narration incorporates Hollywood codes of continuity editing in a fitful, unsystematic fashion, relies heavily on visual forms such as the tableau and inducts cultural modes of looking of a more archaic sort." ("The Politics of Cultural Address in a Transitional Cinema," 12). In Lalitha Gopalan's reading, this gives rise to a cinema of 'interruptions', where, for instance, the "song and dance sequences work as a delaying device; the interval defers resolutions, postpones endings and doubles beginnings; and censorship blocks the narrative flow, redirects the spectator's pleasure towards and away from the state"<sup>168</sup>. Along with these digressive impulses, "Indian popular films are equally invested in assuaging the discontinuity accompanying these cuts by resorting to generic logic"(Gopalan, Cinema of Interruptions 180).

Gopalan's formulation, as well as Prasad's idea of 'spectacular narration', can be seen in relation to Vasudevan's analysis of a segment of Mehboob Khan's 1948 film Andaaz. Vasudevan notes that the serial combination of codes takes place through a cinematic dynamization of three elements: segments of linear narrative, brief moments of iconic stasis and the tableaux, where a static visual arrangement is invested with narrative value<sup>169</sup>. According to Vasudevan, "Both the iconic and the tableau modes are often presented frontally, at a 180 degree plane to the camera and seem to verge on a stasis, enclosing meaning within their frame, and ignoring off-screen as a site of reference, potential disturbance and re-organization." ("Shifting Codes and Dissolving Identities", 55) These are

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<sup>168</sup> Lalitha Gopalan, Cinema of Interruptions (2002):179.

<sup>169</sup> Ravi Vasudevan, "Shifting Codes, Dissolving Identities: The Hindi Social Film of the 1950s as Popular Culture." *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 23/24 (January, 1993) 60-6.

used in tandem with devices of American continuity cinema – eyeline match, thirty degree rule, 180 degree rule, POV shot, correct screen direction, and match on action cuts.

Seen in these terms, the interplay between the eminent (as in iconic stasis), the immanent (as in tableau) and the dialogic (as in linear realist narration) sets up a dynamic and complex unfolding of meaning in cinema, in which the camera oscillates between a secular navigation of an uneven, historical world, to the presentation of a static, depthless façade of an epic cosmology<sup>170</sup>. The latter would be a world where all meanings are always, already secured as the Word, and events are impelled by an ontological necessity that is not subject to complex, psychological predilections or social contingencies that mark the degraded world of the novel<sup>171</sup>. However, according to Vasudevan, the formal ideological challenge in this oscillation between the epic and the modernist-realist codas of expression lay in securing the graduated dominance of an urban, educated middle class subject position in the final count<sup>172</sup>. In other words, it involved the strenuous establishment of a normative of ‘scientific’ story-telling as a baseline of aesthetic value, by which different modes of the cinematic (the song and dance, the *darsanic* encounter with the iconic figure) would be judged in terms of their differential and deferential relations with realism.

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<sup>170</sup> Elsewhere, Vasudevan suggests that the pleasure of visual entertainment can be seen to be operative precisely in a zone of “in between-ness” amidst narratological propositions: “Etymologically, entertainment means ‘holding between’. The cinema’s work of representation performs just such an operation; its skills are used to generate fantasy spaces for its audience, spaces which are literally ‘held between’ phases of routine domestic and working life”. See Ravi Vasudevan, “The Cultural Space of a Film Narrative: Interpreting *Kismet* (Bombay Talkies, 1943)” The Indian Economic and Social History Review 28, no. 2 (1991): 172.

<sup>171</sup> I am of course alluding to Georg Lukács’ famous understanding of the emergence of the modern European novel in a disenchanted world where the gods are in retreat and the composite, depthless cosmology of the epics is in ruins. See Georg Lukács, Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature, trans. Anna Bostok (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1971). Another monumental study in the same Germanic philosophical tradition would of course be Eric Auerbach’s Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Doubleday, 1957).

<sup>172</sup> See Vasudevan, “Shifting Codes”, 72.

## Assemblages of Mythic Novelization

It becomes apparent that popular Hindi cinema presents an uneven topography of enunciation in which novelistic depths are punctuated by epic surfaces. Truth is thus not always a matter of secular investigation and discovery, as in the detective film that makes the essential form of classical narrative cinema. Speech, as Prasad notes, frequently arrives in the form of authorial *vacika* or statement that is already interpreted (Ideology of the Hindi Film 71). In Prakash Mehra's 1973 revenge drama Zanjeer for instance, the young police officer recognizes his parents' murderer by chance, twenty years after the event, when he notices a silver chain dangling on the latter's right wrist. Long ago, during that fateful night, the hero, as a terrified boy in hiding, had seen that hand firing the gun. It had been preserved in his memory ever since by an uninterrupted series of nightmares. Similarly, the protagonist in Nasir Hussain's Yadon Ki Baraat discovers the identity of the villain who had killed his parents and scattered the rest of his family when a twist in the tale reveals to him that the latter wore different sized shoes on his feet. As projects of memory, the chain on the hand or the shoes on the feet are thus images that are a compact of perceptual powers; they pertain to both, a Freudian understanding of trauma as well as a signature of epic memory, like Odysseus' scar<sup>173</sup>. The event of remembrance is a filmic statement whose diagrammatic curve indeterminately intersects a mythic notion of fate or *kismet* as well as that of 'luck' in a mathematical chain of possibilities.

These narrative postulates can be called *assemblages*<sup>174</sup> in a transformed Deleuzian sense, that is, without partaking in Deleuze's occasional tendencies towards an acosmic vitalism or a transcendental empiricism. Assemblages are loose, diffuse, but pragmatic combinations of statements, bodies, sounds, qualities, and visibilities that come together and disperse constantly. The notion of assemblage does not accommodate a subject-object presiding over

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<sup>173</sup> See Eric Auerbach, Mimesis (1957), chapter 1.

<sup>174</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1987). Also Gilles Deleuze, Foucault (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1997).

distinctions between nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Nor does it conform to a Cartesian dualism and hierarchical ordering between the mind and the body. Instead, assemblages throw up diagrams and theorems of how both the materiality of ideas and the idealisms and expressive qualities conferred on matter combine to produce effects of power and intelligence. They are pulses of semiotic energy and sign particles that have a cinematic life of their own, and can be commanded by narratological drives, symbolic structures, and propositional statements only in retrospect, as ‘afterthoughts’ of storytelling. The story, as it so often happens in popular Hindi cinema, may establish *propositionally* or *morally* (as attributes of the national subject) that the Hindu woman never dresses or behaves in an immodest manner. But at the same time, the ‘cinematic’ that governs such a film may easily cast the woman’s body in multiple erotic assemblages of danger or dreams, by which she may be forced to dance in front of leering villains in order to save her boyfriend, or a dream sequence can claim her body to pass it through an entirely different circuit of travel, fashion, and sexual aesthetics. Once that happens, the overarching framework of ethical narration is unable to command the erotics of signs and bodies and telescope them into a constitutive subjective perception. One cannot say that the woman is *actually* not seen in the lurid and decadent dream assemblage, because she, as a pure aspect of bodily energy no longer bound by an Indian soul, is already seen as an immanent cinematic body.

Assemblages can indeterminately combine a host of perceptual, diagnostic, and semiotic powers pertaining to, for instance, the typologies provided by Rajadhyaksha (mythic impulses and modern instruments) and Vasudevan (the iconic, the tableau and the realist). Hence, in assemblages, the so called postulates of the artisanal and the industrial, the traditional and the modern need not always be dialectically poised against each other. They can be in what Deleuze calls *dividual* relationships, in which there are dynamic reunions and aspirations towards ‘wholes’, but at the same time, concurrent divisions of the whole into particles<sup>175</sup>. What is important in such an understanding is that the political and intellectual impact of such assemblages need not be retroactively derived from an absent dialectical synthesis, by which movements of tradition and those of modernity are to be evaluated

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<sup>175</sup> See Deleuze, Cinema 1, 20.

according to the extent to which they either merge or are subsumed by the other. The interaction between opposites can instead produce intelligences and truths as third relations rather than dialectical resolutions. In other words, for a political proper to emerge, tradition need not be extinguished completely in an agonistically achieved process of becoming modern; rather, there can be different modalities of power that orchestrate, manipulate, control, and publicize such varied, dividual interfaces between ideograms of the old and the new. This formulation will be especially useful in understanding not just contemporary Indian cinema since the nineties, but also an ideology of new age *Hindutva* in an age of globalization. The notion of assemblages as such is highly pertinent in theorizing a contemporary 'informatic' overcoding of geo-televisual manifolds (of which visibilities of east and west, home and the world are integral parts) that has been seen in the first two chapters, in discussing a new age cinematic in Shankar's Nayak or Aziz Mirza's Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindusthani.

### **Assemblages of Temporality**

In Yash Chopra's 1965 film Waqt, it is a catastrophic coming together of the father's secular hubristic utterance (Man makes his own fate he peremptorily declares) and a natural earthquake that de-territorializes the family of five, separating the parents from each other and their three sons for years. After that, two forces bring them back together: a secular murder investigation and trial, and the father's metaphysical utterances of repentance and divinatory prayers. Time in Waqt is thus a cinematic calibration of events in a linear temporality (the criminological detection that leads up to the lost son) as well as a curvature of mythic recall that holds constant (there is no temporal gap between the hubris and the repentance; both are attributes of an eternal exemplum). The momentous utterances in the film are thus both dialogic speech acts between interacting individuals in historical time, as well as words that are emblazoned in an epic sky of meaning<sup>176</sup>. Both the past as well as the

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<sup>176</sup> The category epic is used here as part of a modernist epistemology that, in the case of Indic cultures, involved to a certain extent the ordering of the multiple literary and oral traditions of the Ramayana or Mahabharata lore into unstable, but tendentially monolithic body of 'epic' referents for a national culture.



present inhere simultaneously here, as a palimpsest; the sky, which is a recurrent image of disturbance in Hindi cinema, is a baroque façade without any depth<sup>177</sup>. In it, the writings of history, the actions of the past and the redemptions of the future, the knowledges of modern education, as well as the technological facilitations that come with development are already inscribed. This is precisely why the epic cast of the narrative in *Waqt*, as it is true about all ‘lost and found’ themes that abound in popular Hindi cinema, is a chronicle that is already foretold. It is an already there dictation of the *Dharmic* order that says what is lost will be found again. This is also why it can be argued that the ‘end statement’ that closes the film -- which for Bellour, apropos the dominant Western paradigm, constitutes the final submission to Oedipus, or in Prasad’s understanding of Hindi cinema, is a formal surrender to the weak state – needs to be devalued in favor of the assemblages of events and desire that come in between. The moment of ‘finding’ is a ceremonial holding constant, a repetition with *differences* that was promised long ago. What would perhaps be more interesting than reaching a banal conclusion about the *ahistorical*, superstitious bend of such cinema is an examination of the assemblages that *entertain*, in the etymological sense of ‘holding in between’. That chaosmos of semiotics introduces anarchic flows and foldings in ways that often bear no obligation to the propositional epic frame of eternal return. These are forces of medialities (as that unbound power that threatens to engulf both origins and ends) that must be critically understood in terms of their immanent forcefulness, without submitting them to molar narratives of national destinying and retroactively governing their scope of meaning in the process. In other words, what can be the objects of analysis are the *thick* semiotics of the historical, the spectacular, and the mundane that have to be navigated before the lost is found again. A study of popular Hindi cinema can be proposed in terms of assemblages of in-between-ness rather than in terms of a governing mythic orientation of the narrative that formally submits to a weak constitutional order of the middle class in the final instance. This is because it is during these moments that figures and facts are left in an allegorical landscape of ruins, and immoral decadence. Here, allegory, as it has been understood in the first chapter, is no longer a narrative proposition of national becoming, but a catachrestic assemblage of incommensurabilities. In such a stark allegorical landscape that offers no

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<sup>177</sup> A stock shot of a stormy, elemental sky, with lightning strikes, inserted just before something momentous happens, is one of the most recurrent clichés in popular Hindi cinema.

idealism of home or constitution, bodies are free to endure as well as joyously take pleasure in the unbecoming of diagrams – those of the modern as well as the mythic. Sons and daughters often go for interesting joyrides before they are tracked down and rehabilitated by the middle class or feudal values of daddy and mommy.

Assemblages can bring together a *mélange* of perceptual semiotics pertaining to immanent, trans-human wisdom that at once emits from the figure of god or the iconic authority, secular knowledges of the world, and a groundless, purely ornamental aesthetics. The latter for example is seen in two scenes involving inscriptions of blood in Manmohan Desai's Dharam Veer (1977) and Amar Akbar Anthony (1977). In the former film, the hero puts his blood mark on the forehead of a haughty and 'shrewish' princess, declaring that the imprint will take a long time to be effaced. The princess discovers this to be true, especially when she compares the 'manly thickness' of the mark with the watery blood of her 'effeminate' and cowardly fiancé. In Amar Akbar Anthony three brothers, who were separated from each other and their parents decades ago, meet at a hospital through sheer chance. Without knowing, in one amongst many such moments of supreme, wistful dramatic irony, they give blood to a blind woman who is actually their long lost mother. The cinematic blood transfusion becomes an epic orchestration of knowledge particles and instruments of medical science. Three tubes carrying blood from the bodies of the heroes gather in one bottle; the collected reservoir is simultaneously channelized to the mother's body. In this pensive melodramatic moment of non-recognition, the attributes of a medical impossibility (even if the blood groups match, the output from three different sources cannot be simultaneously administered) accumulate with affections from a feudal imaginary (blood or *khoon* as a marker of lineage; the mother as a fountain source of being and meaning in the world).

### **Alcoholic Assemblages and Diffused Ethical Perceptions**

Assemblages often bring about acute, propositionally 'impossible' passages in the melodramatic dispensation of the narrative. That is, they often give rise to a temporary, affectional separation between desire and ethics. In films like Himmat Aur Mehnat (K.

Bapaiah, 1987) and Vardi (Umesh Mehra, 1988) for instance, the stigma of pre-marital sex is mediated by alcohol. The hero figures in both these films undergo a process of naturalistic inebriation, a temporary de-territorialization of their ethical-civic diagrams. They get drunk and have ‘non-consensual’ sex with the heroines. The ‘forced’ aspect however does not pertain to the woman as individual exercising choice and having a juridical identity of her own, but to the permissive limits of the *Dharmic* as absolute. Alcohol here serves as a pure, hyper-real force of linguistic ‘dissolve’ that not only suspends the juridical perception of things (which is why rape is not an issue) but also temporarily de-focalizes the *Dharmic* administration of ethical narration. It enters into an assemblage with the humanoid figure of the hero, for the time being absolving him of ethical habitat, and reinventing him as a romantic beastly automaton, a pure body of masculine robustness. The question of law and civility does not arise, or arises only as afterthoughts precisely because an epic administration of alcohol can achieve the consummate consolidation of melodramatic desire through a waking action that is completely and ‘exceptionally’ devoid of consciousness. Later, after a sobering ‘total’ return of moral focus, the contrite hero prevents the heroine from committing suicide by simply offering to reconstitute the social fabric by marrying her. In Manmohan Desai’s Aa Gale Lag Jaa (1973), it is an assemblage between ice-water, the body of the woman, the voluntarism of the hero, and medical science that creates an ‘emergency’ ground for pre-marital sex. The hero is forced to bring his body into intimate contact with the woman’s in order to pass on heat and save her life after she falls into freezing waters. Melodrama as ‘entertainment’ thus becomes immanent in that very makeshift space where the traditional dictates foreclosing the sexual relation enter into a zone of exceptional commerce with sex as urgent medical administration.

Assemblages are not formations of hybridity; they are not unifying incidents in which the fragments of tradition and armaments of modernity reach a synthesis or an organic state of peace. Neither are they tame semiotic blocks from which a semiological narration can flow punctually, as an uninterrupted part-whole synthetic movement. Assemblages are operational crisscrossings of different, often antagonistic worlds of meaning. In these, ‘blood’ for instance is frequently not a stable, constituted signifier; it is the dint of red on the screen that can always fork and flow into different knowledge universes – blood as a

biochemical entity in the medical sciences, as well as blood as mythic marker of lineage or manhood. Assemblages are thus semiotic affections first and must be considered as such; narratological functions and resolutions emerge as *part* consequences of their erotics. A governing parabasis of narration and its different principles of unity (the subject, frame, time, space and action) cannot pre-determine the semiotic amplitude of assembling signs; they can claim them only partially, that too only formally and retroactively. In the case of popular Indian narratives that consolidated what can be called a 'classical' form during the post-independence era from the fifties to the seventies, the narratological grammar that selectively claims visibilities and statements for plot purposes is only *partly modern*. That is, it includes many devices, functions, and beliefs that have little to do with cultural blueprints of modernity or of a civilizational scientific perspective. The important point however, is that this understanding must not entail what Prasad has warned against, a pre-emptive designation of a 'not yet cinema'. Rather, not only do popular Indian cinematic forms have a complex productive logic of their own, but they can also affect combinations of affections and signs with a remarkably high quotient of suppleness and alacrity. Moreover, it must be recognized that such a cinema is not concerned merely with regional curiosities of the self; instead, it can bring about these fluid assemblages of intelligence on a planetary scale, curving across and organizing a globality of visibilities in a very efficient manner.

## **Postulations**

In archetypal 'lost and found' narratives of popular Hindi cinema, the policing, preserving, and restoring capabilities of the state are seen to have limited functional value. The often abridged visibility and narratological efficacy of the parliamentary democratic dispensation or even of secular, 'rational' forms of intelligence like logic and deduction certainly point to a diagnosis by which one can say that the ideological canvas of these films, although differentially and multiply oriented, is largely dominated by a feudal-Brahminical enunciatory force. Illustrative elaborations of this thesis have to be prefaced by further unpacking of *assemblage* as a concept.

As it has been already suggested, the landscape of phenomenal narration in Indian cinema is an undulating one that cannot be 'totally' surveyed by the imperial gaze of the subject. It holds resources of miracle and magic that can only be revealed to the protagonist and not discovered by his sciences. It is in this sense that resolution, as a moment of 'arrival' at a telos through a mapping of meaning, is a 'postulated' one in such tales of mystery and wonder. Here the word 'postulation' is used once again to denote a sphere of signification that lies between a hypothesis of secular knowledge and 'postulate' in the specific etymological sense of 'prayer'. It is thus located in the middle grounds, intersecting a degraded world of probabilities, apocalyptic fears, forebodings, and enervation in relation to the modern, as well as a different but contiguous universe of mythic belief. This formulation can be cast as a theoretical fiction in relation to another limit case, that of 'real' resolution as a dominant western paradigm. In contradistinction to the latter, postulated resolution is affected by an assemblage of earthly and cosmological intelligences, rather than by pure human inferences of truth or applications of justice. Here, the moment of decision is not the instant when the conscious individual, after a historical navigation of the world, completes his education and finally returns home to the metropolis, the civil society, or the modern state. In postulation, the map of the world is not produced as a truth of science. Postulation is the result of a compossible 'prayer' of deliverance -- a diagram inscribing God, the state, the figure of the hero as citizen or the figure of the hero as a repository of mythic possibilities. In most cases, it is an assemblage that contains all these components and more. As intelligent force of deliverance and desire in the world, postulation can be inclusive of not just attributes of human and godly consciousnesses and actions, but also that of the anthropomorphic or divinely motivated animal. A tiger saves the hero's mother (discursively established as the arch symbol of a nation in crisis) in Manmohan Desai's Mard (1985) and salutes her. In Desai's other film Amar Akbar Anthony (1977), it is a snake that 'ahistorically' arrives from the out of field and protects the figure of the mother from the clutches of unsavory characters. The lost woman then stumbles across a landscape which is an originary world, not rationally unfolded by the cartographic protocols of realist camera movement and editing. She reaches a temple where she is cured of her blindness by the reigning deity. After that, when she returns to the 'real' metropolitan space of Bombay, a

chain of events leads her to a reunion with three sons, separated from her long ago<sup>178</sup>. In the climax of Abbas-Mastan's Soldier, it is a *Dharmic* ensemble of forces – the praying mother, the deity of justice in a derelict temple, and an elemental sandstorm --- that come from a mythic out of field and scatter the army of evil doers. The groundless return of the *Dharmic* thereby delivers the besieged hero, punishes the guilty, and restores order.

Postulations are thus assemblages of secular as well as otherworldly knowledge; they involve memories and projects that extend 'beyond' the archives of the state and the cognitive and analytical consciousness of the individual. The tasks of recognition, retribution and restoration are thus often performed by magical or mythical community generated ensembles of power that often exceed rational historical expectations or juridically permissible limits. In David Dhawan's Aankhen (1993), it is an assemblage of state power and the irresistible ministrations of a cosmic justice that mobilizes human intelligence as well as a 'humanised' monkey to combat international terrorism. In Vijay Reddy's Teri Meherbanian (1985), a video footage of the killing (a recording administered by destiny itself, since no one was 'manning' the camera at the moment) and the memory of the faithful, avenging dog come together to create a plane of machinic, divinatory, and animal intelligence. It is this compact that restores the *Dharmic* by bringing the men who murdered the hero to book. Sometimes it can be the compact of the body (as image) and the Word (as sound image) that can affect decisive transformation; in Desai's Coolie (1983), the Quranic verses recited by the hero render him impervious to bullets. Subjective points of view and human consciousnesses are thus two among many attributes in an intersecting, altering, transforming matrix of 'visibilities', articulable statements, morally permissible tasks and juridically definable actions. The latter components do not add up to a constitutive ethical whole as in the Hegelian nation-state; they are instead postulatory 'pragmatics' of justice as Dharma. They are instruments that often come without obligations or roots; they reside in a random, differential interface between the word of many inscrutable gods and the manifold and fallible judgments of man.

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<sup>178</sup> In this context one can of course mention the numerous films on the snake-man transmogrification myth.

The filmic coming into being of postulation is the result of a dynamic layering of many strata of memory and discourse. It is that which creates manifold pictures of outrage, anger and abomination by accumulating affections and signs from various sources that can be called geo-televisual. The pompous and abhorrent villain in Mukul Anand's Khoon ka Karz (1990) calls himself Hitler Champaklal (as in the Nazi dictator) and Ravana Champaklal (as in the 'evil' King of Lanka in the epic Ramayana) alternately. In Anand's film, he is vanquished by three protagonists who bear names of epic heroes and also sociological signatures of the urban criminalized proletariat in their bodies. As it happens in many such cinematic narratives (especially the urban crime genres of the 50s and 70s), here the postulatory assemblage of justice (that has been elaborated as the force of *Dharma*), has to retreat from the discourse of the formal state and align itself with affects and actions of criminality. In Prakash Mehra's Zanjeer (1973), the justice assemblage inhabits the statist diagram in the beginning, when the hero is a committed police officer. The state however 'misreads' the justice assemblage subsequently; the hero is framed on trumped up charges, discharged from his office and sent to prison. The operation of *Dharmic* justice is however not interrupted by this; it merely de-territorializes, shifts its forces to gather once again, in a 'criminal' pole this time. The hero teams up with a degraded community consisting of a gypsy knife thrower, a Muslim gambler and contract killer, and a Christian drunkard to vanquish the bad forces in the end.

The melodramatic dispensation of such films is of course largely directed towards bringing sociological and juridical profiles of class antagonism -- the smuggler (Deewar, Yash Chopra, 1973), the mafia hitman (Drohi, Ram Gopal Verma, 1991), the pimp (Dalal, Ashim Samanta, 1994), the thief and con artist (Qurbani, Feroze Khan, 1980), the factory worker or the unemployed (Roti Kapda Aur Makaan, Manoj Kumar, 1975) or even the hermit (Sanyasi, Manoj Kumar 1971)-- into affective assemblages with middle class ideologies. But as it has been said earlier, what is of prime interest here is not that socially disruptive energies are, in the last instance, submitted to a Brahminical patriarchal order, but the agonistic process in which this is done. In this uneven, disruptive narrative orchestration of variables, a fully integrated subjective focus (either of the traditional patriarch or the modern citizen) is largely absent. This is why often the retribution

assemblage has to fork into two figurations of force and affect -- one being diagrammatically linked to a formal apparatus of the law, and the other to illegal postulatory energies. These sets, usually cast in the form of estranged brothers operating on opposite sides of the law, share a zone of filial intersection between themselves, where the administration of Dharma takes place. This is seen in numerous films like Ganga Jumna (Nitin Bose, 1961), Deewar, or Aatish (Sanjay Gupta, 1994).

Sometimes the body of the star itself has to be de-territorialized into twin assemblages, good and bad, legal and illegal, pacifist and militant -- which are then re-territorialized into a larger superset of justice. This becomes apparent most emblematically in the archetypal 'double role' films that are common in Hindi cinema. Dilip Kumar plays the twin siblings in Ram Aur Shyam (Tapi Chanakya, 1967), Hema Malini in Seeta Aur Geeta (Ramesh Sippy, 1972), Anil Kapoor in Kishen Kanhaiya (Raakesh Roshan, 1990) Sridevi in Chalbaaz (Pankuj Parashar, 1990), and Sunil Shetty in Gopi Kishen (Mukesh Duggal, 1994). This particular batch of films follows the same general plot outline. The twins are orphaned and separated from each other shortly after birth. They grow up in diametrically opposed social milieus. The rich, but meek sibling is tortured by evil relatives who take over the family property. The poor one grows up as a tough, street-smart rogue. An accident -- the same transhistorical, fateful force that separated the twins in the first place -- this time allows them to switch milieus. From there upon, the ethical assemblage reconfigures itself, shifting from the pole of endurance to that of dynamic action. This narrative function allows the pacifist, ethical, 'Gandhian' pole of the justice assemblage to share a common zone of affective star *faciality* with the criminal, but emphatically 'industrial' pole. This is precisely why the evil-doers cannot distinguish between the twins when the switching of places takes place. When the timid and weak individual transforms into an active, punishing entity, the bad people are surprised, but that surprise does not extend to a skepticism based on individual identity. Apart from a horizontal, diagrammatic dispersal of poles in the form of identical twins, the star double role assemblage can also be deployed in a vertical axiomatic of the generational conflict (as a particular instance of the so called traditional-modern dialectic.) Perfect examples of this feature would be the father and son duos played by Amitabh Bachchan in



Adalat (Dilip Deka, 1976), Mahaan (S. Ramanathan, 1983) and Aakhri Raasta (K. Bhagyaraj, 1985).

### **The Male Star as Paramount Figuration of the Postulatory**

In terms of a 'postulatory' logic of reformist narration, the male star personas (as active poles in the formation of exemplary national couples) can be seen as elastic diagrams of bodies and capabilities rather than as representations of individuals or subjects. Dev Anand, the metropolitan star figure which emerges in the first decade of the free nation in the late forties and early fifties, is thus described by Willemen and Rajadhyaksha as a visual and aural assemblage of "deliberately awkward" pastiches from "various sources" of persona (Cary Grant, Gregory Peck) and satirized and reconstituted generic styles such as "Capra's (*Nau Do Gyarah*), John Huston's (*Jaal*), the thriller (*Jewel Thief*, *CID*), the love story (*Tere Ghar ke Samne*, *Paying Guest*) and the Hollywood epic in *Guide*<sup>179</sup>." The moving star body thus serves as a repository of epic *potentia* that is not circumscribed by a given psychobiography of the subject or a behaviorist sociology drawn from class position, education, or a general assessment of human powers. As chief 'performer' of postulatory powers, the star persona has attributes that are not always 'realistically' encrypted on screen as 'depth' features of the psychoanalytic method actor. The star assemblage, which Vijay Mishra et al. have designated to be a parallel text in Bombay cinema<sup>180</sup>, is thus a perpetually there cinematic package of sign clusters that is made to inhere in and alchemize a particular narrative diagram. It is made to undergo timely mobilizations of its particles of criminality and legality (Dev Anand the undercover cop in Raj Khosla's *CID* (1956), Dev Anand the criminal in Guru Dutt's *Jaal* (1952)), in passing through affective spheres of love, anger, melancholia, and death.

Dev Anand therefore never plays 'himself' (as a marker of actorial incompetence) in film after film, as it is generally understood; his presence merely makes available a singular resource of signs, affections, and capabilities to a host of filmic situations. By and large,

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<sup>179</sup> See Willemen and Rajadhyaksha, *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema*, 42.

<sup>180</sup> See Vijay Mishra et al. "The Actor as Parallel Text in Bombay Cinema" (1989).

similar configurations characterize other memorable star texts too. The de-territorialized, Chaplinesque tramp invested with the prosthetic insignia of postwar internationalism (the Japanese shoes, the Russian hat) in the star assemblage of Raj Kapoor goes through the rigors of criminality (the pick pocket in Awara (Raj Kapoor, 1951), the cardsharp in Sri 420 (1954)) and reform, while searching for a *figuration* of a private realm of desire (with Nargis usually playing the ephemeral woman in white) in the urban spaces of Nehruvian socialism (poverty, unemployment, or illegitimacy of birth.) The Dilip Kumar – music- alcohol assemblage is another one that generates affections of fatal and masochistic desire in the form of consumption, alcoholism and death in Devdas (Bimal Roy, 1955). This is the melancholia assemblage of the nuclear couple that appears in a realm of conflict with the ideological diagrams of feudal patriarchy. The Shammi Kapoor assemblage of the ceremonial Elvis like dancing body, European clothes, foreign locales and techno-transformed traditional melodies, or the compact of the agrarian body and urban literary and industrial figures in the star assemblage of Dharmendra were among the many other instances during the sixties, of the figure of the modern entering into various diagrammatic arrangements with a feudal-communal ethos of the North Indian joint family. The star figure of the popular Indian cinema is thus a catachrestic ensemble of powers and qualities, an *imperso-nation*, as Sumita Chakravarty puts it, that “subsumes a process of externalization, the of/on surfaces, the disavowal of fixed notions of identity. But it also encompasses the contrary movement of accretion, the piling up of identities, transgressions etc.” (National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 4). Prasad has cast the archetype of the Hindi film hero as an archetype largely not amenable to the voyeuristic identification of the individual viewer (Ideology of the Hindi Film 75-76); he is instead the object of a frontal, *Darsanic* gaze that, in Prasad’s psychoanalytic reading, becomes purely symbolic in its identificatory functions. The point however, is that the object in question is a composite of inhuman intelligences and qualities of action. The actorial visage is partly a vehicle, and partly a receptacle for a cinematic invocation of divinity<sup>181</sup>.

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<sup>181</sup> In this context one can also recall Chidananda Dasgupta’s trope of the ‘painted’ visage in The Painted Face: Studies in India’s Popular Cinema (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1991).

Perhaps one of the most combusive and appealing star persona in recent Indian mass culture is the ‘angry young man’ image cultivated by Amitabh Bachchan<sup>182</sup>. As Prasad has pointed out, this cinematic entity was consolidated at a particularly turbulent period in the career of the Indian nation-state, when the fault-lines in the coalitionary Nehruvian ruling bloc had become extremely tensile<sup>183</sup>. The ‘angry young man’ assemblage was one that allowed for urgent postulations of a special kind in the time of ‘emergency’; it created a potential for special combustible mixes between registers of class, religion, caste, money, agency, sexuality and desire. Not that these combinations did not exist before, but in this case, many usual ‘mediating’ factors of evolution and development could be urgently done away with. The Amitabh effect thus came with an accentuated ‘reality’ effect in terms of low life mise-en-scène arrangements (the shanty town and docks in Deewar (Yash Chopra, 1975), or the coal mine in Kala Paththar (Yash Chopra, 1979), a streetwise ‘Bombaiya’ de-territorialization of an erstwhile poetic Urdu dialect that dominated Hindi melodramas of the sixties, and a successful insertion of a middle class body language, voice, and intonation in a cultivated subaltern milieu<sup>184</sup>. It was thus an instance of individual agency beyond the scopes of the human, as a retailership of mythic power of regeneration, in an otherwise profane and abject landscape left derelict by the weak state.

The markers of ‘education’, along with the logical rider of ‘money’ that could buy agency and transformation, became nominally present in the biographical diagram of Bachchan’s angry young man. In contrast to the Raj Kapoor figure who arrives in the big bad city with a bachelor’s degree in Sri 420 (Raj Kapoor, 1955), the foreign educated feudal scion played by Shammi Kapoor in Jungle (Subodh Mukherjee, 1961), or the figure of Dharmendra in Satyakam (Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1969), who is able to use the meager benefits of an agrarian economy to become an engineer before embarking on a life long project of nation

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<sup>182</sup> See Ashwini Sharma, “Blood, Sweat and Tears: Amitabh Bachchan, urban demi-god” (1993), Jyotika Viridi, “The ‘Fiction’ of Film and the ‘Fact’ of Politics: *Deewar* (Wall, 1976),” and Ranjani Majumdar, “From Subjectification to Schizophrenia: The ‘Angry Man’ and the ‘Psychotic’ Hero of Bombay Cinema”.

<sup>183</sup> See Ideology of the Hindi Film, chapter 6 entitled “The Aesthetic of Mobilization”, 139-59.

<sup>184</sup> This can be seen in earlier films, like Guru Dutt’s Aar Paar (1954), but it was certainly the urban actioners of the late seventies that popularized this idiom.

building, Bachchan's heroic figure housed mythic resources capable of meeting 'heightened' emergencies of corruption, disenfranchisement, and fragmentation. The dislocated orphans he usually played in his landmark films like Trishul (Yash Chopra 1978), or Zanjeer (Prakash Mehra, 1973) could thus spectacularly rise, propelled by a supra-historical destinying force of narration, to a social position required for effective postulation. The Bachchan figure thus did not follow a *bildung* whereby he underwent procedures of social apprenticeship in order to gain hyper legal or extra legal qualities or skills. Bereft of the nurturing grounds of the feudal joint family or the agrarian community, his star figure was drawn up as an emergency force precisely because through it besmirched and poverty stricken resources of survival and revenge could be granted a postulatory status. Hence the Bachchan force was that which was capable of a form of 'address' for which a social ground has either not been prepared, or is in a dismal state of incompleteness. This is why the Bachchan phenomenon does not draw an 'identity' from the low class, comparatively 'realistic' mise-en-scène of his films; instead, as a cinematic mobilization of powers, it unleashes a messianic absolution for the mise-en-scène itself. In his films, he is usually a lonely figure bereft of companionship or childhood precisely because the 'people', as an entity capable of public action, is categorically seen to be missing.

The postulates of emergency become spectacularly manifest precisely in the gap that opened up between a coda of upper class, Brahminical paternalism and the realities of a malfunctioning political economy. In such films, money required for efficient postulation is assembled urgently from various intersecting spheres – crime, business, conning, and law keeping. Speed is an important element in the postulation of emergency, since the situation of emergency itself is a result of slow movements in state bureaucracies and courts of law being fundamentally inadequate to address urgent balancing maneuvers demanded by ruling interests. That is, when the state is 'outrun' and out paced by a plethora of ideological, syndicalist, and criminal groups and cannot exercise effective command over the splintered social war machines. It is in such a situation that the police always arrives late (Prasad, Ideology of the Hindi Film 95). The ethical assemblage of revenge that centers itself on the Bachchan image is thus often a criminal entity precisely because the overall field of

illegalities has opened up and is up for grabs. When the formal state is weak, there is no pre-endorsable entity to exercise an absolute monopoly of violence.

Anger thus becomes an 'originary impulse' of the cinematic that can abridge the cumbersome navigatory process that tries to re-connect the fact to the law, or the notion of social justice to increasing gaps between the rich and the poor. Hence, the dockworker in Deewar, or the village bumpkins in Adalat (Narendra Bedi, 1976) Kaalia (Tinnu Anand, 1981) and Don (Chandra Barot, 1978) end up heading massive crime syndicates in the city. The illegitimate working class hero in Trishul (Yash Chopra, 1978) grows up in a stone quarry, comes to the city without money or education, and then proceeds to build the biggest construction empire there in a few months time, in order to humiliate the man who had abandoned his mother. The lost orphans in Mukkaddar ka Sikandar (Prakash Mehra, 1978), Amar Akbar Anthony (Manmohan Desai, 1977), Coolie (Manmohan Desai, 1983) or Mard (Manmohan Desai, 1985) grow up on streets and pavements, in shanty towns, churches or criminal dens, but are able to enter power assemblages of social 'postulation' through a 'groundless' poetics of 'anger' and action. The messianic power of the Bachchan persona thus lies in a special pathologization of melodrama, precisely the one that allows him to restore and fulfill the state, by closing the door, in a messianic manner, on an inhibiting world of prose.

### **The Shah Rukh Khan Phenomenon and a Retailorship of the National-Postulatory**

The male persona, as a familial, but inhuman ensemble of energies, passions, and qualities, underwent several significant changes during the nineties, perhaps most memorably in the form of what is commonly referred to as the Shah Rukh Khan phenomenon. Khan's initial, schizophrenic anti-hero screen prototype was established in films like Baazigar (Abbas-Mustaan, 1992), Darr (Yash Chopra, 1993), Anjaam (Rahul Rawail, 1993), and Duplicate (Mahesh Bhatt, 1995). In each of these films, Khan was unconventionally cast as decidedly psychotic young men, who, despite their heightened criminal affiliations beyond any scope

of ethical redemption, occupied, in each case, the affective epicenter of narration<sup>185</sup>. Khan was indeed what can be called the ‘glamorous’ villain, the baroque prince who was enfigured precisely at that intermediary zone in which an aggressive desire for revenge or satiation of lust stages itself absolutely, with only minimal remembrances of the law and its origins. This aspect was perhaps a novel one in some ways, despite the fact that there were many prior instances of Hindi cinema leading men embarking on the occasional tryst with the diabolic<sup>186</sup>. Nevertheless, by and large the Manichean good and evil bipolarities of traditional Hindi cinema before the nineties called for what can be called consolidated ethical profiles.

As a special phenomenon of recent mainstream Hindi cinema, the Shah Rukh Khan phenomenon can be said to be a particular mobilization of cinematic affections and charisma machines (resources of the archetypal Aryanesque North Indian male physicality, urban body language and mannerisms) towards what can be called a schizophrenic accentuation of impieties. Early in its career, it launches an alluring but forbidden iconoclasm of ethical selves inherited from the father. It brings about an unbridled staging of a body of passions pertaining to revengeful or heterosexual desire no longer constricted by either by an industrial-patriarchal law or the maternal spirit of the national community. The fathers of the Nehruvian generation in Khan’s first few films are either already dead (Anjaam, Darr) or become so after being ‘duped’ and dispossessed of their Nehruvian industrial patrinomy (Baazigar). The fathers are therefore dead in two senses: in terms of a continuing ethical presence, as well as property. This results in the emergence of the Shah Rukh Khan persona in the shadow of an absolute historical orphanhood (which results when the father does not even leave an ethical community behind him) that even his most

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<sup>185</sup> Ranjani Mazumdar’s essay “From Subjectification to Schizophrenia” is an excellent theorization of the passage from the angry young man template of the seventies to the psychic one in the nineties.

<sup>186</sup> Among the three major stars who dominated the Nehruvian cinematic melodramas of the new republic, Dilip Kumar played a rapist in Mehboob Khan’s Amar, Raj Kapoor was the treacherous lover in Pyar, Dev Anand the smuggler and cad in Guru Dutt’s Jaa. Even latter day stars of the sixties and seventies, like Sunil Dutt (Mujhe Jeene Do, Geeta Mera Naam, Chattis Ghante) Dharmendra (Aiye Milan Ki Bela), Amitabh Bachchan (Parwana), and Rajesh Khanna (Red Rose) played the odd villain. Some stars like Vinod Khanna, Raj Babbar, and Shatrughan Sinha began their careers in negative slots before graduating to leads.

illustrious ancestor did not have to endure. Even the angry young man depicted on the screen so memorably by Amitabh Bachchan had to enter into a melodramatic assemblage of modern oedipal contestations and begrudging negations with troubling ethical domains bequeathed by missing fathers – the labor union leader in Deewar and the conscientious school master in Agneepath (Mukul S. Anand, 1990). The bridge of memory in such cases was always the mother who had not lapsed into aphasic silence as in Baazigar.

Baazigar was Khan's first major box office success. The film follows a family revenge plot that has been fairly conventional to popular Hindi cinema since the seventies. Khan plays Ajay Sharma, a young man whose father was cheated off his fortune by a treacherous employee Madan Chopra. When the family ends up in the streets, Ajay's father and infant sister die and his mother is rendered insane. After he grows up, Ajay comes to Bombay in search of revenge. He begins to secretly woo Chopra's (a big industrialist now) elder daughter Seema, and simultaneously invents a pseudo public persona Vicki Malhotra to court his younger daughter Priya too. When narrative developments threaten to intersect the two identities, Ajay, in perhaps one of the most shocking scenes in the annals of popular Indian cinema, kills the unsuspecting Seema by throwing her down from the top of a multi-storied building. Before that, he had tricked his victim into writing a mock suicide note, which he, subsequent to the killing, posts to the bereaved family. Seema's death is thus officially declared to be a case of suicide, although Priya has her doubts. The latter's independent investigation into her sister's death forces Ajay to commit two more ruthless murders to cover his tracks. After the slaughter of innocents, Ajay, as the betrothed of Priya, gains Chopra's trust and undermines him, using the same nefarious schemas that the latter had used against his father.

The Shah Rukh Khan aspect is therefore a 'fascinating' hyperactivation of a diagram of individuality in conventional melodramatic formats of popular Hindi cinema that until then revolved around a largely feudal imagination of the community and the joint family. The powers of cinematic heroism here thus pertain precisely to that picture of a pure un-nurtured being, a sublime host of energies and desires that not only challenge the name giving powers of law and community, but also create newer scopes for the same. The figure of Khan is

rendered a psychopathic war machine precisely because it lets itself be unconditionally and absolutely be claimed by the new, urban, nucleated middle class family and its orbit of interest, in a manner that calls for a total unhinging of its militancy from the formal juridical apparatus of government or the erstwhile ethical definition of a national community. In the picture of emergency that is created, the son is rendered a serial killer precisely because he cannot immediately square his avenging desires to the propositional continuity of justice demanded by the state. As an entity that sacrifices itself in the alter of the mother, he cannot concomitantly emerge as a soldier for the nation as homestead. The killer is a killer beyond redemption because his violence takes the path of total and unbridled retailership.

The charisma and allure of the Shah Rukh Khan phenomenon lies in a pure staging of desire (for revenge in Baazigar, for women in Darr or Anjaam) that deploys the conventional heroic attributes of postulation to demand the impossible, not only insofar as the formal juridical apparatus is concerned, but also in terms of the ethics of an agrarian-Gandhian twilight of tradition. The arch of development, enterprise and peace proposed by the former is too constricting and dawdling for a host of affections, energies, and aspirations now rendered global; the latter meanwhile has receded into a distant horizon that no longer envelops the psychedelic city that continuously creates the shock and welter of apocalyptic displacements and unclaimed territories. The perpetually missing father, the absent community, the mad mother in Baazigar, or the long dead one in Darr cannot forge a home for the orphan who launches a fascinating and pioneering project of de-sacralization. The rebellions of the schizophrenic orphan therefore tantamount to an uncompromising demand for a new covenant from the father; his prodigious magnetism is that polarizing force which opens up a perilous gap between the moral and the vernacular, the law and the fact. It is a new age urban diagram of individualism that brings together the powers of crusading heroism of classical Hindi cinema with an urgent quest for money, empowerment, sexual satiation, lifestyle and recognition over and beyond the slow process of Nehruvian development, or the inflexible hierarchies and lineages of feudal society. The upheaval is thus launched against the state and the god who cannot protect the Nehruvian paternalistic capitalist and his family in Baazigar, or the social order which has already placed the



woman out of the orphan's reach, in way of arrange marriages dictated by clan and caste in Darr and Baazigar.

The assemblage of affections and powers of radical desacralization that may be called the Shah Rukh Khan phenomenon has been a consistent feature in different narrative situations in the cinema of the nineties and after. It has survived and prospered, forking into multiple directions even though Khan himself has shifted largely to neo-traditional marriage romances. Indeed, it has become quite a matter of status for major actors to have at least a few roles pertaining to glamorous negativity in their oeuvre, as a necessary room for performing the 'fascinating' -- a pure, unbridled staging of uncharted and unclaimed metropolitan empowerments and aura<sup>187</sup>. The working class, low caste star persona of Nana Patekar has been inserted into a medley of pictures of militant urgency and maniacal nationalistic fervor in the face of domestically generated and internationally imported terror, corruption, and outrage. In his cinematic figuration the same mannered attributes of schizophrenia are mobilized for propositionally good, as well as bad causes. He played the psychopathic mafia boss in Vidhu Vinod Chopra's Parinda (1988), the landmark crime drama of the eighties. In the nineties Patekar cast himself in his own film Prahaar (1991) as a military officer who goes on a self motivated killing spree to rid a city neighborhood of street criminals before being confined to the asylum by the law. The distinct Hindu-Marathi-Shiv Sena physicality, a decidedly 'dark' non-Aryan Dalit body, and the speaking style evocative of a lumpenized proletarian anger marked Patekar's screen presence. These

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<sup>187</sup> Stars like Jackie Shroff and Sunil Shetty have played larger than life, ruthless terrorists in films like Mission Kashmir (Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 2000) and Main Hoon Na (Farah Khan, 2004). Akshay Kumar and Aksyay Khanna featured as avaricious and conniving gold diggers in Ajanabee (Abbas-Mustan, 2001) and Humraaz (Abbas-Mustan, 2002). Ajay Devgun essayed unredeemable mafia heads and contract killers in Company (Ram Gopal Verma, 2002), and Khaki (Raj Kumar Santoshi, 2003). The Shah Rukh Khan phenomenon crosses gender lines too, perhaps with even more interesting results; Kajol played a love obsessed serial killer in Rajiv Rai's Gupt (1997), as did Urmila Matodkar in Pyar Tune Kya Kiya (Rajat Mukherjee, 2001). In Raj Kanwar's Judaai (1997) Sridevi, the prime female star of the eighties was cast as a money obsessed woman who sells her husband to another love struck woman willing to pay the price. Younger stars like Kareena Kapoor and Priyanka Chopra have essayed conniving and unrepentant *femme fatales* addicted to money and corporate power in recent films like Fida (Anant Mahadevan, 2004), and Aitraaz (Abbas-Mustan, 2004).

features quite easily assembled with melodramatic formats of high patriotism in a series of jingoistic projects by Mehul Kumar, like Tirangaa (1992), Kohraam: The Explosion (1999), and Krantiveer (1994). In the first two films Patekar was cast as Police Officers working for supra juridical formations endorsed by the state to meet the perils of international terrorism, while in the latter he played a slum dwelling demagogue cum crusader who is able to articulate a general situation of communal conflict as well as his personal tragedy at the demise of his foster father through a moral vernacular of urgent Hindu-normative patriotism. The ceremonial naturalization of the new language of commonsense in Krantiveer emerges through rigorous and violent rites of passage, culminating in the zealous speech he renders to the crowd gathered to witness his public execution at the end of the film. Patekar's mass hypnotic street eloquence<sup>188</sup> is counterpoised in the film with the helplessness and aphasic silence of his lady love, a female journalist who represents the ineffectual intellectual class hamstrung with their own constitutional pieties.

The special quality of the Shah Rukh Khan persona pertains not merely to delirious crossing of boundaries, but also to emphatic installations of different ones. The schizoid energization of borderlines not only holds a potential for law breaking violence, but also for a total and absolute commemoration of another, communal father's law in untimely metropolitan milieus. It is precisely this incarnation of the cinematic that marks the later phase of the actor's career, in a series of neo-traditional feudal family romances like Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (Aditya Chopra, 1995), Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (Karan Johar, 1998), Mohabbatein (Aditya Chopra, 2000), and Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (Karan Johar, 2001). In these films the Khan persona encounters a different father, one who, much like Khan himself, has transcended the localizing limitations of the Nehruvian paradigm and has acquired the wealth and worldly tenacity to sponsor the traditional at home.

### **The Female Star as Territorial Assemblage**

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<sup>188</sup> This is in fact a trope in Krantiveer; the protagonist is shown to actually have hypnotic powers. Anyone who looks into his eyes is arrested in a state of submissive stupor.

A whole discourse on Indian modernity has centered on the figure of the woman, or a ‘re-casting of it’ in an interiorized ethical diagram of the home or the *Bharat Mata* or Mother India as an iconic imagination of the nation<sup>189</sup>. In dominant nationalist discourses of the last two centuries, this configuration of the female body served as a repository of core national Brahminical values entering into alliances or compromises with troubling social and linguistic orders of not only the colonial state, but also the secular post-colonial one. In many ways, the figures of the female protagonists in popular Indian cinema function as territorial assemblages where contending sign clusters war and besiege each other. The movement of the feminine body is a complex process of tracing visibilities by which the figure is abstracted gradually, by a shredding of its semiotic potentia, a redirecting of its erotics and *jouissance*, into a postulate of patriarchy. The *haptic* female body is thus always in a stage of esoteric disappearance, being reified and reduced into both – the pure drawings of the nation, as well as the putrid forces and vices that prevent the nation from coming into being. Narrating the nation, in the form of narrating the woman, is a process tending towards the impossible, when the woman as body can be extinguished into the unsullied interiorities of a subjective theater. Which is precisely why narrating the woman is thus always an ‘anxious’ as well as furious narration, always geared towards foreclosing that very moment when she, as a prosthetic, *bodily* cluster of inscrutable semiotics becomes immanent fleetingly, in passing, in *between* diagrams that mutually contend, intersect, and occupy it.

As Moinak Biswas has pointed out, in Mehboob Khan’s Mother India (1956), one sees a moment in the flux of discourse diagrams, when the figure of the woman becomes immanent as a pure incarnation of narratological crisis<sup>190</sup>. She opens out as a disconcerting semiotic void, a momentarily ‘unoccupied’ territoriality of signs. Radha, a rural peasant

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<sup>189</sup> See the Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid ed. Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History (1989), Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta, “Mother India and Mother Victoria: Motherland and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal” (1992), and chapter 2 of Jyotika Virdi, The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History (2003).

<sup>190</sup> See Biswas, “Mother India O’ Roja: *Jatir Dui Akhyan*” (1996).

woman, is deserted by her husband who disappears from her life in shame after being disabled in an accident. After that, a flash flood in the village leaves her house devastated, her girl child dead and herself penniless with two hungry sons. Radha goes to Sukhilala, the village money lender, for a loan. The latter offers her help in return for sexual favors. But what is interesting here is that the indecent proposal is poised in a discursive intersection between illicit male desire and the ethical assemblage that defines motherhood. Sukhilala tells Radha that she has to submit to his wishes because it is her dharma as *mother* to save her two sons from starvation. Since Radha's body is already encrusted by another dharmic statement of faithfulness that defines marriage (which can of course subsist without the physical presence of the husband), there is a crisis in ethical narration, whereby the body of the woman cannot be made to 'naturally' pass from womanhood to motherhood. She has to choose between the two. Since she is a repository of 'feminine values', the ethics of *historical* narration in a degraded world cannot commit her body into an act of marital infidelity; on the other hand, there is a possibility that Radha will be decentered from a diagram of motherhood if Lala's demands are not met. This moment of melodramatic suspension is however not marked by a realist question of personal agency or choice; the woman stands transfixed even as Lala advances towards her because momentarily she becomes a territory abandoned by all secure ethical assemblages. Being caught in a cataclysmic rift between the *Dharma* of motherhood and that of womanhood, she is, literally, as Prasad puts it in a different context, in a 'no man's land'. The impasse is broken when new powers of *Dharmic* restoration occupy her and reclaim her body. In a moment of divine inspiration, Radha picks up the silver idol of Lala's own family deity and knocks the rapacious money lender down with it. She then runs out to join her sons.

Meanwhile, the devastation of the village threatens to bring in an acute state of dereliction; after the dismantling of their own familial order, Radha and her sons now face the imminent dispersal of the village community as well. The three of them see the other peasants leaving the doomed village in droves. Given the diegetic context, the material crisis in this case cannot be solved through a historical coming into being of a developmentalist state (the law, flood relief, the apparatus of political economy in the form of state run rural banks etc.) The country is still under the colonial yoke; the state is a distant one, not yet

figurable in the landscape. Postulation thus takes the form of a lyrical-divine assemblage here. Radha starts singing a song, passionately pleading the villagers to stay and please the mother goddess by working on their lands. The lyrical assemblage, as a flow of occasioned Rasas, gradually intersects with a naturalistic visual assemblage that transforms the devastated landscape into an abundant, green one in the course of a parallel montage that accompanies the song. This passage casts itself a register of epic temporality, whereby there is a time lapse affected by a series of dissolves in the song sequence that lasts a few minutes; the body of the woman is occupied, dismantled and redrawn in the process. From being a young, shelterless peasant woman, Radha becomes an old matriarch; her sons grow up under the auspices of this lyrical, benedictory shift of the cinematic. The historical specter of debt, hunger, homelessness, and prostitution that had threatened to engulf the mother and her sons vanishes under a new horizon of ‘postulated’ becoming. Radha’s attire changes and her body is gradually stripped of all the sexual markers that had previously imperiled her pure ethical figuration. As she is seen working in the fields through the years, a series of arrested, low angle iconic shots in the tradition of socialist realism invest her with the visual attributes of Gorky’s Mother<sup>191</sup>.

In Hindi films of the classical format, the narrative trajectory often passes the heroic assemblage through murky domains of polarized value, historical catastrophes, and alluring desires fostered by a perpetually renewing playground of modern production and consumption, that exist between the world and the home. The body of the woman is charted diagrammatically along such testing paths of fire and shade, in terms of differential, graduated figurations of the whore and the wife. Sometimes the ethical assemblage sets up the women as twin territories of extreme symmetry, as in the case of Raj Kapoor caught between Maya, the woman of the night and Vidya, the woman in white in Sri 420. As the narrative progresses, the libidinal and actorial elements of the heroic figure do shift towards the pole of the good woman, but not before dispersing and passing through seductive territories of the ‘other’ woman. It is this latter component that features in countless mainstream films of the fifties and sixties as a great cinematic ‘underworld’ – the smoky bars, smuggler hideouts, and gambling dens in landmark crime thrillers like Howrah Bridge

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<sup>191</sup> See Moinak Biswas, “Mother India O Roja: Jatir Dui Akhyan” for a more elaborate analysis.

(Shakti Samanta, 1958), Baazi (Guru Dutt, 1951), Aar-Paar (Guru Dutt, 1954), Jaal (Guru Dutt, 1952), Kaala Bazaar (Vijay Anand, 1960), Jali Note (Shakti Samanta, 1960), and CID (Raj Khosla, 1956).

In the feudal family romance -- the dominant genre of the 50s and the 60s -- the women are enfigured predominantly through epic archetypes of the heroin and the vamp. But the momentous and tragic moments of affection in many such films are constituted precisely when anarchic mixes between various pulses of manly desire de-territorialize these archetypes, flowing one into the other. In Bimal Roy's 1955 film Devdas (remade in 2001 by Sanjay Leela Bansali), the nucleated desires (love as a modern trope) of the educated hero are first consolidated around the figure of the 'good' woman Paro. When the absolute dictums of the feudal joint family foreclose the possibilities of conjugality and Paro is married off to a much older landlord, the figure of the hero undergoes a tragic transformation. It is de-territorialized by a melodramatic influx of alcohol as affective force that can dissolve stable sign systems and consolidated perspectives. The alcoholic hero turns to Chandramukhi, the 'fallen woman' with a good heart for perverse consolation. The tragic melodrama of arrested middle-class, nucleated conjugality is thus consolidated when the feminine figures of the good and bad become identical in their territorial diagrams of desire, in the course of a boundless flow of *srngara rasa*. The absolute feudal order that dictates their specific locations as wife and whore is not propositionally challenged by a *weak* new age, educated sensibility of the hero. The latter however creates a picture of affective dissonance in the world, transforming himself into a mobile artifact of 'alcoholic' passage between the polarized diagrams of womanhood -- a melodramatic assemblage of *Rasa* that extends to the 'tasting' of the forbidden. Strong feudal designations of identity (class, lineage, caste etc.) are thus affectively absolved of their social differences and harnessed into a singular ontology of 'love'. The tragic alcoholism of *Devdas* thus becomes a baroque signature of a modernism that is a staging of the self as decadence. That is it becomes expressive as an unremitting artistic will, when the modern sensibility can be experienced only through a ceremonial conduit of masochism. Alcohol is once again a pure semiological function of melodramatic de-territorialization in Abrar Alvi's Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam (1962). In this film the youngest daughter-in-law of the aristocratic Chaudhury family

imbibes it to emerge as a memorable cinematic instance of tragic melodrama. It is alcohol that allows the ideal wife to keep her philandering husband at home, when she allows herself to be re-cast through intoxication -- as a physical automaton that approximates the alluring figure of the courtesan<sup>192</sup>.

A similar commerce of signs between assembled archetypes of the woman can be seen in the great reformist socials of the fifties and sixties. In L.V. Prasad's Sharda (1957), the hero undergoes a baroque disintegration when his father enters into an arranged marriage with his beloved. The melodramatic dispensation of the film is elaborated at that acute interface between the traditional epic order and a modern tragedy of 'chance'. The heroic diagram of affections and duties is thus painfully dispersed between the woman as territorial emblem of private desires and woman as a public incarnation of mother, as announced by the patriarchy's absolute name giving rights. In Bimal Roy's Sujata (1959) the diagram of the 'good' woman is perturbed by markers of 'misfortune', pertaining to low caste identity and absent lineage. In his other landmark film Bandini (1963), the figure of ethical womanhood is pathologized and made to undergo a criminal transformation. When her *weak* husband (a fearless freedom fighter battling the British) concedes to family pressures and marries a second time, she ends up poisoning her rival and ending up in jail.

In the later decades, particularly since the late 60s, the figure of the classical vamp, as a spectacular territory of desire decidedly excluded from the moral, is largely subsumed into that of the modern urban heroine. This induction creates a scope for assimilating, through graduated, affective movements of a 'new' urban middle class 'love', the alluring public physicality of the working, dancing, singing woman into a moral fold. The latter emerges as a flexible formation in itself, capable of housing recalcitrant semiotic energies. The woman thus, increasingly, more than ever, becomes figurable through a diffuse, osmotic commerce of signs between the iconic wife and the iconic whore. She enters and departs the home caught between eternity and bad sides of history through differential relations of exclusion

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<sup>192</sup> See Patricia Uberoi's discussion of this film in "Dharma and Desire, Freedom and Destiny: Rescripting the Man-Woman Relationship in Popular Hindi Cinema" (1997).

through inclusion. The moral choice that was clearly visible in cases like Sri 420, where the two women could be identified in terms of clear spatial divisions of the home (the household, the inner sanctum) and the world (the nightclub, the gambling den) becomes more uncertain. The agonistic battle between desire and ethics becomes especially acute in situations where the assemblage of the modern, rather than that of criminality occupy the woman as 'othered' territory. This can be witnessed in Purab Aur Paschim (Manoj Kumar, 1970), where the Indian male courts a 'western' woman in Europe. The body of desire that forms the heroic assemblage (the figure who goes abroad to educate himself to serve the Nehruvian state better) in this case pussyfoots territories precariously 'outside' the permissive limits of tradition when he falls in love with a thoroughly anglicized, expatriate Indian woman. The hero here can re-territorialize the body of the 'modern' woman and claim it for a national 'conjugal' only by masochistically following a secular trajectory of love. That is, not so much taming her, but patiently bringing her 'home'. The postulation of amour however is a *formal* diagram here because the woman re-territorialized is not the partner subject of the Kantian couple, as in a contractual conjugation between equals. Love does not create a middle class private sphere; it serves as an ontological pull, a re-working of nascent memories in the woman that brings her back to the fold of the joint family or *Khandaan*. She is merely the star body of Saira Banu which is re-Indianized through a national semiological occupation after a curative withdrawal of alien, 'prosthetic' and colonizing assemblages of signs – the blonde wigs, the cigarettes and the skirts. In between however, perverse, spectacular and non-directional energies of desire, in a non-subjective plane of *rasa* aesthetics that works in consonance with the subjective focalizing of the camera, have already mutually 'contaminated' the twin discursive poles of the 'tradition' and the 'modern'. This is because the absolute, 'timeless' image of the *bahu* dictated by traditional patriarchy is achieved only by a historical *in between-ness*, during which affections of melodrama effect an opening out and a globalization of traditional postulates. Love begins with a diffuse flow of desires, when cinematic signs of ardor cross the borders of *Dharma* as duty and actually make the latter undergo a process of worldly extension and intensification.



Often, in other cases of love, as with Dilip Kumar in Ram Aur Shyam (Tapi Chanakya, 1967) (where one of the brothers marries a rustic belle and the other an educated, 'liberal' woman of the city), the heroic assemblage has to split into twin modules, one in diagrammatic relation with the discourse domain of urban modernity and the other with that of rural tradition, and simultaneously occupy both territorial layouts of the woman. There is a vertical, generational distribution of the two poles in the discursive spatialization of the traditional mother figure (played by Nirupa Roy in most exemplary instances, who largely featured in mythologicals early in her career) and that of the new, 'western' woman, popularized primarily through the model/beauty queen star bodies of Parveen Babi and Zeenat Aman in the 1970s. In films like Deewar or Amar Akbar Anthony the figure of Amitabh Bachchan, as an affective rebel assemblage that powers through the modern in the torturous journey home, is constituted through a discontinuous distribution of erotics between the two female diagrams. This is said to be done through often disjunctive combinations between an oedipal moral economy, a non-oedipal masochism, and a spectacular zone of modern consumer desire, yoked together with violence as affect par excellence. Such assemblages of 'emergency' can draw up two territorial images of the woman using the body attributes of the same female actress. This is seen in a smaller scale in the stock situations of the helpless virtuous woman being forced to dance (usually by holding a dear one at gunpoint) for the pleasure of the villain and his henchmen. Repeated in countless films, in this particular situation of emergency, the woman's body is recruited by the immoral spectacular assemblage once the 'bad' forces of male desire occupy her territorially. There is thus a spectacular 'pause', a holding up of ethical narration while the sexualized body of the woman is 'displayed' *frontally* as an 'in between' interregnum of *entertainment*. As Prasad points out, these ceremonial exhibitions follow a visual coda (discontinuous editing, a fragmented order of time and space, 'groping' and frontal camera movements) that does not lend itself to a steady subjective consolidation of the gaze (Ideology of the Hindi Film 77), that Metz, speaking of the classical format, calls 'shamefaced'.

It is not just enough to say that in the 'feudal family romance' 'love' is a weak heterosexual monogamous conjugal institution of modernity that, at the end, can only formally claim the

flow of Rasa or any other name one can accord to rhizomatic forces of desire in the world. It would also be pertinent to recall that in the popular Indian context, love is etymologically linked to *deewangi* or madness and not always a horizon of rational expectations because it cannot always propose a happy coincidence of sexuality (in terms of bourgeois heterosexual desire) with interest (in terms of production) and ethics (in terms of secular morality.) The assemblages of love formally constituting the 'couple' in different cases seem to always have a utopian element in their postulations. In Raj Kapoor's Bobby (1973) or Sippy's Saagar (1985), it is a postulutory resolution to class differences (rich boy marrying working class woman), in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's Abhimaan (1973) it pertains to troubling questions of equality, freedom and work in the form of socialized labor (the woman refuses a professional singing career after marriage).

## **Women and Terror**

The ushering in of a whole new visual universe in the Indian situation of the nineties, the shifts in economy and conditions of production, and the inauguration of a novel horizon of consumer desires and technological translations of social life have given rise to different constellations and dynamics of power. It has ordained new configurations of the woman in a whole new situation of intense geo-televsuality, in which the movements of bodies and the redesigning of spaces corrode familiar interiorities of the self as well as habituations of a static sense of being. The cinema of the nineties, as noted earlier, has morphed and re-organized itself as part of that process, and not as a reflection of it. The chief diagnostic statement that can be made about the present era, compared to the classic typologies of the feudal family romance of the sixties for instance, pertains to the gradual de-differentiation between the figure of the classic heroine and that of the vamp. Not that these moral poles do not exist any more, but increasingly these value diagrams have been transformed into disembodied circuits of urbanity that the woman can be made to occupy and exit from. In this context, one can mention the female orphans of the seventies and eighties who step into the urban professional space, or that of nucleated existence only under the persistent threat of rape and murder, as in B. R. Chopra's fashion model heroine in Insaaf Ka Tarazu (1980) or the raped housewives and sisters in Ghar (Manik Chatterjee, 1978), Akhree Raasta (K.

Bhagyaraj, 1985), Pratighaat (N. Chandra, 1987), and Aaj Ki Awaaz (Ravi Chopra, 1984). The collapse of an integrated vertical universe of the feudal *haveli* -- that distributed female energies and virtues in absolutely defined territories of the *ghar*, the *purdah* and the *kotha* -- creates a de-territorialized urban professional sphere where the figure of the woman can only be located precariously, in transit, perpetually in between dangerous avenues and alley ways of criminal desire. It is precisely in this space that one can locate the many figures of women on the run who are disguised in male drag, from Nau Do Gyarah (Vijay Anand, 1957) to Samrat (Mohan Segal, 1982). The source of peril in this case pertains not so much to the absence of the law or of the machinery of policing; perhaps it has more to do with the anxiety inducing absence of *custom* in urban distributions of feminine allure and male desire. In other words, the peculiar problem of safeguarding the woman emerges not simply due to a collapse of feudal paternalism; indeed, numerous instances can be cited where women are kidnapped and carried off to the *haveli* of the overlord. The bordered spaces of the feudal realm ensure that the ethical assemblage of the woman can be *habituated* diurnally, even in a horizon of fatality, in what is a general course of flowing money as tribute or woman as tribute. The problem, insofar as the location of the woman in a non-closed map of urban modernity is concerned, pertains to the possibility of *customizing* an ethical diagram of womanhood in relation to other gathering storms of production, circulation of bodies and money. In a haphazard traffic of visibilities, the ceremonial postures of worship, confinement, and devotion demanded from the ideal woman become increasingly difficult to be held in the static. The industrial milieu offers less and less scope for such iconic arrests, where the perfect equipoise of the woman as ideogram can be formulated in terms of pure habit, that is, as indistinguishable from life itself. The problem of the city, amongst other things is that it increasingly presents the denizen with a form of life that offers no scope for a stance of *santa* (peace) or *bhakti* (devotion). One of the most scandalous pictures of the woman and the turbulent city was seen in the late eighties film Zakhmi Aurat (Avtar Bhogal, 1988). In this film, a band of raped women pool in their various professional, intellectual, and physical resources (the police officer, the surgeon, the temptress) to entice and trap rapists at large. The men are then anesthetized and taken to a secret operation theater where they are castrated by a doctor belonging to the group. The city in this film

becomes the site of a frontal encounter between warring postulates of fear – that of rape and that of castration.

## **Women and Business**

It is perhaps because of this difficulty in positing an ethical ‘home’ for the ‘Indian’ woman in an urban milieu full of anarchy, speed, and unrest, that increasingly, in the nineties and after, ‘womanhood’ as ceremony, being, and poise becomes possible only in an assembled realm of pure spectacle that exists *beyond* the city, in the hyper rich North Indian mansions. Such utopian milieus are seen especially in the genre often called marriage melodramas, inaugurated and established by films like Maine Pyar Kiya (Sooraj Barjatya, 1989), Hum Aapke Hain Kaun (Sooraj Barjatya, 1994), Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam (Sanjay Leela Bansali, 1999), Ek Rishtaa: The Bond of Love (Suneel Darshan, 2001), Hum Saath Saath Hain (Sooraj Barjatya, 1999), Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (Karan Johar, 2001) and Main Prem Ki Diwani Hoon (Sooraj Barjatya, 2003). In these films ‘tradition,’ as a compendium of value postulates, becomes figurable in the plane of femininity only when it assembles with qualities of ‘richness’. The latter attribute is a special instance of cinematic power; it must not be reduced to a simple picture of an economic class. Richness in this case is not merely the presence of money as *currency* of production; it is an affective assemblage where, in a realm of pure spectacle, value as tradition is seen to overcode value as generated surplus. Richness actually is that which is capable of presenting a temporality different from that of production; it is a power capable of removing the body of the woman from the cannibalizing and prostituting public realm of the market. This opulent, spectacular redress of the woman is a utopian achievement of the cinematic precisely because it offers us a glimpse of the impossible, when the woman, as a paramount artifact of tradition, can be enfigured through a process of total and consummate ‘de-publicization’ – a placing of her in an unsullied decorative milieu sealed off from a world of exchanges and circulation.

What is noteworthy is that this decorative realm can easily house the vast plenitudes of metropolitan consumption (Coca Cola, sportscars, or ballet in Hum Aapke Hain Kaun) along with postulates, principles and ritualistic paraphernalia of high Hinduism. The

woman as a territorial ensemble of signs is often characterized by indices of cultural and professional skills that are embellishing markers, historical, new age *differences* in an overall, inalienable repetition of Being as a singular national artifice. Which is why, sometimes these instruments have to be foreclosed visibilities in the mise en scene in order for the ethical assemblage to be able to occupy and redesign the body of the woman as wife or mother. Hence, in Hum Aapke Hain Kaun the two sisters are declared to be a doctor and a computer engineer through pure applications of the sound image. In terms of the visual paraphernalia of the mise en scene, they, as wives and mothers, are foreclosed from instrument-signs of production (the stethoscope, the personal computer.)

There is thus no money at all in the milieus of Suraj Barjatiya's Hum Aapke Hain Kaun or in Sanjay Leela Bansali's Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam. In the governing ontology of the cinematic in such films, money as capital is only a distant, alien referent that can make incursions into the ethical universe only as tribute, gift, or charity, and never as sponsorship or sustenance. Such families are great families precisely because they are capable of transforming their diurnal into money as pure spectacle, a national heritage exhibit unsullied by the commerce and traffic of labor and production. The great families in other words, are able to *afford* and maintain the exemplary housing of the woman as national deity. Their *havelis*<sup>193</sup> of splendid isolation are seen to provide a utopian sanctum of eternity, to present the woman as an artwork of pure interiorities, categorically separated from the storm and stress of chance, vicissitudes, and shifting barometers of the market. The rich are therefore rich not because they have money, but because despite the vagaries of modern life and the increasing demands of production, they have the will and commitment to not let women work. This is indeed a curious postulate, a spectacular juxtaposition of incommensurabilities that involves the narrative positioning of the feudal *haveli* as an ethical home in the metropolis. The *haveli* as an absolute fortress of values is seen to be bereft of the land that bore ground rent. In the present scenario, the *haveli* has to engage in 'business', but in a manner that inducts the movements of the latter within the aegis of the clan. The business assemblage is thus always already a familial assemblage that never disperses into a

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<sup>193</sup> The *haveli* is the traditional residence of the feudal lord.

mass-corporate body of anonymous, moneyed shareholders. The cinematic consolidation of the *haveli* is thus an authorial homesteading of passions as forms of business, rather than a shifting assemblage of money bearing interests. Both business and the woman can thus be part of the same ethical 'framing' of the world; the former harbors no powers of the outside, in terms of global speculations, debt relations, and inhuman architectonics of the share markets.

In Barjatiya's film Hum Saath Saath Hain, the eruption and subsequent taming of unrest in business follows the track of the epic Ramayana. It arrives in the form of a domestic schema perpetrated by a narrow minded foster mother, who extracts a word of honor from the patriarch to send his heir apparent (the eldest son of the family) to exile. In Dharmesh Darsan's Ek Rishta the crisis is a grave one. It takes the form of a generational conflict between the aging patriarch of the family business and his coda of paternalistic capitalism, and his American business school educated son, who believes in a new age principle of hiring and firing. This is further exacerbated when the patriarch's corrupt son in law attempts to take over the business through nefarious means. The latter and his cronies are punished at the end by the eldest son and the band of laborers as a community of sons. As noted earlier, when the diagram of the *Khandaan* or feudal joint family inscribes that of the modern business establishment, the result is often a visual assemblage where the paraphernalia of modern production and financialization cannot completely deterritorialize the patriarchal authority into a dispersal of anonymous shareholdings of money power. This is precisely why, in terms of proprietorship of women, and custodianship of value, the patriarch is never dispossessed of 'richness' even when he is formally cheated of his property rights. The evil son in law cannot establish his 'lawful' rights over the property when the workers barricade the gates; neither can he command conjugal rights over his wife who spurns him, nor his paternal rights over his unborn child. In a utopian space where the filiality of authority is seen to take over all other contractual relations (of labor, money, property and woman), money qua money can have no other ontological power apart from being part of a consummate richness of a singular upper caste, upper class, Hindu-Indian 'tradition'. The spectacular-ceremonial mode of the marriage films thus emerges precisely at that impossible interface between the ethical diagram of the Indian woman and the new age

diagram of business. The figuration of home in this milieu is thus that of absolute and total repose, a total picture of custom removed from circulation.

The intensification of *informatic* geo-televisuality in the subcontinental context since the early nineties has perhaps given rise to a situation in which a Brahminical narrative impelling of signs, a semiological recoding of linguistic energies no longer takes place through the positioning of absolute borders demarcating unfringeable territories of the self. A hierarchical installation of neo-Brahminism, or postmodern Hindutva as many people call it, becomes apparent through measures of control and manipulation of linguistic *variables*. That is, this subjective diagram, as one amongst many other major and minoritarian ones, frequently gains a preponderant status in the meshwork of languages increasingly through managerial functions rather than priestly ones. The overt neo-Hindu patriarchization of Indian film culture thus takes place not by a syntactical stringing together of words and images through the integrated subjective vision of the father, but by allowing the propositional statement (of the nation, the Indian self, society, or culture) curve into and envelop a globality of signs. It is thus not an operation of enclosure; it is one of tracing and tracking transmissions, acquiring regularities and achieving densities rather than *removing contradictions*. This is precisely why it would be unwise to gauge the strength of such textual powers in terms of propositional equity. That is, critique it in terms of a dialectical logic and relations of contradiction, as in how and why a neo-liberal language of finance capital can never be squared with the agrarian moorings of a proposed national identity, or why a Brahminical concept of national community must be antithetical to founding ideas of democratic equality. Perhaps one can say that as an aspect of informatic power that is global, but at the same time particularist, flexible and context specific in its operations, Hindutva is able to translate these contradictions to a different dimension of banality, common sense, and pure information. That is, to a dimension that works below the radar of a voluntaristic human consciousness that is able to identify logical contradictions and call them to judgment. Hindutva, as an order of information, thus effects a linguistic transformation of sign and value systems in a plane of massified and 'distracted' thought; it does so through a manipulation of assemblages, loose constellations of visibilities and

statements, and by setting up diffuse ecologies of affections, rather than monuments of hard myth.



## 5. The Music of Intolerable Love: Indian Film Music and the Sound of Partitioned Selves

### Towards a Lyric History of India

In speaking about the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Aamir Mufti has broached an important question: instead of a more conventional format of aligning propositions into a narrative of constitution, is it possible to understand historicity as a lyrical assemblage of powers that are often obtuse and eliding in their relational meaningfulness? The lyricism of Faiz, according to Mufti, is precisely that which “represents a profound attempt to unhitch literary production from the cultural projects of the postcolonial state in order to make visible meanings that have not been entirely reified and subsumed within the cultural logic of the nation state system” (“Toward a Lyric History of India,” 246). The obstinate meaningfulness of the poetic therefore resides in that very space which has not been imperially taken over by a historicity qua philosophy of subjective narration that engulfs all expressive powers into a constitutive tale of statist becoming. In a Hegelian schema of the modern, it would pertain to that impulse of the ‘irrational’ in the ‘Indian spirit’ which, since the dawn of the world historical, has “produced superb gems of poetry without any corresponding advances in art, freedom, and law.”<sup>194</sup> An invitation to read the historical in the light of the lyric is to already turn the tables and posit the latter in a light of rare and brave new autonomy, by which it arrives in a form that is not already pre-judged by an essential and universal content of the former.

In Mufti’s Adorno inspired reading of Faiz’s poetry, the lyrical abstraction of a pure subjectivity is not an effete departure from the social, but the very moment at which the social becomes catastrophically immanent in the very ruins of a *suffered* language of the poetic. In the case of Faiz, one sees a diagram of the self that is ‘Indian’ in an encompassing

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<sup>194</sup> Hegel, Philosophy of World History, 102.

sense, precisely because it flows out boundlessly and flouts the prosaic and determined borders of community and nation state. The poetic thus offers an affective power that enters the world as the pre-thought of all political divisions, like that between India and Pakistan as geo-political entities. The suffering of the lyric subject in Faiz's poetry never finds a home in the aftermath of the partition of 1947; rather it is that which radically generalizes a state of exile, corroding all fatal demarcations between the here and there, home and the world, India and Pakistan. As a result, love and a painful alienation from the beloved assume the form of a political arrest of normative becoming, a groundless foreclosure of consummation, conjugality, and anchorage of habit in the form of citizenship (Mufti, "Toward a Lyric History of India," 248).

Mufti elaborates that in the Sufi traditions of Urdu and Persian poetry, *Wisal* is a sign for mystic union with the divine that is accomplished when the desire of the self becomes extinct (*Fana*) in a realization of *Ishq-e-Haqiqi* or "true" love of God (257). Compared to this consummation that is devoutly desired, love of man is only *Ishq-e-majazi* – love that is inauthentic and metaphorical. What Mufti notices in Faiz is a secularization of this cosmic devotion, one that poetically closes the door on the unfreedom of given homes and embattled worlds. *Wafa* (loyalty) and *Junoon* (the madness or trance of poetic love) come to mean both, political steadfastness and selfless abandon -- the rational and irrational components of commitment to a being no longer endorsed by a *historicist* fatalism of a singular modern enterprise (257-58). Love is also that which is unbound from the law and psycho-biographical procedures of identification that govern the prose of the world; it is that candid power of expressivity that is no longer searching for form and recognition, but has become historically manifest as a catachrestic assemblage in of itself. It requires no further blessings of historical formalisms and hermeneutics in order to be figurable; it is that which de-territorializes assiduous quests for home and belongings to inject a perverse and disconcerting exiledom into the very heart of the city.

Mufti's quest for a lyric history has wider amplifications that demand attention and understanding. It proposes a critical rethinking of a grand aesthetic project of modernity that seeks to not only evaluate all worldly expressions of art in terms of their historicity but also

induct them, differentially, into a planetary civilizational conversation of becoming. In an intellectual process that began with Goethe's celebrated call for a World Literature, one can indeed discern and chart out a relentlessly emerging Global Republic of Letters as figural diagram of thought. This is a blueprint that is indeed monumental in the scope of its ambitions. Despite the undeniably commendable possibilities it invokes, like all constitutions, it can also usher in a system of value and unity that comes before any enunciations of selves of the world. What could be said in the plural and polyphonic assertions of different societies of globality thus stand the danger of being already pre-judged by a schema of form that has to do with how things may be said in the first place. All the classic imperatives of art – those of instructing, moving, and delighting – would then be confronted with the possibility of being allowed into the stage only after passing a scrutiny of a metalanguage and an overarching Hegelian metanarrative of becoming. The republic of letters can then be seen to become possible only when, in the age of print capitalism and mechanical reproducibility, all expressions are spiritually informed by an impulse of translation that refers everything back to a grand human journey towards self consciousness and a historical coming into being of the rational state. It is in such a scenario that the novel form, more specifically the realist novel, assumes a pre-eminent position in the publicity of the city. This so called blueprint for a world system of the literary has of course been critically challenged, segmented, and questioned in terms of value and power by many thinkers, lately by Pascale Casanova's ambitious project entitled The World Republic of Letters<sup>195</sup>. But the troubling question, one that is vexing and at the same time inescapable, has to do with a cardinal decision of constitution – what, in terms of a *founding* historicity of this meritorious planetary conversation, can be considered to be a proper enunciative form, and wherefore would be the subject to helm it? This line of questioning need not necessarily proceed with a grey haired wisdom surfeit with disabling irony and a nihilistic abjuration of the undeniably revolutionary compendium of constitutive values brought forth by the enlightenment; nor does it have to posit an anarchic nostalgia for a positive outside. In an age of rampant financialization of all avenues of social life, a relayed subalternism of informatics, representation, and accessibility, it can begin with a deceptively quiet humility,

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<sup>195</sup> See Pascale Casanova, The World Republic of Letters, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

with a primary quest for an understanding of the historical not governed by the tripartite and imperial unities of the subject, the signifier, and capital.

The consolidation of what we call the classic cultural formations of the nineteenth century European bourgeois class, primarily impelled by Herderesque nationalisms and a global career of imperial capital, provided a complex, but singular template which is perhaps still useful to understand the import of contemporary meditations on the world republic of letters. Imagining a world system for the literary in isomorphic alliance with (instead of being a superstructural reflection of) the planetary coming into being of capital's command would inevitably propose a schema of value, one that combines an aesthetic diagram with that of scientific accuracy and disenchanted observation. It is such an ordering of discourse in the modern episteme that privileges a realist narration of events as a form of imitating life that best approximates history itself as a realist chronicle of human kind's coming of age. It is only after the inauguration of the city as a world of prose that the republic of letters -- with its relentless processes of enunciation, representations of selves, translations, and civic conversations -- can come into being. It is because of this that thinkers like Franco Moretti and Neil Larsen<sup>196</sup>, in laying out complex world systems of the literary, or in investigating peripheral modernities, demonstrate how critically nuanced, opened up, multivalent, but ultimately unavoidable notions of realism and realist narration operate as singular powers of translation and interlocution between global cultures. In the final instance therefore, the historicity of all art becomes calculable in terms of their differential and deferential relationships with realism, even though that may not be predicated on a question of a positive identification of all forms with the European matrix. The point however is not to declare such projects to be invalid or Eurocentric in the last instance. Instead, the objective should be to appreciate the points of steadfast historical commitments in such modernizing

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<sup>196</sup> See Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," New Left Review New Series 1, 2000, 5<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2005 <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR23503.shtml>> and also chapter 3 of Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900, (New York: Verso, 1999), and Neil Larsen, Modernism and Hegemony: A Materialist Critique of Aesthetic Agencies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). See also Prasad's excellent analysis of Larsen's thesis in relation to Hindi cinema and a transparent metalanguage of the classic realist text in Ideology of the Hindi Film, 59-62. Moinak Biswas discusses Moretti's thesis in Historical Realism, 16-17.

diagrams and, at the same time to think whether it may be possible to critically recharge the very concept of history by blasting its continuums altogether. This question about literature can also be critically transposed in the domain of international cinema studies, especially after Paul Willemen's question, as to whether it is possible to think of a comparative film studies on the lines of Moretti, one that would re-conceptualize 'world cinema'<sup>197</sup> within the auspices of a true republic of images.

Mufti's question does not pertain to whether at all or to what degree can the lyric poet be allowed entry into such a republic of letters. Instead it inquires whether one can recast the historical landscape itself as a discontinuous realm of poetic events. In his reading, the work of Faiz does not remain a world abnegating quietism of poetic repose -- an otherworldly emblem that, like nature itself, awaits meaning and judgment from the luminous prose of the city. The lyric here aims to call the city itself as a perpetual site of its own eventfulness; it is that power that can de-territorialize the positivisms of modular casts of homeliness by bringing back an obdurate, exiling errancy of language. In the process, such a thinking of the lyrical radically suspends the fatalism of a historical imagination that has recently announced its own spectacular death, as well as the universalist presumptions of a state language that has been announcing its global claims in an increasingly terrifying manner. Mufti's observations are thus highly pertinent in a discussion about popular Indian cinema and its possible place in a World Republic of the Image so assiduously called for by Willemen. The lyrical aspect of such films is evident not just in the staple song sequences, but also in terms of a powerful poetic impulse of the *Lukhnawi* Urdu culture of the North Indian Muslim aristocracy that informs manners, speech, diction, and style in many melodramatic forms and ceremonials. This force of lyrical elucidations and exchanges between older and newer architectures of value, between a dominant Sanskrit Brahminical culture and a radical or decadent Islamic-Urdu poetic romanticism, is a very important one

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<sup>197</sup> "Detouring Through Korean Cinema", unpublished seminar paper, Irvine, California, cited in Biswas, Historical Realism, 17.

in popular Hindi cinema<sup>198</sup>. In the formative decades of the 'all India film', this was consolidated in the hands of a group of extraordinarily talented lyric writers like Sahir Ludhianvi, Kaifi Azmi, Hasrat Jaipuri, Shakeel Badauni, and Shailendra. It is not the purpose here to engage a musicality of cinema in a dialectical battle with the classic realist text. Rather, it is to understand the lyrical as a pervasive and insidious de-territorializing power that is capable of contaminating and transforming hard artifacts of historical narration. In that, its historicity lies precisely in its ability to forward obtuse meanings, boundless affections, and inscrutable figures and in the process, transform, question, or dismantle dominant institutions and archives of historicism.

### **The Song Sequence**

The song sequences are not so much *vehicles* for cinematic geo-televisuality in the kind of popular Indian cinema that is being investigated in this project. They are instead moments of the cinematic in which geo-televisuality itself reveals its musical character, that is, when it lyrically detaches itself continuously from schemas of information that relentlessly report the dance of signs to the unities of the state, the subject, the signifier, and the law. This is perhaps because these sequences, perhaps more than others, remove bodies from the propositional flow of narratives, transport them to temporal and spatial orders that are outside a determined milieu of story-telling, and endow them with magical resources and playthings beyond the scope of integrated characterization. More over, humanoid figures are only one of the bodies we see being orchestrated in the dynamic sign clusters that are seen in such sequences; other bodies, like pure digitized dancing effigies, the grotesque bodies of special effects, animals, cartoons, expressive-naturalistic objects, totems or emblems are regularly mobilized as well. The song and dance routines, in recent times, have emerged as some sort of a formal signature in both journalistic as well as academic understandings of popular Indian cinema. Because of the fact that they disrupt the serial continuity of the story telling process, they are often looked upon as quaint 'insertions' of

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<sup>198</sup> The lyrical aspect is of course not unique to Indian cinema (although it has certain specificities of assembling powers), nor is the musical genre as a molar expressive format of the same (apart from Hollywood, and Latin America, one can think of the Egyptian musicals of the fifties and sixties in this regard)

the ceremonial or ritualistic kind, a cultural curiosity specific to the subcontinental tradition, in what is seen as an otherwise normative business of classical narrative cinema. But such interruptions are rarely seen as experimental or innovative challenges to dominant, transnational formats. Rather, they are usually understood in terms of an ontology of 'escape', as departures from a scientifically or politically determined 'reality'. As a result, they never seem to qualify to the status of avant garde modernist disruptions of the classical Hollywood style, as artworks that often call into being a utopian line of flight precisely to depart from the unfreedom of a purported, definitive 'reality'. Are they really 'interruptions' in the sense Gopalan has designated them?<sup>199</sup> It is only from a grid of value that sets up a clear hierarchy between the two historical roles of cinema – the pictures of life in the work of the Lumières gaining aesthetic precedence over the cine magic of George Méliès – that one can pronounce the song and dance to be an 'interruption' in the first place<sup>200</sup>. Indeed, the status of the song sequence -- as a signature of the variegated pre-modern, folk-agrarian roots of cinematic representation -- has always been a tenuous one in an overall, transnational field of cinema. It has shifted between that of a marker of indigenous, 'authentic' cultural specificity, and of a formalist obstacle that had to disappear or be transcoded in a gradualist process of *becoming modern*<sup>201</sup>.

The works of scholars like Tom Gunning and Miriam Hansen have suggested that early cinema in the west had developed along many potential lines of social usage before they

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<sup>199</sup> See Gopalan, Cinema of Interruptions

<sup>200</sup> Of course Gopalan's critical energies are directed towards a dismantling of this very normative of cinema. She uses 'interruption' as a trope rather than as a positive concept.

<sup>201</sup> The various journalistic and academic instances of this tendency are too numerous to tabulate. Consider for instance the formal description of the popular Indian film forwarded by Arun Kaul and Mrinal Sen in the Manifesto of the New Cinema Movement: "...a mechanical business of putting together popular stars, gaudy sets, glossy colour, a large number of irrelevant musical sequences and other standard meretricious ingredients." Close Up, no. 1 (July 1968): 37 (emphasis mine). Speaking about Shankar's 1994 film *Indian*, Theodor Bhaskaran categorically states that "The flow of the film would not be affected in the least if song sequences were excised, wholly or partially." Quoted in Gopalan, 128.

were erased or overcoded by a corporatist-taylorist mode of big studio production, and a style of melodramatic realism and continuity editing<sup>202</sup>. In the annals of Indian cinema, more specifically in relation to the song and dance sequence, a similar historical process of aesthetic reformation and normalization can be noticed. For instance, in early experimentations with the technology of sound, narration in films like Indrasabha/The Court of Indra (J. J. Madan, 1931) or Kalidas (H. M. Reddy, 1931) unfolded musically, in the form of what Bhaskar Chandravarkar has called ‘songlets’ of short duration, rather than through a now dominant mode of dialogue based, propositional realism<sup>203</sup>. Ashoke Ranade has suggested that these lyrical formations were a continuous rather than an ‘interrupting’ principle of expression, perpetually in between poles of tune and dialogue, emanating from oral expressive cultures<sup>204</sup>. It would therefore be gratuitous to say that Indrasabha had seventy-one songs; instead, the entire sound track of the film can be considered to be a singular, constitutive body of musical narration, in which interacting lyrical assemblages are interspersed by stylized voice incantations. The gradual suppression of this comprehensive melodic impulse, the streamlining of an often radically experimental interface between traditional forms and technology<sup>205</sup>, and a cultural abjuration of genres of attraction and magic (like the Phalke and Prabhat mythologicals and the Wadia stunt films), subsequently created a modernizing aesthetic clearing for various modes of ‘narrating the nation’.

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<sup>202</sup> See the three essays of Tom Gunning -- ‘Primitive’ Cinema: A Frame-Up? Or the Trick’s on Us”; “Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity: A Theory of Genres in Early Films” in Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker eds. (London: BFI, 1990): 95-103, 86-94. See also Miriam Hansen, Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1991).

<sup>203</sup> Bhaskar Chandravarkar, “Growth of the Film Song,” Cinema in India, 1, no. 3 (1981): 16-20.

<sup>204</sup> Ashok Ranade “The Extraordinary Importance of the Indian Film Song” Cinema Vision India 1, no. 4 (1981): 4-11.

<sup>205</sup> See Geeta Kapur, “Mythic Material in Indian Cinema,” and the two seminal essays of Ashish Rajadhyaksha on early Indian cinema: “The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology,” and “Neo-traditionalism: Film as Popular Art in India.”



## The Music of Intolerable Love

In Mani Ratnam's 1998 film *Dil Se*, Amar, a city bred, educated radio journalist, meets Meghna, a mysterious woman at a train station when he is on his way on an assignment to the politically turbulent North Eastern part of India. He keeps bumping into the intriguing woman from time to time during his sojourn and falls hopelessly in love with her. What Amar does not know is that Meghna is part of a terrorist outfit affiliated to a secessionist movement in the north east, and is being trained to be a suicide bomber<sup>206</sup>. Most of the song sequences accompanying the dramatic unfolding of events and revelations happen to be 'free indirect' visual consolidations of sublimity, terror and desire. As stated earlier, the visual and aural flows of affections, semiosis, and spectacle that are seen these sequences are often not governed by privileged perspectives or moral-aesthetic visions that can be accorded to specific diagrams of subjectivity – the new age metropolitan male journalist, or the marginalized woman turned human bomb. Nor are they fully entered into a founding relationship of obligation to the narrative process.

The *Chaiya Chaiya* sequence takes place at the beginning of the film, immediately after Amar's first, fleeting encounter with Meghna at a railway station in a dark and stormy night. The musical interlude begins with a discontinuous cut to the top of a train moving under a clear sky, and in broad daylight. It becomes a utopian space for bits of anthropological spectacle, signs of ethnic chic and traditional bodies combined and set to techno rhythms. The hero dances atop the train with a host of rural people in spotless rural attire, and a comely belle whose body combines rustic forms with a distinctly urban body language. Here there is a complex assemblage of camera perspectives that is a recurring feature of song and dance sequences that involve pastoral set pieces, folk forms and other agrarian motifs. Examples of these would lie in the innumerable Hindi film song and dance

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<sup>206</sup> In that sense, the narrative of *Dil Se* is different from various 'threat of the nation' stories of the 60s and 70s that came especially in the wake of wars with China and Pakistan. Classic examples would be Dev Anand's *Prem Pujari* (1970) and Ramanand Sagar's *Aankhen* (1968).

pieces featuring singing and dancing North Indian peasant bodies, Goan fishermen, or tribal bodies in jungles. In such situations, the camera assumes both, an urban, anthropological 'look' (by which the city historically has read the country), as well as a perspective that sexualizes such bodies in a manner that reveals them to be nothing but attributes of a metropolitan, post-historical arcade of 'ethnic' designs. The bodies of peasants, fishermen, or jungle folk thus become figurable (as dancers inseparable from the dance) at that interstice between the home and the world, at once inside and outside the cinematic city. The anthropological distancing of their forms and settings, as objects of 'discovery' and study, is offset and re-combined with a vision that immediately and inseparably redresses them as part of the global projections (of fear, fascination, or romance) of the city itself. It thus pertains to the casting of ethnicity itself as geo-televisual information set in seductive cadences.

The *Chaiya chaiya* sequence injects a thickened cluster of signs into the otherwise linear continuum of the narrative, hailing in a different world of desires. It constitutes a top angle, godly 'look' into an 'Indian' context 'passing through' a peaceful interregnum that comes *between* activities of metropolitan journalism, and those of terror. This 'look' emanates from an imperial point of view of a cinema of the normative-metropolitan, one that enters the film in between movements of pathological violence and the unrest of individual passions. The 'look' allows for a momentary incursion of health, when the camera -- in creating a picture of peace that narrative developments will soon shatter -- assumes a basic function of a museumographic-spectacular translation of various life functions of the world. A transnational techno rhythm, in assemblage with the melodic strains of an indigenous Sufi tradition and Urdu poetry, occupies the figures of ethnically dressed peasants and fruit-sellers, luminously absolving them of the dirt and grime of labor. There are of course two sides to this feature that can be said to be a general tendency of not only Indian popular cinematic forms, but also the myriad commerces that take place (as they always have) on a global scale between diverse cultural formations. On the one hand they destroy certain priestly, indigenous pieties of the 'local', affecting perverse contaminations and de-sacralizations; on the other hand they can also remove from the picture the very agon and historicity of difference (the career of imperial capital, the international division of labor

etc). In these, the multiple combinations and dispersals of a global electronic database that are beamed from skies always interact in a lilting but complex manner with rooted memories of the earth. Faced with such a *mélange* of formations, one perhaps needs to stay away from fortifying and protecting *dictated* edifices of tradition (like Sufi philosophy or Urdu poetry) as well as uncritically championing incursive powers and qualities of a transnational re-coding of culture. This however does not call for a totalization of irony in thought, or a lapse into gross relativism. It simply invites a perpetually critical look, detached from all metaphysical truths of the 'self' (of the west, as well as the east) that examines dynamic relationalities and incommensurabilities in cultural interactions. Most importantly, the task is to see these instances as part of (and not a reflection of) a complex global socialization of finance capital itself, as a process that is not *essentially and organically tied to either European style cultural modernity or even political liberalism*. That is, conversely, just as the supercession of so-called anti-modern forces and ideologies (a neo-Brahminical *Hintutva* for instance) in a particular situation of power can actually prove to be a facilitating (rather than disruptive) force in an emphatic financialization of social life.

The next song sequence in Dil Se takes place a little later in the narrative, after Amar tracks the evanescent Meghna down to her village and declares his intentions of asking for her hand in marriage. It is important to note that at this point, neither he, nor the viewer has any knowledge of Meghna's identity as a terrorist. Hence, the title track sequence that follows is an anticipatory coupling of the affects of violence and love, one that once again crosses an economy of subjective narration qua the point-of view of the unsuspecting protagonist. The picturization of the song *Dil Se* ("From the Heart") combines different visual diagrams: the realist narrative, the steadycam shots of a CNN style battleground reportage, a transnational consumer lifestyle of advertising, tourism, pearl necklaces, designer gowns, and the constantly re-ordered body of the woman. This is a filmic style that Ratnam had also used in his previous political thrillers like Roja (1992) and Bombay (1995). A mobile, probing, investigative camera vision that is characteristic of a transnational 'on the spot' television newsgathering is 'quoted' in both the films. In Roja it is that which 'raids', with dazzling speed, the idyllic village of the countryside, and reveals the den of 'terror' at its heart. In Bombay, the 'CNN style' mobile camera captures, in a 'livewire' and

‘awry’ fashion, the madness of the communal riots. This camera of information is thus inevitably a camera of emergency, by which the city instantly monitors and detects the objects of its worst fears, and restores itself constantly into a homogenous mass of consensual citizens through accompanying measures of militarization, aid, and policing. The ‘CNN style’ footage of terror and militarization is that which *jolts* a habitual cause-effect flow of the narrative, just as news disrupts the quotidian courses of life itself. What is interesting about the title song sequence in Dil Se is that at this point of the story Meghna’s dark secret has not been revealed to Amar. The disconcerting shots of simulated news gathering in a strange environment (the feeling that the world is somehow, somewhere, out of joint) are thus foreboding devices here. This visual coda is *ominously* orchestrated with those of touristic and advertisement commercials. These, in tandem, facilitate the passage of the female body from the mysterious and romantic figure in black to a carnivalesque bearer of signs of a globalized middle class desire. In doing that, it also prepares the *affective* ambience for the pending revelation of the profile of the terrorist.

The Dil Se sequence figurally invents an intimate space of the couple (about to be denied by the narrative) and inserts it into the public domain of violence. Music, in de-territorializing bodies from their realist milieus, affects a visual consolidation of desire that is already foreclosed by the ethical universe of exemplary storytelling: the citizen cannot fall in love with the terrorist. As surreal insertion or super-imposition, musicality liberates signs and bodies from the axiomatic of narration to bring about what can be called a ‘postulated’ expression of romance, as opposed to a ‘real depiction’ that is already rendered impossible by word of law (the state in this case has a greater claim on the woman’s body than the man’s). The term ‘postulation’ is once again being used in the etymological sense of ‘prayer’ here. It is interesting that postulation, as ‘prayer,’ becomes a secular heresy precisely because it figurally establishes a desire not commensurate with an organization of reality in terms of an ethical substrate of nationhood. But there is another question that needs to be discussed: is it forbidden to fall in love with a terrorist simply because it is against the spirit and letter of the law?

Love is an anarchic energy, because it threatens to introduce a terrible forking of paths between the destinies of the citizen and that of the state. In the Hegelian conception of the civil society and the rational state, human (heterosexual) love is a unifying middle term that sets up an organic bridge between spirit and substance, between the particular and general interest, and between individual reality and universal essence<sup>207</sup>. Love is therefore that which (as a force secondary to reason) animates the totality of a perpetually gestating ethical life in a manner that prevents the latter from becoming a cold universal. That is, the ethical life propounded by the rational state must, at every point, be in an *organic* relation to the vegetative immanence of social processes. The vertical emergence of the modern rational state has to be a synthetic process of history, and not the tyrannical imposition of a cold, distant, and overarching mechanism. Partha Chatterjee, in his “against the grain” reading of Hegel in relation to Indian nationalism, points out that for the great German thinker, love, to that end, had to be necessarily telescoped into the modalities of the bourgeois nuclear family. Chatterjee argues that an understanding of Indian nationalism on the other hand perhaps needed to conceptualize the turbulent, often fragmenting force of love in relation to the community rather than the nuclear family<sup>208</sup>. In other words, apropos the particular story that is being discussed, the peculiar nature of Indian nationalistic formations would already delegitimize the couple because in their expressions of nucleated desires, they contravene the ethics of community. In Amar’s case, the latter would be a Hindi speaking North Indian community that dominates the pan Indian state scenario, while for Meghna, it would be one that is marginalized from that very centerstage of Indian-ness. This theme can be followed a little, not as a universal coda of truth that can be ‘applied’ to a third world, post-colonial context, but as one of the many powerful fictions of constitutive modernity that intersect with critical discourses about the nation-state in the Indian context.

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<sup>207</sup> See G.W.F Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 265-74. Also Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, 99-100.

<sup>208</sup> Partha Chatterjee, Nation in Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, 230-31.

Once again, the three constitutive precepts of subject, unity, and law are at stake here. It is useful to recall that the trial for Hegel in this was to absolve the spiritual union between the family and the state from the ‘contingencies’ of legal contracts that feature in the works of Locke or Montesquieu. Law – constitutional or moral -- in other words, is not the ultimate question here. In the spiritual journey of self consciousness towards a rational and organic unity of things, law is merely a contingent moment of isolation from the whole<sup>209</sup>, just as the constitution is a mere formalization of the covenant of the nation state, or moral precepts in Kant and Rousseau are *externally* dictated categorical imperatives. For Hegel on the other hand, the absolute right of ethical consciousness is such that the deed will be nothing else but what it *knows*<sup>210</sup>. In a world devoid of oracular wisdom or Cassandras of doom, the guilt of Oedipus must be historically foreclosed through a historical consolidation of private property, governing institutions of civil society, the bourgeois family, and of course, the modern state that supercedes the tragic antinomies between human and divine law. From such an anthropological perspective, the conditions of incomplete modernity in the Indian context would entail that the possibility of incest and other forms of illicit love in ‘lost and found’ narratives of popular Hindi cinema can only be prevented through a Dharmic dictation of *fate*, rather than a rational ordering of civil society, state, and family.

What has been just culled is of course an idealistic shorthand of a philosophical discourse of the west, perpetually inflicted by the duality of fallible earthly contracts between mortals and a postulate of an irresistible, cosmological spirit of world history. As declared earlier, the critical effort here harbors no intentions of evaluating it in terms of a possible metaphysics of truth. Rather, what would be interesting, as far as this discussion is concerned, is to see how this schema of normativity intersects with forces, materialities, and desires in Dil Se, entering and departing from them in complex ways. In other words, to see the very moments of catastrophic discontinuity between a cosmopolitan cartography of modernity,

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<sup>209</sup> Hegel, Phenomenology, 259-61.

<sup>210</sup> Hegel, Phenomenology, 281.

and the historical third world landscape it tries to transcode as one of its many worldly projects. The question one can begin with pertains to a psychobiographical baseline that is usually a feature of realist, subjective narration: how, and to what extent, at each point of the story, does Amar *know* about Meghna's identity, and how does that knowledge affect his ethical being? This query would therefore be an important one if one were to go by the usual practice of creating a moral universe of good and evil in the narrative from the point of view of the subject. Is Amar's 'crime' on the same lines as Oedipus's – the result of a tragic absence of knowledge in an atomized and individuated world vision?<sup>211</sup>

That is clearly not the case with Amar. In the narrative of Ratnam's film, his manic quest for Meghna continues even after he comes to know of her secret. It is interesting to note that the only time he is ready to give up his frenzied search happens early in the film, when she lies to him, saying that she is already married. A shocked Amar withdraws but then pursues her to the very end after he comes to know about her falsehood, despite learning later in the narrative that she is a suicide bomber working against the interests of the state. The prohibition of the legal state apparatus is not enough to dissuade Amar; he does not find his attraction to be 'unnatural' (since it is neither incest, nor a contravention of the territorial rights of another man – Meghna's fictional husband) despite being avowedly against the dictates of the state as well as the joint family. Amar's manic chase remains on course even after the law, in pursuit of the terrorists, declares him to be a collaborator with anti-national forces and disgraces his family. What is thus offered is a glimpse of a disconcerting new age, 'urban' conjugal desire that is not afraid to cast itself against both, the 'not yet modern' constitutional nation-state, as well as the self contained ethical universe of the feudal joint family.

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<sup>211</sup> Interestingly, it is an epic compact between a mythical process of justice and a primordially of the blood relation (that does not allow one to inadvertently fall in love with a long lost sister) that wards off the possibility of incest in popular Indian 'lost and found' film narratives. In Raj Khosla's Bambai Ka Babu (1960) and Ravi Chopra's Zameer (1975) for instance, the sister is horrified to discover that the person she has fallen in love with could actually be her long lost brother; however, in both cases, the brother is revealed to be an imposter, thus delivering the subject from the guilt of incest. This theme is parodied in Shyam Benegal's Mandi (1983).

The narrative of a mad, obsessive, and ultimately self destructive quest of the citizen-professional protagonist is *affectively consolidated* through the star text of Shah Rukh Khan and the lyrical-rhythmic motorization of bodies and nature in the song sequences. The central motif of Dil Se is established and thematically resonated in the lyrics of two songs in the film – the title track and the *Satrange Re* number. These song numbers cast Dil Se (literally, ‘from the heart’) as a journey through the seven shades of love, as elaborated in ancient Arabic literature – *hub* (attraction), *uns* (infatuation), *Ishq* (love), *Aqidat* (reverence), *ibadat* (worship), *junoon* (obsession), and finally *maut* (death). This trajectory of becoming, much like the irrational spectrum of Rasas that refuse to constitute themselves into a peaceful stance of *santa* or the submissive one of *bhakti*, is thus that which de-territorializes the normative psychobiography of the modern subject, in the process engaging with and dismantling the state and society sanctioned coda of conjugality. The last feature becomes manifest in the film through Amar’s brief flirtation with ‘home’, in the form of his engagement with Priety – the girl who has been picked by his family to be his bride. The narrative scenario is all the more complicated by the energies of love being all the time informed indeterminately by the energies of war. The community based war machine that Meghna is a part of takes advantage of Amar’s *junoon* and uses his home and family to find temporary refuge from the law. As part of the terror plan, Meghna also exploits Amar’s feelings for her to get a job as an All India Radio correspondent. Her figuration in the film perpetually takes place in the realm of the inscrutable, in between patriarchal formations of the old and the new, with signs of affection indeterminately distributed between communal love for her disenfranchised people and her nucleated desires for Amar.

The debate that takes place when Amar finally confronts Meghna towards the end, after coming to know of her true intentions, is perhaps not seminally important to this discussion. What can be noted in passing is that the dialectic between the historical legitimacy of the national state and the outraged search for justice and law destroying violence by the marginal community is left suspended in the showdown between the naïve citizen and the hardened terrorist. In the special urban sensibility that governs Dil Se, there can neither be a theodicy, nor a wholesome late coming of the secular state, to affect a final unity between the dialogic word of the law and a singular ontology of justice. After the unfinished



interaction, conjugality can only proceed fatally, in the stark landscape of the pre/post political, where god is neither absolute nor has he achieved a modern death; he has simply stopped speaking. Meanwhile, in Dil Se, love consummates itself through an obstinate voluntarism of death, when Amar and Meghna blow themselves up with the explosives originally intended for the terror act. The illegitimate couple thus overcomes the fear of demise that is presumed by most modern political philosophies of constitution based on contract or a self-other dialectic of lordship and bondage. Suicide, as a perverse, yet supreme achievement of *modernism* (as Benjamin would say) de-territorializes a unitary cosmology made up of a behavioral logic of modernity and an economic-governmental one of modernization<sup>212</sup>. It prevents the encounter between law and life and takes love ‘elsewhere’. Death, in other words, becomes the utopian ‘elsewhere’ that Amar searches for when, after coming to know of Meghna’s identity, her past, and her ironclad filial obligations, he pleads that the two should run away to a place that is distant from both -- the violent geo-politics of the nation state, as well as the proprietorship of the joint family.

The problem of love in this case has to be located in a cleft that perpetually opens up between the universality of a philosophical discourse of modernity and demographic modalities of the population state. Amar naively pleads Meghna to disarm and remove herself elsewhere, *when her identity itself is constructed by the national state in terms of a fundamental relation of war*. Here it would be opportune to recall that the totality of the Hegelian rational diagram invoked earlier comes with a necessary rejoinder – Meghna cannot be loved within the scope of an egalitarian homogeneity that constitutes *peopleness*; as a minoritarian presence, she can only be an object of *toleration* and *suspicion*. Meghna can be accorded civil rights (which are always contractual and contingent) pertaining to representation and juridical forms, but *ethically* speaking, she can never be a citizen<sup>213</sup>. Like the Quakers, Anabaptists, and Jews of the Prussian state devoutly desired by Hegel, in her

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<sup>212</sup> Fredric Jameson, in a valiant attempt to resuscitate modernity as a trope of political polysemia, rather than as a concept, makes similar distinctions in A Singular Modernity (London: Verso, 2002).

<sup>213</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, 168-68.

case, a civil recognition by law as an entity to be preserved or punished does not amount to an entry in the ethical family-state composite. Meghna is always foreclosed from entering the former as a site for individual love, as well as latter, as the repository of patriotic love. It is this latter organic unity that, in the Hegelian universe, dialectically presides over a force field of interests and finally renders ethics as *custom*. Meghna's legal rights can ensure her inclusion into the national fold only through a process of tolerated, differential exclusion<sup>214</sup>. Her aspect of terror unfolds at the very liminality of that tolerance, when her shadowy presence and insidious homelessness makes her drop out of the monitoring radar of a malfunctioning population state<sup>215</sup>. As a result, a question of law here cannot be mitigated by a benign unfolding of everyday lives and everyday desires; *it can never be customary to be in love with Meghna*. The debate about sovereignty, as far as her profile is concerned, is always to be restricted to the rule of exception. The preserving/establishing violence of the law, as far as she or her community is concerned, can never be extinguished. On the other hand, had Amar married the familial citizen Preity, there could have been, in terms of a unitary national-communal spirit, the possibility of diffusing the formal inclemency of law, that is, not only rendering love legal, but also rendering it indistinguishable from life itself.

Love in Dil Se thus remains a tragic pathology in terms of narration as supreme ethical instantiation of national life. In the course of the baroque death drive that unfolds in the realistic storytelling, the song sequences open up luminous intervals for the visual consolidation of an unremitted desire, a picture of love as an otherworldly life without political status. The non-directional lyrical pathos of these sequences informs the dramatic

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<sup>214</sup> I am of course alluding to Giorgio Agamben's brilliant study of modern sovereignty in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.

<sup>215</sup> Michel Foucault has theorized late modern governmentality in terms of altered sovereign practices that are more attuned to the flexible management of populations, rather than to the creation of 'peoples' through discipline and a cultural pedagogy of citizenship. The 'birth of biopolitics' as such, presumes the Population state, rather than the territorial one. See Michel Foucault, "Birth of Biopolitics" and "Security, Terror, and Population" in Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, vol. 1, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, Paul Rabinow ed. (New York: The New Press, 1997): 73-75, 67-71.

build up of events, infusing the latter process with the anarchic semiosis of an *intolerable* love that can manifest itself only musically in a prosaic world. The body of the woman, perpetually crisscrossed by contesting patriarchal forces, lends itself to various catachrestic geo-televisual ensembles of signs. It is motorized as part of a perpetually altering and forking assemblage of desire that is always deporting itself to a mythical 'outside', into the pure immanence of a visual utopia that can come only *after* national geo-politics. There is, however, more to this escape. The woman, as an expressive animation of desire out of bounds, seems to be figurable only when it enters image diagrams of value in of itself. That is, only when her body is temporarily absolved of its location in unhappy history and terror, and claimed, in a state of supreme lightness of being, by pure, worldly and specular relations of commodification. In other words, the narratologically impossible picture of the terrorist woman as beloved becomes apparent only as *cinema-as-spectacle*, which is indeed capital accumulated to the point of image<sup>216</sup>. The woman-in-cinema as a result assumes the form of unbridled, immanent production values (the dancing body, the fetish body, the fashion body) in a *mise-en-scène* no longer weighed down or mediated by statements and visions of a historically defined situation. The song sequences exert an ontological pull that removes images of desire from an embattled geo-political milieu of the nation-state, but this removal to an 'outside' can be seen to become manifest only as a never never transnational arcade of *lifestyle* signatures. Commodities and vectorized time-space modules thus arrive without historical procedures of labor and production, and an agonistic process of *becoming* tends to be flattened into a vision of the post-historical freedom to consume that is always arriving. However, it could be wrong to conclude that such 'groundless' re-coding of historical bodies and locations into batches of metropolitan spectacles and ideologemes completely exhaust the semiotic energy of these interludes. They, in other words, are not simply formations that repress, gloss over, or exploit historically disenfranchised bodies like Meghna's; in strange ways they are also enabling. They create realities; they produce and transform; they are often capable of destroying sedentary and enervating pieties of the already given. In the *Satrangi Re* (Oh my lover) sequence, we see the militarized grounds of Ladakh being transformed into assemblages of travel cinematography, exotic, eroticized dance

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<sup>216</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 24.

movements, and urban motifs of bondage and ritualistic masochism. The pressure of a geo-televisual nomadism of desires it facilitates cannot always be contained within the parameters of an assumed subject – for instance, that of the normative Oedipal one. The sequence ends with the dancing figures of Amar and Meghna striking the posture of Michel Angelo's *Pieta*, with Meghna as the Virgin Mary, and Amar as the martyred Christ.

Perhaps, as briefly indicated earlier, the so called indifference and non-obligatory nature of song sequences need to be thought in terms of *disjunctive* relations with the narrative. That is, as qualitative and expressive entities which *affect* narration through seepages and osmotic flows of semiotics (as a system of signs), rather than through a constitutive dialectical participation in an overarching, synthesizing movement of semiology (as a system of language). This postulate can be illustrated by using a couple of moments from Ratnam's two other films on political conjugality -- Roja (1992) and Bombay (1995). In the first film, the *Rukmini Rukmini* sequence comically orchestrates a disjunctive synthesis between a new metropolitan coda of the sex relation with what Prasad has called the monitoring gaze of a not yet modern, but no longer feudal moral guardianship<sup>217</sup>. The zone of privacy for the newly wed couple is a precarious, still to be consolidated historical proposition in the cinematic milieu of Roja, where the agrarian feudal joint family is shown to be dominant<sup>218</sup>. The latter is not narratologically dismantled, but loosened from its earthy moorings and spectacularly de-territorialized in terms of affect. The young and old of the village gossip, dance and sing to celebrate the nuptial night in this song sequence. The traditional bodies of middle-aged village 'matrons' are unhinged from ethical statements and memories of the folkish earth and transmuted through a utopian and 'groundless' application of 'MTV' musicality and laughter. They are re-publicized as bodies in kinetic oscillation between

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<sup>217</sup> Prasad, Ideology of the Hindi Film, 53-113.

<sup>218</sup> This is established earlier in the film through a meticulous depiction of the rituals and protocols that go into the finalization of the arranged marriage. The only pre-nuptial meeting between the hero and his originally intended bride (she secretly confides to him that she is in love with another person; the hero chooses to marry her sister instead in order to save social embarrassment for all) is presided over by the entire community from a distance.

discursive poles of tradition and modernity. In becoming chaotic figures, caught in the limbo between the composite body of the community and the individuated persona of the west, the dancing women create the affective grounds for the nuclear couple to emerge in the narrative in the realm of pure spectacle, in which attributes of the feudal (the profile and attire of the village woman) and those of the modern (the pelvic thrust and the techno beats) are not historically resolved, but indeterminately present. Musicality is thus that which vibrates and renders rhythmically fuzzy the gap between the priestly statement of the absolutist country and the clamorous prose of the liberal city. It is only after this rite of passage that the couple can cut the chords of kinship and leave for Kashmir, which is, at once, an earthly paradise for honeymoon as well as a professional battleground for combating terror.

There is a similar movement in Bombay. The newly wed couple is at first besieged by communitarian obligations, which requires them to put up a bunch of kids of a visiting family inside their bedchamber. It is only after this comical delay that the neighbors themselves take the initiative to isolate them for the bridal night. The politically sensitive inter-religious marriage between the Hindu boy and the Muslim girl (who have eloped from their rural, familial stations to the urban anonymity of the big city) is consummated in an interesting manner. The figure of the woman had hitherto been constructed in the narrative as a furtive, *burkha* clad figure in the traditional-agrarian mode, and also, in the 'Kannalanae'/'Kehna hai kya' ('What is there to say') sequence, shot in the Indo-Saracenic style Tirumal Nayak Palace in Madurai, in terms of a mannered, courtly dancing body drawn along Islamic-aristocratic lines<sup>219</sup>. In contrast to that, in the *Humma Humma* number, the depiction of conjugality inside the bedroom is interspersed with a carnivalesque and libertine dance number that takes place in the neighborhood premises, now discontinuously transformed into a pure stage of the MTV musical. The seductive techno beat rises to a crescendo and in the course of its trajectory claims not just the bodies of the dancers -- who are dressed in a mishmash of styles, assembling the *purdah* to ostensibly 'sexy' dance

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<sup>219</sup> See Gopalan, Cinema of Interruptions, 131.

costumes of an ‘alien’ kind – but also that of Shaila Banu, the young bride. The body of the Islamic-rural woman begins to sway intermittently to the music, as part of a playful, pre-coital overture, and is gradually ‘de-marked’ of its attributes of tradition – the psychobiographical qualities of coyness, ‘lack of exposure’ due to a strict ‘Islamic’ upbringing in the rural backwaters, and sociological ones of body language and attire. It is thus the de-territorializing affect of music that carries her over to an urban epistemological fold where a liminal image of private, ‘consensual’ and secular sex relation becomes possible. She undresses as a musical automaton and lets her body be claimed by a new metropolitan patriarchy and its nucleated desires. The mating ground between religions is thus secured not through a dialectical war of historico-political propositions and their resolution in a rational realm of Kantian cosmopolitan culture, but in a groundless register of *consuming* the music of metropolitan globalization. Shaila Banu, in other words, *is*, because she is capable of consuming. In that, like her husband, her neighbors, and the carnivalesque visitors from the nearby red light district, she has discovered an originary plane of being capable of holding the temporalities of the ancient as well as the modern regimes. This of course is a paradoxical moment of that which, for the lack of a better term, can be referred to as a situation of ‘postmodernity,’ in which a pre-modern tribalism of religious conflicts and prejudices is offset by an emphatic *primordialism* of consumer desire. The latter arrives non-temporally, in an instant when it reveals itself to be always, already there, without graduated historical measures of enfranchisement, education, or cultivation of taste. The semiotic affect of this pageant like stasis percolates into the narrative, in a diffuse manner rather than in terms of propositional logic. Subsequently, as Shaila Banu settles into domesticity and motherhood, her figural presence in the film lends itself to a ‘metro-normativity’ that is defined by naturalized practices of urban Hinduization. She no longer wears the *burkha* and stops eating meat. The song sequence thus retroactively envelops her ‘Muslim’ self into a rural ‘pastness’ that is overcome by a ‘natural’, historically inevitable progress to urban conjugality.

The moment of geo-televisuality is thus not one where the image, in a progressive dialectical transfer, draws itself from the repository of a so called organic national memory and worlds itself in an international stage. It is, on the other hand a situation where figuration comes

from a geo-televsual cinema machine freely emitting pulses from a globalized database-screen. The image, to use a Heideggerian metaphor, is thus always *worked* on by a technology of celluloid inscription between the nation as familial memory of the earth, and the expansive televsual sky of the global. It never settles into synthesized self-other profiles of hybridity or celebratory multiculturalism, but is always in the process of being overwritten or underwritten through a fluid, haphazard movement of language particles. The song sequences are not moments of simple ‘representation’, the coming into being of linear good or bad ideological constructs; they are instead complex movements of power, tribulations in the battleground of languages and gestures. The geo-televsual images in such sequences are those that globalize the body in a manner that has the betrayal of the ‘self’ (as a national-local precept of being) as its limit. They should not be judged simply on the grounds of what they ‘communicate’, in terms of propositions or baseline addresses; instead, it would be critically rewarding to understand them in ways in which they problematize communicability itself in the world<sup>220</sup>. The geo-televsual image always slips away, into an ‘elsewhere’ whenever subjected to interpretive hermeneutics of cinema studies. It is because of this that the song and dance sequence often emerges as the ‘gag’ in relation to a constitutive language of nationhood and culture.

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<sup>220</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, Means Without End: Notes on Politics, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) for an understanding of the cinematic as a politics of gestuality.

## 6. *Mantras of the Metropole: Digital Inscriptions and Mythic Curvatures of Profane Time*

### **Epic Melodrama and the Diagram of the All India Film**

In his epochal essay “Epic Melodrama: Themes of Nationality in Indian Cinema”, Ashish Rajadhyaksha identifies three strands of cinematic realism in the complex and variegated field of Indian cinema – the modernist, the statist, and the *avant-garde*. He notes that because of an overall equation between realism and certain “objectified values and symbols” of rationality, science, and historicity, an ontological ground was prepared early on for what he considers to be a far more significant change in the annals of Indian film (“Epic Melodrama” 57). That is, apart from the general emergence of humanist, socialist realist, or developmentalist efforts to secure western style industrial hegemonies in the national context, what he finds to be more important is an overall cognitivist valorization of realism. The latter however did not arrive with absolute powers of translation and historical enframing of diverse artistic expressions; realism as inscription was frequently decorative, devoid of a rational, metalinguistic status accorded to it by a Hegelian aesthetics of the west. This phenomenon of a non-total cognitive valorization, one that is wondrous to the beholding eye, but does not arrive with a complete universe of godless truths, facilitated a preponderant generic shift from the reformist social of the thirties (including the Prabhat mythologicals like Sant Tukaram or Sant Dhyaneswar) to an idiom of melodrama that constituted the ‘All India Film’ of studios like Filmstan and the Bombay Talkies in the forties (Rajadhyaksha, “Epic Melodrama” 67-68).

This shift from an agrarian mythological twilight to what are ostensibly urban, juridical, and secular-constitutive themes of the modern spectrum demands attention. This is because this transformation did not follow a normative trajectory of modern artistic becoming that key western aesthetic models often seem to cast as universally valid. The so called secular realist impulses thus often arrived as pure decorations and magical cinematic texturalities imparted to an already there iconic tradition. It was thus more often a realism that was not an



imprimatur of an irresistibly unfolding world historical consciousness. A genealogical understanding of these exchanges between epic, lyrical, and ceremonial impulses and realist-prosaic forms of representing the world could allow one to see how they have acquired an altogether new dimension in the contemporary age of global new media. Undoubtedly, this relationship between a primal mythic impelling and a plentiful multiplicity of the secular/social world has undergone many complex transmutations since the epochal years of the young republic, nevertheless, a study of that in the light of the present globalized scenario could be instructive. It could facilitate an understanding of how, in popular Indian films of present times, an ideology of *Hindutva*, or its founding myths can actually enter into assemblages of cinematic spectacle and affect with metropolitan lifestyles, managerial codas of the 'free market', individualism, consumer desire, and neo-liberal imperatives of polity and government.

The task therefore, is to achieve a machinic conception of cinema, one that involves planetary motions of 'intelligence', rather than consciousness of the self or of the other; one that is more about demographic saturations and rarefactions of affect and visuals than the agon of fragmented parts and non-consolidated wholes. It is only then that one can critically appreciate how the animated skies of the digital age, through their inhuman connectivities, constellations and disintegrations, can perform both apparently incommensurable tasks: calling the gods into being, as well as making manifest the pictures of perpetually altering destinies of national, financial, regional, cultural, and political communities of the world. An emphasis on the 'machinic' is necessary also because a new age publicity of *Hindutva*, like many such 'postmodern' fundamentalisms of the world, largely works through efficient production and management of de-ontologized, fungible signatures of 'tradition' as well as 'modern development'. Such signs are the result of a massified project of memory as well as of a critical amnesia; they are 'informatized' and readied for a metropolitan screen through a dual process that at once promotes them as ominous, destinying signals of a resurrected self and at the same time, imparts them with dexterous powers of combination and contamination by divesting them of the so called organic roots that had tied them to earthy and enclosed habitats of the old world. The objective of this chapter, amongst other things, will be to see how the myth is 'worlded' in a new geo-televisual universe in Mani Shankar's

2004 film Rudraksh. In terms of space, the film recasts the transnational, geo-televisual world that threatens to imperil all ossified notions of selfhood, into the sovereign sphere of the founding myth. In the dimension of temporality, it seeks to envelop the transformative shocks of changing times with a mythic time that is a figure of the eternal. Once again, the critical issue here is not how the film acknowledges the geo-televisual as powers of thought and visibilities that perpetually arrive from an 'outside' and transform the home or the subject. That, as it has been said earlier, is nothing new. What is more important is an assemblage of power that actually aspires to preempt the geo-televisual at every step, to instantaneously report it as nothing other than a global informatics of the self as Being, and capital as a singular onto-theology of that Being.

The discussion on Rudraksh however has to be prefaced by another important understanding: there are numerous instances in the annals of Indian cinema in which mythic impulses have been mobilized in radical directions, in order to corrode positivistic commonplaces of knowledge and production, as well as fatalistic dispensations of caste and caste hierarchies. An exemplary instance of this can be visited with patience. Rajadhyaksha notes elsewhere that in early Indian cinema realism was merely a 'subterfuge' in the pioneering mythologicals of Dada Saheb Phalke like Raja Harishchandra/The King Harishchandra (1912) or Krishna Janma/The Birth of Krishna (1917)<sup>221</sup>; that is, it was a means of "locating/showing up/adding conviction to the fiction" -- a cosmetic embellishment or a wonderful accentuation of the imaginary world that the mythical icon at once opens up and incarnates ("Epic Melodrama," 61). The fascinating science of 'true to life', moving inscriptions therefore came with no powers that could facilitate an anthropological enframing of the god on screen, as an understandable picture of ethnic belief. But what is more important is that once this aesthetic bridge between the mythic and the real was established, an ontology of the mythological could be extended to other genres ("Epic Melodrama" 61)<sup>222</sup>.

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<sup>221</sup> See also "Satyajit Ray, Ray Films, Ray Movie" 12.

<sup>222</sup> Rajadhyaksha cites the example of Baburao Painter in this regard, who "elaborated his mythologicals into historicals on the Marathas, and into reform dramas with what appears to be little change in scripting" (61). The 1921 mythological Bhakta Vidur (Kanjibhai Rathod) was banned by the colonial administration when the

It is from this theoretical vantage point that Rajadhyaksha reads early Indian cinema as a dialectic between the tangible and the imaginary. When the former (as tactile inscription on celluloid) surrenders itself to the latter (as a steadfast godly destinying for images that move), as he proposes it happens in Fattehlahal and Damle's Sant Tukaram/The Saint Tukaram (1936), the mythical icon cannot be reduced to a phenomenological 'object' on film; rather it itself becomes the author of the text (Rajadhyaksha, "Neo-traditionalism", page 43)<sup>223</sup>. This classic film depicts the life of the seventeenth century Marathi poet saint Tukaram who abnegated ruling Sanskrit in favor of vernacular cadences of a devotional poetry that was part of a varied but compelling wave of *Bhakti*, the first widespread subaltern movement against Brahminical orthodoxy. The episodic plot charts the rise of Tukaram as the people's saint, and his endurance of the sufferings brought onto him and his family by his Brahminical antagonists. According to Willemsen and Rajadhyaksha, the film "binds song, gesture, rhythm and camera together with character and crowd behavior denoting the spiritual connection between the poet and the people while separating off the members of the Brahminical caste" ( Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema 270). The 'miraculous' interventions of Tukaram's worshipped deity are radically located within the gentle tempos of the diurnal, in tune with the general liberation of work and worship. In another essay, Rajadhyaksha notes that "In *Tukaram*, cinematic time is extended to certain specific rhythms, derived from the poet's lyrics with their associations with people's labor. ....is what holds the dialectic and the 'realist' – the holding together of living and example" ("Neo-traditionalism" 44). Fattehlahal and Damle's film is thus not a biopic in the normative sense; it is not an anthropological excavation and restaging of legend as *history*. The film, on the other hand, is an immanent self-making of the saint as a cinematic postulate of manifest popular memory and devotion. It is not a monument to humanize the saint that facilitates an enframing, a representation, or a spectatorial 'look into' the life and works of an

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title character, belonging to the epic Mahabharata, appeared on screen as a thinly veiled figure of Gandhi, complete with the Gandhi cap and *khaddar* shirt (62).

<sup>223</sup> See also Geeta Kapur, "Revelation and Doubt: *Sant Tukaram* and *Devī*" and "Mythic Material in Indian Cinema."

exemplary subject. Rather, the cinematic here is indistinguishable from the writings of the medieval poet-saint Tukaram as a perpetual miracle of belief that informs life itself.

One can therefore never enter into a relationship of 'identification' with Tukaram. As a technological consolidation of a cinematic cosmos that is already there, Tukaram can only be beheld with devotion. The central question that Rajadhyaksha poses in this vein unsettles the very core of a psychoanalytic conception of the cinematic apparatus: must cinema be necessarily voyeuristic in order to be pleasurable ("Epic Melodrama," 61)? In his reading, the field of evocations inaugurated by Tukaram gives rise to manifold possibilities of becoming. As a non-anthropomorphic writing and communal memory in the world, the poetry of Tukaram radically invests the world with a saintliness of unalienated quotidian labor that, in its corrosive and utopian powers of affection, is able to blockade both -- the inevitability of the modern bourgeois state as historical finality, as well as that of capitalist form of production as a corollary of the same. The vigor of an obstinate piety and devotion thus in this case forks away precariously from a trajectory of development already foretold by the prose of modernity. The immanent presence of the saint is precisely that which radically forecloses an intolerable politics of the colonial state and its production of wage labor. The evocation of *Bhakti rasa*, or the affections of a groundless devotion, is along the lines of what Mihir Bhattacharya, speaking in a different context, calls a groundless exit from the servitude of wage labor, a mythic departure of an already de-territorialized self from the proscenium of history that tries to enframe it into a static sense of being<sup>224</sup>. The marvel of the cinematic in Tukaram therefore lies precisely in a poetic rendering of the universe as a complex field of divinations in which the monotheism of the state is not secured.

For the present critical excursions, the importance of the cinematic in Tukaram would lie in its special non-technical apprehension of filmic technology and the consequent creation of a plane of non subjective intelligence. This intelligence emanates in a perverse ecology of contesting origins, where the devotion of the low caste, subaltern poet saint becomes exemplary precisely because it allows a utopian repose that is conquered by neither a

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<sup>224</sup> See "Conditions of Visibility" 92.

singular and absolute Brahminical propriety, nor by a secret theism of the secular modern state. It is however not a romantic notion of an unsullied self that can be safely ensconced in a pre-modern anterior; the poetically rendered world of labor in Tukaram is, on the other hand, a powerful counter-temporal postulate that at once flouts the calendrical norm of industrial cinema, as well as dominant cyclical imaginations of time. The diurnality that is seen in the communal rhythms spiritually authored by the poet's here and now evocations is indeed a dynamic one; it is a caustic virtuality that can neither be wistfully mapped into a golden past nor placed into an antechamber of ceremonious 'tradition'. The utopia in that sense, is a 'non-space' in relation to a modernist historical cartography that not only identifies and designates installations of 'civilization', but also manufactures, engrafts, and proposes 'tradition' as its own other. Tukaram therefore is a glimpse of what Foucault and Deleuze, following Heidegger, have indicated towards to be the 'thought of the outside' that informs all assiduous quests for form and constitution; it is the nothingness in which all modalities of being are suspended. It is in this sense that Fattehlal and Damle's film cannot be subsumed into orbits of 'tradition' and the 'modern' as bipolar arrangements of Being and Time. It offers a cinema that is not reducible to a negotiation of the subject with his non-synchronous heritage, promulgated in forms of nostalgia, dream, cosmetic play, or even the joke.

It is not that this ecology of *Bhakti* or devotion -- one that creates the acolyte as well as the icon -- is something that can be noticed only in the genre of the mythological that was predominant in the Indian cinema of the colonial period. This immanent field of social energies is precisely the battleground in which different artistic and ideological installations, of which the realist cinematic narrative is only one, struggle for dominance. The grand postulates of secular modernity can come into being in this milieu not by a total anthropological takeover of this sphere, a categorical dismissing of it, or the summary ordering of a new world order altogether, but by affecting a graduated, complex and multi-pronged dominance over it. This is precisely how the mutually competing molar forms of 'national narration', and their regional counterparts came into being during the latter decades. The gradual eclipse of the mythological genre in the modernist-developmental euphoria of the new republic has to be seen in this light, as re-orderings of devotional

energies in the direction of the state and its emblematic-iconographic instruments. This was indeed a complex and rich domain of artistic endeavor, one that, in different ways, encompasses both -- the eclectic Nehruvian socialist realism of Mehboob Khan, as well as a rigorously mythical, anti-bourgeois humanist impulse that propels the films of Ritwik Ghatak. The multi-pronged war, in other words, was over a grand mobilization of *Bhakti* that would define peopleness in the new republic, both for and against the formal bourgeois state apparatus.

Rajadhyaksha suggests that the introduction of sound technology in Indian cinema in the early thirties inaugurated two thematic mutations within the auspices of what he calls an already there aesthetic bridge between the mobile, emblematic qualities of the screen and the cosmic pull of the mythic image in transcendent repose. First, it gave rise to a variety of allegories of the 'traditional' in order to overcome the formal/technical problems of finding a verbal analogue to the Phalke mythological. In these, the religious-mythological icons were replaced by figures from reform literature cast in dominant social values<sup>225</sup>. The second shift was more crucial; the icon was also increasingly replaced, not by another one, but by a *narrative structure* ("Epic Melodrama" 64). Hence, once a panoptic point-of-view – in which the tangible, here and now inscriptions of film always submit themselves to an epic imaginary – is in place, the mythological can undergo generic transformations without the immanent presence of the icon. It can be substituted, amongst other things, by a mythic national Being, in this case largely furnished by a primary imagination of the ideal woman.

The birth of what Rajadhyaksha calls the 'All India Film' in the studio products of Filmstan and Bombay Talkies in the early forties was thus largely conceived in accord with this particular narrational impulse, in which mise-en-scène attributes of secular cinematic inscription never really garner an autonomous cosmology of their own. The gods always animate the screen from a 'beyond' the frame, where the world within the frame is a mythic environment of blessings and curses. According to Rajadhyaksha, realist textures of the cinematic image in the 'all India film' largely remain 'formal' signatures of a degraded,

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<sup>225</sup> See for instance Rajadhyaksha's reading of *Gunasundari* (1927) a perennial social melodrama of Ranjit studios that was remade twice, in 1934 and 1948. ("Epic Melodrama" 64).

fragmentary world continuously restored and reclaimed by a powerful mythic ontology of Being as Dharmic, or Being as Nation. The studio films of the Bombay Talkies largely left this non-subjective phenomenology intact in forging an assemblage between an analytic-dramatic style of Hollywood and the manifold decorative typologies of the Indic traditions (“Epic Melodrama” 64-70). This is what paved the way for what Rajadhyaksha identifies as the proto-modern creation of a cinematic picture of *Tradition* in the fifties – a schema of narrating the nation aligned with Nehru’s ‘third way’<sup>226</sup>. The problem for him however does not per se have to do with the fact that the reformist heroism of the would be citizen inevitably follows a trajectory of saintliness, or that the agency of a historical vanguard is perpetually overcoded by *amodern* forces of mythic origin; rather, it pertains to the fact that the so called secularization of the mythical imaginative realm was largely an exercise of eclectic dominance by a variegated ideological combine. Far from turning out to be what could be a ‘fighting popular’ in the Brechtian sense, the “All India Film”, for Rajadhyaksha, was thus a passive revolutionary assortment of Brahminical doctrines and weak postulates of liberal constitutionalism<sup>227</sup>. As a result, he concludes, “what could have been a decorativeness alive with magical transformations now became a loose chain of attractions designed to attract the spectator’s pleasure” (“Neo-traditionalism, 59).

### ***Mantras that Deliver the Metropole: Digital Inscription and the Mythic Depths of Time***

Mani Shankar’s 2004 neo-mythological Rudraksh/The Seed begins with a voice over from the depths of time. Amitabh Bachchan’s rich and somber baritone reminds the viewers of a terrible coming already prognosticated, a long time ago, by the ancient Puranic scriptures. The remembrance is about the imminent return of the *Rakshashas* or the demonic clan that has, intermittently, plagued mankind down the ages, ever since the dawn of creation. Indeed, the voice over suggests that the history of the world itself can be understood as a

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<sup>226</sup> Nehru described his own paradigmatic dispensation of the Indian postcolonial order as a “a third way which takes the best from all existing systems – the Russian, the American and others – and seeks to create something suited to one’s own history and philosophy.” Cited in Sumita Chakravarty, National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 29.

<sup>227</sup> See Rajadhyaksha, “Neo-traditionalism” 55-59.

relentless, triangulated battle between the *Devas* or Gods, the *Manavas* or the human kind, and the *Asuras* who are Negroid and monstrous entities that periodically emerge from the dark underbellies of hell. According to the cosmogony delineated by the holy seers of ancient times primarily belonging to the Samkhya and Yoga schools, the first group is an evolute of *Sattva* or the element of truth; the second of *Tejas* or energy, while the last of *Rajas* or the primal force of darkness<sup>228</sup>. As the scriptures say, thousands of years ago, after the demise of the last great *Asura* king Ravana in the hands of Rama -- the godly Aryan prince of Ayodhya -- the demonic forces of the netherworld had experienced a protracted twilight. But the seeds of an inevitable resurgence were always buried deep in the wombs of time, waiting for the opportune moment. Mani Shankar's film begins exactly at the moment prior to the regeneration.

The voice over begins when the camera opens out to a pure CGI generated visualscape and conducts a winding journey through verdurous glooms up to a strange, distant dawn. The movement ends with the voice over statement that the slaying of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka not only brought about the temporary end of the reign of the *Rakshasha kul* on earth, but also inaugurated what is, as per a Puranic timeline, the present *Kali Yuga*. The camera then launches the present day narrative by cutting away to another landscape that is a picture of some ancient city ruins -- a compact of analogue visuals and graphics. The voice over introduces this space as Yala Lanka, the now derelict, once mighty capital of Ravana. The year is 1990 AD, and the ground of a mythic battle between good and evil is seen to be transformed into an archaeological zone where human beings, headed by an international group of researchers, are committing the hubris of plumbing the recesses of a primal past. One should pause here and try to fathom the forbidding dimensions of time that is invoked. If Rama's monumental deed marked the end of the *Treta Yuga*, how far back in our habitual, linear reckoning of temporality must one travel to comprehend the ambitious scope of this archaeological operation? Indeed, the question cannot just be of academic interest only, if one keeps in mind the catastrophic events that have taken place in the

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<sup>228</sup> See for instance chapter 14, verses 5-16 in the Bhagwad Gita. See also chapter 17, verse 9: "Men of *Rajas* like food of *Rajas*: acid and sharp, and salty and dry, and which brings heaviness and sickness and pain."



theater of Indian politics centered around the historicity of Rama's birthplace<sup>229</sup>. Apart from fearful outcomes in the domains of cultural nationalism and sovereign power, the question of course has also resonated in the disciplinary academic domains of history and archaeology.

## Temporality

In her illuminating monograph Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India, Romila Thapar visits and challenges a long standing western presumption that the only concept known to early India was cyclic. That is, she sets herself the task of demolishing the assumption that the unity between Chronos and Clio of the Graeco-Roman world, one that founded a historical temporality of the state, was non-existent in Indian civilizations until the modern age. Some aspects of her argument and presentation can be elaborated to enrich this discussion. Thapar launches into a powerful dispelling of a *categorical* separation between cyclical and linear orders of time and suggests that these two orders can actually combine in myriad and material ways in different forms of humanistic, statist, astronomical, theological, and eschatological thinking. She begins by recalling Mircea Eliade's observation that cyclical modules of time in the Indic tradition are often so massive that they render human activities and beings in the world quite insignificant (Time as a Metaphor of History 5). Inhabiting a plane of temporality in an existential of the everyday thus may be akin to walking the earth itself in a manner that casts the immediate local ground beneath one's feet as flat, although beyond the distant horizon, it actually curves down to its planetary roundness. Time or *Kala*, as a grand compass that is beyond immediate existence or immediate memory, is indeed that which destroys or gives birth to only to abolish<sup>230</sup>. It is

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<sup>229</sup> The obvious reference is to the protracted battle over the historicity of Rama's birth site in modern day Ayodhya launched by the Sangh Parivar. The *Ramjanambhoomi* movement reached its peak on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1992 with the destruction of the historical Babri Mosque and continues to this day in the form of the Hindu combine's demand for a Ram Temple at that very space.

<sup>230</sup> Krishna tells Arjuna in chapter 11, verse 32 of the Bhagwad Gita: "I am all-powerful Time which destroys all things, and I have come here to slay these men. Even if thou dost not fight, all the warriors facing thee shall die."

indeed a formidable task to comprehend its looming appetites and the unfathomable scope of eternal returns that it calls into being.

The notion of cyclical time is said to have originated from diurnal regularities in nature, in the form of the synodic month, the lunar fortnights or the seasonal cycle of the year. In Vedic literature, this came with an accompanying notion of *rta* as a cosmic imperative of rhythmic regularity and predictability (Thapar, Time as a Metaphor of History 10). Time, in the Rig Veda is a constantly churning five spoked wheel. Initially, this format was developed within a stellar framework of the sun and the moon, and proposed a five year unit called the *Yuga*. As it will be seen later, in order to account for the astronomical courses of the planets, the Vedic concept of temporality had to be extended to wider spans of metrical time. “The term *yuga*, literally a yoke, is intended to suggest a binding together as an entity.....[it] carried not only the notion of a natural cycle and was therefore benign and harmonious, but the conjunction of planets carried another meaning, in that it suggested a variety of bi-polarities – good and evil, divine and human, life and death” (11). Thapar notes that the Indian interest in astronomy and meticulous mathematical calculations of planetary motions originated through infusions of Hellenistic ideas (which were in turn based on Babylonian predicates) around the fifth century BC (12). It is this crucial commerce between worlds that opened up an entire cosmology of time reckoning, an epic extension of the powers of *Yuga* infinitely over and beyond the manageable diurnalities of the sun and the moon.

The *Yuga* astronomy of the fifth century AD emerged as a compact between a scriptural cosmology of *Brahman* as Being and mathematical computation of stellar bodies. Thapar suggests that in this system *Kalpa*, or the longest unit of time consisting of 4320 million years, was derived from Puranic scriptural sources. The resultant time reckoning was thus an elastic one, beginning with instants of humanly controllable time, like the blinking of an eye, and then arching out to the infinite temporality of the *Brahman*, crossing the time spans of the forefathers (*pitrs*) and gods (*devas*) on the way (13). It would be pertinent to forge a deeper understanding of this subject by accompanying Thapar in her forays into some founding texts of the Sanskritic, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. The cosmological time

described in Manu's Dharmasastra and in the epic Mahabharata undergoes numerological mutations in the Puranas, especially in the Vishnu Purana which Thapar studies in extent.

Manu's Dharmasastra, like many other similar scriptural authorities, proposes four *Yugas* or epochs – *Krta* (or *Satya*), *Treta*, *Dvapara*, and *Kali*. The first *Yuga*, which is *Krta*, lasts for four thousand years with four hundred years of twilight preceding and following it. The next three ages suffer a progressive reduction of one thousand years from each, and a corresponding lessening of a hundred years in the two twilight periods. *Treta* thus spans for 3600 years (3000 + 300 + 300), while *Dvapara* and *Kali* add up to 2400 and 1200 years respectively (14). The grand total of 12000 years constitutes a *Mahayuga*, or an age of the gods, and a thousand of these form a single day of Brahma, with the night being of equal length. A similar description of the four ages appears in the *Vanaparvan* of the epic Mahabharata, with the *Krta Yuga* returning at the end of *Kali*. The cycle of the four *yugas* is a cosmic imagination of time that is informed by a perpetual understanding of Dharma, or the ethical order, being in a state of progressive decline. It is said in the *Vanaparvan* of the Mahabharata that in the age of *Kali*, the cycle is complete and the world turns upside down as a result. Hence, this is the age of *Mlechchas* or the rule of lower caste kings; the eclipse of the Brahminical order is complete at this point, and the warlike *Ksatriya* caste is devoid of its virtues (Thapar, Time as a Metaphor of History 14).

As Thapar and many others have pointed out, the understanding of the four ages -- with the attendant valorization of the Brahminical caste hierarchical order and the apocalyptic notion of gradual degeneration that accompanies it -- may be latter day priestly interpolations in the long dynastic-scriptural traditions that gave rise to the textual universe of the Mahabharata. The immediate task however is to understand the exact status of *Kali*, as a curved orbit of 'our time', according to this system. The concept of the four ages was further elaborated in the body of texts called the Puranas, which Thapar dates to the mid-first millennium AD (14). There is indeed a greater, almost dizzying play with numbers in these texts. The twelve thousand years that made a godly epoch or the *Mahayuga* in Manu and the Mahabharata are treated as divine years in the Vishnu Purana. A conversion of that span of time to human years calls for a multiplication by three hundred and sixty five. As a

result, *Kali*, the smallest and the most degenerate of all ages in the cycle, assumes a mammoth extent of 432,000 years<sup>231</sup>. In terms of the sombrous weight of time that Mani Shankar's film *Rudraksh* invokes, the momentous feats of Rama the godly king during the end of the *Treta* age would thus be at least 864,000 years before even the commencement of *Kali*, since the *Dwapara* age came in between.

The point of course is not to look at the forbidding and otherworldly scope of these temporal modules in terms of a positive arithmetic of the rational state or the worldly or eschatological computations of the human. As constituents of a mythic 'deep' time, they envelop the historical as a particular force of both memorialization and destinying, rather than calibrated becoming. The time of *Kali* is thus not to be identified with the hodological profanity of the present (which may include temporary triumphs and carnivalesque interregnums). Rather, it is a mythic postulate that 'curves' into the inevitable finite presentism of not just individual consciousness, but also institutions of history and the state. The curvature of time is that which opens out a non-metric and groundless utopia both before and after the perpetual present that stretches as far back as archaeology and the other sciences can remember. It is therefore time that cannot be either tracked or traced; it can only be 'recalled' to absolve the profane and render it sacred. *Kali*, like the other ages that precede it, is thus a *figuration* of time. As a postulate of degeneration it indeed is an instance of power, particularly when its attachments to naturalistic Brahminical ideologies become clear, but what is immediately noteworthy is the fact that such deep notions of time also abound in the staunchly anti-Brahminical Buddhist, Jaina, and Ajivika texts. In her monograph, Thapar illustrates this by citing a beautiful figure of time from the *Samyutta Nikaya*: "if there is a mountain in the shape of a cube, measuring one *yojana* [in various measures, a *yojana* ranges from two and a half to nine miles] and if every hundred years the mountain is brushed with a silk scarf, then the time that is taken for the mountain to be eroded by the scarf is the equivalent of a *kalpa*" (*Time as a Metaphor of History* 16).

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<sup>231</sup> Thapar points out that according to some scholars, the number 432,000 could be of Babylonian origin, combined with the Greek epicycle theory (15).

Such a notion of time is groundless because it is that which creates, in a fecund and irresistible manner, all grounds of thought and being. It is precisely in this sense that while in the Brahminical paradigm the notion of *Kali yuga* comes with that of a peremptory resurgence of a 'just' Brahminical caste based order, in some strands of Buddhist thinking an isomorphic figuration of time is used to await the resurgence of *Dharma* in the form of *Maitreya*, which is at once cosmic and communal balance, harmony, and friendship. "The past is pushed back by recalling the many Buddhas before Gautama and their long spans of time. Thus Dipankara lived for 84,000 myriad lakhs of years a hundred thousand unaccountable *kalpas* ago" (Time as a Metaphor of History 40). Thapar also points out that this Brahminical cosmology of decline was challenged and innovatively redirected by notions of individual *karma* and myriad postulates of *bhakti* as personal devotion to the deity and a boundless sharing of an already immanent grace beyond all social protocols and measures of hierarchy (24). Tukaram, the poet saint already discussed, is a historical figure in the anti-Brahminical *Bhakti* movement that swept the Gangetic plain during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. When he becomes the author of Fattehlahal and Damle's film, an instance of the cinematic is created in which the cinematic apparatus itself, socialized in a communitarian impelling of *bhakti*, partakes in a radical 'recalling' of immense time. The apparatus here must therefore be understood in an extended sense; it is not just restricted to the instruments of film, but is a plane of intelligence that also necessarily includes the already there community of *bhaktas*, their beliefs and the inspiring, saintly presence of the works of the medieval poet. It is this mythic remembrance of a time beyond measure that allows for an *amodern* abnegation of a chronometric regime dictated by the state and by production. *Bhakti* thus brings about a radical curvature to all commonplace, calendrical accounts of temporality. It is that ontological force that is summoned to bend the theologies and teleologies of the given, at both ends -- in terms of grand lineages, as well as minute, infinitesimal degrees -- toward the utopian. As a result, the morbid realities of a caste divided society themselves become aspects of *Kali*. The dark investiture of the latter can therefore be transcended only by a groundless transcendence of the caste system itself. The cinematic summonings of the energies of *Bhakti*, in various melodramatic formats of

popular Indian cinema frequently effected an overall femininization of space that Biswas has commented upon<sup>232</sup>, one that is made possible by an absolute faith that looks to the deity alone as singular patriarch, cleansing the here and now of all man made divisions of caste, class, and gender.

The cinematic in Mani Shankar's film Rudraksh relates to something entirely different. The recall of the mythical in this case does not pertain so much to a utopian affirmation of *Bhakti*, but to what we can call a Brahminical 'ritual' that is appended immediately to a statist administration of terror and crisis. One can, for the moment, cast 'ritual' in the specific Vedic sense Thapar draws from Satapatha Brahmana, Atharva Veda, and Rig Veda: "where [the ritual] is meticulously observed, it suspends the performers of the rituals into a threshold condition where only the parameters of their time-reckoning prevail" (Time as a Metaphor of History 10). In that sense, the ritualism in Mani Shankar's film is indeed an exceptional one, for in it, the auspiciousness of the moment of bringing to mind a mythic past becomes congruent with the frenetic surveillance, policing and deliverance of a global emergency. The event of the ritual here enters into a consummate equation with the absolute phenomenon of the capitalizing and developing state in the world; the mythic absolution of the profane becomes none other than the rejuvenation of the latter. One can, at this point, return to the particular place where the belly of the earth holds the seed of a monstrous power.

The film opens out to a dusty and grey archaeological site that, in the organization of its mise-en-scène attributes, follows a regular orientalist visual pattern established by Hollywood, perhaps most famously by the Indiana Jones trilogy. Here one meets Bhuria, the chief labor contractor of the site. Referred to later in the film as a man from Bihar, he is uncouth, corrupt and displays a beastly sensuality from the very onset. The physicality, speech and attire of the long haired and unshaven Bhuria endow him with tribalesque indices of identity; he also wields an anachronistic leather whip in his interaction with the workers, in what is ostensibly the democratic dispensation of modern Sri Lanka. Bhuria therefore, in terms of a racial aesthetics established early and maintained throughout the

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<sup>232</sup> Biswas, Historical Realism 154.

film, is a *mlechcha* or untouchable, a *sudra* of low caste, a dark skinned non-Aryan who would be king. His female companion Lali too is enfigured initially as a tribal girl with a simmering, diabolic presence. Both of them thus clearly belong to an ancient stock of darkness and are well equipped to inherit the *tamasic* mantle of Ravana.

Two successive incidents start a chain that soon assumes titanic dimensions, both in terms of a spatial span of the universe as well as the eternity of time. First, the archaeological party unearths a totemic statue. Second, as a second voice over establishes, the statue, which is of the ancient god of the *Rakshashas*, begins its nefarious animations with stealthy silence, picking Bhuria as its chosen one. The latter begins to wake up from uneasy dreams that are the result of a long pending call of evil on earth. Once he is under the spell of a strange *mantra* that keeps echoing inside his head, Bhuria searches out and steals a mysterious amulet that was hidden inside the statue of the *Rakshasha* god. This amulet of course is the *Rudraksh* or the seed that holds Ravana's power. Bhuria disappears from the archaeological site with Lali after killing several people on the way. The scenario then flashes forward to Mumbai in 1993. The city at that point is burning, with the communal riots that followed a few months after the demolition of the Babri Mosque by Hindu zealots on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1992 going on. Bhuria appears in this scene and instigates both the Hindu rioters as well as the Muslims in their murderous intent. Next, one sees Lali in the year 1995 as a sophisticated urban woman who has lost all memory of her past existence and has been transformed into a deadly assassin for hire.

A series of quick time ellipses chart the diabolical careers of the evil twosome that develop over a decade. The figures of Bhuria and Lali undergo significant morphological and behavioral changes during these years. The former loses his long, unruly tresses; his hair becomes colored and spiked, and his skin tone assumes a bleached whiteness. Lali too is continually recast by different signatures of metropolitan style; her attire is sometimes that of the dominatrix, sometimes that of the punk, and often that of the leather clad, serpentine killer. The nefarious couple therefore ascends to mythic dimensions of evil by a relentless, informatic accumulation of a global plenitude of signs and skills. As mentioned earlier, the actor, in ancient Sanskrit poetics, is conceived of as *Patra*, or as a repository of indices and

performative energies. In this case, the figuration of evil takes place through a complex amalgam of the realistic method actor and the performing body as vessel, a mythic haunting of the here and now body, by which the anthropological profile of the animalesque tribal is transmogrified into a global aspect of evil. The affective securing of the latter proceeds through an unreal and trans-social evolutions; it is a coming into being of the demonic as iconic visage, which gathers its strength precisely when it keeps crossing the borders of psychobiographical plausibility. The picture of consummate evil is therefore cinematically consolidated precisely when the lower caste, uneducated, and beastly figure displays an inhuman sensitivity to the world and its plenitude of powers and aptitudes. Not only do Bhuria and Lali transform their appearances and acquire multiple resources of Mephistophelian cunning that belie their humble backgrounds, they also display a disconcerting comfort in using instruments of finance and technology – cell phones, expensive cars, gadgets, weapons, and communicative media. The cinematic figuration of evil thereby acquires a striking transnational character, having acquired the intellectual, social, and financial resources for it to be inserted into diverse situations of the planetary. The stage is therefore set for a replay of an epic battle foretold, but it is, from the onset, global in character.

A scene set in the Mumbai of the present (2004) shows Bhuria and Lali in a surreal landscape, contemplating their future. The landscape, once again, is the result of pure digital inscription on screen, but one that perhaps imparts a special mythic ontology to the filmic image. The space qualifies to be a picture of home for evil of epic dimensions precisely because it brings about a total transcoding of an old cinema that used to be a perfect image analogue of the world. The formal possibilities of cinematic special effects are claimed, from the very onset, by a primal imagination of the mythic precisely because special effects, in being able to absolve the camera of its realist proclivities, are capable of affecting a total removal of the banal here and now from the screen. The picture of technical achievement immediately becomes a picture of perfect otherworldliness absolved of the profane. The iconic dimension of evil is established here beyond all phenomenological doubt endemic to the medium precisely because within the auspices of the cinematic-as-ritual, technology facilitates a removal of the iconic figure from all contact with the world as it is. Instead of



the dialectic between a mythical imaginary and a modern technology of cinematic representation that Rajadhyaksha notices in relation to early Indian cinematic mythologicals, what we have here is a relationship of adequation between the two. That is, a new visual aesthetic that suggests that technology itself had to undergo a rigor of development before it could garner the capabilities to banish the mundane from the frame in a total manner, and hence be equal to the task of giving birth to a mythic cinema in a true, 'developmentalist' sense. Unlike as in the apparatus of classical narrative cinema, where special effects intervened into the phenomenological exchange between the camera and the world only as attributes of deceit or décor, here the earthbound matters are sacralized. This is because the earth has been claimed, with all other powers of the cinematic (the camera, computer technology, mise-en-scène, actors, costumes, lights, or the celluloid base) into a comprehensive ritual of invoking the Brahman through a narration of myth. One sees similar total, mythic digitizations of the mise-en-scène in key moments of conflict in the film. Hence, technology itself assumes an iconic presence in Mani Shankar's mythological because it absolves the classical cinematic eye of the fatality of representing or embellishing the given.

The sacralization of special effects can thus take place by a governing ontology that removes it from commonplace distinctions between the real and the false. Among the various Vedic schools of thought, there are ones that accept the reality of the given world (Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, or the Vaisesika) and those that do not, casting all perceptual entities as attributes of *Maya* or illusion, with the only abiding reality residing in the Brahman or Being as One. But perhaps what is common to all these major schools is the sense that the everyday world and its manifold attributes cannot be said to harbor a part-whole relationship of identification with the *Brahman*. The latter can only be said to have a relationship of *interest* with the material universe. In such a cosmology therefore, among other things, the world can indeed be seen as cinema, and cinema as a module of the world. In terms of the dualistic but non-Cartesian Samkhya line of thought, just as *budhhi* (intellect) and *manas* (mental organ) are subtle forms of matter, cinema too would be a material incarnation of immanent intelligence, and not a reflection of it. The crucial point of difference however -- one that would distinguish between good and bad powers of the world -- between those devoted to

the *Brahmatman* (the spirit of *Brahman*) and those to the *vyavaharik* or practical truths, would lie in a process of relentless sacralization, of which narrating the mythic is a part. As Mircea Eliade has pointed out, narrating mythic elements eventalize an occasion in an *atemporal* dimension of time. It is an act that immerses the presentism of the Kali yuga -- the time that is perpetually 'ours' -- with all its sullied things, into the unfathomable night and day of the Brahman<sup>233</sup>. Seen in that light, special effects would thus be matter just like anything else, but one that, in this case, is rendered holy because it actively partakes in a ritual of total recall that continually abolishes the decadent forces of this-worldliness and restores them in a cosmological plane of memory. Apart from this visual aesthetic that coincides an ontology of mythic recall with the powers and potentia of a technological cinema, the interactions between visibilities and statements in the film also set up a special intercourse between the language of science and the language of a Brahminical scriptural tradition.

Bhuria reveals that he has by now spent a *vanvaas*<sup>234</sup> of fourteen years imbibing the diabolical energies of the *Rudraksh*. It has been made known to him that he is to be the instrument for affecting the consummate and total resurgence of the powers of the demonic on earth, when all human kind would metamorphose into *Rakshashas*. But in order to completely unlock the forces of Ravana's seed, Bhuria needs the combinatory 'recalling powers' of another entity with equal or greater mental capacities. He thus declares himself to be in search of a partner blessed with a special spiritual talent. While Bhuria prepares his satanic schemas, the forces of good are introduced in the film. This happens with the advent of Gayatri, a scholar from the University of California (campus unspecified) who researches the paranormal. She and her team of assistants encounter several frauds posing as godmen before zeroing in on an eccentric young man named Varun who works as a 'true' miracle healer during the day and as a bar bouncer at night. He also has a third profession, as a martial arts instructor who combines physical combat techniques borrowed from the Far East with an Indian spiritualism. The racial polarities are of course kept in place. Varun, played by Sanjay Dutt,

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<sup>233</sup> Cited in Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History* 25.

<sup>234</sup> In a literal sense, this means 'living in the forest'. Bhuria uses the same word traditionally used to depict Ram's self sacrificing tenure in the forest in the *Ramayana* in order to preserve the sanctity of his father's word.

is a tall, fair, 'Aryanesque' North Indian Brahmin, highly qualified to emerge as the arch antagonist of the dark, *mlechcha* like Bhuria, played by the originally South Indian actor Sunil Shetty of pronounced Dravidian looks.

Gayatri's video camera, which records one of Varun's magical cures, arrives in the world of the film as a humdrum, here and now counterfoil to the cosmic cinematic camera. The latter, as we have seen, is capable of absolving special effects by appending them to a grand ritual – the invoking of a mythic temporality. Gayatri's recording instrument, as a camera within the camera, on the other hand serves as a documenter of scientific truth in a secular milieu bereft of miracles. Within the auspices of the mythic frame of the cinematic, the video machine thereby becomes a part of the profane; it can only trace and track happenings to the point where they pass onto the mysterious outside to a planetary epistemology. This is what happens when it records Varun curing a woman of a dreaded skin disease by assuming the pain and the symptoms on his own body within minutes, even as they disappear from his patient's self. Later Gayatri and her team meticulously chart the alterations in Varun's physical self in a meditative state with the camera and other implements of medical science. As he ascends to a meditative state, Varun's blood pressure and heart rate drop beyond normal life sustaining conditions. A brain scan of his hypothalamus and deep cortex reveals that he is exploiting more than seventy percent of his intellectual energies, when ordinary mortals can use only about one percent. All of this is accompanied by an alarming and inexplicable rise in electromagnetic radiation around his body. Gayatri concludes her investigations by declaring that Varun is in a state of *Samadhi* that comes with a complete immersion of the self into thoughts of the *Brahman*. When this happens, the cosmic energies of the self, as a distant ripple of the singular Being, are able to abstract themselves from the prisonhouse of the body. The scholar from California concludes this phase of her research with the observation that 'science', for now, cannot explain the phenomenon just observed.

When he steps out of his meditative stance, Varun underlines his return to a world of appetites and corporeality by attracting a soda can with his telekinetic powers. The moment of product placement on screen coincides with yet another demonstration of the

unexplained. A relaxed Varun then initiates a series of discourses with Gayatri, the diligent scholar, which should be of particular interest. These utterances -- scattered throughout the film and interspersed by spectacular encounters with evil -- set up a geo-televisual field of translation, by which both postulates of a so called old world 'tradition' as well as the technological paraphernalia of state-of the art development can be re-publicized in a different realm of value . Varun, the new age Hindu provides Gayatri with a new vocabulary of the metropolitan – a new lens to view the manifold wonders of the world itself. Varun says that his telekinetic and telepathic powers are the result of a connectivity that comes from the immanence of Brahman itself – a plane of divine intelligence he calls the *Swapna Akash*. *Swapna Akash*, or the sky of dreams, he explains, is a divine internet. But unlike the earthly one, it is not just spatial; the *Swapna Akash* is a domain that at once incarnates all registers of time – the past, the present, and the future. According to Varun, it is indeed what Einstein has called the quantum domain. Under this sky of comprehensive and singular intelligence therefore, there can be nothing geo-televisual in either a practical or a philosophical sense; all visibilities and events are already undertowed and informatized by a supreme network of monotheistic ordering. Later in the film, Varun also describes the *Rudraksh* or the seed or Ravana's demonic powers as a multi-dimensional hologram. The powers of this new age translation and reckoning thus aspire to create a spiritual summit of authority from where all manifest planetary wonders can be surveyed by a Brahminical language gone global. In the enunciation of the new Hindu patriarchy, tradition is no longer caught up in an agonistic, contradictory relationship with modernity. Rather, pulses of tradition are seen to be enhanced by the instruments of the techno-modern, just as the latter are emboldened by the ontological powers of the Brahman.

Further in the film, Gayatri and Varun see the first traces of an already manifest evil on earth. They go to investigate an interned madman who is a surviving victim of Bhuria's diabolic ministrations. The patient keeps uttering a strange form of gibberish that Gayatri records on tape. This gabble is actually accentuated by the phonetic roots of the *Rakshasha* Mantra – “Rah..tadim tadim” that was first implanted in Bhuria's brain and then disseminated through him in the world. The word *Rakshasha* comes from the etymological root *Rak* which is the phonetic source of all nefarious powers, just as *Om* is the primal word

uttered by Brahman. The utterance of the mantra has devastating effects precisely because like all precise projections of sound, they alter the harmony of forces and given dispositions in the cosmic order. In the Vedic order of things, there can be no punctuations in the Sanskrit language precisely because the universe itself is one unfolding sentence that begins with the singular and originary primal breath of Brahman.

When Varun tries to read the mind of the patient, he has his first telepathic contact with Bhuria. The camera zooms to his eye and then proceeds to a journey into the interiors of his mind. The cinematic instrument thus crosses the phenomenological threshold that divides the external cosmos from the internal one; it forays into a timeless, absolute interiority that the other camera – Gayatri’s handycam – cannot penetrate. This inner space of course is once again a pure CGI generated mise-en-scène, in which the inner space of the biological brain, depicted through a flow of processes inside the optic nerve, merges into a suddenly opened out interstellar space. This then leads to the platform of a meeting, which is like a giant column suspended in the universe, exactly where all relative temporal orders are suspended. Over there, the incarnate spirit of Varun meets the same of Bhuria. This is a meeting that was always already remembered as well as foretold; it takes place in the very thickness of time itself, at a location that is at once of the orders of the past, the present, as well as the future. Bhuria at this point tempts Varun to join him, for he is convinced that he has finally met the man who processes the mental powers to tame the powers of the *Rudraksh*. The interview begins with Varun in regular North Indian attire with a designer accentuation, while Bhuria, once again in his old, long haired tribalesque incarnation, dressed like a medieval Indian king. The former refuses the latter’s mischievous offer and challenges him to a battle. The fight sequence that follows features Varun transformed into a transformed, sleek figure in war paint and Bhuria too as a peculiar transnational combat figure wielding a samurai sword. The battle ends with a determined Varun winning over his own internal demons. He defeats Bhuria and throws him off the battle site, into the deep portals of time that he had just recalled in his meditative trance.

Gayatri and her team of researchers discover, much to their horror, that the Rakshasha mantra has the capacity to alter the genetic codes of live mice. Within a very short period of

time, the animals evolve as a different species of aggressive beings. It is also becomes clear that this strange incantation has unholy effects on both mice and men. One of Gayatri's fellow researchers falls under the hypnotic spell of the charm and transforms into a dangerous assassin controlled by Bhuria. After that, Gayatri and Varun venture forth to a Vedic monastery in the lap of the Himalayas to meet Varun's father, the venerable *Adhipati* or head of the monastery called the *Trishakti Pith*. The sage correctly determines the diabolical source of the sound structure. He describes it as a 'spiritual virus' that is at first implanted on a man's brain, which then spreads throughout his being, transforming him into a demonic entity. The *Adhipati* launches into a detailed phonetic analysis of the recorded sound bite, in an effort to abstract the seed mantra from the noise. An instrument is of course required for such a study, for, despite his erudition and profound mental capacities, the holy man dare not perform the task within the auspices of his own mind, since the mantra harbors the potential to affect even the noblest of souls. He thus takes recourse to what is called a *ganayantra* in Sanskrit, which means a computing machine (*ganan* means to count). When the *ganayantra* is introduced amidst the Vedic paraphernalia that adorns the antechamber of that monastery in the splendid isolation of the *Himalayas*, it is revealed to be nothing else but a state-of-the-art Apple Macintosh. The *Adhipati* announces at the conclusion of his research that the *mantra* does not belong to any of the four Vedas. The Akhanda Puran however informs him about the etymological roots of the *Rakh* sound and of the once existence of a *Rakshasha* Veda now lost.

The peace and tranquility of the monastery is disturbed when Bhuria, who has now assumed the face of a globally omniscient evil, launches a whirlwind attack on the holy place. The *Adhipati* is brutally killed by what, to the naked eye, is a dark, turbulent cloud of dust. Nevertheless, the inhuman precision of Gayatri's camera that later provides a clue to the devastated Varun about the identity of his father's killer. It is only when the camera is able to play the recorded events in slow motion that the specter of Bhuria becomes discernable to the naked human perception. Following that, Varun and Gayatri begin a long and arduous search for Bhuria across the subcontinent. The tracking and detection of evil becomes a journey not just across historical space, but also into the internal cosmology of Varun's mind. The events, as depicted on film, assemble tropes, typologies, visual styles,

and editorial intelligences from a host of conventions from world cinema and an overall playground of globalization– the generic formats of the orientalist action adventure, the Hong Kong high wire martial arts choreography, the sci-fi flick, the detective film, the texture and visual idioms of transnational consumer advertising, video games, and the travel film. The centerpiece of this investigation is another meditative voyage, in which Varun returns to the instant of his father's death and interrogates his father's assassin at the site of the murder itself. He does not do that by returning to the past, but by calling Bhuria, along with the entire historical moment of his father's killing, once again to a plane of congealed, mythic temporality. But Bhuria of course is no ordinary foe; his counter forays into the mind of Varun sets up a Rashoman-like play of perceptions – a shadowy battle of truth and falsehood, light and shadow. During this quest, the lineage of detection, reasoning, and inference that take place in empty, calendrical time are always impressed upon and curved by a mythic, sacralizing temporality. The latter harbors no suspense like the classical detective film (which, as we know, sets the paradigm for all realist narrative cinema according to Stephen Heath), but functions as an inhuman memory that casts the tale as a chronicle already foretold, many, many ages ago.

By the time Varun pieces together Bhuria's history and his complete profile of evil through practical detection as well as knowledge procured through a cosmic connectivity of the universe (the *swapna akash* or the divine internet), his enemy has gone from strength to strength. The ominous shadow of evil has long crossed the boundaries of a national crisis and assumed global dimensions. Riots and unrests, as a planetary swell of imminent and rejuvenated *Rakshasha* power, have spread to cities of India, China, and the US, among other countries. The planetary insurrections of disorder however do not, in this case, conform to usual diagnostic patterns pertaining to political economy, trade disputes, or international relations. They fan out as a gigantic spread of unreason and terroristic energy that is amenable to only one description – as Varun puts it, a world war between humans and Rakshashas. Bhuria is at this stage capable of marshalling all worldly powers of science, finance, and technology towards this end. At this point, he has taken over a host of television channels and radio stations. A planetary dissemination of a multitude of sounds

and images are seen to be increasingly accentuated by a singular resonating frequency of the *Rakshasha* mantra.

Hence, once again, there is a terrifying and humbling glimpse of the impossible, when the multitudinal horizons of a global geo-televisuality are informed, in a total manner, by a solitary ontology of evil. The manifold forms and multiplicities of a planetary urban life are, in the process, seen to be telescoped into a page or footnote of the book of the cosmos. No matter where Varun goes, Bhuria sends him messages through media like the television or the radio transmitter. The inhuman, many-veined intelligence of multi-channel television (that which the human subject cannot surf at once, since s/he can watch only one channel at a time) is, in the process, compressed into a unitary beam of mythic projection. Varun notices that the television in his room switches channels automatically. The fragmentary sound and video bytes are however already overcoded by a cosmic articulation; they add up to a message by which Varun is invited for a tryst with a destiny larger than himself, or anything of this world. The final battle between Bhuria and Varun of course ends on a predictable note. Good triumphs over bad. It does not merit a discussion apart from the fact that within the auspices of *Kali*, when the gods are in recession, the only way Varun can defeat Bhuria is by a voluntary transformation into the *Rakshasha* state. This advice is given to Varun at a crucial moment by a personage no less than the spirit of his dead father -- the venerable Pandit Ved Bhushan, former *Adhipati* of the *Trishakti* monastery and a widely regarded authority on ancient Hindu scriptures. It is only by assuming the state of being demonic that Varun is able to redirect the powers of the *Rudraksh* against Bhuria. In a general apocalyptic drive towards darkness that marks our *Kali* age, evil can only be combated by exercising it differentially, that is, through a strategic manipulation of the overall, general ascension of demonic powers. The time of the mythic battle, which belongs to the order of *Kali*, is thus that which affects incessant curvatures into the time of globalization that stages a prognosticated battle between good and evil. The time of globalization, as an earthbound historical dimension devoid of messianic powers, however cannot account for the true nature of this momentous encounter. A sage Brahminical awareness of a cosmic temporality thus can only differentially restore a contemporary world that is always already profaned beyond redemption.



What is striking and symptomatic about Mani Shankar's new age mythological is that it does not cast tradition and modernity as overarching metanarratives locked up in an agonistic self-other battle with each other. Rather, the particle signs of tradition – the Vedas, the Puranas, the *kundali*, the *swapna akash*, etc. are brought into a state of flexible, informatic orchestration with those of modernity and technology – the internet, the brain scan, Einstein, or the quantum zone. Informatic orchestration is a specific production of publicity and power; it is an erotics of signification in which signs arrive as fungibles and effects that combine with other signs and effects in a *non-obligatory* manner, as variables rather than ossified signifiers that point to a whole. That is, they do not come with the burden of constitutive grand narratives and consolidated domains of knowledge by which we can signify forms of becoming or worlds of comprehension – the Gita as book of the world or the logical encyclopedia of enlightenment as book of the world. Hence fragments and loose, pseudo signifiers of Vedic spiritualism can be brought into relations of proximity and translation with scientific markers of quantum physics and medicine; mythic visions can be cinematically assembled with a *mise-en-scène* of archaeology. Tradition and modernity are thus not propositionally entered into a dialectical war, or resolved to a state of peace. They are instead combined as fluid-mosaic packets of spectacle and affect that constantly come together and disperse in the screen of the city. The powers of a new age metropolitan *Hindutva* publicity, as is apparent here, thus lie not in proposing a stable subjective horizon of meaning, but in creating an informatic plane, a project of new age memory, where pulsating, de-enunciated mantras of *Brahminism* can enter into diffuse and osmotic relations with metropolitan common sense and habit. One is thus not describing a punctual, uncompromising, and comprehensive Vedic compendium in the world, but a situation in which a plethora of Vedic effects, puranic effects or mythic effects suffuse and saturate life and language themselves. If one can at all talk about Rudraksh in relation to an imagistic ecology of Hindu fascism, one may do so only when one identifies the latter as predominantly not a subjective or an identitarian one (although such examples exist), but one which is part of an overall planetary informatics of terror and instantaneous capitalization. In this ecology, especially in its instantiation in the form of sovereign power, an adequation of power/information rearticulates, transposes or even supplants the classical

power/knowledge one that Foucault attributed to modern societal formations. In such a cinema we therefore do not see *Hindustva* as a sedentary home of truth that reaches out to the world, rather it becomes, quite insidiously -- in a realm of fluctuating and whiplashing dynamic of the metropolitan -- a matter of commonsense, coolness, normativity, style, entertainment, or habit to become Hindu in the global metropolis.

### **Mythic Repetition and Worldly Novelties**

This mythic impulse is of course not a total aesthetic mode that informs all kinds of cinema in India. Rather, it is only one, albeit a very important, ontological predicate amongst many other contending powers of form and expression. Apart from the variegated tradition of art cinema -- perhaps most famously exemplified by the realism of Ray and the avant-garde experimentations of Mrinal Sen and Mani Kaul amongst many others -- many mainstream films, especially in the recent past, have departed from the mythic format. The powers of sacralization, especially as a benediction that originates from the nation/dharma, is for instance starkly absent from a genre of urban crime thrillers that have come into being and prospered in the last decade and a half, in way of films like Parinda/Pigeons (Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 1989), Satya/Truth (Ram Gopal Verma, 1998), Chandni Bar (Madhur Bhandarkar, 2002), Company (Ram Gopal Verma, 2001), and Maqbool (Vishal Bhardwaj, 2004). The specter of crime in such cases brings with it an affective force of profound urban disenchantment that actually forecloses a mythic rehabilitation of the state. The cinematic community of crime that we see in these films becomes visibility exactly at that unclaimed land between the materiality of the shanty town and the diagram of the metropolis. In this zone, where the city has suspended refuge, lawlessness becomes the only mode of production and exchange that can continue to sponsor and abet the kinship and communal ties of the discarded village. The organization of crime therefore takes place when ties and friendships rehabilitate uprooted and floating bodies under a sky of fatality, without recourse to an absolute normativity of finance capital and wage labor. The *Bhai* (Brother) films on the Mumbai Mafiosi thus often affect a radical, melodramatic familiarization of what should be an out and out professional-legal space of the city. The usual retailership of individuated existence is offset by the perverse joint ventures of the 'family' of felons. Ram

Gopal Verma's *Satya* evokes many topological memories of Raj Kapoor's classic Nehruvian saga *Sri 420* (1955); the protagonist, much like the hero in Kapoor's film, comes to the big, bad city of Mumbai from an unnamed origin, and without a personal history. In Mumbai he meets Vidya, the archetypal lady in white who is indeed the same feminine figure Kapoor's hero Raju had fallen in love with more than four decades ago. Vidya, in both films, is the daughter of a wheel chair bound father who is taken out by her paramour to see the resplendent lights that adorn Mumbai during the Diwali celebrations. Unlike Kapoor's lady in white however, she remains blissfully unaware of her lover's secret identity as a killer for hire until the police inform her at the very end of the film. In contrast to the classic Nehruvian allegory of 1955, conjugality can proceed to a large extent without knowledge of the secret source of funding precisely because the city is no longer a space amenable to an epic polarization of the good and the bad. It is rather already a diffuse network of violence and intrigue, a battlefield of differentially exercised illegalities between the formal state and other contending forces. Satya's aspect of criminality is never visible to Vidya (the word means 'knowledge' in Sanskrit and several other North Indian languages) because the illicit never enters the conjugal space in the form of the 'other woman' as it happens in Kapoor's film. The vampish *Maya* (that means deceptive illusion in Sanskrit) is absent in Verma's film; rather she becomes an immanent presence in the public domain of illegality, in the web of kinship and filial bonds that encompass an entire brotherhood of crime. Apart from the fact that in Verma's film there is no final consolidation of the couple in a national-ethical mould after a testing journey through fire and temptation as it was in Kapoor's, what is also interesting is that Satya, the stranger hero in Mumbai who starts his career as a hotel waiter, finds a community of kindred souls only in the underworld, and not in the company of the pavement dwelling urban proletariat as his illustrious predecessor once did. The habitat of the unlawful non-citizens thus therefore becomes cinematically manifest exactly at that perpetually apocalyptic twilight, where both -- a horizon of secular development, as well as a mythic order of justice -- are in recession. The criminal ruin of the city becomes a space bereft of myths, in which death is neither the end of apocalypse nor the opening up of a utopia.

Apart from subgenres like the urban crime films of the nineties, one can also mention here the gradual flowering of an 'English' or 'Hinglish' cinema in the Indian context, particularly stimulated by the growth of multiplexes in big cities. These films, in line with a transnational aesthetic, usually abjure the mythological impulse or enframe it ethnographically. This is perhaps why frequently in such films we see an apparatus of realist cinema citing, classifying, and 'globally' re-articulating an Indian cinematic of mythic dimensions. Such narratives often take the form of 'arranged marriage' melodramas in assemblage with an offshore, planetary cinematic perception of the non-resident Indian. Films like Hyderabad Blues (Nagesh Kukunoor), Hollywood/Bollywood (Deepa Mehta), Bride and Prejudice (Gurinder Chaddha, 2004), and Monsoon Wedding (Mira Nair, 2003) are thus suffused with prototype Hindi filmic situations held in parenthesis. Here the realist camera justifies the song and dance scenario, the ritual, or the melodramatic regularities through a rigorous process of phenomenological reduction, by embedding and designating them as ethnographic ceremonials, curios of a global cinematic tourism, or as aspects of a national 'structure of feeling'. The anthropomorphic/industrial understanding of mythic postulates, as cottage formalisms devoid of a legitimate cosmos, is also what is seen in numerous such films made on the Hindi cinema industry, like Bombay Boys (Kaizad Gustad, 1998), and Bollywood Calling (Nagesh Kukunoor, 2001).

The digression devoted to interesting and not so interesting exceptions can be ended here and one can proceed further with examination of the mythological tendency in contemporary Indian popular cinema. As said earlier, this deep temporality, one that perpetually introduces curvatures of the utopian kind in all metrical calendars, can be mobilized towards varied ideological projects. The predominant Brahminical mode of national narration that one sees in a plethora of what Rajadhyaksha calls the 'all India film' is only one of the many models by which the state tries to exercise a catastrophic domination over this field of groundless divinations. The state in this case is of course, not a monolithic consolidation of classical bourgeois hegemony and values, but a complex diagram of power that includes both, the formal constitutional apparatus as well as a varied and tensile assemblage of different contending ruling ideologies. In Fatehlal and Damle's

Tukaram, as in many other moments of the cinematic, the same aesthetic is mobilized towards a boundless, immanent cinema of *Bhakti*, as a force of counter-Brahminical devotion that dismantles all earthly hierarchies of caste and class. In the Bengali cinema of Ritwik Ghatak, a mythical impelling is energized in the form of a radical questioning of the career of the historical national state in the subcontinental context, especially centering around the monstrous event of partition that, apart from resulting in one of the greatest mass exoduses in recorded human history, also precipitated some of the ghastliest genocidal killings in modern India. In Ghatak, a formal coda of socialist realism therefore can be assembled with mythic postulates of memory in a manner that does not yield a positive edifice of the world historical, but perpetually points to an ‘unthought’ that escapes both, the hermeneutics of industrial modernity, as well as a romantic composite of tradition.

The mythic stream has also been rechannelized into innovative directions by film makers like Kumar Shahani, for instance, in his epic-melodramatic invocation of the Urvashi-Pururavas legend from the Rig Veda in a context of labor agitation and gathering clouds of nationalist and internationalist capitalization in Tarang (1984)<sup>235</sup>. In his 1977 Malayalam film Kanchana Sita/The Golden Sita, G. Aravindan revisits the last *parvan* of the legend of Ramayana to bring about a complex merging of an anthropological proclivity of the realist camera with a poetic naturalism that tends to de-territorialize it. The iconic figure of Rama is subject to a ‘haunting’ of an undefined, ambiguous psychologism, while the presence of Sita, his wife, is registered only through the whispers of the wind and rustle of leaves in the forest. Aravindan used actors from the *Rama Chenchu* tribe from the forests of Andhra Pradesh to portray the mythic characters. An anthropological redress of the legend -- using the bodies of a particular tribal sect that believes itself to be descendents of the original Rama -- thus invokes a darkening counter-memory that dismantles a luminous nationalist cultural process of Aryanizing the icon. Other ‘New Cinema’ and popular efforts towards mythic re-articulation, like Shyam Benegal’s plotting of the Mahabharata legend in a modern urban milieu of industrial capital in Kalyug/The Age of Kali (1981), or Bapu’s

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<sup>235</sup> See Willemsen and Rajadhyaksha, Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema 468.

relocation of the same in a rural-feudal milieu in Hum Paanch/We Five (1980) are perhaps too numerous and too variegated to discuss within the scope of this dissertation.

If one can, to a satisfactory degree, understand mythic cinema as a ritualistic and memorable recalling of deep time, this hypothesis can also be extended to a theory of repetition in popular Indian film. That is, if the mythic is a turn to the sky, a waiting for the gods that is endorsed neither by the positivisms of the physical sciences nor by those of statist histories (although, as we have just seen, a discourse machine of 'Hindu' statism can indeed try to control, manipulate, or exercise strategic regularities over such a field on divination), then one should also be able to see how such summonings may be repeated in many formally different situations. The eternal return of a cosmic temporality can indeed be staged in manifold milieus of the profane, composed of different sign factors of production, sovereign power, culture, and historical circumstance. It is therefore largely because of an overall tendency towards a mythic eventalization of the quotidian, through assorted measures of ritualization, recall, and decoration, that the so called 'formulaic' plot structures regularize themselves in such films. Innovations in plot, paced flow of revelations and suspense effects, serial chronometricism of happenings and spectacles in narrative cinema, or the final outcomes of particular stories, are therefore regularly claimed by a stronger ontological calling, by which what matters is how such instances are already always blessed or cursed by the divine thickness of time. In cases of 'national narration' what becomes of profound critical interest are also the complex ways in which this enveloping deepness of time enters and departs from a dominant historical blueprint of the constitutional state. The cinema of Kali yuga, which can only comprise of myriad images of the profane (which includes the state), can be repeatedly subjected to the curvature of time that bends the belated knowledges of the present away from and towards the Kṛta, the temporal fountain spring of truth. This is precisely why, as the famous Oriya novelist Phanishwarnath Renu once said, all stories of the world become, quite ineluctably, stories of the Ramayana. However, the notion of 'story' here must not be understood in a mundane sense, as a mere sequence of happenings or as singular authorial enunciation, even by a proposed Brahminical subject. The mythic impulse would then just be a spiritual teleology, a consolidated and singular public religion for national becoming much like the Hegelian

model. Rather, the concept of 'story' would have to do with a mythic occasioning of different features of the here and now, by which they achieve a rare luminosity that can come only with what is already foretold. The aspect of 'foretelling' here does not rest merely in eventualities of cause and effect (although that is undeniably part of it), but in the inevitability of mythic recall in war and peace, sickness and health, crime and punishment, and other myriad situations of the given world. Although it curves into the vagaries of becoming and all the novelizations that the world offers, mythic remembrance enters the folds of the 'all India film' when it offers the immanent image of Dharma as that which causes all energies to recede to origins instead of aligning themselves into a format of progress. It is a centripetal operation, rather than a linear proliferation; a pull to the static, as Rajadhyaksha puts it. It is thus when the story surrenders its agon and distemper of daily existence and finite human agency, and congeals its energies in an epochal moment to provide a glimpse of the eternal that we meet a moment of mythic dimensions. But what is equally important is that this spark of light should render aglow different situations of the same. The strength of the One therefore becomes irrefutably manifest precisely when it lays claim to the multiple.

The mythic temper is first and foremost a discontinuous surge of affections, a weltering of pathos and exhilaration. It undoubtedly oftentimes is gathered into a governing semiology of national being, but only as a secondary instance, in the form of peremptory but insufficient end statements, especially of the Brahminical kind. This is precisely why the mythic tendency, despite contributing largely to them, cannot be exhausted by the grand symbolic gestures of the national-statist kind. The grasping of a story of eternal remembrance cannot be the result of a positive mapping of the present (as a history of the state) in line with a chain of exemplary events of the past. The two cannot reach a moment of final identification, for that would mean proposing an end to the cosmic process altogether through a nefarious casting of the profane as sacred. This is precisely what a modern statist discourse of *Hindutva* tries to effect through its priestly and magisterial pronouncements. According to a less constricted understanding of the mythic dispensation, ultimately both, the universe and language itself, can only unfold relentlessly, like a sentence that never ends; becoming therefore is more a process of perpetual renunciation and

abandonment than an arrival. Home is a project of memory demanding a perpetual recall rather than a projected terminal reachable through navigations of the degraded. The glimpse of the eternal is that which momentarily illuminates the tragic profane or engulfs the carnivalesque here and now with the darkness of an ongoing apocalypse. It therefore is never able to equate itself fully with the historical career of the state, which of course, in terms of dominant ideologies, is a consummation devoutly desired. After all, that would mean proposing the existent status quo as beyond the unforgiving eschatology of mythic time, as the redoubtable *Raj* of Rama himself.

The immanence of mythic memory and devotional energies constitute a social field which is capable of 'occasioning' the cinematic as part of its expressive powers. In other words, it would perhaps be a mistake to simply understand the 'Indian' cinematic as being of the order of a universal apparatus that, in its characterizations, repeatedly enframes the same hardened, psychologically unnuanced, and non-individuated mythic icon, or, in its narrative plottings, incessantly revisits the same story over and over again. Instead a cinematic can be proposed here that follows a different logic of regularities and difference. It is that which employs an abstract diagram of the mythic story, as a mere tabulation of signature events already foretold, to restore and replenish different image situations of the profane. The isomorphism of happenings in the 'retelling' is thus only part of an overall ritual of recall, not the entirety of it. This is precisely why the mythic can be generated in a stroke, by the simple anointing of a person or power at an opportune moment without psychobiographical or social justification. This violent urban space in which a conscientious cop wages a lonely battle against corruption and injustice can thus become the epic battleground *Kurukshetra* in Mahesh Manjrekar's 2002 film of the same name. The brave warrior brothers who confronted each other as arch antagonists in the epic Mahabharata can be the ontogenic sources for mythic figuration and nomination of a modern pair of brothers jointly taking up arms against a sea of troubles in Rakesh Roshan's Karan Arjun (1994). Exhilaration or mourning in a cinema of devotion does not lie in the fact that worldly events sometimes follow a sequence isomorphic to an epic story, but in the very presence of a resplendent and lyrical emotiveness of the here and now that can be withdrawn from a historical chain of causality. Sacralization is thus purchased through a suspenseful coming together of living



and example (which is already foretold), but also in the infinity of ways it is rendered possible from moment to moment. As a result, the many armed forces of the manifold (sometimes for, and sometimes against the state or the Brahminical patriarchy) are absolved when they are suddenly lightened of their historical weight and lineage, and revealed, only momentarily, as ripples of the Being as One. This is precisely why it will be argued in greater detail in the next chapter, that in order to understand the powers of the cinematic in such films, the critical mind to develop a stance that does not consider narrative as primary ethical instantiation. In other words, one has to adopt a critical viewpoint whose primary interest does not lie in how stories of modernity begin or how they end, but in how curvatures of time always inform, through differences in repetition, the here and now lineage of happenings.

## 7. Repetitions with Difference: The Long and Arduous Journey of Mother India and her Sons toward the Metropolis

### Epic Repetitions and Profane Differences

The mythic impulse in ‘secular’, ‘here and now’ formats of popular Indian cinema is never a totality that encloses matters of the world absolutely; rather it is a curve of belief that arcs across a plenitude of complex signs and materials that make a given situation of the *vyavarika* or practical world. It is thus a cosmology that can inhabit different constellations of the historical, producing, very often, remarkably different forms of cinematic language. This can be understood to a certain extent by invoking one of the most famous ‘stories’ that has been tirelessly ‘retold’ in the annals of Indian popular cinema. The plot that was first witnessed in Mehboob Khan’s Aurat/Woman (1940) has indeed resonated, amidst various settings, involving a host of personages and social identities, in a body of films across the decades, like Ganga Jumna (Nitin Bose, 1961), Deewar/The Wall (Yash Chopra, 1975), Aatish/The Mirror (Sanjay Gupta, 1994), Vaastav/Reality (Mahesh Manjrekar, 2000), and perhaps most famously in Mehboob’s own 1957 retelling in Mother India. But what is indeed important is how the monumentalizing process of melodrama in these films, featuring the same prototype personages – the mother nation and her two sons, one ‘good’ and the other ‘recalcitrant’ – alters and shifts at every instance of ‘recall’. This can be understood by thinking about the play of repetition and difference that imparts a singular character to all moments of profound remembrance. In terms of the field of inquiry that this project has established, it would be pertinent to track this temporal and spatial journey of the mother and her sons that covers both timely and untimely moments of the nation-state, from the naissance of the free republic to the age of unipolar globalization, and also spirals out to envelop an entire world, from a nondescript village in North India to Mauritius, Switzerland and beyond. For the study of geo-televisuality is not just restricted to how the external powers of the world invade or tour the home, but also involves how a primal, uterine picture of interiority can morph itself in dynamic ways to embrace or recoil from the world and its animated skies writ large.

## Mother India

In Mehboob Khan's 1957 Oscar nominated epic Mother India, the mother is a rural peasant woman named Radha who defies monumental odds in single handedly bringing up her two sons Ramu and Birju. The latter two however follow different paths in life – Ramu grows up to be a model farmer of the new age that has been ushered in, while Birju is an unruly and tempestuous young man. The young rebel, unlike his brother and the rest of the village community, is not ready to endure the profane and wait for the distant invagination of time that will mitigate the intolerability of the given. He does not have the patience or forbearance to understand that justice is a cosmic principle beyond the agency of the human, that it is an infallible appetite of *kaal* or a time beyond measure that creates only to engulf and destroy. While such a belief announces that all nefarious and tyrannical powers of the world, no matter how strong, will inevitably fall to the movement of Karma in the world, it can also suggest that the weak and the exploited should submit to this dispensation of the *Dharmic* by perfecting a stance of limitless patience. This is the feeling that is expressed in the song “*Duniya mein hum aaye hain toh jeena hi padega, jeevan hai agar zaher toh peena hi padega*” (If we have come to the world, we have to live, if life is a poison, we have to drink). The film, coming around the time of the completion of Nehru's first five year plan, has obvious allegorical dimensions in perhaps an all too evident, almost banal sense; when the temporal compass of the story is measured against a calendar of linear time, it becomes clear that it must have begun in the colonial era and ended in the wake of the independent republic. However, as it will perhaps become clear, the objective of this critical excursion is not to point out the isomorphic similarities between this story and its repetitions over the decades and the unfolding career of the nation state. Rather, it is to investigate how the ontological inevitability of recall combines, in each case, with different and complex constellations of the historical, the legal, and socialized desires for justice and survival.

The entire film is told in flashback, with Radha remembering her past life just before inaugurating a dam that has been built in the vicinity of the village. The story proper begins with a lap dissolve: when the old mother of the village is garlanded, the scene shifts to a

moment many years ago, when the young Radha, as a demure, blushing bride, was being garlanded by her husband during her marriage. The narrative then proceeds with the subsequent depiction of Radha's mothering of three children, an accident that leaves her husband disabled, his leaving for an unknown destination in shame, the death of her infant daughter, and her heroic struggle to bring up her sons. A mythic gathering of energies is witnessed at a key moment towards the end of the film, when an infallible ethical order achieves a total resonance in this peasant community plagued by the greedy and wicked money lender Sukhi Lala. The rebel Birju, in order to wreak revenge on the Lala (who has been responsible for the ruin of Radha's family and many others), abducts his daughter from her marriage ceremony. It is Radha who runs after her son, begging him to stop. She says that Roopa, being a daughter of the village is her honor as well as the honor of the rest of the community. It is an absolute dictum of *Dharma* that under any circumstances, honor or *laaj* cannot be sacrificed. The determined Radha picks up a gun and stands in the way of her reckless son, who ignores her pleadings and says that being a mother, she can never shoot at her own son. Radha answers by declaring herself to be the mother of not just Birju, but that of the entire village. When Birju brushes her aside and begins to ride away into the horizon, she shoots him down. She rushes to her dying son and embraces his body as life slips away from him. As Birju's blood gushes out from between her fingers, the second lap dissolve in the film completes a temporal cycle, matching the outpour of blood to waters bursting out from the sluice gates of the dam just opened by Radha. The accumulated affections of blood, fatality and toil thus momentarily merge into a picture of development in the new republic. The powers of the allegorical in this case pertain to a temporal landscape that discontinuously brings together -- as a relation of haunting rather than constitution -- an arc of nationally destined progress with a heightened, enduring instance of upholding the eternal.

The moment of modern naissance is thus yoked to a profound one of sacrifice, when the community could preserve *Dharma* only by a terrible recall of its own boundlessly proliferating forces and desires. The monstrosities of outrage and anger that had emerged from historical relations of class exploitation, hunger, poverty, and hardship are reclaimed by a purportedly Indian spiritual order, one that can assert itself in the lusty but unforgiving

field of the historical only as a dim and weakening ontology. The figure of the mother is an abstract diagram that combines a firm but endearing rusticity of speech and gait with a geo-televsual attire borrowed, according to Moinak Biswas, from socialist-realist visualizations of Gorky's mother<sup>236</sup>. It is a moral cinematic that combines a diurnal naturalism of the earth with the principled immanence of the womb as ontic repository par excellence, one that is not just fecund with resources and values, but is also capable, in a moment of epic crisis, of recalling and withdrawing its violent offspring from the orbit of the profane.

It would however be simplistic and truly sacrilegious to consign the profound implications of the mother's sacrifice to a singular autobiography of the state. This disjuncture is established early in the film when affections of wistfulness and loss surround the mother's figure in the title sequence, which features her moving across an agrarian landscape being gradually taken over by machines of industrial production. The rumble and drone of the new, in the form of tractors and combine harvesters that pound the land, are counterpoised with the signs of sorrow that fleet across the face of the mother. The close up here is not *of* the face as Deleuze once reminded us in a different context<sup>237</sup>, but *is* the face itself, as an expressive, facial entity that combines both powers – of a helpless humanoid profile, as well as of a face of the land increasingly no longer informed by that spirit. The peace between the enduring land as mother or the mother as land, and the living and dying community of historical sons is thus perpetually a divided one. The mythic arc of time can only be recalled from time to time as a curvature to envelop the profane; it can never close itself completely to inform this world in a total manner, not even with the celebratory installing of a new, benevolent statal order in the ancient battlefield of history.

This remains true of the manifold instances of the mother's 'return' in the annals of popular Indian cinema, especially the ones that will be examined soon. The profundity of her appearances from time to time must not be judged by a calibrating scale of historicism, one that reduces history to a formal measure, by merely cataloguing events as a continuum of

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<sup>236</sup> See Biswas, "Mother India O' Roja: *Jatir Dui Akhyan*." This reading of Mother India is heavily indebted to this analysis.

<sup>237</sup> Deleuze, Cinema 1, 87.

causes and effects, with a clearly identifiable beginning overture and an end statement that neatly ties it up together. The return of the mother is thus not to be anthropologically understood, in terms of semblances between the biographies of Radha in Mehboob's Mother India, Sumitra in Deewar (Yash Chopra, 1975), or Sheetal in Shakti (Ramesh Sippy, 1975). Rather, the event of the return is a special assemblage of affections that combines a mythic tenacity of time with an umbilical image powerful enough to lay claim to the messy plenitudes of the historical. In other words, the return is not accomplished when the ordinary peasant woman in Mother India or the simple mill worker's wife in Deewar performs extraordinary tasks; it is accomplished when these tasks are placed in a mythic invagination of time. This is when the story stops being one of exemplary individual commitment to law or honor; rather it becomes one in which the fallen and degraded mechanism of human law or conflict ridden perspectives of honor are absolved in an instant, by the sudden opening out of an altogether different sky of meaning. Once the woman, as a primary imagination of the national form, is endowed with such potentia, it becomes possible to rehearse her return in different situations and milieus, with varying degrees of strength and weakness. In later films, this epic inevitability of second comings combines with modern subjective/existentialist machines of cinema – for instance, the oedipal apparati in Deewar and Shakti, or the unforgiving urban milieus of the later films. Further, the return is sometimes possible without the body of the woman. In the Shakti, as in Sanjay Gupta's Aatish (1994), the eventalization of a mythic theodicy, one that momentarily overcomes all agonistic separations between the law and justice, happens without the physical presence of the mother. She is killed early in the narrative developments of both these films, especially in Gupta's retelling, in which she appears for only a couple of scenes.

Yash Chopra's 1975 cinematic landmark narrates the story of Sumitra and her two sons – Vijay and Ravi. The family is forced to migrate to the city of Mumbai in an abject condition of penury, when Sumitra's husband Anand abandons them and runs away in shame. He is a trade union leader who betrays the cause of the workers to corrupt capitalists when his wife and children are abducted and held at gunpoint. The people of the small town, unaware of the circumstances, are unforgiving in their condemnation. A group of drunks catch hold of

little Vijay one day and tattoo these ineffaceable words on his left hand: *mera baap chor hain* (my father is a thief). Once the family is in the Mumbai, Sumitra begins to work as a construction worker and Vijay as a shoe shine boy to make ends meet. Ravi is sent to school; he grows up to join the vast hordes of educated youth that throng the cities. In his adulthood, Vijay becomes a brooding dockworker, perpetually haunted by the secret shame of his father's cowardice. On his left hand however, he bears a badge of identification given to him by the dock authorities with the number 786 inscribed on it. As one of his Muslim co-workers point out to him, the number is a holy one -- the numerological equivalent of *Bismillah*, which means "in the name of god." The older dock-worker's words prove prophetic -- the badge saves Vijay's life several times at crucial stages in the story, till the very end, when chance and fate conspire to deprive him of it.

After the migration to the city, the story is immersed in a historical milieu that is a visual compact of dire sociological realities of India under Indira Gandhi's Emergency, as well as of *mise-en-scène* features recalling the setting of Elia Kazan's On the Waterfront (1953). From this point, the paths of the two brothers take divergent trajectories, toward and away from the mother. Vijay turns to crime and launches a spectacularly successful career as a smuggler; Ravi becomes a police officer. The latter comes to know of his brother's exploits and the source of his suddenly acquired wealth from the state itself. He is given a file containing information about Vijay's criminal life and is assigned the task of bringing him to justice by his superiors. The file alters the configuration of the domestic order in a way only news provided by the state can. The melodramatic dispensation of the familial zone, with the mother at the center, had hitherto been cast along pure uterine lines, with no intelligence, except that of the state or god (since in the fragmented life of the city the community is no longer figurable) being able to percolate that. This is precisely why the mother and Ravi himself had so far stayed Vijay's luxurious bungalow without a shadow of doubt. The issue of truth had earlier been settled frontally, when the mother, before moving from the shanty town to the luxurious house, had asked Vijay whether he was doing anything that he ought not to be doing. Vijay had replied that he was not doing anything that he *thought* he should not be doing.

It is thus the revelation of the historical state that introduces an intolerable novelization in a naturalistic uterine completeness<sup>238</sup> of the familial order. When the report filed by the state enters the picture, the familial order registers the presence of a historical out of field whose forces have already destroyed its ethical composition. It introduces into the epic surface a disconcerting 'depth' of modern psychological dispensations emblematically presented in the film as the tattoo imprinted on Vijay's arm. The constitutive realm of truth therefore gets divided between what the patriarchal order has already dispensed, as infallible words emblazoned in an epic sky of meaning, to be the thing to be done, and what the schizoid individual *thinks* should be done. In between these scenes, the father Anand is seen from time to time, over the years, traveling endlessly on trains. Unlike Shamu, the father in Mother India who is never seen once he leaves the house for an unknown destination, Anand keeps reappearing in the melodrama, as a haunting reminder of a deracinated patriarchal presence that cannot exit to a pure outside. Anand's journey is thus driven by an unforgiving eschatology devoid of the messianic; it is an interminable drift through the historical that can end only in death without any ceremonial. This is precisely what happens many years later; his corpse is discovered one day in a train compartment. It reaches the family through Ravi, who chances upon a lifeless and dire inheritance of the father when by sheer chance, he is called upon to inspect it as a representative of the state.

There are, however, two other father figures in the film that the sons come in contact with. The first one is Davar, the smuggling boss who takes Vijay under his wing, initiates him into crime and, after a point, steps down to pass his mantle onto the talented young man. The second patriarch appears as yet another fleeting presence within the fragmented, unfamiliar space of the city in the form of an impoverished and retired school teacher whose son steals a loaf of bread in desperation. Ravi apprehends the boy after shooting him in the leg. On discovering that the thing stolen was a mere loaf of bread, the much contrite police officer visits the family to offer his apologies. The boy's mother presents him with a complaint

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<sup>238</sup> See Vinay Lal, "The Impossibility of the Outsider in the Modern Hindi Film." Here Lal talks about *Deewar* being a film concerned with the impossibility of being an outsider. Ravi, according to him, cannot have a true human relationship because he is caught between social institutions and anthropological burden of kinship.



inflected by historical nuance and relational perception: the state should arrest the unscrupulous wealthy, the rich thieves, and black-marketers before punishing the poor and the unemployed with little choices in life. The principled school teacher however, in an epic sweep, inducts all relativized realities of the world into an absolute statement: all thefts, whether big or small, are thefts in the last instance. It is after this pronouncement by another father in endurance -- in the absence of the real father, who, meanwhile is in a desultory state of transit across a ravaged nation that is a vast no man's land -- that Ravi gathers the strength to take up the legal battle against his own brother. For him, this exemplary lesson rendered by the starving school teacher squares the *Dharmic* with his formal duties as a cop.

The moment of epic recall, one that binds Deewar to Mother India happens later in the film. The recalcitrant Vijay, at this point is contemplating a come back into the ethical fold. This happens after his mother recovers from a serious illness and his girl friend Anita (a bar dancer with a heart of gold) reveals to him that she is pregnant with his baby. Vijay calls his mother to tell her that he would be meeting her at the temple she frequents at a designated hour. The prodigal son and erstwhile atheist thus expresses the desire to surrender to the mother and to god before handing himself over to the law of the state endorsed by them. Fate however cruelly intervenes when the child-bearing Anita is murdered by the henchmen of Samant, one of Vijay's long standing enemies. An angry Vijay once again picks up his gun and goes on a killing spree, finishing off the culprits in a fell swoop. The mother hears about Vijay's unbridled rampage just as she is getting ready to go to the temple for the scheduled appointment. When Ravi dons his uniform, she hands him the service revolver with the words: "*Goli chalte waqt tere hath na kape*" ("May your hands never shake while shooting"). She then announces that she would keep her end of the bargain by going to the temple and waiting for her son. She says "*Aurat ne apna kaam kiya; ab ek ma apne kam karne ja rahi hain*" ("A woman has done her duty; now a mother is going to do hers). Sumitra, the mother, is able to affect a moment of mythic recall precisely because she, unlike the wife of the poor school teacher whose son was shot and apprehended by Ravi, is able to punctually and uncompromisingly equate the *Dharmic* postulates of womanhood with the categorical imperatives of the law abiding citizen. The agency of the latter thus lies in a willing instrumentalization of the naturalistic self to the preeminent cause of the state – in honoring

the state's sole right to decide on the exception and monopolize violence. The school teacher's wife on the other hand, had challenged the ethical status of the state precisely by extending the affections of motherly *fondness* to a realm of law and judgment. In insisting that her son's 'exceptional' situation of poverty and distress foreclosed a judgment of the state, she had therefore inserted a melodrama of motherhood between the law and the fact, between the state and the body of citizenry it targets for discipline and punishment. The poor, 'untaught woman' (as her schoolmaster husband describes her) had, in the process, called into being a stark, unforgiving world, where it was impossible to equate endurance with ethics, motherhood with citizenship.

In contrast, Sumitra, the mother of Vijay and Ravi, is able to imagine her sons as a brotherhood of citizens already consigned to causes of martyrdom and sacrifice in a world in which principles of *Dharma* are inseparable from the dictums of the state. The absolute obedience of the citizen, emitting from a stance of devotion that encompasses life as well as death, becomes indistinguishable from the perpetual endurance of the *aurat* as *karmayogi*. The primordial uterine order that the powers of motherliness evoke is thus the result of perpetual births and perpetual deaths that continually sacralize lived life of the here and now in the auspices of *Kaal* or time. This absolving process in Deewar becomes one with the incessant and uncompromising reconstitution of the state in a moment of emergency. In between the primordial moment of holy conception, a beginning in a state of uterine purity and the recall to that same order in death, the body, in intermediate worldly existence, has to suffer the rigors of *karma* under a constitutive horizon, in which truth can lie only in instrumentalizing oneself for martyrdom or sacrifice in the interests of the state. This is the crucial point of repetition as well as difference between the moments of Radha in Mother India and Sumitra in Deewar. While the former wields the weapon herself in order to preserve the ethical composite of her 'national community', the latter announces that the 'timeless' ethical mass can be singularly vehicled in the degraded world only by the law of the historical state. In the absence of the father, she deems it proper to hand the gun over only to a police officer.

In Deewar, a melodrama of disaffection against the state is thus at every point overcoded by a melodrama of uterine recall. After the formal handing over of the gun and its firing (when Ravi shoots his fleeing brother), the existential and metaphysical energies of rebellion are subsumed in the melodramatic assemblage of motherliness and divinity when a fatally wounded Vijay arrives at the temple to die in his mother's arms. In Madhava Prasad's understanding, Deewar is a masochistic fantasy in which the tragic destiny is marked by Vijay's attempt to replace the unresponsive father/legal order with the primal figure of the mother. Speaking from a Deleuzian standpoint on masochistic desire later conceptually elaborated in the realm of cinema studies by Gaylyn Studlar<sup>239</sup>, Prasad suggests that in Deewar, an idealized union with the body of the oral mother is rendered only possible after rites of death have already expiated the formal claims of the father's rule (Ideology of the Hindi Film 149). According to Studlar, the allure of such a psychologism -- one that proposes a mystical and symbiotic return to the womb -- pertains to an imaginary outside the normative scope of the Oedipal subject: "The masochist imagines the final triumph of a parthenogenetic rebirth from the mother" (Prasad, Ideology of the Hind Film 149). In Prasad's reading, this melodrama of masochistic identification, one that culminates in a triumphal union with the mother in death and a final exit from the orbit of the profane, is mobilized to 'mask' the matriarch's unquestioned submission to the constitutional state in a historical environment of profound crisis. The picture of uterine interiority is thus a powerful attractor of unrestful energies; it is that which is able to envelop and palliate social expressions of anger, discontent, and subversion and in the process, preserve the formal pre-eminence of existent statal order.

The critical task here is not to question the validity of Prasad's diagnosis of Deewar as an epic- melodramatic re-channelization of worldly disaffections into a primal myth of masochistic return. Nor is it to disavow the obvious statist ideological impulse that presides over this narrational format and dispenses, in a complex manner, allocations of pain and pleasure that guide it. The objective, on the other hand, is to appreciate whether the

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<sup>239</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty and Gaylyn Studlar, In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic

repeated, wistful and enduring submissions of the mother to paternal orders occur without any difference insofar as the resuscitation of the constitutional state is concerned. Perhaps what is of great importance in this regard is the powerful feminization of national affections that such a melodramatic format necessitates. The forces of devotion can be called back to the state only after using the mother as an all powerful conduit, one that lays an unquestionable ontological claim on the bodies of warring sons. This recall of the mother that births the sacrificial body as well as nurtures the body of the martyr is a love that is larger than life and greater than death itself; it is a spiritual automaton of melodrama that can be parlayed to causes and crises of the existing legal order only provisionally, and always precariously. In Mother India this became immanent through affections of wistfulness and nostalgia that saturate the expressive agrarian form of the mother when she appears in the landscape undergoing industrial transformation. It is this sadness (one that remains unaccounted for in the historical memory of the state and its charter of development) that resonates in the scenes depicting the state's formal recognition of the mother as an entity of respect and devotion, when she is called upon to inaugurate the newly constructed dam adjourning the village. In Deewar, this dissonance inheres in the form of the stoic and enduring mother who is called on stage by her younger son Ravi to receive his medal of decoration given by the police authorities. It is pertinent to note that the film begins as well as ends with this scene, with the entire story told in flashback through the perspective of the woman.

The iconic assemblage that congeals in the end statement of Mother India is one that catachrestically brings together the emblem of development (the dam) and the eldest son Ramu in the traditional *Khadi* attire that marked the Congress politician in the Nehruvian order together with the tragic presence of the mother as tradition (but also endowed with the visual insignia of a socialist internationalism). In Deewar it is a coming together of the reconstituted stage of the legal order, the son in police uniform, the medal of recognition, and the uterine entity as a more pronounced, nucleated one, in the form of the mother as a rehabilitated woman in the city. The aspect of the mother, as the paramount ontological power that blesses and absolves the legal apparatus of the profane and is recognized as such, is however an *absent minded* one. It is from this pull of distraction that the narratives of

unrest and conflict in the patriarchal order are launched in each case, as an alternative mythic memorialization of natality that has been forgotten by the state and its archives. The pull of pre-occupation must however be understood in a larger sense; the flashback narration in neither films is restricted to the point of view of the humanoid mother. Nonetheless, one can say that the mother is *figuratively* present in both situations to occupy a temporal gap between the historical recognition of the state and a commemoration of which only she is capable. The monumental staging of these latter recollections, an instantaneous stroke of memory inside the mother's uterine self, is spread over two hours of profane diegetic depiction on screen. It actually comprises only a few minutes of 'real time', when she stands to be felicitated on each occasion. It is this 'in between' amplification of the mythic instant of uterine recall that allows the momentousness of sacrifice to be brought into critical adjacency with the formal ovation that takes place when the stage of the state is set.

It is important to understand that the mother is not a subject; it is a profound impress of a deep time that seeks to *subject* and absolve all, including the vehicle that animates it on screen. The mother is therefore an assemblage of signs and expressive powers freely drawn from different avenues of knowledge and signification – the stylized socialist realist postures and clothes, epic articulations, low angle shots, empty spaces and wide spanning Technicolor skies in Mother India, and the oedipal machinery, the masochistic machinery, hard industrial labor, and a confined urban mise-en-scène of absolute interiorities in Deewar. The latter is a case in which the milieu of the city, working in conjunction with modern postulates and hermeneutics of desire, like the oedipal and masochistic casts, invents the figure of the mother as a concentrated power of domesticization and familial reconstruction. The uterine energies are not allowed to spread across the land, the skies, and the community at large in a historic moment of state emergency. In other instances though, the exact opposite thing happens. In more violent situations of the historical, when the secular-political machinery is in a state of retreat, the mother, as an entire ecology of melodrama, can appear *without* the humanoid form.

In Ramesh Sippy's Shakti/Power (1980), the mother Sheetal is killed before the climax of the film, caught in a crossfire between legal and illegal forces of the turbulent world outside

the home. In this film, the prodigal son is once again a member of an urban criminal syndicate, while the citizen/lawkeeper pole is occupied this time by the father. Sheetal is killed by the goons of J.K., their common enemy and the boss of another mafia gang. Her death introduces an interesting transformation in the stage of the titanic oedipal battle between father and son (the roles were memorably essayed by two of the greatest male star thespians in the pantheon of Indian popular cinema – Dilip Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan). The son, who is once again called Vijay, escapes from police custody to hunt down and kill J.K. After that, when Ashwini Kumar, the conscientious senior police officer shoots his only son for escaping from the law and taking the law into his own hands, the death scene that follows features Vijay dying in the arms of his father. The men, who always had perpetually been caught up in a dynastic conflict with the mother in the center, now declare their love for each other for the first and only time in their lives. In the figural absence of the mother, it is the uniformed police officer, the representative of the law and the state who is inserted into the epicenter of an overall melodramatic ecology of motherliness. The powers of the state/father, which had hitherto failed in the tasks of custodianship, in being neither able to protect nor revenge the mother, enter the final assemblage of uterine recall by undergoing an overall femininization. The ‘outsider’ can thus be reclaimed by a melodrama of the nation only by suffusing the entire melodramatic space with ambiotic energies. Here the malfunctioning state, having failed in its guardianship of the mother, can atone by taking her place and tendering the uterine recall for the dying rebel, who was never a legitimate protector of the mother, but was the only entity who could avenge her.

The entire narrative of Shakti is also rendered in flashback, but in a confessional mode that is a little displaced from the enduring but sad witnessing mode of the *absent minded* mother qua mother. Years later, the now retired police officer Ashwini Kumar recounts the tragic happenings to his grandson -- Vijay’s now grown up son just about to embark on a professional career. Ashwini Kumar’s retelling of the uterine tragedy therefore partly de-territorializes the pristine aspect of the mother’s sacrifice into a displaced confessional, by which the now femininized state intelligence substitutes for the mother and announces its own formalism. When the father inhabits the dead space of the mother, after having taken

his uniform off, a different form of remembering becomes manifest. The tragic memory of the mother, which was only formally applauded, but never recognized by the legal order in Mother India and Deewar, now infuses itself into the father's scrupulous and inflexible commitment to the law, the very piety that had once upon a time allowed him to unwaveringly consign his own kidnapped infant son to death<sup>240</sup>. The confessional impulse begins with a declaration of love for the moribund son continues years later with the recounting of the entire story to the grandson; it ends with the erstwhile principled police officer declaring to the youngster that the price to pay, in committing one's life to the *farz* or duty of lawkeeping, lies not in the challenges or perils of such a task, but precisely in the limits of such a steely instrumentalization of the self that allows neither retribution nor mercy within the scope of the familial. The confessional mode therefore becomes apparent precisely when the single minded determination of the law keeping father has to give way to the feminine and absent minded memorialization of the mother. What is also important is that this recounting ends in the extension of a choice to the son: he is offered the option of denying a life of the uniform and hence formalizing his status as a designated instrument of the state ready for martyrdom. In the post emergency historic milieu of Shakti, the choice of profession for the grandson is made under this horizon of disenchantment, when the young man, after hearing his grandfather's story, decides to become a police officer after all.

The dead mother, as originary memory of the nation, therefore haunts the historic milieu of the state in a different way when she can no longer be accorded an iconic figural presence within it in the stages of felicitation that are seen in Mother India and Deewar. When the law preserving violence of the state can no longer protect the mother as a historical body around which an entire ceremonial of mythic nomination of the state can be launched, the mother becomes a disembodied essence, an abstract diagram. This is an irrevocable loss for a modern statist project of memory precisely because in a world of rampant and unbridled violence that extends to the very heart of the familial and the communal, there is no other oracular voice left to demand martyrdom and sacrifice as clearly identifiable entities. When the uterine assemblage of melodrama becomes dispersed, the legal order itself suffers utter

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<sup>240</sup> This happens early in the film. The infant Vijay is kidnapped by goons who want a compromise from Ashwini. The latter however tells them that he would rather lose a son than betray his coda of duty (*Farz*).

privation because without a spiritual and authentic separation between renegades and soldiers, the entire body of warring brothers becomes inducted into an overall picture of abject orphanhood. After the death of the mother, while the myth of uterine recall remains powerful and all encompassing, it can no longer be claimed solely by the state for its law preserving ends; all bets are off and all violence threatens to become law making in character. When the mother, as an assuring, humanoid figuration is removed from the picture, what the state loses is a presiding ontological power that fills up the gap in a horizon of secular belief that opens up between desires for justice and judgments of law. The formal state, in a world of multivalent realities, is therefore no longer endorsed, in the final instance, by the mother as immanent theodicy or at least as a powerful nostalgia for the same. The final formal sway of the state is not any more occasioned by a mythic curvature of time that momentarily elevates it from the order of the commonplace and places it in an iconic constellation with the mother.

What is left behind in the world with the eclipse of the communal/social presence of the mother is an army of inclement orphans not longer bound by a primal pull that makes it impossible to be an outsider. In the subsequent moments of mythic return (that are repetitions with myriad differences), the scenarios get more and more saturated with violence. In them, the moments of revenge and reconstitution are characterized by increasing moral amplitudes claimed by the recalcitrant avenger outlaw and by a concurrent and cynical abnegation of statal duties by the citizen/lawkeeper figure. This is because the originary causes of rebellion in Mother India (Birju's obsession with a pair of bangles belonging to his mother that are kept inside Sukhi Lala's cashbox) and Deewar (Vijay's schizophrenic impulse that draws from the inscription of shame on his hand and memories of his helpless mother being insulted) now extends to the primary question of life and death. It is precisely in this situation of melodrama that the outlaw son can not only demand a uterine union with the mother, but also claim an autonomous political recognition from the weakened father. What is given rise to thereby, is a new covenant of sovereignty that is solemnized in a stark landscape without resources to mother and homestead passions. This new covenant is one of an even greater emergency, one which comes into being precisely when it becomes sufficiently clear that the spirit of the law can be preserved and the mother



can be avenged only by a momentous suspension of the constitutional law. In such milieus, the moment of profound recall and the impress of deep time are registered at that very instant when the new covenant, in a moment of consummate danger, overrides all contractual arrangements of the social.

In K. Bhagyaraj's Akhree Raasta/The Last Path (1985), the generational order is reversed: it is the old father who launches the extra legal program of revenge this time, while the son, who is a conscientious police officer, tries to prevent him from doing so (both characters were portrayed by Amitabh Bachchan). As it becomes increasingly frequent in revenge sagas of the eighties and nineties, the arch villain in this case is a corrupt politician, a grotesque parody of the idealized Nehruvian prototypes that abounded in the reformist socials of the first two decades of the new republic. The police officer son chases the avenging father and shoots him just as he is about to execute his final act of retribution during a public event featuring the unscrupulous Minister. When the body of the would be assassin is pulled out of its hiding place and displayed to the gathering public, the gloating and relieved Minister garlands it in mock celebration. Just as the simmering anger of the young police officer (who by now has knowledge of his mother's rape and murder) rises to a boiling point, the presumably dead father becomes animated again for the last time, shooting the evil Minister on the forehead before the last gasps of life ebb out of him. The shocked silence that follows is broken by a solitary act of ovation by the police officer son, who begins to clap his hands before the title credits roll.

Unlike as in Deewar, when the applause is registered in Akhree Raasta, it is a lonely acknowledgement without official recognition or endorsement. By doing this, the police officer salutes the outcome of a secret pact between himself and his outlaw father, by which the two had earlier decided that they would respect their respective quests for justice within the ambits of the law and outside it. According to that agreement, each would be honor bound to laud the other's success. What is unique about the melodramatic situation in Akhree Raasta is that in this case the end statement that celebrates the achievement of justice does not emit from a restored and replenished loneliness of state language. Rather, it emerges from a newer realm of revalued value, by which a sovereign custodianship of the

mother has to be rethought. The altered situation pertains not only to the fact that the constitutional apparatus is unable to exercise a desired monopoly of violence in a given situation, but also because the parliamentary machinery itself has been taken over by forces of a perverse sultanism. Heroism, in a state of abject orphanhood, therefore lies in a principled retailership of violence. It is this aspect of difference that becomes increasingly more pronounced in further cases of mythic return. This is true not only of the orphans that populate the films of the crime genre of the eighties and nineties to the present, like Parinda (Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 1988), Satya (Ram Gopal Verma, 1998), Gang (Mazhar Khan, 1999), Gardish (Priyadarshan, 1993), Krantiveer (Mehul Kumar, 1994), Kaante (Sanjay Gupta, 2002), and Company (Ram Gopal Verma, 2002), but also of the two important revocations of the Mother India myth in Aatish (Sanjay Gupta, 2002) and Vaastav (Mahesh Manjrekar, 2000). A detailed discussion of the last two films has to be prefaced by a wider understanding of the cinematic urban milieu they are set in.

## **Ordinary Mothers and their Criminal Sons in Real Settings of the Global Kind**

### **The Divided Sky in Gardish**

One of the most important transformative features of popular Indian crime films of the late eighties and after pertains to what can be called a realist melodrama of urban sustenance overcoding and often de-territorializing the epic diagram. This new cinematic assemblage is a flexible intersection between an aesthetics of 'de-glamorization' (purchased through breakaways in technique from not just the classic 'All India Film', but also grand melodramatic formats of Hollywood), 'awry' schemas of filming and editing borrowed from avant-garde and minoritarian terrains of America, Europe, Latin America, or Hong Kong, a steady cam propelled transformation of the urban milieu into a zone of rapid information, and a diffusely lit, austere, sociologicistic urban mise-en-scène derived from the Indian New Cinema of the seventies and eighties. It is an assemblage of myriad sound and image cultures, emotional intelligences, and cinematic textures that come from a new, transnational visual universe of the nineties. It includes complex aesthetic pressures of a globally extended market for the Indian popular film, and also the skills, artistic desires, and

transformative urges of the first two generations of film professionals trained in film academies like the Film Institute in Pune<sup>241</sup>. In such a scenario, the different tracings of the mother as icon undergo significant transformations. It is not that the mother loses the timeless endurance that identifies her with the earth itself, but in a context in which there is an anxiety inducing diminution of space between the earth and an electronically animated sky, she has to withstand not just a planetary proliferation of her son's prodigal desires, but a also new ecology of faith and an altered militancy of devotion. This is precisely why a conceptual locating of the home that houses the mother and her son in the urban space of the nineties calls for an initial understanding of the city itself that threatens to over run it.

The popular crime melodrama of the nineties, in many ways, inaugurates a new criminal figure, one who not only inhabits a realist urban milieu of abjection, joblessness, and poverty like his predecessors once did, but one who is also deprived of benedictions from a mythic sky. Priyadarshan's 1993 film Gardish/The Sky is an exemplary instance in which the figure of the criminal becomes manifest in the intermediary space between a mythic nomination of the heavens that invests the heroic mantle on the reluctant protagonist and the blind law of the father that designates the same heroism as illegal. The film is set in Mumbai, with diffusely lit, pastel shaded interiors shot in soft tones by Santosh Sivan – one of the most prominent new age film makers and directors of cinematography in contemporary Indian cinema. This cinematic milieu is remarkably different from the Technicolor *Mohulla* neighborhoods in gang films of the seventies because it combines a techno aesthetic of filmic realism with well established signatures of shanty town life in Mumbai. The muted luminosity and texture of photography can thus be easily transposed to a James Bond-like song sequence (complete with martini glasses, guns, roses, and chamber music) that comes as a departure of fantasy in the middle of the narrative. The surfeit of top angle shots in the crowd scenes (with a protracted fight sequence taking place on the tops of cars lined up in a traffic jam) impart a vulnerable character to the heroic figure, denying the low angle, larger than life, epic postures that dominated the previous decades.

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<sup>241</sup> See Gopalan, Cinema of Interruptions, 1-6 for an overview. Moinak Biswas has called this a new will to realism.

Shiva is the eldest son of an upright police constable Purushottam Sathe and his wife Lakshmi. Sathe dreams of seeing his son as a Police Officer and having the pleasure of saluting him before he retires. However, fate has other plans in store. A sudden situation of violence emerges in the neighborhood just days prior to Shiva's departure to the Police Academy. By then, a dialogue exchange in the film, like as in many others, has already defined the urban space as an aspect of the darkness of *Kali Yuga*, in which the advent of *Ram Rajya* or the kingdom of Rama is no longer identifiable with the promises of the constitutional republic. When the goons of Billa Jilani, the local don, attack Sathe on duty, the terrified public watches in silence as the uniformed representative of the state is beaten to pulp in broad day light. It is then that the otherwise shy and reticent Shiva explodes in anger. In front of hundreds of stunned onlookers, he beats the seemingly invulnerable Billa and his henchmen to inches from death. After this incident Shiva's life and dreams begin to crumble around him. His father's colleagues make sure that he escapes without a police record, while the young and old of the neighborhood begin to venerate him as the top dog in the battle space of the city, where communities have long since been replaced by predatory packs. When the reluctant young man without any natural proclivity towards violence gets into further skirmishes with enemies who attack him, the police, including his father, begin to look at him with suspicion; his drunkard brother-in-law and another hoodlum begin to extort money from the locals in his name, and his would be father-in-law breaks his engagement with his beloved.

Sathe, in representing a patriarchal order unquestioningly devoted to the state and its rule of law, chastises and then closes the door on his son for taking the law into his own hands. The people of the neighborhood by then have already endowed him with ethically undeterminable but mythic dimensions of fear and reverence; a local woman inquires from a child whether the already famous Shiva looks like Ram or Ravana. There is a remarkable moment of mythic insertion in the realist *mise-en-scène* of the film when Shanti, the destitute sex worker whose husband was murdered by Billa, looks at Shiva as he walks by the bazaar. The everyday middle class figure of the latter is transformed in a single frame shot from her perspective into a Ram like figure in mythic attire that passes through the battle torn historical space. In contrast to Shanti's casting of Shiva in a mythic crest of time -

- as the chosen one that brings justice to the world and absolves it of demonic powers like Billa -- the reactions of the people in the vicinity remain ambiguous. They waver between adoration for an avatar of justice and fear for that which is larger than life itself; they dance with jubilation around Shiva after his victory and also silently pay up extortion money when it is demanded of them in his name. The rites of donation thus remain distributed between offerings to the deity and a degrading tribute in the form of protection money. The mass in the melodramatic assemblage never emerges as people precisely because it remains a divided body of acolytes that affirm their faith in a mythic nomination and a herd of not yet citizens that is too scared to exercise its will in the realm of the political. The mass, often established through teeming movements in the city through aerial long shots, is thus a mammoth *nothingness* of threadbare life; it is that background against which all national-spiritual concepts of being can be seen to be suspended. The silence of the masses is compounded by the deafness and blindness of the state. As a result, Shiva's interventions, which always take place in situations of emergency, and are to protect himself, the family (the father who is beaten up on duty, the sister who is kidnapped by Billa), and friends from unwarranted attacks, are never recognized as acts of self defense. The state, in its melodramatic incarnation as the strict and inflexible father, becomes discernable only as a compendium of dictates that is out of sync with a violent city full of relative truths and nomadic perceptions. In his strict adherence to the word of law, the father thus perpetually 'misreads' the intentions of the son. The state formalizes itself even further after it arrives late on the scene, when it launches a retroactive reading that is no longer inflected by a witnessing voice of the people. Shiva's name enters the criminal records in a milieu bereft of an epic side of wisdom as organically expressed political will of the community, as well as the formalities of juridical advocacy. His spectral figure of crime emerges in a climate of profound unrest, when the community of devotees can no longer distinguish the god from the demon, and the juridical intelligence of the state has also lost its 'true' name giving powers.

In such a situation, the state/father suffers from a denial of its own gradual abstraction from a world of reality. That is, it formally posits its constitutional form as absolute, when it has lost the ability to decide upon and act out the exception. This is precisely why the cinematic

state in Priyadarshan's film cannot condone Shiva for his emergency measures even though it can no longer monopolize violence. When the state refuses to acknowledge its own belatedness, the right to protect one's own life and that of his near and dear ones is automatically proscribed because the law no longer recognizes a citizen self apart from one literally committed to the letter of the law. That is, it decays to the point when all notions of citizenship, civility and moral law in the Hegelian sense evaporate with a practical abstraction of the law itself. There can be no defense of the self in such a situation because the existent legal language of the state loses its ability to define one, precisely because it cannot be claimed any longer by a discourse of sovereignty that can determine the very conditions in which that law can be suspended. Till the very end of the film, the father stubbornly bears an aspect of a melodrama of legality (as seen in Deewar) precisely because he has no comprehension of an imperative to survive that has already saturated the urban space around him. By announcing that the son has no right to take the law into his own hands, even to protect his own life, the father thus virtually denies the son's right to survive. When Shiva is turned out of the father's home, he finds replenishment and sustenance in a homeless world in which only differentially executed illegalities survive – Shanti the prostitute, and a friend who runs a highly corporatized network of beggary in Mumbai.

It is at a crucial moment of danger, when the state withdraws its powers completely that the father begins to realize his mistake. This is when Billa and his men attack the home in his absence after the banishment of Shiva; they grievously injure the mother and Shiva's younger brother, abduct his sister and ask for Shiva himself as ransom. When Sathe reaches the police station to get help to rescue his daughter, he sees, for the first time with his own eyes, a picture of abject privation: the city no longer has any policemen because all of them have been transformed overnight, into uniformed guards at the wedding of the daughter of a powerful minister. A helpless Sathe takes Shiva to Billa, but only after extracting an oath from him that no matter what happens, he would not lift a finger in anger. It is only later, when the father sees his son being beaten up without mercy that the oath of legalism is retracted, when he realizes that the evil aspect of Billa requires a new naming that is different from the profile of rights and enfranchisement outlined by the state. The father who had forbidden his son from attacking another citizen under any conditions now exhorts

the latter to finish off the *Rakshash* (demon). In this profound moment of recall, when the father remembers an epic nomenclature of good and evil, the melodrama of legality unconditionally submits to that of survival. After Billa is vanquished by Shiva, Sathe fulfills his dream by saluting the son for whom the doors of the Police Academy are closed forever. This he does because, as he says, his son has achieved something that he would never have, had he been a police officer. The titular sky in Gardish is thus a divided one; under it, the hero can be saluted only without the uniform and never with it. In terms of the mythic dimension in Indian cinema, it also creates a context in which the figure of the survivor can emerge precisely because the state can no longer claim full authorial rights on a spiritual impelling of the Gita. The formal state can, in other words, neither ask for sacrifice nor martyrdom.

### **Company: The City of Refuge and the Criminal Home**

The mother in Ram Gopal Verma's 2002 film Company is a de-mythologized figure that originates in a new will to realism in the popular Indian cinematic context. She dotes on her son Chandu, who takes to a career in organized crime, and is decidedly pleased with and proud of his spectacular success. In one of the most memorable sequences in the film, she welcomes Malik, Chandu's gang boss, to her house with the decorum and gratitude reserved for a company superior. When Chandu makes rapid headways in his profession, the mother willingly moves from a tin shed in a shanty town to a plush, expensive apartment in one of the most exclusive areas of Mumbai. Like any woman concerned with settling her son in life, the mother takes an avid interest in finding a suitable bride for Chandu. The young wife to be is also least perturbed by the fact that her intended husband is a *bhai* or operator of the Mumbai underworld. The notion of a melodrama of survival here is not restricted to mere bodily subsistence; it pertains instead to a form of life worth living. Sustenance is therefore that very state which allows one to *become* metropolitan and enter a state of being that is beyond mere biological existence. This imperative becomes a crucial component of the family melodrama precisely when the picture of *Dharmic* interiority, comprised of a stable patriarchal order and a safe custodianship of women becomes increasingly imperiled and bare without metropolitan instruments of property, finance, and security. In this cinematic

assemblage, the notion of home -- as a stage for modern ceremonials of tradition, expressions of love, piety, and kinship -- can be worlded only when, as a cluster of signs and emblems, it is able to insert itself in images of metropolitan traffic and circulation. In these films, the home is thus perpetually endangered by either the real-estate-unemployment assemblage, or the criminal-political nexus of development.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the 'home', as part of an overall modern invention of tradition (a cinematic formation that brings together memories of agrarian communities and domestic interiorities of a fragmented city life), also has to be marked by a constant securing of what, for the moment, can be called ethical happiness. In the popular crime film of the nineties, it is this imperative that brings together states of moral grace and pragmatics of urban pleasure and security; in order for happiness to be cinematically *figurable*, bodies have to travel, acquire styles and protection, transact money, and play with manifold goods and commodities in the world. It is this state of metropolitan blessedness that distinguishes the home from the *refuge* in the city. In Company and in many other crime sagas of the nineties, this passage is achieved by any means whatsoever, when the family moves from a temporary tin shelter or *kholi* to prime real estate. In a separate genre of films – the opulent and sumptuous marriage melodramas like Hum Aapke Hain Kaun/Who am I to You? (Sooraj Barjatiya, 1994), Hum Saath Saath Hain/We are Together (Sooraj Barjatiya, 1999), Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge/The Braveheart will Take the Bride (Aditya Chopra, 1995), Kuch Kuch Hota Hain/Something Happens (Karan Johar, 1998), and Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham/Sometimes Sorrow, Sometimes Joy (Karan Johar, 2002) – a spectacular cinematic staging of homeliness becomes possible only when an abstract modern diagram of tradition assembles with commodity saturated, extraordinarily rich domestic settings of upper class, upper caste North Indian families. A cinematic ritualization of tradition in the world thus calls for a surfeit of modern instruments and sponsorship; it can no longer be achieved in conditions of austerity or frugal, romantic-Gandhian measures of old nation-building, as was seen in the middle class melodramas of the fifties and sixties, involving the engineers who engaged in rural development in Paigham/The Message (S.S. Vasan, 1957) and Satyakam (Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1969), or the idealist doctors who tended the villages in Zindagi Zindagi/Life, Life (Tapan Sinha, 1972), Tere Mere Sapne/Our Dreams (Vijay



Anand, 1970), and Anand Ashram/The Abode of Happiness (Shakti Samanta, 1977). This is precisely why the 'revisitings' of bygone stories in the films of Sooraj Barjatiya – Nadiya Ke Paar/The Edge of the River (Govind Moonis, 1982) in Hum Aapke Hain Kaun, the epic Ramayana itself in Hum Saath Saath Hain, and Chit Chor/Stealer of the Heart (Basu Chatterjee, 1976) in Main Prem Ki Diwani Hoon/Crazy About Prem (2002) – require the transformation of rural or mythic milieus to a perfect metropolitan interiority of tradition as spectacle, one that is sealed off from the historical out of field and the laboring process.

Home, in the popular cinema of the nineties, is thus a locus rather than a habitat; that is, it manifests itself cinematically when the absolute statements of tradition are seen to *adequately* curve across a plethora of global signs and affections. The idea of adequation is important here. The violent, extralegal securing of homes in crime films like Satya or Company pervert this very moral postulate in the achievement of a *Dharmic* consummation devoutly desired: the protection of women against rape, destitution, unhappiness, and poverty. In these films, 'realist' subaltern profiles embrace a singular, globally publicized metropolitan class fantasy with vengeance; they bring about an assemblage of filial love and duty, and the happiness of conspicuous consumption, without affiliation to public protocols of law and production. They survive to sustain a home by adopting, through any means whatever, the form of urban life increasingly established as the only one worth living. The realist impulse in these films however have very little to do with phenomenological or cognitive veracity; it pertains to a straight and determined journey from the refuge to the home, engaging the city in between as a zone of differential illegalities. The realist space becomes manifest through a de-territorialization of a melodramatic diagram of honor (witnessed for instance in Mother India); in as much, it accords no scope for an untimely, enduring wait for the gods or for a curvature of a mythic temporality to groundlessly sacralize and absolve the profane. The body is figurable now in the urban milieu only as a globally desiring body; it has to enter circuits of danger, pleasure, finance, and commodities in order to survive as a *timely* postulate in the city. In as much, the cinematic in such films affects perverse 'worldly' assemblages of irony, bathos, or the joke: the company itself in Verma's film, the temporary mafia takeover of a jewelry shop to buy a ring for a girlfriend in Satya, the assassin for hire

who plays video games all the time, or the astute cinephilic appreciation of the *bhais* of Spielberg's Jurassic Park as an English horror film featuring giant lizards.

The cinematic milieu in Company presents a warlike zone in between the shanty town and the metropolis, in which the latter's precepts of representational power and enfranchisement are unable to overwrite the former's surviving bodies. A melodrama of sustenance therefore becomes figurative precisely when the myth of the state exhausts itself; the nomination of the citizen/*bhakta* is then not enough for an enduring continuation of existence. Ranibai, the mother in Company, is a coming together of a more low key, methodic actorial style, the low class, low caste body, speech cast in the edgy *Mumbaiya* dialect and shorn of ornament and repose, and a sunny disposition that comes from a perverse innocence that enables a total foreclosure of Brahminical values, as well as a sublime transcendence of hunger, illiteracy, and poverty. She is enfigured perpetually in transit, as a cinematic entity that is hustled through rootless fragments and violent jostlings of urban space. In the visual and editorial schema of the film, she is filmed by a mobile and cynically awry camera that denies her low angle iconic shots and often captures her in naturalistic and harsh key lighting schemas. The overall editing pattern in Company, which frequently launches haphazard, rapidfire montage segments that establish a city space saturated with violence, immerses the body of the mother in a semiotic ecology of gunfire, news, police sirens, and ringing telephones that can be the only communicative bridges of sound in an anarchic milieu. The mother is thus totally abstracted from any epic lineage, when she becomes part of the 'news images' and reportage or investigative segments that abound in the film. She is worlded in a cinematic milieu styled in line with Steven Soderberg's work in Traffic (2000) and with the landmark gangster films of Martin Scorsese, in which existence is perpetually informed by a differential flow of illegalities, accidents, and attendant non-messianic, absolutely calendrical questions of life and death. In a milieu in which the glitzy surface of the metropole and its dark underbelly, the exception and the normative, law and lawlessness flow into each other, Ranibai the mother calls neither martyrs nor bodies for sacrifice into being; she is an entity that can only give birth to fighting survivors.

### **‘Encounter’: The Police as Melodramatic Assemblage of illegal *timeliness***

Much like the crime film, the cop dramas in recent times have also cinematically cast the city in a dissolved state, as a space in which there can be rule of law only in terms of a comparative exercise of illegalities. The police, in other words become cinematic only in an urgent, exceptional sense, when a uniform social application of punishment in lieu of crime, or the maintenance of law and order has to give way to *timely* reinventions of sovereign power. The latter becomes manifest, as Agamben would say, precisely at that moment when the only way to preserve the law is to stand outside it and announce that nobody can be outside the law. The police, in order to arrive ‘early’, therefore have to take preemptive action. It is this unique aspect that makes the cop drama of the nineties and after a cinema of mafia assassinations and police ‘encounters’ to a more pronounced degree than was previously seen. Encounter is a colloquialism used by police personnel in the Indian context to describe an extra legal killing, by which an ‘exceptional’ conviction can be said to culminate in justice only if the question of life and death is settled without recourse to law and juridical procedures. Encounter as such takes place in an intermediary zone between the battleground of law breaking/law preserving violence, and the sphere of juridical intelligence; it is not an act of war because in its proper form, it can be exercised only when the targeted body is disarmed and subject to techniques specific to an administration of legal abeyance (like covering the face with a piece of jute or hemp to muffle the point blank gunshot wound and restrict the spread of carbon, shooting from behind, or planting guns)<sup>242</sup>. The dead body as a result is produced in passing, in the temporal and spatial gap between the executive and the juridical, through the invention of a new corpus of the condemned that lies between the abstract form of the citizen and that of the prisoner of law or war. The cinematic of the encounter is one in which the practice of sovereign secrecy enters the realm of public visibilities and acquires, within the scope of melodrama, an affective approval of terrified commonsense. The encounter is therefore a newly manifest, ‘special branch’ of sovereign execution that was not practiced by the cops that killed by answering fire with fire in the landmark films of the genre belonging to the seventies and early eighties, like

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<sup>242</sup> This technology is explained in detail in N. Chandra’s 2004 film Kaagar, in which Daya Nayak, the notorious encounter specialist of the Mumbai Police, played an advisory role.

Zanjeer/Chain (Prakash Mehra, 1973), Farz Aur Kanoon/Duty and Law (K. Raghavendra Rao, 1982), or Satyamev Jayate/Truth Always Triumphs (Raj N. Sippy, 1982).

The age of a new, carnivalesque criminality is thus also one of a febrile and pathological commitment to a state power no longer restricted to the formal legal order. In the altered situation of criminality and terror however, the *Dharmic* administration of justice can be achieved often only by a melodramatic recoil from the constitutional form, through a rigorous and unforgiving passage through the profane as already criminal beyond absolution. The important thing in this however, is the fact that the messianic powers of a cosmic justice often unhinge themselves in a total manner from the enterprise of written law, as a result of which the bureaucratic-juridical order is kept out of the sacralization process. The heroic figures in Kaagar: Life on the Edge (N. Chandra, 2003) and Ab Tak Chappan/Fifty Five so Far (Shimit Amin, 2004) -- the two films based on the real life exploits of Daya Nayak, a controversial police officer reputed to have meted out more than eighty encounter killings – therefore assume their true form only when they acquire an exceptional sense of duty. This sense of duty is in many ways different from the one shared by their illustrious screen ancestors because it comes more from a psychologism of abject fatality rather than a mythic nomination and instrumentalization of the self. The police officers are thus denied the steadfast, epic repose within the familial order or the masochistic drive of a memory of natality. The wife of the encounter specialist in Ab Tak Chappan is killed by a bullet aimed for him; he himself is framed under false charges and has to leave the country and run away to the Middle East. In the end, it is under an alien sky that he promises to carry on his ‘work’ for a now distant motherland without the formal trappings of the uniform. ACP Prithviraj Singh, the chief protagonist in Mahesh Manjrekar’s Kurukshetra (2000), has to take the help of Iqbal Pasina, the don, in his fight for justice. It is the latter who provides the only possible haven of shelter for the ACP’s wife and sister in an urban space transformed into a site for an epic war between good and evil – the title of the film of course referring to the legendary battlefield in the epic Mahabharata. The agonistic journey through the degraded world increasingly requires similar desperate measures of survival and sufficiency: the dedicated cops in Aan/Honor (Madhur Bhandarkar, 2004) extort money to pay their informers, the ones in Khakee (Raj Kumar Santoshi, 2004) kill a

treacherous fellow officer in their midst, and the protagonist in Indian murders his own father-in-law, who is also a corrupt police chief. The scrupulously honest police officer of Shool/Weapon (E. Niwas, 1999) ends up shooting a powerful and sadistic politician in the Assembly House itself, while the idealists of Gangaajal/Ganges Water (Prakash Jha, 2003) use battery acid to blind goons in custody (the acid itself is symbolically cast as 'Gangajal' or the holy water from the river Ganges that is used as a medium of purification in Vedic rites). The task of policing assembles with a realist machinery of cinema not because the resultant schema of representation speaks truth to the world, but because it involves a constant warding off of terror by any means whatever, instead of a mythic reconstitution of the state and family.

### **Politics as Melodrama of Degeneration: The Lalloo Effect**

The melodrama of survival is perpetually informed by the Nehruvian twilight as a specter of political degeneration that is frequently depicted in an anthropomorphic form. This latter iconography of perversion is largely drawn from a cult of *dehatism* centered on the public persona of Lalloo Prasad Yadav, the present Railway Minister of the Central Cabinet in India, and the erstwhile Chief Minister of Bihar -- a state in India that is rich in minerals, but is also chronically underdeveloped. Hailing from the lower caste constituency of the Yadavs, Lalloo Prasad is one of the many politicians in the present Indian political dispensation who rely on a solid voter base maintained through measures of tribute and kinship alliances. In the metropolitan screen of judgment, he is thus emblematic of a tribalistic machinery that continues to inundate rational processes of finance and industrialization. Lalloo is therefore an aspect of obstinate caste antagonism that not only effects a continual, pre-modern recoding of the parliamentary mechanism, but also forecloses a global imperative of techno-financial management. The specter of Lalloo that haunts a shining India is thus that mass of inhuman, low caste recalcitrance that de-territorializes circulations of wage and profit through flows of tribute, and perpetually prevents an invention of the mass as population for governance, and the coming into being of a national spiritual peopleness based on a naturalized Brahminism in the world. As a cinematic that is part of that metropolitan publicity, Lalloo is a series of effects pertaining to

class, caste, dialect, education, hygiene, violence, totalitarianism, brutality, and myriad pathologies. The Lalloo effect can be congealed into grotesque anthropomorphic parodies or be distributed across bodies and peoples of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds as fungible signatures of a singular and terrifying pre-modern abyss. The panorama of comic villains in popular Hindi cinema that have been based on the Lalloo prototype is indeed a vast one; some examples would be Bachchu Yadav in Shool (E. Niwas, 1999), Lakhan Yadav in Calcutta Mail (Sudhir Mishra), Sadhu Yadav in Gangaajal (Prakash Jha, 2003), Parshuram Bihari in Major Saab (Tinnu Anand, 1998), or Balraj Chauhan in Nayak – Asli Hero (Shankar, 2001).

The question of caste however is a complicated one, especially when it comes to the numerous ethnographic specters of the pre-modern that haunt melodramatic assemblages in popular Hindi cinema. It would be simplistic to say that moral positionings of caste violence in such films always favor the upper castes. Quite the contrary, there has been a long line of villainous personages drawn up in line with an evil, ruthless prototype of the upper caste *Thakur* in mainstream Hindi and regional cinemas, especially in the rural dacoit melodramas that gained popularity in the sixties and seventies. Nevertheless, what largely distinguishes the Lalloo figure from the *Thakur* is that unlike the latter, it is a postulate that belongs to the urban-representational assemblage inaugurated by the republican revolution of 1947. In contrast to the anachronistic and peremptory *Thakur* who perpetually strives to ward off the constitutional rule and create a feudal outpost of absolute suzerainty, the Lalloo prototype is seen to inhabit the very heart of parliamentary power. As a prime, emblematic aspect of the diseased polity itself, it points to an ultimate coming into being of the *Kali Yuga*, when a war machine of uncouth, animalesque, and uneducated subalternity is seen to take over the key terminals of democratic representation. The cinematic of a diseased polity is thus an aesthetic project that assembles polarized powers of expression to offer a picture of metropolitan dissolution: the city ruled by the tribe. An ascendancy of Lalloo to a position of legislative self determination not only brings about a consummate picture of hierarchical subversion prognosticated by the Gita itself – the *dalit* or *Sudra* inheriting the earth – but also proposes a disruption in the managerial stewardship of capital. The principled police officers and citizens who battle the malevolent Yadavs in the

films mentioned above – Samar Pratap Singh in Shool, Avinash in Calcutta Mail, Amit Kumar in Gangaajal, or Major Jasbir Singh Rana in Major Saab – are of course Aryanesque, upper caste, educated professionals with merit. This however does not mean that the Lalloo phenomenon must be solely understood as a molar dimension of caste based identity; it is rather a semiotic contamination that invests nominally upper caste, corrupt bodies as well. Much like the Islamic body, it is a diffuse flow of semiotic abominations that instantaneously, on a massified spell of commonsense, spells an alarming deviation from a normative, aesthetic and reassuring environment of meritorious and chic Brahminism. The specter of Lalloo thus immediately dislocates the city from its metropolitan habitat and robs it of its sanitary normalcy: it offers a glimpse of the impossible, when it is no longer a technocratic urban middle class that determines the political<sup>243</sup>. It is precisely because of this reason that the arrival of such forces inevitably announces a situation of dire emergency, by which the formal sanctity of the constitutional order can be maintained only by suspending the law and exercising a determined violence that carries the battle over sovereignty to its absolute limit, at the point which it becomes a terminal question of life and death.

### **Aatish – The Mirror**

Sanjay Gupta's 1994 film Aatish/Mirror was another instance in which the story of Mother India and her two warring sons were repeated with difference. A brief outline of the account can be considered, once again, not in terms of an isomorphic similarity with the plot of Mehboob Khan's landmark cinematic saga of 1957, but to understand the different historico-political grounds of a mythic recall. The resonance of the eternal in this case sets up a remarkably different relationship between the *Dharmic* and the state. The film is set in a geographically nebulous milieu that combines visual attributes of a down market, impoverished part of Mumbai with spectacular touristic locales of Mauritius -- foreign made cars, guns, and suits, and a centerpiece song and dance sequence featuring the men dressed as Spanish flamenco dancers and the women as Arabian belly dancers. What is also

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<sup>243</sup> In other words, the founding myth of the state that has to be posited as a past anterior to any constitutional order. See Carl Schmitt, Concept of the Political.

interesting is that the narrative borrows heavily, in terms of plot and the treatment of the action sequences, from John Woo's Hong Kong action flick A Better Tomorrow.

Aatish begins with a title sequence that at once establishes the mother as different from her illustrious predecessors. She is already a widow at the beginning; a garlanded photograph of her late husband shows that he was a police officer. When a local hoodlum attacks the helpless mother, her elder son Baba has to kill him in order to save his mother's honor. After that, it is the mother who delivers Baba from charges of juvenile delinquency by placing him under the protection of the local crime boss. It is under the paternal care of the latter -- reverentially called 'Uncle' by his subordinates as well as enemies -- that Baba grows up to be an especially talented operator of the underworld. He and his friend Nawab enter and flourish in the counterfeiting business, apart from other trades. Baba however stays away from home all this while with his mother's blessings and approval so that his tainted shadow would not fall on his younger brother Avinash, who goes to school and grows up to join the Police Academy. The making of the model citizen is sponsored by crime at every step; Baba accepts his first contract killing assignment the day the dues are paid for Avinash's college admission.

The advent of the adult Baba into the melodramatic space is informed, from the onset, by what the mother pronounces to his birthright -- a legitimate claim for uterine recall. She says that now that the family is anchored in the city, with a house full of luxurious comforts and Avinash set for life, it is time that Baba completes the home by re-entering it. This return however would be one without any settlement of debts with the law or the state; the mythic picture would be fulfilled without the latter asserting any ethical claims on Baba's criminal self. The story proper thus begins when the journey through the degraded world outside is almost over, with Baba embarking on what would be his last operation. By then, he has also fallen in love with Nisha, a beautiful florist. It is during this phase that a conspiracy hatched by Sunny, one of the minor members of the gang, reaches maturity and Baba is captured by the police. After his true identity as a powerful crime lord is revealed to the world, Avinash comes to confront his mother in a scene reminiscent of the memorable one in Deewar.



In Yash Chopra's 1975 film however, it was the mother and the police officer brother Ravi who had confronted Vijay. The revelation of Vijay's criminal life had, in one fell stroke, destroyed the environment of ambiotic innocence that the mother invested the home with. She had left Vijay's house with Ravi, telling the former "You are my son.....my own blood...how did you write on your mother's forehead that her son is a *chor* (thief)?" It is this departure of the mother that had condemned Vijay to a life of homelessness. This is accentuated later in Deewar, when, in another confrontational scene with Ravi, Vijay asks him: "Your principals, your ideals! Of what use are your ideals? ... These ideals, for the sake of which you're ready to stake your life, what have they done for you? A job that pays 400-500 rupees, a rented flat, a government jeep, two sets of uniforms? Look, here I am and there you are. We both rose up from this sidewalk, but today where are you and where have I gotten to? Today I have buildings, property, a bank balance, a fine home, a car! What do you have?" In answer to this angry question, Ravi consolidates one of the most memorable moments in popular Hindi cinematic melodrama by replying that he has 'mother'.

A critical consideration of sound itself as image is important to gauge the epic melodramatic import of these utterances. The statements are frontally uttered, with the figure of the mother or the legitimate patriarch turning away from a commonplace exchange between individuals to rest the look on a position of splendid repose. The direct look towards the camera destroys a naturalistic/voyeuristic organization of the filmic apparatus, extending the cinematic itself towards a meditation of the eternal. The linear, dialectical parlay of propositions and counterpropositions is suddenly arrested and held in the static, as Rajadhyaksha says<sup>244</sup>, with the sound of the utterance rising to the surface, leaving behind the clamorous noise of a multivoiced reality. It is at such moments of groundless, epic transmission of judgment that the mother can transcend her psychosis of maternal love and guilt -- her history of exploitation, insecurity, and privation -- and abolish the vicissitudes of the profane in a single stroke. This absolute declaration of uterine innocence withdraws the son's right to home; his re-entry into that fold of restfulness is possible only after he has purged himself by submitting his body to the justice of the state (as Ravi suggests). But as

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<sup>244</sup> See Rajadhyaksha's essays on early Indian cinematic forms and the notion of 'frontality': "Neo-traditionalism"(1986), "Epic Melodrama" (1994), and "The Phalke Era" (1987).

Prasad's astute, frame by frame, psychoanalytic reading of the first confrontational scene demonstrates, the mother's (and Ravi's) epic look away from the dialectical exchange with Vijay is always a process in tension with the historical mise-en-scène. The almighty utterance of the just and the iconic faciality of the medium are thus always tinged with the inevitable sadness of maternal loss. "The sequence shows Vijay's exclusion from the Oedipal enclosure, as brother Ravi (Shashi Kapoor) occupies [within the frame] the place of the father, beside the mother (Nirupa Roy). The mother goes along with the phallic imperative, punishing Vijay with her righteous defense of law, but when alone [foregrounded in the frame] with Vijay [receded to the far depth of the background], she is racked by guilt."<sup>245</sup>

In *Aatish*, it is the police officer brother who comes to confront his mother when she is praying for the health and happiness of *both* her sons. This happens immediately after Avi has graduated from the police academy, and Baba captured and indicted by the law. The interaction between the indignant and idealist younger son and the worldly wise, long suffering mother combines the over the shoulder shot/countershot model with the occasional turn away to a frontal broadcasting of the *Dharmic* utterance -- as that which points to a cosmic imaginary already plotted since eternity. The moment of epic repose is however not only disturbed by the conflict in the viewpoints of the doting mother and the professional crime fighting son, but also imperiled by inserts in parallel montage, of hooded assassins coming to harm the mother. Meanwhile the conversation between the mother and Avi that follows affects a remarkable polarization of *Dharmic* postulates and the interests of the national state. When the incensed police officer/son demands Baba's expulsion from the familial order, the mother refuses. A surprised Avi wants to know how the mother, being *adarsh* or the ideal personified, could overlook the norms of *Desh* or country. The mother replies that for a mother, her son is *desh* itself; she says that Avi should go and tell *his desh* that it should declare that all mothers with starving children should choke their young to death. It is with this reasoning of the *Dharmic* that the mother absolves Baba of a cardinal accusation: he is not a *chor* or thief, no matter what the state says.

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<sup>245</sup> *Ideology of the Hindi Film* 146-47.

Baba is thus exonerated by the uterine order of the same inglorious marker of identity – that of the *chor* – which had once upon a time called for Vijay's eviction from the familial fold. The cinematic of epic melodrama in this case enters a profound moment of mythic remembrance to close the door, in a messianic manner, on the uniform law of democratic fathers. Unlike Deewar, where the ontic statement of motherhood had curved around the state and excluded the son, here the curvature of deep time congeals all energies and affections of nation as Being around the son that has survived *despite* the ineffectuality of the legal order. There is thus no longer an *adequate* conceptual commerce of 'emergency' between the uterine-ethical domain of motherhood and the formalism of the latter; the mother instead suggests that it was in fact Baba who had acted in the true sovereign spirit of the exceptional, by allowing the family to survive dire calamities. It is therefore the mother, and not the state (that the mother once blessed and handed the gun to) that stands outside the law to declare that the only law possible inside the uterine fold pertains to its sustenance and replenishment. Those are the very last words that the mother utters, apart from the names of her two sons in her dying breath. She is shot dead by the hired killers who invade the home now left unprotected by Baba. The violence of the city thereby not only introduces dislocating pressures that carry matters to the very limit of endurance, but invades the very heart of the uterine system.

Apart from his mother's unconditional blessings and a standing offer of return to the domestic fold, the cinematic power that worlds Baba's rebellion in a different realm of values altogether is his romantic liaison with the florist Nisha. Unlike the women of dubious professions (the prostitute in Deewar, the bar singer in Shakti) who entered into doomed relationships with the outlaw in the past, Nisha is a 'respectable' orphan who lives by herself in the city. In contrast to her predecessors, she also gets a chance to consolidate a legitimate conjugal relationship with Baba. The moral law that defines such an association is once again one that has separated itself from the charter of the state. Nisha is repelled and aghast at one point after witnessing a brutal murder committed by Baba in broad daylight, but she returns to him after being convinced by the community that her lover is not he who kills, but he who *sacrifices* for the survival of his family and friends. In this particular instance, Baba

was finishing off a contract killer who had been hired by his enemies to kill Avinash, the conscientious police officer. The Baba-Nisha romance is thus established lyrically, in the course of a few song sequences, as a powerful machinery of affections that exhausts and forecloses the legal out of field. It occupies and flourishes in the very gap that has opened up between the judgment of statal law and a communal ontology of justice.

Love in this case is thus a formidable allure of affections and loyalties that becomes cinematically immanent as a form of life worth living. It becomes an assemblage of amorous desire, communal blessings, a globalized class fantasy and a worldly plenitude of commodities and geo-televisual informatics: gorgeous locales, expensive clothes, and foreign made cars. This spectacular assemblage of love and commodities also inscribes the romance between Avi and his girlfriend. The cinematic of love is thus a body of values in a special sense, one that can be incarnate only when an abstract machine of emotionalism comes together with a lyrical-advertising machinery of global production values. The latter component is to be understood not as a reflection of the industrial necessities of [realist] narrative cinema, but as an immanent, non-obligatory filmic coming into being of production values qua production values. Romance is thus figurable as a form of life worth living only as an unmediated, depthless aesthetic rapture of money burning on screen. When the body of the incorruptible police officer Avinash is recruited in such scenes, he can be seen to handle and consume things of the world beyond the scope of his economic class position precisely because in such scenes geo-televisual information is inseparably inscribed by the spectacular offices of cinema as capital in of itself. The screen becomes a pure transmission of informatics about the wonders of the world that precludes not just the ethics of the old national state, but also an uneven historical landscape of production and labor. In this spectacular and groundless shareholding of a transnational class fantasy, there can thus be no distinction between use values and exchange values, between a legally doomed love and a Kantian moral conjugality, or between licit money and illicit money. The love of the outlaw as well as the cop is consolidated in Mauritius as pure outdoor -- a space beyond what used to be the looming, sheltering sky of the state.

The uterine melodrama in Aatish is already withdrawn from a legal public order when the mother dies after issuing a call to Baba to return, without any mediating role of the punishing state, to the familial fold. The only laws that can exist after that are those of kinship and fraternal commitment. As a result, it is an affective melodrama of oedipal conflict between Avi and Baba that continuously overrides and de-territorializes the propositional dialectic between law and crime. Avinash tries his desperate best to step out of the notorious shadow of the elder brother that had brought him up and whose rights to the uterine order he could not negate. When he accuses Baba of being a Ravana instead of being a Rama, as all elder brothers are supposed to be, the latter replies “*Jab apni akhon ke samne apni chote bhai ka hot ho aur bhookh se tarapta hua pet ho, to phir Ramayan yaad nehi rehti*” [when one is faced with a younger brother’s dry lips and empty stomach, one does not remember the Ramayana]. Baba relentlessly protects Avi, whose police uniform is no longer potent enough to allow him to survive like an adult in a violent world. The latter is attacked several times by the men of Sunny, the villainous crime boss who wants to take over the city completely by killing off both the brothers. What is far more interesting than this oedipal diagram is the epic moment when it is abandoned, along with the weak dialectic between law and crime itself, to usher in a cosmic truce of another kind. This happens in the final stage of the film, when, in the midst of a bloody battle, Avinash comes to know that it was Sunny who had killed his mother. A cornered Sunny breaks into a mocking laughter when police jeeps are seen approaching the site from a distance. He gloats to a helpless and frustrated Baba that he would surrender to the authorities to save himself from the marauding brothers, and then use his considerable clout and money to escape justice yet again. It is at this instant that an epic pact is sealed between the sons of the mother who had hitherto not seen eye to eye. Even as Sunny’s evil laughter resonates with the approaching sound of sirens, the police officer Avinash hands a revolver to Baba, who takes the handed down gun and shoots dead his mother’s killer. The police, in the form of Avinash, do not arrive late here, as Madhava Prasad has so astutely observed in cases of the vendetta films of the seventies and eighties; instead a formalism of the police is inserted into the very heart of a mythic reckoning of time and justice. But that becomes possible only as a witnessing act, since policing usually involves an inhabiting of and a tracking of metrical intervals between apprehension and indiction, between law and punishment. As a normal coda of *timely*

operations, it is thus inadequate to actively participate in a mythic call for justice that is, by its very nature *untimely*. This portal of time has opened up after a deep period of maturation; once lost, it can never be recovered by the deployment any mortal resource of prudence or practice. This is because this moment of ripeness is the result of epic ministrations that has abolished earthbound realities, in a singular instant, of all statistical odds that empower state as well as a criminal like Sunny. The latter two occupy the same plane of crime and punishment as administrations of differential illegalities; in a moment of danger, Sunny turns towards the state for protection precisely because he knows that he commands instruments of money and power to redirect, manipulate, and neuter the latter's tardy and inefficient bureaucratic-juridical machinery. The call that Avinash answers to in handing over the gun is a call for a law making violence over and beyond the stipulations of written law. Once the uterine compact sealed between brothers in memory of the dead mother comes into being, a novel and militant sovereign power is unleashed into the world that can groundlessly claim bodies as instruments (Baba), sufferers (Sunny), and witnesses (Avinash the police officer). It is the space in which 'encounter' meets the illegal act of *Dharmic* vengeance.

### **Vaastav – The Reality**

There is thus once again a momentous handing of the gun to an instrument of justice. In Mother India, it was the mother who had taken up the gun and fired it herself; in Deewar she had handed it over to her younger son Ravi, who was a police officer; in Aatish, the nature of emergency is recognized and respected by handing the terminating weapon to a power who is rendered the only one capable of exercising decisive sovereign execution precisely because he is not formally tied to a statist charter of duties. These resonant repetitions with difference however do not make a simple progressive series. That is, in terms of an ushering in and an anointing of the Nehruvian paradigm, its painful endorsement during the turbulent seventies, and its eclipse and abnegation in a violent ridden globalized field of the nineties at once marked by sublime terrors as well as a plenitude of desires and commodities. Instead, each of these instances instantiate the complex nature of mythic recall. They constitute moments of danger in which the epic

melodramatic movements of cinema create quite different assemblages of *Dharmic* sovereignty that not only call entire worlds into being, but also judge all, including the republican state in the process. The invoking of an eternal aspect of time involves a ritualistic deployment of many things great and small, many modules of desire and compassions, and numerous errant energies of survival and belonging. This is also why, in terms of cinematic idioms, the mythic can bring into play different aesthetic signatures of Soviet style socialist realism, MTV visuals, the travel film, the consumer commercial, classical or neo-noirish Hollywood, Hong Kong action cinema, as well as myriad filmic devices from the European and Latin American avant-gardes.

The cosmic skies of such narratives are informed by the apocalyptic darkness of *Kali* as well as animated from time to time by brilliant flashes of epic illumination. The linear temporalities of scientific models of history are not absent altogether from such a picture, but they appear with other temporal imaginations in what Deleuze would call a time crystal of cinema<sup>246</sup>. The aesthetic judgment of repetition and difference is thus not to be made on neither the parabasis of a unidirectional narrative of progress, nor in terms of realist narration as an authentic procedure of the same. Hence, while the strong presence of a boundless, cannibalizing, and actionist elite class fantasy can indeed be registered in *Aatish*, it would be simplistic to conclude that the impulse towards a repeated mythic recall in manifold situations of difference is exhausted when the erstwhile rebel is handed the gun and coronated as the new baroque prince of our times. That is, when the latter, in the solitary instance of Sanjay Gupta's film, is seen to move from being an outsider to the state to being a vigilant and active participant in a secret covenant of sovereign justice. Indeed, there is no perpetual peace even after this picture of a new patriarchal arrangement; the mythic impulse is not extinguished in a so called situation of the post historical. In Mahesh Manjrekar's 1999 retelling of the Mother India myth, the mother takes up the gun again, and unlike Baba, the rebel in this case does not survive and prosper.

Unlike its cinematic predecessors, *Vaastav/Reality* begins with the nondescript. That is, the narrative is not launched by an abomination that destroys an idyllic familial order, but

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<sup>246</sup> See Deleuze, *Cinema 2*.

begins from a refuge that is not yet a home. The story gradually exposes the inhabitants of this precarious uterine order to the diurnal violence of the city. In Vaastav, the rebel is not created by a perverse voluntarism that questions the father's law from the onset. Instead, he is born out of a melodrama of urban irascibility, through a rootless floating of bodies and destinies in a whirlpool of chance. The rebel, in this case, starts off with honest employment; he becomes an outlaw quite unwittingly, when he is forced to escape from a normative course of earning a living in order to save his life. This paradoxical situation is created when he has to step out of the orbit of the law in order to address a basic question of life and death. This happens at a moment when he realizes that he has no legal preserve of his biological existence; his life is a bare one, exposed to a relentless traffic of violence in a city reeling under the machinations of contesting sovereign powers. Turning to crime is the only way left in a situation where the terminals of the state and its organs of representation and legal address are also inscribed into a field of fluctuating, osmotic illegalities. When the formal state no longer commands a monopoly of violence, every inhabitant of the city is differentially exposed to a state of being life that can be killed without sacrifice<sup>247</sup>. The outlaw is thus created in a moment of life preserving reflex, when the citizen is confronted with the knowledge of his legal death.

Raghunath Shivalkar is a young man who lives in a shanty town in Mumbai with his parents and his educated but unemployed elder brother Vijay. Raghu's life acquires some direction when he starts a fast food stall with a modest loan that his mill worker father procures for him. The business, run by Raghu himself and a few friends from the neighborhood, is a thumping success from day one. The sudden flush of money brings elation and comfort to the otherwise hand to mouth existence of the family. Raghu's mother Shanta feels proud of her son, his father feels vindicated, and arrangements are made to bribe officers to get Vijay a job. It is at this juncture that goons of the notorious 'Fracture gang' begin to frequent Raghu's eating joint. The hoodlums never pay their dues and bully the workers constantly; Raghu crosses his limit of patience when they start beating up one of his friends. In the mêlée that follows, one of the 'Fracture' brothers is accidentally killed by him.

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<sup>247</sup> See Georgio Agamben, Homo Sacer.



A frightened Raghu absconds and gradually understands that the malignant environ of the city allows no legal address of his circumstantial crime. The police officer investigating the incident happens to be on the payroll of the Fracture gang; he intends to find Raghu and turn him over to his bloodthirsty enemies. It is thus an utter absence of a sustainable legal definition of self, as that which is worthy of preserve, that evicts Raghu from the refuge of his parents. He turns to Viththal Kaniya, a rival don and sworn enemy of the Fracture brothers for shelter. Matters turn worse when arrangements are made to broker peace with the Fracture brothers. Kaniya agrees to pay them blood money in lieu of Raghu's life, but the treacherous brothers renege on their promise and attempt to kill Raghu when he meets them. The latter commits the second murder of his life in order to save himself. This incident ends all possibilities for a return to a normal life. Raghu begins to take part in Kaniya's operations and soon emerges as one of the most dreaded hitmen of Mumbai.

The emergence of the figure of the killer from a homely melodramatic assemblage of jovial innocence takes the form of a drug-alcohol assemblage. This begins when the frightened Raghu has his first shot of alcohol after his second unintentional killing. The cinematic figure of Raghu the killer is thus created through powerful affections of insomnia, intoxication, and a schizophrenic warding off of terror and inner demons. Violence therefore becomes endemic and de-territorializes all notions of the self, corroding all boundaries between the external world and the internal one. The aspect of an unbridled Raghu gradually loses its familial qualities and becomes a staging of the terror and multipronged aggression of the city itself. His figure, as a baroque artifact of urban violence, is perhaps returned most memorably into the erstwhile melodramatic space of survival in the scene in which he comes to visit his parents for the first time since the inception of his new career. This is when he, in a totally inebriated state, lovingly demonstrates to the mother the mechanical intricacies of his gun.

Ironically, it is only after the meek transmogrifies into an energized and volatile participant in the warring processes of the city that the paths of survival -- the possibilities of transforming the refuge into a home -- open up for the familial order. Raghu threatens a

head hunter to get a job for elder brother Vijay, and also clears the path for the latter's wedding by making his girlfriend's status conscious father an offer he could not refuse. Raghu himself falls in love with, impregnates and then marries a prostitute called Sonya. The mother Shanta welcomes her new daughter in law without any moral reservations. But subsequently, apart from Raghu's ill luck, the dreams of finding a home for the mother and a unity of the uterine order are foreclosed by a new impulse of desire. The educated white collar employee Vijay fulfills his long cherished ambitions by leaving the joint family set up and the lower class neighborhood for a nucleated existence with his wife. Unlike his illustrious predecessors like Ramu the new citizen of the young republic in Mother India, the firm and principled cop Ravi in Deewar, the educated model subject in this case abandons the mother.

The signatures of a sanitized middle income urban respectability are gathered around Vijay along with a relentless moral and emotional commentary that invests him with a pathological despicability and selfishness as strong as Raghu's nihilistic death drive or drug abuse. Vijay leaves home even though his wife wants to stay with her in laws. He is seen to be slavishly busy with office work even when his grievously injured father undergoes a crucial operation at the hospital. He refuses to acknowledge or welcome the presence of his brother even though it was the latter that had got him his job and arranged for his marriage. The abode of the new representatives of a nucleated intellectual class is however a perpetually insecure one in a domos in which it has failed to define the political or create and sustain adequate institutions of culture and governance. Vijay's greed for a good life requires that his wife must work (she herself has no say in the matter); however, he is unable to protect her from sexual predators that constantly harass her. The cowardly and impotent man thus once again turns to his criminal brother for help. Raghu is disgusted at his educated brother's failure to protect his own honor by either keeping his wife at home, or by ensuring that her poise of tradition remains safeguarded in public. It is thus once again the felon brother -- who is by now a master controller of brutal forces in the city -- that has to intervene to ensure the maintenance of an urban picture of private conjugal peace. Raghu protects the sanctity of his sister-in-law in the only way he knows, by the summary extermination of her stalkers.

The cinematic assemblage that constitutes the figure of Raghu as rebel contains many expressive qualities. As a staging of the city itself, it is an anarchic jumble of moral statements that no longer connect with social visibilities. Raghu is a compact of altruistic desires and pathological feelings of despication that translate regularly into terminal exercises of a sovereign power distinguished from the state. He is a combination of a street smart instinct and intelligence for survival and a diffused, drug induced perception that increasingly detaches itself from reality. Apart from being tormented by a world marked by a totally evacuated horizon of belief, Raghu, as he says repeatedly, is driven by a visceral hatred for the 'white collar'. This latter aspect, triggered initially by his disgust for his spineless brother, acquires violent and explosive expressions several times in the film. He kills a corrupt police officer and a Parsee gentleman who adamantly refuses to sell his property to a criminal muscle-real estate nexus. These incidents unhinge Raghu from a calibrated economy of money, law, crime and violence that runs the city. As a result, the very criminal-political order that had been sponsoring him so far now removes its support.

Raghu's spectacular rise to notoriety was facilitated by the fact that he, as an unbridled and raw reservoir of warlike energies, had been recruited by a special formation of power. The latter appears in the pro filmic space of Vaastav in the form of Babbanrao Kadam, a thoroughly corrupt minister who wields a tremendous amount of power brokered through a network of diffuse and informal syndicalisms: parliamentary representation, real estate, street muscle, extortion, and hired killings. Kadam is thus an incarnation *par excellence* of what has been earlier expounded as the Lalloo effect. The Kadam-Lalloo personification affects the ultimate melodrama of urban dissolution, by which he is seen to be able to overcode both – the non-directional antagonism of the outlaw Raghu, as well as a bureaucratic-institutional machinery of governance. The resultant form of power is habitually referred to in popular Indian cinema as *rajniti*. Despite being a Sanskritic equivalent of the signifier 'politics', *rajniti*, in this context, acquires a fearsome aspect from the point-of-view of the modern: it pertains to the very sum of all fears that realizes itself when one witnesses an overall, perverse vernacularization of the metropolitan diagram. That is, not when a Sanskritized language of the state aspires to attain a globality of

relevance (as we saw in the case of *Rudraksh*), but when the sociological signatures of *dalitism* as non-being (uncouth manners, the dark, slimy non Aryan body, animalesque sexual appetites, inability to speak English, absence of formal education, a pathological proclivity towards evil and deceit) contaminates the entire body politic of modern democracy. What distinguishes the Lalloo effect as a perverse, sultan-tribalesque ensemble of anti-modern qualities from the complex historico-political phenomenon of Lalloo and caste based politics in contemporary India is that the former is an instance of a linguistic production of common sense. That is, the sublimation of the Lalloo type on screen requires an abstraction of fungible signs mobilized as cliché, parody, and affects of abomination. It also calls for a vanishing of or a controlled ordering of the historical as out of frame. This is precisely why, Kadam, like many other filmic avatars of Lalloo before and after him, dominates a ruinous mise-en-abyme of democratic polity without a visible constituency. He can never acquire the legitimate profile of 'popular' representation because in the absence of a singular, globally constitutive horizon of liberalism, the people themselves are seen to be missing from the teeming herds of Mumbai city.

When a power and narcotics pumped Raghu is recruited by the perfidious machinery of *rajniti* commanded by Kadam, he embarks on the way to a tragic end. Despite the worldly wise warnings of Kishore -- his childhood friend and a cynical, bribe taking average police sub inspector -- Raghu organizes several assassinations and strong arm maneuvers at Kadam's behest. The most crucial among these is the murder of a pacifist Gandhian leader of the Muslim community that leads to widespread communal riots in the city. This grotesque induction of the rebel into a perverse war machine of *rajniti* is of course once again smothered by a melodrama of narcotic de-territorialization. The heroic assemblage here is no longer propelled by impulses of oedipal angst or a masochistic desire for a reunion with the uterine order; it becomes a pure schizophrenic dissimulation of being across the city space<sup>248</sup>. As Raghu tells Kadam, alcohol, drugs, and the high of killing itself become pure agents for switching off the mind, to instrumentalize oneself for a cathartic expurgation

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<sup>248</sup> There is indeed no quarrel with the father here; in one of the most memorable scenes of the film, Namdev, Raghu's unfortunate son embraces his son and cries out – "why did this have to happen son?"

of passions, and foreclose thinking in a world devoid of any originary fountainhead of meaning.

The contract of violence however runs aground at a critical point, when Raghu's boundless *resentiment* overrides the meticulously crafted economy of Kadam's operations. As he has done numerous times before, the latter decides to set Raghu up as scapegoat in order to save his political career. Kadam activates the legal war machine this time, which apprehends and kills the members of Raghu's gang in a series of 'encounters'. The clean up is cynically publicized through the media by Kadam himself. It is at this juncture that Raghu tricks Kadam into a trap and finishes him off. Following that however, the rebel exhausts his energies. The entire city by then has been sealed off, and a massive man hunt is already in place to fish him out and terminate him. Relentlessly on the run, Raghu somehow evades the police and reaches his farmhouse in the outskirts of the city where his entire family is waiting for him. This tremendous journey across a war torn landscape is however neither impelled by a hope for a mythic union with the mother who waits with patience, nor by a primordial instinct to survive (for which means have run out). It is a 'mindless' run, to get away from an urban horizon taken over by fear. This fear emits from neither the formal specter of legal death, nor from the possibility of facing the enemy in warpath; it comes instead from Raghu's realization that in a battle for sovereignty between the state and other criminal forces, he has, for the first time, been absolutely rendered 'bare'.

By the time Raghu reaches his family after a superhuman trek across the countryside, he has already lost his wits. The mother escorts a hallucinating and rambling Raghu to the garden, where he gives her his money, his possessions, including his gun and begs her to sell them and procure some drugs to help him switch his mind off. The long suffering mother Sumitra realizes that her son, who had long ago been claimed by legal and ethical deaths, has crossed another threshold of life. From henceforth, his body as well as soul can neither be motivated by the nourishment of love, nor by the pedagogy and punishment of the state or the community. They can only be tormented by fear and insomnia, or mobilized through the volatile and grotesque *jouissance* of narcotics. The mother understands that the only form of life her son is capable of at the moment does not permit a re-entry to the uterine order

after rites of atonement presided over by the benevolent state, but instead relates to a pure venomous pathology of total forgetting. This is precisely why he surrenders his gun to his mother and begs her to get drugs for him. A being-eclipsing contact with 'vaastav' or reality has foreclosed, once and for all, the myth of the mother, and has instead created an acute state of abjection in which the only way to survive or find a home is to be in a perpetual state of hallucination. It is at this profound moment that the mother remembers the prophetic lesson imparted to her by her son about shooting guns. In an act of profound mercy which only mothers are capable of, she uncocks the gun and shoots her son to deliver him from the fearful hunt of the city.

## APPENDIX

### A Critique of Cinematic Reason: Indian Cinema and Classical Theories of Film

#### Invocation

Noël Burch has noted that it was the elimination of the flicker in 1909 by the double action shutter that created the possibility for a properly realist art of film through the shedding of non-naturalist theatrical moorings like melodrama, Vaudeville, or the Grand Guignot. This was what allowed the apparatus to be recruited into a larger project of bourgeois aesthetics (Noël Burch, “Primitivism and the *Avant-Gardes*” 485-86). One can also recall that André Bazin spoke of there being not just one, but many realisms, with every age having its own. He was thus not talking about a simple transparency of the filmic apparatus, but an ontology of realism that would provide not merely an idealistic-Platonic copy of the world, but a “finger print of reality”, much like the holy shroud<sup>249</sup>. It is in this ontological-existential grain that Bazin proposes that the realist work is one in which the cinematic apparatus works to efface its own presence as machine of inscription, offering a transparent metalanguage that facilitates a full and punctual presentation of reality as material for meaning production. Colin MacCabe points out in his seminal critique of the classic realist text that in such cases realism as art is seen to strive to achieve a state of “perfect luminosity” that would permit it to “unmask a nature which finally resembles it.”<sup>250</sup> The

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<sup>249</sup> Cited in Casetti, Theories of Cinema 1945-1995, 31-32.

<sup>250</sup> See Andre Bazin, “Bicycle Thief” in What is Cinema?, Volume II, essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray, foreword by François Truffaut (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 47-60. See also Colin MacCabe’s discussion of Bazin in “Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure” in Narrative, Apparatus and Ideology: A Film Theory Reader, Philip Rosen ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 182. MacCabe elaborates this thesis in Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature (Manchester:

task of making meaning to that end is assigned to the author-reader as sovereign citizen (a virtual freedom, not a real one as Bazin is careful to point out), who is contractually recruited on the ethical grounds of liberal democracy. Bazin's overall understanding of the historical role of realism can indeed be understood as a radical aesthetic proposition suited to the political urgencies of a postwar era. Seen in this light, the coda of Italian neo-realism, articulated for instance by Caesar Zavattini as a revolutionary styling of the cinematic medium in which "the space between life and spectacle must disappear" and the effort should be "not to invent a story that looks like reality, but to present reality as if it were a story"<sup>251</sup>, would justifiably be one of the many realisms that would be epochal, but not universal. It would acquire a specific historicity that would place it as part of a general Italian revivalism of Giovanni Verga's 19<sup>th</sup> century literary movement of *Verismo* in multiple avenues of culture. On the other hand, at times Bazin's statements can be seen to veer close to postulating an evolutionary ontology of subjective perception under the rubric of a democracy of viewership.

Unlike Bazin, Sigfried Kracauer speaks of an emblematic realist innateness of cinema that concurs with Prasad's assertion about a long standing presumption in western film theory that pre-orientes the medium to realist representation (Ideology of the Hindi Film, 1-2). According to Kracauer, "It may be assumed that the achievements within a particular medium are all the more satisfying aesthetically if they build from the specific properties of the medium" (Theory of Film 12-13). In the case of cinema, since specific qualities of the medium aim toward the reproduction of reality, the photographer "in an aesthetic interest, must follow the realist tendency under all circumstances" (Theory of Film 13). Formal innovations therefore must, in the last instance, submit to the photographic base. Between Bazin and Kracauer, one can propose two abstract diagrams of western thinking about

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Manchester University Press, 1992): 34-35. According to him, the cultural ascendancy accorded to the 'classic realist text' in a post-enlightenment Europe is "defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth." In the context of the literary realist text, the "narrative prose (is seen to function) as a metalanguage that can state all the truths in the object language...and can also explain the relation of this object language to the real".

<sup>251</sup> Cited in Francesco Casetti, Theories of Cinema, 25.



realism that always undeniably enter into intricate and complex relations of exchange and opposition with each other: 1. A Continental Tradition predicated on an idealist metaphysics of the subject and Being, and its critical offshoots, like the Lacanian-Althusserian interrogations of the bases of language, ideology, and psychic locations in the dominant film theories of the sixties and seventies. While the former can be said to have tried to configure cinema on the lines of a Kantian transcendental unity of apperception, the latter investigated the fault lines of that very interiorized human subjectivity, and its constant efforts to assuage the forbidding plenitude of its (cinematic) imaginary by a relentless submission to the symbolic through processes of narration, enframing, and identification. 2. An Anglo-American Empirico-Pragmatic Tradition that sought to understand the unfolding of meaning in cinema in terms of social institutions of normalized subjective exchanges – a constituted and functional parabasis of mass cognition – rather than the models of schizophrenic or ideological viewership investigated by psychoanalysis. In other words, the effort in this tradition was largely to investigate that very process of efficient signification and commonsense (in classical Hollywood cinema for instance), that assumed a pragmatic causality to be the prime unifying principle and the already there presence of a habituated (habituating) spectator. The works of David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Noel Carroll would be especially worth mentioning in this terrain.

Within the parameters of this project, it is not possible to enter into a detailed elaboration, a critical opening out of these two predominant modes of thinking about realism. Rather, one can pause and reflect on some key foundational concerns in western film theory and philosophical traditions that will be pertinent to a discussion on Indian cinema.

### **A. Towards a Philosophy of Film: Phenomenology of the Subject**

As briefly mentioned earlier, from the viewpoint of a constitutive phenomenology of the historical subject of reason --perhaps most memorably enfigured in the German idealistic metaphysical traditions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – the realist film camera should be an instrument that presents the world in an unforgiving and stark fashion, without the coloring of mythical or romantic projections. Precisely because it was capable of ‘reproducing’ matter

as hard objects of a scientific gaze, cinema was thought to have a necessary imperative of rendering the world discursive with a weak messianic power. The filmic camera was thereby seen to be irresistibly informed by a disenchanted historical consciousness and hence had to task itself to the navigation of a godless landscape devoid of any mythic pregnancies of meaning. As a conceptual shorthand, this filmic apparatus called a perceptual-cognitive one of Cartesian humanism. It is that which had to open out to the universe in a perfect state of ‘doubt’ and had to maintain, in the course of its explorations, a contiguity of time and space, and a plausible, editorial correspondence between the frame and the out of field. Narration, in a phenomenological sense, had to operate in two registers – first, to present the given in its ‘immediacy’ and second, to dialectically subsume that immediacy into a consciousness of reality at a higher, meta-linguistic level of meaning<sup>252</sup>. It involved a regulated and rational grasping of the world, in a self conscious journey (in which the machinic camera eye punctually matched the perception of the subjective human ‘I’) from *verisimilitude* to *veritas*, or from a sensuality of the real to an edifying knowledge of reality<sup>253</sup>. Jean-Lois Baudry bases his psychoanalytic understanding of cinema on this subjective diagram, wherefore the image becomes a phenomenological reduction in the Husserlian sense, and the process of the cinematic becomes one in which the multiple ‘cogitatoness’ offered by the world are enframed, recorded on film, and embraced, in an organized perceptual field, into the folds of an identical *self* (“Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus” 292-93). In Baudry’s understanding, it is from this anchoring in the subject that the multiple, dynamic, flooding sign assemblages of cinema can be harnessed into the

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<sup>252</sup> Georg Lukács for instance devotes an entire chapter of Aesthetics (1963) to cinema. Cinema, for him, is a double mirror of reality. First it reproduces reality in its immediacy, then it dialectically shifts that immediacy to a higher level of synthesis. On this, see Casetti, Theories of Cinema, 39-40.

<sup>253</sup> Of course, apart from obvious figures like Bazin and Kracauer, the figure of Lukács looms large in this background. Our determinate abstraction of the problem of realism however has to acknowledge that historically, this liberal-democratic humanistic impulse was always challenged by counter-postulates, like the revolutionary experimentalism of Brecht, Eisenstein’s dialectical montage, and Dziga Vertov’s conception of cinema as a machinic eye that attached itself only to the perspective of the proletariat.

confines of the Platonic cave or into the Lacanian unconscious that is structured like a language.

The immediate problem that one could have with this phenomenological system of course pertains to the potential imperialisms of two grand postulates that could engulf a whole world of expressive powers into a universal edifice. That of the Oedipal subject, and of the Signifier, as defined by an anthropological linguistics of that subject's being in the world. The former would thus induct manifold drives, desires, and pleasures into the scope of its triangulated psychodrama, while the latter provide an unassailable yardstick for evaluating a historicity of enunciation. Hence, the question: in honoring cultural differences and according legitimate 'alternative' status to non-European forms of life, that is, in opening out the modern, but at the same time searching for a basic unity of subject, the law, and law in all situations, how can one prevent oneself from embarking on a great journey back to Kant? This question is of course not easy to answer, for modernity, as a figure of thought and a compendium of values is something that cannot be, or should not be wished away. However, what one can certainly question is its status as a supreme ontological power that must necessarily manifest itself for a proper homesteading of culture and its subjectivities.

Dudley Andrew has called for a critical return to the phenomenological moorings of film theory, but perhaps without the already there subject of identification and the hermeneutic codes and interpretive schemas generated around it. After pointing out that the structuralist and psychoanalytic film debates of the sixties and seventies gathered momentum in a special intellectual environ of the Sartre – Lévi-Strauss debate, Merleau-Ponty's move towards a theory of language, and Jacques Lacan's towards a linguistics based psychoanalysis, Andrew suggests that critical attention should be turned to that preformulatory perceptual realm where sensory data is ordered "into something that matters" ("The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory" 627) and also to the zone of post-formulation "in which the psyche must come to terms with a surplus value unaccounted for by recourse to a science of signification." The call is thus to develop an edifying stance towards "life itself [that] tells us that experience is dearer and more trustworthy than schemes by which we seek to know and change it" ("Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology" 631). The

‘subject’ thus undergoes a process of ascetic privation, stripping itself of complacent modes of understanding. For Andrew, it is in this clearing of thought that the subject can reunite with fragmented and dispersed interpretive groups of the ‘us’, that is, when ‘we’ leave our armaments of theory and come and stand together in what has to be a location of the subject at ground level of experience. What requires closer attention, according to him, are the initial modes of appending the object of knowledge, a perpetually alive questioning of its methods and ‘field’ theories, and a retroactive acknowledgement of that which slips away. The phenomenology of a ground level of experience can thus be a pre-conceptual *fonde*, a safe house for forces akin to the Kantian *a-priories*, as well as a realm in which an analytic of experience can be perpetually questioned in retrospect, when the film is over and read with. The remarkable nature of this site however lies in the fact that it affords an intuitive flow that is never subsumed into an analytic of reasonable understanding; even as the latter completes its mappings of the world, the former is already registering that which has slipped away. The community of the ‘we’ is thus a figure that can exist only before the act of interpretation and immediately after it. It is a restorative, but unhappy home that vanishes in the historical agon that lies in between. This much chastened idea of the universal is thus held at a limbo once the film is switched on and the wars of understandings begin.

The modalities of pre-formulation and retrospective stockpiling of surplus residues therefore, while justifiably pointing out the limits of sciences of signification, do not really deliver us from a constituting/constitutive horizon of the experiential subject and its dualistic relationships with the world. In Andrew’s argument, it is the mind that remains the lamp of nature; it is an autonomous entity that has a ground of its own, from which it volunteers to educate itself in the world and *become* a subject or democratic citizen. The mind is thus perpetually morphing, but always, in the last instance, seen to be a creation of its own intentionalities. Vivian Sobchack on the other hand has usefully de-territorialized the phenomenological apparatus of cinema by calling it an “experience of experience by experience” (“Phenomenology and the Film Experience” 38). Working primarily from a vantage point afforded by the late Merleau-Ponty, she speaks about a sensuality of cinema that gives rise to the possibility of a reversal of perception and expression. A monotheism of the subjective apparatus thus gives way to a corrosive immanence of language as chiasmus,

a plenary, sensual, and babbling erotics of exchange, without any priestly separation between human and machinic perceptions. Cinema uses modes of embodied existence – seeing, hearing, physical and reflective movement -- as intersubjective scopes of experience, the very ‘stuff’ of language. Sobchack thus forwards a notion of semiotic phenomenology that steers clear of semiological edifices of Being, and replaces the ‘I’ of the classic cinematic apparatus with the “‘We’ of the thickness of the human experience”. This semiotic phenomenology, she argues, in “reflect[ing] the universality of specific scopes of experience” allows us to escape the typologies of dominant film theories that conceptualize the screen as the mirror, the frame, or the window (“Phenomenology and the Film Experience” 41-42). In other words, viewing cinema as a network of experiences enables one to avoid the modular traps of identification or ideological-tautological systems (for psychoanalysts, Marxists, and feminists), subjective psychologism or seeing the object as expression in itself (as in formalists) and objective empiricism, or a notion of objectivity free from human prejudices (as in realists) (“Phenomenology and the Film Experience” 47-48).

Despite a tasteful invitation to study cinema in terms of pure relationalities, without a comforting, ontological Big Bang of Being, or its attendant, ‘administrative’ hermeneutics, Sobchack’s formulation remains in the realm of reflection and mediation theory. She takes recourse to a Rousseauistic notion of natural language as a primordial one of embodied experience, to propose, in that grain, a *universality* of specific scopes of experience. Hence, it is the crucial question of cinema as language (which experience cannot instrumentalize, rather experience itself inheres in it) and of power that disappears from the picture. The intersubjective body or mass can thus be conceptualized as an *anthropomorphic* compact between the cinema machine and a congregation of experiencing and communicating humans. That is, a constitutive ‘we’ that is created by an intersubjective amplification of both – the cinema machine and the Cartesian individual. The plane of experience thus creates a utopian clearing for a cinema of humanism, albeit beyond the individual. Despite being absolved of a classical model, this cinema’s flow of meaning is thus never that of an ‘inhuman’ machinic intelligence, subject to socialized productions of affinities and tastes, administered populations, demographic distributions of images and informations, or general mass technologies of power and language. Cinema is remains a production in which

volunteering humanoid consciousnesses -- as anthropos or anthropomorphic machines that are willing agents of history -- wield the Archimedean lever.

Where then does that leave the subject? Perhaps one can, in line with a general questioning of the autonomous subject in French thought after Althusser, suggest that it is both the mind as well as the so called subjective camera that are *subjected* through configurations of social powers pertaining to language, production, class, affections and ideas. In terms of social and epistemological relations that can be called cinematic, the subjective cinema and the viewer subject are produced by specific circuits of power and knowledge that bring together visibilities and articulable statements. The mind thus is not the subject; it is subjected by a host of powers, the body itself being one of them. In his study of Hume's philosophy, Gilles Deleuze draws up the mind as a terminal of passionate and social affections, understandings (a process of socialization of passions), and ideas. It is thus a play without a stage, devoid of a primordial, basic nature (Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 21-22). Cinema, it can thus be suggested, becomes meaningful through multiple assemblages of human and non-human *intelligence* in the world, individual and group projects of memory and understanding, ethnologies of training, mythic structures, institutions of belief and faith, differences of class, caste, race and gender, or technological memories, speeds, and creativities. It is this meshwork of forces that constitutes the cinema machine. This is precisely why, in Deleuze's conception, cinema, or the medium as such, is not a reflective index of the world; rather it is, along with the human brain and its manifold phantasmic visualizations, part of an entire universe of images as matter – a 'subjectively' outrageous *metacinema*<sup>254</sup>. This unbound notion of virtuality however is not a case of what may be called a subjective idealism in the old philosophical sense; instead it is to understand the cinematic in a wider scope, as a diagram of power that produces both, given configurations of the subject, as well as the 'objective' world such a subject sets to conquer under different flags of truth. The objective of such a form of thinking is therefore not to announce a regretful

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<sup>254</sup> This is the Bergsonian impulse Deleuze develops in *Cinema 1*, in relation to what he calls the 'plane of immanence': "the plane is not distinct from [the] presentation of planes. This is not a mechanism, it is machinism. The material universe, the plane of immanence, is the *machinic assemblage of movement-images*. Here Bergson is startlingly ahead of his time: it is the universe as cinema in itself, a metacinema (59).

demise of any conscientious commitment to ‘reality’, declare that everything is illusory and retire to a safe ground of the spoilt aesthete or the cynical relativist. Rather, to think in terms of matter as image (as that which is not cognitively *given* by the assured presence of a transcendental subjectivity, but is always, already inflected by ideas and relations of power) and the materiality of the image (as an intellectual force in the world that gives birth to realities rather than reflecting them) allows one to understand why experience in itself does not emanate from an interaction between something and a primal ground of subjectivity, but is in itself an image, a material force. The virtual is thus real.

Unlike the apocryphal human who makes history exactly the way he likes it, the subject in that sense would not be the autonomous figure who instrumentalizes language out of his own volition; rather, he would be an entity that inheres historically in language. That is precisely why one can understand subjectivities to be discursive formations in themselves. They are ephemeral ‘positionalities’ that do not draw from either the commanding heights of a transcendental unity of apperception, nor from the depths of a primordial psyche; but as Foucault says, they are instances of intelligence within a “deep anonymous murmur”<sup>255</sup> that characterizes an epoch. Hence neither the camera, nor the viewer are in any ways subjects at a ground level; rather, they are always *subjected* by chaosmic flows of meaning and in the process, cut across, at every instant, by fluctuating diagrams of subjectivity. That is, never an imperial ‘I’, but a multitude of them.

This diagram of non-subjective perception, inhuman glimmers of images and words that form complex networks of intelligence, can be brought into critical proximity with some Indian strands of realist thinking. In the early *Samkhya* dualism, the classical *Yoga*, the *Nyaya Vaisesika* and the Buddhist schools, that of the *Madhyamika* (the Middle Path) tradition in particular, one encounters the question of phenomena and truth. In the *Samkhya*, *Purusa* (a cosmic Consciousness) is distinguished from *Prakriti* (primal matter). However, *Budhdhi* (intellect) and *Manas* (mental organ) are also subtle forms of matter, not

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<sup>255</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, 7. Foucault’s thinking here draws from the work of Maurice Blanchot.

consciousness in of itself. The *Purusa*, as the cosmic consciousness of Being or *Brahman*, is only a *witness consciousness* (*Saksin*) which has a relation of indeterminable *interest* in the real world, without being its historical agent, as in Hegel. Mind is merely an evolute of *Prakriti*. The immaterial activity of *Purusa*, or the Being as One, is thus to be distinguished from the processes of the mind, which are thoroughly material in nature<sup>256</sup>.

In his stimulating discussion of the major Vedic and Buddhist schools, it is in relation to *Samkhya* that Richard King invokes the notion of cinema. *Samkhya*, according to King, proposes an image theory of perception, whereby what we perceive are mental modifications (*Vritti*), or images made of subtle matter (Indian Philosophy 187). Many Vedic schools in fact proposed the mind as a sixth sense organ, avoiding the Cartesian duality with the body altogether. The mind therefore cannot be related to cinema hierarchically, in terms of a subjective essence that the latter ‘objectively’ approximates or reflects. Both, according to *Samkhya*, are filaments of interacting matter. They are merely diverse moments in an overall cosmology of interactive intelligence images and matter images. A cinema thus becomes an illusion in a world of illusions, with the abiding truth residing only in the Brahman. It is this cosmological imagination that Krishna invokes in the Bhagwad Gita when he says “Invisible before birth are all beings and after death invisible again. They are seen between two unseens” (Chapter 2, verse 28)<sup>257</sup>. Unlike a profane cinema of humanism, in the world conjured up by the Vasudeva, the power of divination does not lie in the individual subject’s secular maneuverings and mappings in the world; it resides with a God whose “power of wonder moves all things – puppets in a *play of shadows* – whirling them onwards on the stream of time” (Chapter 18, verse 61)<sup>258</sup>. Seen in this light, the so called world renouncing postulates<sup>259</sup> of the Vedic schools – *Kaivalya* in

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<sup>256</sup> See King, Indian Philosophy, 38-67 and 186-87, Mohanty, Classical Indian Philosophy, 11-38, and Hiriyana, Essentials of Indian Philosophy, 57-128.

<sup>257</sup> Bhagwad Gita 12.

<sup>258</sup> Bhagwad Gita 85.

<sup>259</sup> One of the most famous judgments in this regard would of course be Hegel’s: “in the Indian doctrine of the renunciation of sensuality, desires, and all earthly interests, positive ethical freedom is not the goal and the end, but rather the extinction of consciousness and the suspension of spiritual and even physical life.” (Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, 145).



*Samkhya*, *Nirvikapla Samadhi* (the isolation of pure consciousness by an abjuration of categorical thinking) in the classical *Yoga* school, or *Yogi Pratyaksha* in certain strands of Buddhism – may be interpreted as potential moves away from the world of phenomena and categories, towards what Foucault would call the “thought of the outside.” A renunciation of the world, the final submission to Brahman would therefore mean the end of cinema itself. But till that happens, there can be no way of differentiating cinema with an ‘out there’ reality in terms of subjective and objective poles.

King points out that the universal oneness proposed by early Buddhism (largely the *Abhidharma* school) is misleading because it is always, already reduced to a complex mesh of *dharma*s or physical properties. In this phenomenology of the non-subject, *citta samtana* is the river of consciousness that arises because the properties of the mind interact with properties of the world. All instances are momentary comings into being of a perpetual eventfulness (*ksanabad*). Group or individual memories and communal conventions arise due to regularities and intersections of *karmic bijas* (seeds of actions and events) planted into consciousnesses not just from the present life’s works, but also from imprints from past lives. In other words, there is no abiding intuitive, innate substratum of the self; in a cosmic stream of cinema beyond cinema, primordial receptions or conventional interpretation of momentary images merely point to a continuum of worldly intelligence uninterrupted by the subject’s birth, education, posturings as historical agent, or his death. That is, a cinema beyond the individual psychobiography. There are thus no *a-priori* categories in *citta samtana* as in the Kantian notion of perception. All categories are traces of mental and physical *dharmic* events from previous births. The personal self (*Pugalatman*) is merely a second order entity arising from a convergence of the five *skandhas* – *rupa* (form), *vedana* (sensation), *samjna* (cognition), *samskara* (disposition), and *vijnana* (consciousness)<sup>260</sup>.

The *Madhyamika* school or the ‘Middle Path’ of Buddhism, under the intellectual leadership of Nagarjuna, increased the de-ontologizing thrust of this mode of thinking, by denying the substantive presence of even the *dharma*s or properties. They propounded a theory of

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<sup>260</sup> See King, *Indian Philosophy*, 38-88.

*Sunnyata* or emptiness as a realization of an interdependent origination of all images. *Sunnyata* however, is not a substantive quality or an underlying reality, it is the pure force of difference that allays all transcendental bases of thought, leaving the world as a network of visibilities and statements, without a *parabhava* or absolute cause. The Vedantic Being as One was thus radically dismantled by the *Madhyamika* as a *positively* absent (non) being as multiple<sup>261</sup>.

The notion of *Positive Ignorance* or *Avidya* in the school of Nagarjuna is something that can be cast, as a de-territorializing force against the postulate of Totality in European humanistic metaphysics, particularly since Hegel. Perception, in the order of *Avidya* is always non-synthetic; knowledge is a destructive poetics in which error is inevitable; it can only avoid the *mistake* of positing an absolute Being or an abiding truth. In relation to Vedic scriptural traditions, the chief subversive force of Nagarjuna lay in foreclosing a substantive difference between the states of *Samskara* (the habitual world) and that of *Nirvana* (enlightenment). In the enlightened mind, everything is redeemed or affirmed in the common realm of emptiness. Hence, his was not a philosophy of nihilism; he did not negate the usefulness of practical affairs or the importance of *works* as political and historical engagements with the world. Rather, in emptying out both the habitual and the state of enlightenment into a vortex of *sunyata*, he de-substantiated Being, and therefore foreclosed the figure of the Priest or Brahmin as arch mediator in the great journey towards *Brahman*. Hence, if the imagistic universe is cinematic, there is nothing outside the text. Language, as a conceptual approximation and destruction *within* that universe, can, through a perpetual movement of difference as *sunnyata*, point to a non-numerical and non-euclidean outside that is not a positive incarnation of Brahman as Supreme Being or singular truth as in the Vedic schools.

It is not within the means of this dissertation to undertake a travel across the other rich avenues of thought in the Indic tradition, particularly the other materialist schools like the *Carvaka*, the *Nyaya Vaisesika*, the non-dualistic ones like the *Advaita Vedanta* and the later

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<sup>261</sup> See King, 99-139.

Islamicate traditions of thought. The purpose of this rather short, violent and unready excursion was to introduce a note of distemper, in the form of a constellation of thought that can proceed without recourse to a phenomenology of the subject. The objective was also not to pose a self contained 'Indian' self that has to be considered in relations of pure *difference* with a critical phenomenological machinery of the west. Rather the diagram of non-subjective realism that elaborated can be considered to be an instance of *multiple* globalities of thought that merges with and recedes from other such sets. In the terrain of Indian popular cinema, such disparate postulates of 'looking' are indeterminately present with dioptric visual models of the west. The classical apparatus of realist narration works in conjunction with other metaphysical and realist modes of visualizing.

So can it be said that the idea of a subjective plane of experience has no bearing in relation to Indian cinema? That is should one simply declare that popular films in this context are primarily marked by a 'traditional', hierarchical mode of address, in which the viewer as acolyte receives an otherworldly wisdom from the god, the king, and the star and hence has nothing to do with either the authorial/expert/artistic mode of subjective enunciation or an idealistic ideogram of democratic exchanges of subjective experience? Must a critical invocation of the early *Samkhya* or the *Madhyamika* as 'traditional' 'pre-subjective' world-views necessarily disqualify Indian cinema from entering the ambit of the modern? Far from it, such an investigation has to take into account the very discursive grounds of a modernist invention of 'tradition' in India – the very epistemological parabasis that allows the inscrutable (as in *Samkhya*) or the positively non-existent (as in *Madhyamika*) *Brahman* to become meaningfully available in the anthropomorphic dictates of the God, the King, or the Star. In other words, precisely that discursive condition which 'subjects' cinema to a constitution of Brahminical statehood. Before we ask how cinema in the Indian context has 'evolved' in a modern sense of becoming, and has acquired a dominant Brahminical sense of devotion towards the nation-state, we therefore have to ask a more disturbing question: how exactly did cinema become theistic in the first place? The early *Samkhya* or the *Madhyamika*, as immanent modes of earthly intelligence that do not extend to a positive knowledge of *Brahman* that is there or not there are thus not postulates of 'tradition', just as a Deleuzian counter-phenomenology of cinema is not.

## B: Towards a Semiotic Understanding of Cinema

As he himself states very clearly, Christian Metz's epochal study of film, stretching across two decades, was undertaken with the presumption that the "topological apparatus of the cinema resembles the conceptual apparatus of phenomenology, with the result that the latter can cast light on the former" ("The Imaginary Signifier" 55). The problem just stated in relation to a phenomenology that has the figure of the European human subject at its epicenter thus becomes pertinent to the very processes of cinematic signification that Metz investigated in his remarkable oeuvre. What should be of immediate interest here is that Metz, by the logic of his own arguments, cannot accord this phenomenological system a universal *perceptual basis for all cinemas of the world*. His linguistic and psychoanalytic meditations about filmic language are always informed by self imposed epistemological and historical limits. The grammarization of cinema (as a social production that is always ongoing) by that token, can proceed only through a 'slight' ethnology of training, which, for its overwhelmingly West European orientation, precludes the child adults of societies without cinema, as in Africa<sup>262</sup>. Metz states that semiology in film (which produces the secondary meaning in cinema while psychoanalysis produces the primary) must be informed by other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, history, political economy etc., which produce the 'social fact' itself. The linguistic status of the image is already dependent on a socio-cultural iconology<sup>263</sup>. As a result, cinematic semiology for Metz can be only an *epistemological anticipation*, not a universal framework of plausibility. His formulations, by his own critical observation, come out of a particular context of European embourgeoisment. The understanding of classical narrative cinema that Metz offers later in his career, as a relentless textual move to domesticate and telescope a plenitude of desires of the imaginary into the symbolic, proposes the latter as a *juxstructure*, rather than a superstructure or infrastructure.

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<sup>262</sup> See Metz, "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film," 53. Much like European children before the age of twelve, "At first contact [with cinema], they [adults of 'black Africa'] do not understand the complex films of our societies, but later they are able to grasp them quite rapidly."

<sup>263</sup> See "Imaginary Signifier".

One can return to the question Metz began with in a now legendary article first published in the 4<sup>th</sup> issue of *Communications* titled “Cinema: Langue ou Langage” -- Can cinema have a semiology?<sup>264</sup> Metz concluded that while the medium did not have an intrinsic semiology, it could be imparted with one, but only if it is approached from the point of view of science. The call for a linguistic study of cinema was thus made in an intellectual environ in which the issue of cinema semiotics was taken up at great length, especially in Italy during the sixties, around two major international conferences on the language of film, held in Pesaro during the Mostra del Nuovo Cinema in 1966 and 1967. Apart from the works of Gianfranco Bettini, Pier Paolo Passolini, and Umberto Eco in Italy, the early articulations by continental intellectuals like Georges Bluestone, Marcel Martin, Roland Barthes, Jean Mitry, Julia Kristeva, and Peter Wollen, can be said to have converged on some basic questions: can cinema have a language system or only a rhetorical momentum? If there can be no dictionary of images (as Passolini pointed out), is there a possibility of forging a general semiology of film as part of the production of modern social life itself? The trial, as Mitry’s encyclopedic project was to put it, was to discover a proper subjective dynamic for an aesthetic unfolding of film, by which the flow of images could be organized in a logical dialectical mold capable of “conceiving, judging, reasoning, ordering according to relationships of analogy, consequence, or causality.”<sup>265</sup>

The initial problem, as Metz identifies it, pertained to the fact that film does not have a process of double articulation, as in verbal languages. That is, no phoneme or seme in the senses proposed by Julien Greimas, but only ‘blocks of reality’ as shots (Metz, “Problems of Denotation” 39-40). Moreover, the shot/sequence pair too cannot be corresponded to the word/sentence pair as basic units of enunciation. Hence, as Passolini points out, grammar and rhetoric cannot be separated in cinema: connotation always flows into denotation in the

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<sup>264</sup> See Christian Metz, “The Cinema: Language or Language System?” in Christian Metz, Film Language: Semiotics of Cinema (New York: Oxford, 1974) 39-41.

<sup>265</sup> Cited in Casetti, Theories of Cinema, 69.

illustrative screening of images<sup>266</sup>. Perceptual similarity always retains divergent traces of analogy because it is only overcoded but never exhausted by the symbolic. Unlike verbal languages, whose signifieds have nothing in common with what they are meant to communicate, cinema incessantly leaves an infra-filmic residue. It is from this parabasis that Metz develops his notion of the syntagmata as a basic functional unit of signification in film<sup>267</sup>. The cinematic corpus of meaning is thus located between a minimal segment of sequentially moving images, below which film dissipates into fragments of reality (with no *filmic* aesthetics or meaning of their own), and the maximum syntagma of the film as a whole. The wholeness of the film thus becomes a projected totality; it is within this auspice that *narration, as a primary act of ethical instantiation, and donation of meaning and aesthetic value* take place. The flooding of moving signs into the mise-en-scène, the enframings of the world, and the intervention of an editorial intelligence to make that world discursive are many diegetic elements that garner their historical and social registers of signification only in terms of the distant but overarching signified of the film as a whole. The consequences of elevating this European cinema machine to an imperial-global status (something which Metz assiduously avoids), is of course easy to discern. The process of ‘world’ cinema would in that case -- despite its occasional ceremonial overtures, ritualistic spaces of empty stillness (as in Ozu for instance) or spectacular pageantry (as in the popular Hindi film song and dance sequences) -- find a global relevance only in terms of already instituted social semiologies of the modern. That is, through a panoptic gaze of narration that governs and retroactively projects -- into a totalized horizon of meaning -- the errant and agonistic cascade of ‘*other*’ signs through a singular prism of subjective perception and linearization of immediate memory.

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<sup>266</sup> See Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empericism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). Metz discusses Pasolini’s concept *im-segno* in “Problems of Denotation in Fiction Film”, 39. *Im-segno* refers to an increment that a culturally trained viewer can identify over and above the literal discerning of the ‘object’. According to Metz, the *im-segno* is located “at the very center of the perceptual analogy between the object and its image”.

<sup>267</sup> See “Problems of Denotation” 55.

In this diagram of segmented narration narratology and signification proceed hand in hand, beginning from what Metz, citing Claude Brémont, calls *couche signifiante* – a layer of signification that is already there before the import of narrative props<sup>268</sup>. Following that, the narrated event, as a signified in the semiotics of narrative vehicles, becomes a signifier in the semiotics of narrativity. What all this adds up to is however not the deictic ‘I’, as in verbal enunciation; it is an “individual seeing agency which puts forward the story and shows it to us” (Metz, “Story/Discourse” 548). Metz’s figuration of an omniscient, anthropomorphic yet godly donator of meaning thus comes close to what Albert Laffay, in his understanding of filmic narratology, calls the *Grand Imagier* of cinema – an abstract master of ceremonies who is not to be confused with either the director or an implied enunciating author<sup>269</sup>. Nevertheless, this entity is accorded a unique status in what is primarily a humanistic conception of a cinema that is capable of ‘speaking’ to us about itself. It does so by clearly dictating the relation of its signifying patterns to the concrete signifying situation, and also by setting up an almost infallible bridge of human communication between the act of narration, and the listener/viewer it presumes.

As Metz himself states repeatedly, this structure of signification is always susceptible to leakages of meaning, or excesses as it were. Diagenesis is therefore a perpetual agon of the modern; it is an always renewed effort to lock a fecund flow of semiotic energies in the temporal order, and a multiplicity of perceptions in an enframed spatial order. It is an incessant, dynamic process of telescoping and focalizing what Barthes would call distracted or ‘skidding’ perception, or the Russian formalists would define as the ‘semi comprehensive’. This is precisely why Stephen Heath earmarks the *Detective film* as the normative prototype for the unfolding of the classical narrative film. According to him, “Narrative is not essential to cinema, but historically the latter is developed and exploited as a narrative form: *against* dispersion, *for* representation, where representation is less immediately a matter of ‘what is represented’ than of positioning; narrative in cinema is first and foremost the organization of a point-of-view through the image flow, the laying out of

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<sup>268</sup> See “Problems of Denotation” 59. This of course is akin to what Julia Kristeva, speaking in more psychoanalytic terms, calls ‘primal lectonic traces’ (“Ellipsis on Dread and the Specular Seduction” 237).

<sup>269</sup> Cited in Casetti, *Theories of Cinema* 67-68.

intelligibility, the conversion of seen into scene as the direction of the viewing subject” (Stephen Heath, “*Jaws*, Ideology, and Film Theory” 513).

It is on this subjective parabasis of idealist signification that a process of chronological, key signification developed as a classical form in Hollywood. In this form of cinema, perhaps more successfully than many others, the ontology of human comprehension met with a capitalist-industrial system of film. That is, a diagram of punctual cause and effect seriality of images intersected with what Lyotard has called a ledger book of film, in which screen time, inevitably, and irrevocably, was money (“Acinema” 350). A semiological process of subjective understanding and pleasure punctually coincided with a circulating logic of capital. Which is why, filming here becomes what Lyotard calls a process of ‘semiotic elimination’, a libidinal normalization of a plentiful erotics of signs. (“Acinema” 350). The notion of ‘excess’ in such an industrial format thus becomes redundant in terms of a social institution of cinema and its mass aesthetics. Excess is parcelized into a different language game of academic interpretation (and the volume of textual analyses it produced in seventies’ film theory, in the wake of linguistics and psychoanalysis). As Kristen Thompson puts it, “the only way excess can fail to affect meaning is if the viewer does not notice it; this is a matter of *training* and *background*.” What matters, in her empirico-pragmatic study of the classical system, is the existence of a General Semiology as part of an overall social relations of cinema. That is, a genius of the system, its narrative formats, as well as a trained audience (Kristin Thompson, “The Concept of Cinematic Excess” 132).

When this model of semiological-narratological plausibility is brought into critical proximity with popular Indian cinematic forms, the evaluating schema that announces a ‘not yet ness’ of the latter becomes a little clear. The dispersive song sequences, a weak, often symbolic mise-en-scène (a police station can be represented anywhere with a few typological, almost Brechtian props – a desk, a map of India, a few men in uniform, and a couple of portraits of Gandhi and Nehru), and non-obligatory digressions from the narrative in the form of comic or affective inserts (the *Holiday on Ice* sequence in Kalidas’ Half Ticket (1960)), and a frequent disregard for continuity in editing and camerawork would be some of the many attributes of these films that would invite such a designation. Also among these would be an



epic orientation of memory and movement that allows frequently for a groundless transformation of bodies, and an often miraculous motorization of things that flout a cause-effect economy of secular narration. The miracle of course is an event of disruption in the phenomenological schema of Hegel; it takes place when the immediacy of perception does not proceed through the faculties and is not safely ensconced in understanding and then reason. The problem becomes immediately apparent when one tries to critically gauge these formal devices in terms of a unified landscape of realist narration, as that which functions as the supreme meta-language for cinema in the international arena, not just in terms of aesthetic reception, but also marketability.

The serial combination of codes in popular Indian films seems to largely present an uneven topography of disjointed enunciation, where the industrial and secular spatialization of time does not look to be a 'complete' process. Here the cognitive, Cartesian 'I' as the subject of history *par excellence* is not presented with a series of events linked in a causal chain, mapped in a digital architecture of temporality. The plane of narration oscillates between segments of linear progression, moments of iconic stasis and the static visual arrangement of the tableaux, and presents a series of plateaus, marked by novelistic depths and epic surfaces. This variegated and stratified topography is not homogenized enough to be the imperial domain of the modern subject who can use his scientific consciousness to excavate its foundations, build monuments of signification and invest it with history and meaning. On the other hand, as Vasudevan suggests, here meaning seems to emerge from multiple planes – dialogical (as in linear narration), eminent (as in iconic stasis) and immanent (tableaux)<sup>270</sup>. Since the flexible modulation of codes does not follow the uniform cartographical imagination of modern representation, there are, in the narrative, always those 'superstitious' spaces of immanent and eminent meaning that lie beyond the compass of secular 'gaze.' 'Truth' is not just a result of scientific investigations, but also a matter of revelation or chance discovery. The hero is only sometimes the degraded figure in a novelistic world, undergoing a secular education about his duty as citizen, and being an object of psychoanalytical or anthropological query. Which is why, in moments of great peril and crisis brought about by crimes, there is no imperative of secular *detection* (in

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<sup>270</sup> See Ravi Vasudevan, "Shifting Codes, Dissolving Identities" (1999).

Heath's sense) to bring about justice. As Vasudevan, Ashish Nandy, and Rosie Thomas have pointed out, Indian popular cinema is predominantly indifferent to suspense and surprise<sup>271</sup>. For instance, in the landmark crime thrillers of the fifties like CID (Raj Khosla, 1956), Baazi/The Bet (Guru Dutt, 1951) or Kaalapani/The Blackwaters (Raj Khosla, 1958), film noir signatures like chiaroscuro effects, high key lighting are structured into a Manichean bipolarity of good and evil. Of course, later films like Bees Saal Baad/Twenty Years Ago (Biren Nag, 1962), Gumnaam/Nameless (Raja Nawathe, 1965), Anita (Raj Khosla, 1967), Woh Kaun Thi/Who Was She? (Raj Khosla, 1964), Jewel Thief (Vijay Anand, 1967), 100 Days (Partho Ghosh, 1991), and Khiladi (Abbas-Mustan, 1992) approximated, in a loose, musical manner, the 'twisty' denouement format of the classical Hollywood thriller, but by and large such instances were exceptions to the rule and did not really consolidate a mainstream genre. The gaining of knowledge remained predominantly a confluence of secular readings of the world and 'revelations' of a non-anthropomorphic, epic wisdom. To take a stray example, in Inteqam/Revenge (Raj Kumar Kohli, 1988), the villain kidnaps the near and dear ones of the two heroes and takes them to an unspecified location in the big, bad city of Mumbai. It is then the force of an epic certitude, combined with ten years of taxi driving experience in the city that allows the heroic two bearers of justice to move instantly, in the form of a groundless 'cut away' that happens in the register of a thickened, messianic time, to that space.

The notions of dispersal, weakness, or the idea of the part having an organic obligatory relationship to the whole, are critical criteria derived from a dominant, normative point of view of the classical realist form itself. But the question at this point can of course be, why would not this formidable body of film qualify to be a *counter-cinema*, especially because it is an obstinate, and in many ways an antagonistic, third world cultural product that rivals or regularly outstrips the mass reach of Hollywood not just in India, but globally? What exactly is the ontological bearing that consigns popular Indian cinema to a third ground

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<sup>271</sup> See Ashish Nandy, "The Hindi Film: Ideology and First Principles" India International Center Quarterly 8.1 (1981): 89-96; Rosie Thomas, "Indian Cinema: Pleasures and Popularity." Screen 26:3-4 (1985): 116-32; and Ravi Vasudevan, "The Melodramatic Mode and the Commercial Hindi Cinema: Notes on Film History, Narrative, and Performance." Screen 30:3 (1989): 29-50.

*between* a normative modern expression and an avant garde *modernist* challenge to the classical format that Peter Wollen for instance notices in Goddard or David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson do in the case of Ozu?<sup>272</sup> To answer that question, it would be fruitful to investigate popular Indian cinematic forms in their own logic of assemblages, without granting this critical diagram of realism an overbearing presence. For the time being, one can say that such films do not qualify to a radical and iconoclastic, or sometimes even a noteworthy status not just because they are frequently propelled by extremely conservative, reactionary Brahminical ideologies, but also because they do not subscribe to what we have been calling an overall phenomenological imperative of subjective narration and an industrial linguistic format of scientific story telling in cinema. In other words, like the great avant-garde instances, they are seen to be unable to critically *negotiate* with the classical format. In their departures from a normative of cinema, mainstream Hindi films for instance, are seen to be ill equipped to display a 'self reflexivity' Satyajit Ray sees in the political cinema of Godard: "It is important to note that with Godard the reversal of convention is not a gimmick or an affection, but a positive and meaningful extension of film language...Godard is fully *aware* that he treads on dangerous grounds when he drops all pretence of telling a story" (Our Films, Their Films 89 emphasis added). Popular films of India are thus always already delegitimized because they either altogether depart from, or leave in a state of vexing incompleteness a linguistic/propositional/pragmatic diagram of a so called universal subject of modernity in their filmic dispositions. On top of that, they are also incapable of subsuming the habitual modes of film language into a higher, dialectical realm of critical metacommentary. The problem is thus not limited to what these films are or what they say, but also to what they can be in terms of *potentia* of thought and expression in our world.

In that case, how can one begin to understand this *different* ontological mobilization of signs without entering a happy multiculturalist ground of *alternate modernities* or a nerveless notion of cultural difference? It would perhaps be useful to introduce a postulate of dislocation within the linguistic phenomenological diagram has been delineated so far. Tejaswini

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<sup>272</sup> See Peter Wollen, "Goddard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent d'Est*" Afterimage 4 (1972) and David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu" Screen 17.2 (Summer 1976): 42-45.

Niranjana and Vivek Dharieswar, in discussing the cinematic re-inscription of the lower caste, Dalit body with the visual insignia of MTV in Shankar's 1994 film Kaadalan, very usefully point to us why there is a need to move beyond the structural impasses of narratology:

“As Christian Metz....argues: ‘Enunciation is the semiological act by which some part of the text talks to us about this text as an act’. ...Metz rightly claims that the cinematic enunciation is reflexive rather than deictic....And yet Metz seems confused about how to clarify the nature of cinematic enunciation without inheriting the anthropomorphism of a linguistics of deictics. He inherits this confusion, or so it seems to us, from the linguistic monism of semiology. Gilles Deleuze, who opts for Peircean semiotics precisely to avoid this confusion, offers a diagnosis of the confusion inherited by a semiology of cinema: “We....have to define, not semiology, but “semiotics”, as the system of images and signs independent of language in general. When we recall that linguistics is only part of semiotics, we no longer mean, as for semiology, that there are languages without a language system, but that the language system only exists in its reaction to the *non-language material* that it transforms. That is why utterances and narrations are not a given of visible images, but a consequence which flows from this reaction (Dharieswar and Niranjana, “*Kaadalan* and the Politics of Resignification” 212.)

In discussing the formal components of mainstream Indian cinema, the challenge thus lies in working towards a possible semiotics of such filmic practices. That is, in seeing not only how they all the time curve into established trajectories of modernity (the Hegelian model of history, the European Human's being in the world), and how they often depart from them, but also how they can exercise a transformative power in the multi-layered linguistic terrain of cinema itself as a *global* phenomenon. The task therefore would pertain to a problem in a general relationship between cinema and the subject – how, and by what criteria of subjectification can one propose a phenomenological *reduction* of an *irreducible* multiplicity of signs on the screen? By what semiological cast, and by what operations of knowledge as power, can one attach the chaos of visibilities to founding propositional statements in stories of the nation, the state, and the modern citizen subject?

## C: Towards an Understanding of Psychologism in Cinema

Speaking about Metz's theorization of classical narrative cinema, Raymond Bellour says that the unfolding of meaning in such a film – the subject's navigation of the world to acquire knowledge and achieve a home, the setting up of a punctual correspondence between the frame and the out of field, the part and the whole – can be defined in terms of rhymes, condensations and displacements (shots re-writing previous shots). As a result, "the film is subdued, it submits to the narrative as the subject submits to Oedipus"<sup>273</sup>. The end of the film, in that sense, represents the terminal where the fragments of the fluid-mosaic flow of signs meet their destiny, and desire surrenders to order. Bellour calls this power, that is, the game of constant opening and closing of semiotic energies, the *Blockage Symbolique* ("Segmenting/ Analyzing 78). It represents the confrontation with the law and subsequently the point of access to the realm of the symbolic. Bellour's statement is part of a critical *softening* and *liquification* of the structuralist model supplied by Metz. The significant units of cinema are seen by Bellour to have insidious powers of contamination; they do not become meaningful through modular associations with each other, but become so through mutual inflexions and flows. There is therefore a commerce of signs that take place below the radar of subjective contemplations, molar propositional statements, and narratological pivot functions. According to Bellour, a new conception of the *grande syntagmatique* will "need to constitute a body of spatio-temporal matrices, where the present syntagmatique types, together with their compliments and necessary modifications, would be arranged into an orderly series. Then the surface level, that is, the level of textual organization, would alone merit the name autonomous segment, presenting analysis with the constantly renewed *singularity* of a precise decomposition of the filmic chain" ("Bellour, "Segmenting/ Analyzing" 69). Segmentation, in that sense, becomes for Bellour a *mise-en-abême*, a plumbing of depth that is a process without end.

It is interesting that Bellour forwards this re-conceptualization of Metz's hard types while discussing a song sequence in Minnelli's Gigi, in which a hyperactive scene/sequence

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<sup>273</sup> Cited in Casetti, Theories of Cinema, 172.

vacillation, and the absence of an alternating schema to separate the real from the pseudo presents the filmic surface as a stubborn *textual volume* that resists a chronometric mapping of meaning in terms of sequential events and dialectical flow of statements<sup>274</sup>. Bellour thus correctly proposes that an intellectual confrontation with this scene can be satisfactory only when one steps out of an analytical format of integrated *mise-en-scène* and looks at it as a certain rhythmic and repetitive mobilization of affects. The song sequence in *Gigi* thus brings in a corrosive plenitude of signs that increasingly become difficult to submit to a constitutive horizon of meaning in terms of the subject. It occupies a strange ground of visibilities in which a so called emblematic narratological verisimilitude of cinema (people sing and dance in real life) cannot be separated from attributes of cinematic ‘hyper-expression’ -- an excess of glamorous veracity. When one considers the latter seriously, that is, for a moment imagines cinema as not really of the world, but as Edgar Morin said, merely “properties of our spirit” that are “fixed in the picture and then gaze back at us”<sup>275</sup> the film departs from its tasks of representing the world as it is, and enters a grand anterior conversation of the human psyche. In such a situation, what Bellour calls a relentless plumbing of depths becomes not so much a matter of establishing a tortuous but meaningful relationship between the subject and the objective world, but an interiorized journey into the demonic, the dreamy, or the desirous recesses of the self. Cinema becomes an ‘archive of souls’, or an ‘anthropological mirror’.

It is in this spirit that we can understand Jean-Louis Baudry’s understanding of cinema as a primal scene, in which what is cinematic is comprised of our own dreams and hallucinations in an exaggerated form<sup>276</sup>. The will to narrate on screen thus becomes a psychic propelling force, a narcissistic desire for a lost totality; the viewer in turn, partakes in that process through a series of graduated and regulated identifications. As we know, it was from this parabasis that both, the wave of psychoanalytic film criticism of the sixties and seventies, as well as the Althusserian-Marxian understandings of textual ideologies,

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<sup>274</sup> See Bellour, “Segmenting/Analyzing” 70-8.

<sup>275</sup> Cited in Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, 48.

<sup>276</sup> See Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” and “The Apparatus: Metaphysical Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema”.

unconscious slippages of meaning and intent, came into being. The works of Jean-Pierre Oudart, Jean-Luis Comolli, and Jean Narboni in the French journals Cashiers du Cinema and Cinéthique, and the efforts of Colin MacCabe, and Stephen Heath in the British journal Screen are especially noteworthy in this regard.

In psychoanalysis, the Saussurian notion of semiological difference -- the residue of the filmic inscrutable that perpetually escapes the command of narration -- thus became playful trope in a psychodrama of the subject. Excess of meaning, leakages, and complex foldings of semiotic patterns came to be accounted for in terms of the subject's otherwise irresistible journey towards Oedipalization through a maze of lacks, desires for fullness, traumas, and genital hermeneutics of pleasure. The notion of an overarching symbolic order, to which the terrifying and alluring plenitudes of the imaginary had to submit, could be achieved only by granting a status of primacy to this narrative, and its agonistic knottings of sexuality and identity. Through signification, the subject was sutured into stable meaning and normative identity. Time and space were no longer Kantian a-priories, but configurations achieved through what Heath calls a continuous "stitching up of wounds". The self could thus insert itself into the world (once it had learnt to distinguish itself from it) not in terms of a diurnal induction into the organic compost of the community, but only as a signifier in the symbolic order, by a tragic "gaining [of] meaning at the expense of being" and primal drives (Kaja Silverman, "Suture" 219). What held the civilization of the subject together was no longer an idealism of moral 'truth,' but the assuaging fictions of restoration and habituation -- the figment of a symbolic wholeness that screened the individual from a schizophrenic anarchy of desires and terrible imaginings that extended to and beyond the Fichtean void.

In the critical understanding of psychoanalysis, cinema thus was no longer taken to provide a full and punctual cognitive access to truths in the objective world. Rather, the analysis focused on how the editorial intelligence of the apparatus and its framing and suturing devices could mitigate anxieties of loss and lack (especially of the male spectator), and produce a 'subject effect' or 'coherence effect'. This subject effect was predominantly tied to a contiguous 'reality effect' precisely because in the epistemological horizon of a scientific, godless modernity, the symbolic order could legitimately lay claim to the plenitude of the

imaginary and assert its name giving rights only when it worked without the illusory comfort of miracles or magic.

A diagram of modern realist cinema therefore becomes modern precisely because as a discursive formation – as a grammar of visibilities and articulable statements -- it coincides with a diagram of subjectivity. This coming together is on a constitutive plane of an architecture of visibilities, which, according to Heath, draws from the renaissance visual pyramid and point of view of the Quattrocento paintings (“Narrative Space”, 386). The ‘look’ of cinema therefore embraces the governance of a normative human perspective, tailoring its machinic processes to that end. The screen, as Dario Romano put it in his phenomenological study of cinema, aspires to emulate the visual and cognitive processes of the brain<sup>277</sup>. Here we can also quickly recall that Metz, in elaborating an apparatus where it was the human eye that was the recorder-projector, says that *there are no uncommon angles in cinema, only inhuman ones*<sup>278</sup>. The formal paraphernalia of the classical style – eye-line match, the 180 degree rule, the 30 degree rule, depth of field and such like – assume a normative status in this light. The flat, inscriptive surface of the cinema screen, which can potentially house a multitude of visual styles, architectures, and dynamic modes of movement, is seen, in the light of a historical discourse of modernity, to come to its own only when it submits itself to a workable diagram of being in the world. Which means meaning can be extricated from a torrent of moving images only when they are pre-oriented to the notion of a static self. Nevertheless, precisely because he recognizes the potential of cinema to step out of this perceptual format and an accompanying symbiotic exchange between the imaginary and the symbolic, and in the process, engender new forms of thought and signification, that Metz says that one day perhaps film studies will make a contribution to the science of psychoanalysis.

What kind of cinema is created if the filmic protocols involved clearly depart from this schema of containing the cinematic ‘gaze’ within a format of the ‘human gaze’? To take an

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<sup>277</sup> See Casetti, Theories of Cinema, 96-97.

<sup>278</sup> Metz elaborates this point in “The Imaginary Signifier”, in the section entitled “On Some Subcodes of Identification”



example pertinent to the present study of Indian cinema, how would this psychoanalytic compact between cinema and the subject evaluate aspects of frontality and insertion of tableaux in linear narration that are commonly used in popular Indian films? A comment made by Stephen Heath could be considered in this regard, purely as an instantiation of a governing logic of this intersection of realism and psychoanalysis that has been provisionally formulated. The point here is not to take Heath himself to task for an exclusivist, Eurocentric understanding of cinema, but to point out some specific affiliations of the critical system he inhabits and studies. Speaking about early film space, Heath says that such formations tend to be “tableauesque, [a] set of fixed camera frontal scenes linked as a story” (Heath, “Narrative Space” 385). The paramount feature of such a structure is that it “misses the subject in the very moment of the movement it now offers” (385). Hence, if we go by a categorical logic of modernity (that is globalize Heath’s observation about the classic realist narrative), it would be a basic, ‘pre-civil’ nature of the representational architectonics of Indian popular cinema that would consign it to an ‘early’ stage in an evolutionary chronicle of film foretold.

Of course this diagram of psychoanalytical film theory centered around the Oedipal psychobiography has been strongly questioned and dismantled in the western academy itself. The works of feminist scholars like Claire Johnston, Laura Mulvey, Jacqueline Rose, Linda Williams, Mary Ann Doane, and Janet Bergstrom have, in different ways, problematized the linearity of the scopophilia-identification compact<sup>279</sup>. Tania Modleski has called attention to the ambiguous sexualities of the men Hitchcock’s seminal films<sup>280</sup>, while Teresa de Laurentis has proposed a polemical notion of baseline experience as that of the

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<sup>279</sup> See for instance Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Screen 16.3 (1975): 6-18; Claire Johnston, “The Subject of Feminist Film Theory/Practice,” Screen 21.2 (1980); Jacqueline Rose, “The Cinematic Apparatus: Problems in Current Theory” in The Cinematic Apparatus, Teresa de Laurentis and Stephen Heath eds. (New York: St. Martin’s, 1980): 172-86; and Linda Williams “Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions” in Philip Rosen ed. Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology (1986): 507-534.

<sup>280</sup> See Tania Modleski, The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory (London: Methuen, 1988).

gendered subject at ground level<sup>281</sup>. Thomas Elsaesser has elaborated on how in Fassbinder, we have an instance of Hollywood's formal armada of clichés and typologies being mobilized in a manner that displaces identification all the time. The act of seeing in such cases does not occupy the center of the narrative; Hitler, in Fassbinder's *Germany*, is exhibited rather than offered to the gaze as an object of identification<sup>282</sup>. A basic critique of heteronormative, genital sexuality that informs the classical psychoanalytic model has been de-territorialized by Gaylyn Studler's classic elaboration of a pre-genital sexuality in cinema (displaced identification through queerness, play, drag and masquerade), based on Deleuze's study of Masoch<sup>283</sup>. In the context of Indian cinema, one could understand Biswas and Prasad's invocation of psychoanalytic concepts as part of a polemical staging of the non-constituted self, a de-territorializing of the scientific discourse in the revealing of the so called unconscious as a dimension of the other.

Apart from a consideration of form and aesthetics, the problem of an Oedipal narratological imperative, as an ontological propeller of meaning, can be, and has been, approached from a different view point altogether. This involves forwarding a fundamental notion of cultural *difference*, undercutting the validity of the Oedipal myth in the Indian context. Sudhir Kakkar has suggested that in the case of the 'Indian' psyche and its phenomenal relations of the world, there is a weak separation between the ego and external objects. The subject therefore has to be configured as an 'incomplete' arc of a hermeneutic that refuses to close itself. It therefore ends up doing violence to the character trying to grasp him, slipping away in the last moment, and revealing itself to be an animal or a woman not redeemed by a constitutive self<sup>284</sup>. Kakkar illustrates his thesis by broaching the animal-human continuum in the cave paintings of Ajanta; one could also recall in this context the figure of Shiva as the hermaphrodite god – the male and female compact of the *Ardhanarishwara*. Hence, according to Kakkar, in the 'Indian' psychological disposition, perfectability lies not in

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<sup>281</sup> See Teresa de Laurentis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>282</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, "Primary Identification and the Historical Subject," *Ciné-Tracts* 11 (Fall 1980): 43-52.

<sup>283</sup> See Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure* (1988) and Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1991).

<sup>284</sup> See Sudhir Kakkar, *Inner World: A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (1978).

achieving individual self-consciousness, but in a complete spiritual union, a merging of the self with the other. Moreover, unlike the Oedipal myth, in the Indian ‘hegemonic narrative’ (which in itself, is part of a modernist construction of ‘tradition’), the status of the *Devi*, the mother goddess, is paramount. The father-son rivalry is built on the former’s, and not the latter’s jealousy, since the mother is already sexually disavowed and closer to the son. There are indeed many instances in the annals of popular Indian cinema that can be considered to be illustrative of Kakkar’s thesis. One of them can be visited quickly. When the hero’s mother is killed by an arrow bearing the royal crest in Manmohan Desai’s Dharam Veer/Dharam and Veer (1977), it is the son (and not the bereaved father) who can storm the royal palace and demand justice from the kingdom’s queen mother. He demands that according to an irrefutable and universal plane of justice, which calls for an eye in lieu of an eye, it should be so that the old, widowed queen should leave the comforts of the palace and come and live in his humble abode of an ironmonger, as his mother. The law is upheld to the last letter. The queen abdicates the throne in favor of her son and goes to live with the poor hero as his mother; she conscientiously performs all the duties the role demands. What is interesting of course is that the deceased woman’s other identity, as the conjugal partner of her husband never appears in the discourse of justice and law. The tearing of the filial and patriarchal fabric and its subsequent restoration takes place without the father’s conjugal rights being either a *Dharmic* or an epistemological concern. The hero, having got a mother for a mother, starts calling the queen by that name; his widower father continues to extend to her the deference and decorum commanded by majesty.

The point of course, is not to consider either the Oedipal paradigm, or Kakkar’s thesis of an ‘Indian self’, to be modular, self-contained grammars of plausibility capable of providing us with a total horizon of meaning. The task, on the other hand, would be to see how in the formal dynamics of Indian cinema, inscriptions of modernity, as well as signatures of tradition, a complex network of subjective positionalities and their particle perceptual and expressive powers are all mobilized in manifold ways in what can be called a cinematic of globality. Simply put, one cannot account for cinematic events in the Indian situation in terms of a linear logic of dialectical becoming – Kakkar’s ‘pre-Oedipal’ devotee yielding to a singular psychotic diagram of the modern citizen, or in even in terms of a categorical war

between selves. The popular Indian filmic forms need to be understood in terms of inhuman combinatory powers of the medium, one that, especially in melodramatic dispensations, indeterminately inscribes the feudal diagram of the joint family or community into the political-economic one of the nuclear couple. A machinic cinema that is -- one that brings about unholy contaminations between selves and terrains of discourse without the sound assurance of a metaphysical home (even though images of home may abound). This is precisely why it would be wrong to account for the myriad affections and complex semiotic foldings of such films solely in terms of anthropological mirrorings of an already accepted, normative self of the modern and its set of behavioral and psychic hermeneutics. Such a habituated understanding of the cinematic would render a lot of formal and enunciative attributes of such films (including the aspect of geo-televisuality that has been singled out for special attention) *categorically* meaningful in terms of psychoanalytic relations with the dream, the paralogism, or the joke. On the other hand, perhaps critical efforts could go in another direction – towards a laughter induced by pure surfaces, without the echoing of a chamber of interiorities and depths, that is, a laughter without an anxious wading through pre-modern nightmares and without actually getting the Freudian joke.

In this section it was examined how a modern disciplinary diagram of realist cinema can be brought into a critical adjacency with Indian cinematic formations. That is, the former can enter into a multiplicity of force relations with the latter, without being able to imperially exhaust its divergent energies into a subjective horizon of meaning. The point therefore, is not to be simply for or against categories like modernity or realism. It is to refrain from using them as *categorical essences* and championing and denigrating them as such. Which is precisely why such concepts, along with anterior ones like folk culture, tradition, or Indian-ness can be mobilized as packets of knowledge, information, spiritualist myths, spectacles or affects to create perpetually altering, fluid-mosaic movements of power/antagonism in our global temporalities<sup>285</sup>. As a matter of fact, one can argue that liberating the postulates that

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<sup>285</sup> Power, in the sense I am using it, has no mystical originary being of its own. That is, in this case, it is not substituting for the Kantian transcendental subject. Power in such a sense becomes immanent only in

are habitually with the modern (equality, rights, citizenship etc.) from a Hegelian burden of a constitutive and singular history can in fact release their transformative potentialities. Indeed, after having provincialized a philosophical discourse of modernity qua realism, one should also pause for a moment and recall, following Biswas's lead, the many instances of a radical deployment of realism in Indian cinema. These were the occasions when different aesthetics of realism entered a realm of cultural discourse with profound powers of creation and destruction – the anti-feudal pressures in the IPTA socialist realism of the fifties, the humanism of Ray, or even the urban-developmental schemas of New Cinema of the seventies that, in many ways de-territorialized ossified structures of language, and Brahminical edifices of habituation and common sense.

In a global sense, it is undeniably possible to consider realism as a transformatory force that occasionally combines with other historical assemblages of intelligence and expression to renew what Deleuze would call the powers of the false. That is, precisely as that force that exiles thinking from the allure and comfort of 'truths' and universals. It is in this spirit that one can locate the host of postwar new cinemas of the 50s and 60s that in different ways issued calls to realism by corrosively casting such conceptions of reality against dogmas of representation and dogmas of development. The obvious examples would be the *Nouvelle Vague* in France, Free Cinema in England, Cinema Nuovo and Tercer Cine in Latin America, New American Cinema in the United States, *Neues Deutsches* Cinema in Germany, Young Cinema or independent cinema in Italy, East Europe, and Japan. These avant gardist tendencies were multi-pronged and ranged from a quest for a proper revelation of essence, as in many formats of *Nouvelle Vague*, a means of disenchanted witnessing, as in English Free Cinema, and an iconoclastic denunciation of established power discourses as in Latin America. The concern for Biswas, viz-a-viz a missed encounter with a true, revolutionary popular, in the Bengali milieu of the fifties, or Geeta Kapur's about a nerveless Indian modernism developing without the jolting shocks and charges of serious avant gardist kinds<sup>286</sup>, have to be placed in this international environment of questioning the

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movements and perpetually forming and de-territorializing architectures. It is not founded with its own mythical big bang and the subsequent creation of a universe that it can command.

<sup>286</sup> See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion.

modern from various angles. Caught between a plethora of historical factors -- like the incomplete capitalization of the film industry, the dominance of feudal ideologies and mercantile modes of exchange in production and distribution sectors, and the failure of the welfare state to encourage an alternative aesthetics for the republican revolution of 1950 -- the New Cinemas of India neither garnered a pan national register for themselves, nor crossed a critical threshold of epistemological visibility. That is, they never gathered into a disconcerting social force like the many veins of the Latin American avant garde -- the Brazilian Glauber Rocha's proposition of a critical realism (in fact a concrete surrealism impelled by an aesthetics of hunger and one of de-colonization) that had nothing to do with objective reproduction of reality, a cinema of counter-information formulated by Solanas and Getino in Argentina, or Julio Garcia Espinosa's call for an 'Imperfect Cinema' in Cuba<sup>287</sup>.

Looking at realism from this angle is to understand it as a constantly renewing attribute of exile, as that which demolishes the habituations of homely thinking. This is precisely why, a radical evaluation of realist efforts as a jagged, rhizomatic line in the histories of cinema is also to absolve the so called attributes of tradition from a parochial ontology of this or that 'local' Being. It is to dismantle that very baseline of subject, unity, and law which casts 'tradition' as a molar identity of an Indian (Brahminical) self and then judges it solely in terms of *differential and deferential* relationships with itself. Instead perhaps one could try to look at different assemblages of the realist and the traditional as *eventful*; that is, not amenable to the administered, already there narratives and grammars of plausibility, whether they are oriented a propositional 'modern' self, or its derivatives of 'otherness'. This postulate of thinking eventfully can be aligned to what Ronald Judy, speaking about 'societies of globality' (which, within the present parameters of this discussion, can be called societies of geo-televisuality), calls for an urgently required mode of thinking that is centered around the 'pending' of inherited categories. That is, a manner of intellection in which concepts can be invited elliptically, without closures or imperial Hegelian moves toward dialectical negations and syntheses. In the sense Judy uses it, 'pending thinking' therefore becomes "a suspension of determinate judgment as far as globalization is

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<sup>287</sup> See Casetti, Theories of Cinema, 77-85.

concerned....[which means that] its meanings and possibilities are hanging, “impending or imminent” (Ronald Judy, “The Threat to Islamic Humanity” 105).

### **Endnote: Geo-televisuality and the Death of Classical Realist Cinema**

How do such questionings of a philosophy of the subject relate to ‘geo-televisuality’? The notion of a ‘postmodern’ death of the classical ‘phenomenological’ cinema apparatus is of course nothing new. Miriam Hansen has pointed out that the 70s shift in film theory, from integrative textual structures and ontologies to Lacanian-Althusserian studies of reception and spectatorship happened in a environment when the electronic dissemination of images in society was replacing an aesthetics of the gaze with an aesthetics of the glance (“Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere” 135). That is, a new, diffuse ecology of transmissions created a ‘post-contemplative’ scenario of disruptive and discontinuous encounters with the image, much like the shock and welter of traffic in Benjamin’s Paris. The city of walls and enclosed domains was itself being transformed into a social architecture of visibilities and multi-channel disseminations. The works of scholars like John Ellis, Charles Eidsvik, and Timothy Corrigan are especially pertinent in this regard<sup>288</sup>. Hansen herself grounds her understanding of this de-territorialization on a foundational critique of the idealistic Habermasian picture of the public as a “general horizon of experience”. She suggests a need to formulate a ‘social horizon of experience’ as an object of study, one that is an acutely complex, multi-layered, perpetually morphing calculus of a ‘consciousness industry’ (“Early Cinema, Late Cinema” 135-42). What can be said, in keeping with the spirit of her argument is that the surprises, allures, and shocking dispersals of the ‘new’ have to be understood in keeping with the very logic of de-territorialization that this thesis forwards. That is, they have to be gauged in terms of a transposed ecology of image diffusions, instead of deducing meaning through a dialectics of *nostalgia*, or a pensive, retroactive phenomenology based on the classical framing formats

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<sup>288</sup> See Ellis, Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video, Eidsvik, “Machines of the Invisible: Changes in Film Technology in the Age of Video”, and Corrigan, A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam.

and editorial intelligences of the erstwhile subjective camera<sup>289</sup>. The latter is a phantom of film that one needs to exorcise critically, registering its ghostly presences, and also celebrating its vanishings.

Geo-televisuality, therefore, has nothing *essentially* and totally to do with the phenomenology of the subject as a *total* scope of cognition or understanding, although it may include many subjective arcs of perception and knowledge as variegated matter. It neither pertains to the finitudes of the individual human's readings of the world, nor to a national identity or social class as an *idealistic, anthropomorphic amplification* of that subject. Rather, geo-televisuality is a multiplicity that can only be partially surfed and navigated by individual or group intelligences (how exactly do sudden arrivals of alien dancing bodies inflect a so called Indian nationalistic consciousness?) and their presumed psychobiographies. It is thus not that which opens up a constitutive world by mapping things into a grid of totality, but one that can be understood as a force that, at every step demolishes the centrifugal, subjective focalization of the frame. It is that which reveals the frame to reside between perpetual borderers of *Avidya* or positive ignorance, and with a center of 'truth' that has forgotten its own metaphorical status. It is that which makes the frame 'work'<sup>290</sup>. In that sense, geo-televisuality has to be distinguished from a mere worldly travel of an 'Indian' sensibility or subjective perception. The spatial terminals of the home and the world, the temporal ones of beginnings and ends can only be posed as afterthoughts or signposts of nationalist narrations, diagrams of the 'self' or authorial dictates of 'tradition'. The home and the world are unstable installations in what is an immanent, borderless sea of the geo-televisual, effected by power as organization of discourse, knowledge, and conditions of utterance. The latter try to 'subject' geo-televisuality by locking its energies into a singular horizon of meaning, but undergo continuous

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<sup>289</sup> See Laura Mulvey's comments on the 'curious spectator' or the 'pensive viewer' (Raymond Bellour's term) in relation to the slowed or stilled image that becomes possible only in a post-classical environment of video technology and the pause button. "Looking at the Past from the Present: Rethinking Feminist Film theory of the 1970s" 12-13.

<sup>290</sup> One can of course recall Derrida's *parergon* as that which is not the frame, but which 'works the frame, makes it work, lets it work, gives it work to do' (*The Truth in Painting* 12).



transformations themselves while attempting that. Meanwhile geo-televisuality remains a corrosive and disconcerting force not because it ‘misses’ or evades the subject due to inadequate suturing devices, but because it discloses the subject to be always already missing or catching up. What has been called geo-televisual informatics in the first chapter of this dissertation is thus a particular territorialization of geo-televisual *potentia* into a matrix of power. One that, in our occasion, works increasingly towards enframing the multiple, metacinematic world of signs into an *assembled* and *managed* picture of a subject Being that lends itself solely to the neo-liberal state and to capital.

Undoubtedly, geo-televisuality, especially in our present age of Informatics, is an arena for war and the production of social life itself, but it also involves a host of transmissions and effects that are not determined and stipulated by intentionalities of a fixed human subject or its catalogue of derivative identities (the Bengali male, the urban middle class woman of Delhi etc.). The point therefore is not merely to declare the philosophical death of the modern human subject who had killed god and presumed to have taken the latter’s place<sup>291</sup>. The objective of such a study should also be to understand how informatic geo-televisuality, as an abstract machine (one that creates all the diagnostic effects of what is called a situation of postmodernity – copies without originals, a cinema of the glance, virtualization of value etc.) produces realities and allows them to morph. The flows of statistical, demographic, machinic, financial or human intelligences that constitute this sphere certainly do produce installations of state power, densities and rarefactions of money, and create regularities and frequencies in terms of human consensus models, commonplaces, beliefs, ideologies and life styles. But it is also important to understand that it also continuously gives rise to a plethora of variables, making status-quoist formations devoted to bio-politics, governance, discipline and investment suffer a relentless process of opening out and globalization. In other words, geo-televisuality is precisely that which destroys and percolates the conceptual and thingly borderlines humans impose to integrate and define a subjectivity, a culture, or a self. When one embarks on a serious theoretical elaboration of geo-televisuality in cinema, it does not

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<sup>291</sup> See for instance Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 386-87: “man is neither the oldest not the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge.....As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.”

mean that one has to abnegate critiques of ideologies and metanarratives of nationhood or class dominance that dominate the framings of film or its editorial rendering of the world as discourse. Rather one would be looking at processes by which the absolutist statement, the dominant statement, or the hegemonic statement (pertaining for instance to a molar notion of upper class, upper caste, heterosexist male *Hindu* culture in the Indian context) can only be *floated* in a sea of semiotic multiplicities. Hinduness, as a static postulate of national self, tries to encurve the zeal of the latter, without being able to enclose the arc, or even trying to, in line with a humanist effort towards totality. Instead, one can understand the political predominance of neo-Hindutva in the age of financial and electronic globalization as a new regime of power, a new ‘glocal’ schema of controlling and re-directing (rather than a conceptual engulfing into the territories of the ‘self’) of borderless visibilities and statements. A parabolic operation that is dynamic rather than a linear one that brings stability of definitions. The success of this form of power *does not* lie in how a broad discourse of Hinduism removes its crippling contradictions, squares postulates of a unitary *Dharma* of national selfhood with alien imperatives of finance capital and neo-liberal market management. Rather, it lies in how it manages and regulates oscillations of meaning, organizes pluralities and ideological commitments in and around the curve of the statement. That is, how it produces the Hindu as a differentially distributed, micro-punctual intelligence of patriotism, as an instance of a globally relevant normative of value<sup>292</sup>.

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<sup>292</sup> See Ashish Rajadhyaksha’s very perceptual observations about ‘Bollywood’ as a diffuse publicity of culturalist and pop cinema effects outside the parameters of the classical apparatus in “Rethinking the State After Bollywood.”

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