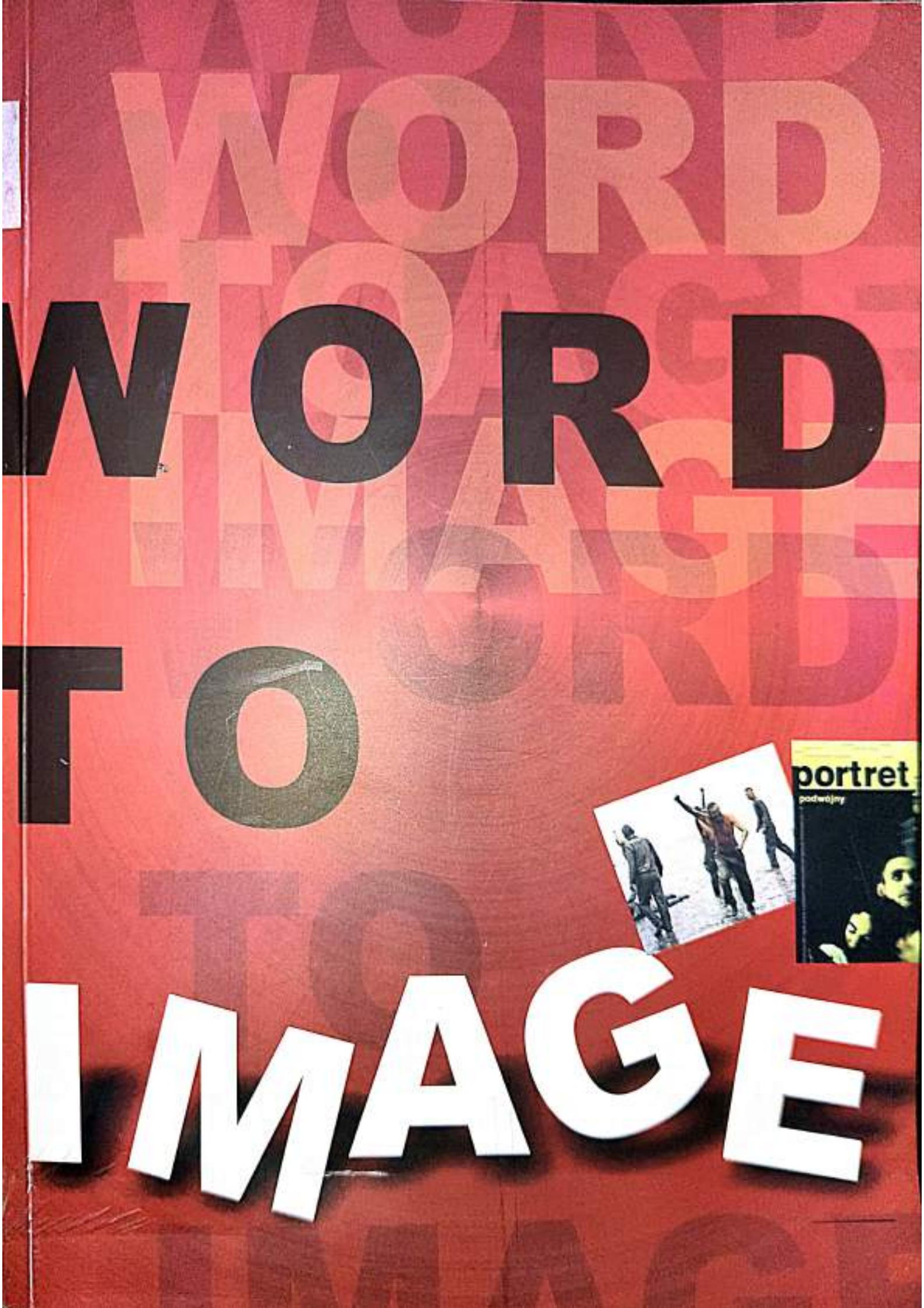




WORD

TO

IMAGE



In Association with



3rd
Bengalooru
International
Film Festival

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SUCHITRA CINEMA AND CULTURAL ACADEMY
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Word to Image

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From the EDITORIAL DESK

We at Suchitra believe that a Film Festival contributes a great deal to the vitality of a culture. An International Film Festival, especially, by bringing the viewers of a society and a culture face to face with the concerns, preoccupations and creative designs of film makers of other societies and cultures (that actually reflect many contemporary historical and political issues and developments), helps them understand the very nature of the times. In this sense films, by capturing the 'spirit of the age', are part of the cultural expressions of all communities, societies and nations. The experience of watching a film is simultaneously a creative, cultural and political experience.

Film Festivals generally become huge exercises that are part of the routine activities of the Government, or tend to remain massively glamorous events projecting the splendour of the Film Industry. Film Societies and Academies, however, regard film festivals as serious cultural events. The significance of a film festival comes from the manner in which films sensitise the viewers - who are basically members of a community - to aesthetic, social and political issues.

"Suchitra", both as a film society and an academy, has always integrated aesthetic pursuits with cultural concerns. In screening films, and in organising

seminars and workshops on cinema, "Suchitra" has kept in mind the fact that the tradition of cinema, in the long run, will have to contribute to the political and cultural dynamics of the society it originates from. The choice of films in our festivals revolves round this central understanding.

"Suchitra" is also conscious of the fact that festivals can become ephemeral affairs if they are not sustained intellectually. It is for this reason that "Suchitra" brings out publications during the festival on landmarks of Indian Cinema established by eminent directors. "Suchitra" publishes books in English and Kannada to cater to the needs and demands of serious movie goers both within and outside Karnataka. The local and the global are of equal importance when it comes to cultural questions and matters and "Suchitra" does its best to contribute to both. Each film festival that "Suchitra" organises places some emphasis on specific aspects of cinema and the souvenirs brought out on the occasion try to highlight them. The focus of the 1st Biffes was on cinematography while the 2nd Biffes was on editing. The 3rd Biffes will be focused on featuring individual directors who have also excelled in other areas of creativity. The souvenir features poets, novelists, theatre personalities who have made films. The souvenir carries articles that discuss the emergence of visual images from words - whether spoken or written. Hence, the souvenir is entitled "WORD TO IMAGE". The value of the souvenirs goes beyond the film festival. The souvenirs do serve as basic texts for further studies to be done in the field of cinema. It is our sincere hope that all concerned with the future of cinema would further our efforts in many more ways.

Dr. Vijaya
N. Vidyashankar
N. Manu Chakravarthy
(EDITORS)

INDEX

PERSPECTIVES ON CINEMA

- | | | | |
|---|---|-----|----|
| ■ | CINEMA | ... | 3 |
| | <i>K. Shivarama Karanth</i> | | |
| ■ | AN INDIAN NEW WAVE? | ... | 7 |
| | <i>Satyajit Ray</i> | | |
| ■ | THEATRE AND FILM | ... | 20 |
| | <i>Satish Bahadur</i> | | |
| ■ | TRAGIC WALK OF HEROISM | ... | 32 |
| | Reflections on M T Vasudevan Nair's Film Literature | | |
| | <i>P.S. Manoj Kumar</i> | | |
| ■ | M.T. VASUDEVAN NAIR | ... | 38 |
| | <i>Dr. Chandrasekhara B. Kambara</i> | | |

WORD TO IMAGE

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----|----|
| ■ | I TOO MADE A FILM | ... | 45 |
| | <i>P. Lankesh</i> | | |
| ■ | BETWEEN THE ABSTRACT AND THE CONCRETE | ... | 50 |
| | <i>T.S. Nagabharana</i> | | |



■ VISUAL LANGUAGE AND...	...	56
<i>B. Suresha</i>		
■ 9 YEARS AGO...	...	64
<i>P. Sheshadri</i>		
■ LITERATURE AND CINEMA	...	70
<i>Dr Baragur Ramachandrappa</i>		
■ BETWEEN DIFFERENT GENRES	...	79
<i>Nagathihalli Chandrashekhar</i>		
■ MULTIPLE STORIES' OF 'A STORY	...	84
<i>Umesh Kulkarni</i>		
■ FILM AS LANGUAGE	...	90
<i>A. N. Prasanna</i>		
■ SCREEN WRITING: LITERATURE OR THE FILMMAKER'S ART?	...	95
<i>Prakash Belawadi</i>		
■ CAMERA EYES IN LETTERS (ALPHABET)	...	100
<i>Krishna Maasadi</i>		
FIFTY YEARS OF FFSI	...	103
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS	...	109

**Perspectives
on
Cinema**

CINEMA

■ *K. Shivarama Karanth*



Is cinema an art?

Screening of films has come into vogue throughout the world, whether we desire it or not. Just as a few fine arts have mingled in our culture from a long time, cinema too has caused an obsession in us, sometimes to a greater extent. For urbanites, viewing films now and then has turned out to be a part of a daily routine. Watching films has become a habit just as the habit of reading newspapers everyday. It has spread to every village in Western countries. Its popularity in Russia is unmatched in other parts of the world. Just as food gives nourishment to the body, cinema is the food for the minds of many people. It has gained prominence on par with literary works such as poetry and novels. It is not valid to condemn literature as a whole just because there are improper aspects in some literary works. Similarly, cinema cannot be condemned going by a few bad and obscene films that we happen to see now. Can one denounce music and dance because they are used for lewd purposes by prostitutes! The arts are very essential to the lives of human beings. A great culture cannot exist without great arts.

When one says so, one may get the following response: these statements apply to fine arts like music and dance and not to a mental addiction like cinema. On the other hand, one cannot even say that the interest being shown by many towards cinema is like an alcoholic being addicted to drink. If cinema is dismissed for this reason alone, then all the fine arts that have the same attracting power would have to be brushed aside. It would be improper on our part to castigate it only because it is too new. The first art that showed itself up among



the primitives is dance; it, too, seemed to be new then. Later, singing came into being; then, singing, too, appeared to be new. Much later, sculpture and painting came into existence. Then, they too appeared to be new. As human civilisation progressed further, architecture came into being. For those times, architecture, too, was new. But, in these times they are ancient. Hence, it is our duty to examine whether cinema has the features of an art instead of deriding it because it is new to us now.

At the outset, let us discuss what is meant by art. Art is nothing but the means of producing in others the same emotion that one experiences through a medium. When a child is hurt it cries; others too feel sad on seeing it. Is this art? No, because expressing one's sorrow through crying is the nature of a person that has come from birth. But art is not the nature or the quality that comes by birth in our lives. Though actions like crying while in sorrow, laughing when happy, being furious when angry can literally drown others in sorrow, joy and anger, they cannot be regarded as arts. There can be bad qualities in art too. But they are not our natural qualities. They are not the realistic imitations of any natural qualities. To imitate the crying of another person is not art. In some aspects, immediately, though art may appear to be imitation it is abstract in some respects. Abstract elements are the products of the realm of imagination; they are things that cannot be seen in concrete terms. The creation that takes place by blending these two aspects is art. Whenever we want to create something, we definitely need concrete things before us. Similarly, actions that are visible to the eyes are also required. If we use just these, it cannot be called a creation, an art. "A thing may be a perfect imitation in terms of its outer shape, size; yet it cannot provide the emotional joy that the things responsible for its creation can give. The image of a person does not occupy the position of a person" (Paul Rotha p.40) Let us now ponder over a small musical composition. It is composed by using seven notes. These seven notes are similar to the sounds heard in nature. Notes alone are the contents of the song. But it is not the group of sounds that is heard in nature now and then. Every bit of the song which comprises notes could be the bunch of notes heard in nature. For example, a segment of the song may sound like the call of a cuckoo. Other bits may seem like the sounds produced by different animals. These bits can make the creation of the song acquire a quality that inspires an abstract emotion.

Now, let us take the example of a picture. The colours present in the picture are those found in nature. The parts of the human beings, animals, rivers etc. depicted in the picture might be quite close the real ones. However, the feeling the picture generates in us is completely new; it could even be something abstract that is not found in nature. One can speak about the elements of dance in the same vein.

Thus, the purpose of art is the creation of abstract conceptions that inspire emotions by using either abstract or realistic embellishments. In such creations, it is the medium of the respective arts that determines the proportion in which imitation and abstraction could be employed. Charles Marriot says, "The nature of art is determined by its medium. Art is nothing but the blend of the exact imitation of nature and its abstract form. The amount of abstraction and imitation that should be used depends on the medium we use". Now let us take the example of dance. The imitation of nature is very less in dance. The gestures and various movements of the limbs exhibited while dancing are not found in nature. There is more of the abstract in it. There is more of imitation in sculpture and painting.

When we ponder if the same is true of cinema, we do feel it is so. Though most of the pictures that we get to see are imitations, a good film has the capability to create a new work that displays more of the abstract. Instead of just being realistic, it could be creative and, hence, truthful. "One could say no other art has the powerful dynamic energy and the ability to inspire emotion" (Paul Rotha, *ibid* p.45) [Translation]. As Charlie Chaplin says, "Films have the ability to provoke our imagination, and our senses to rhythm and colour. Therefore, the film industry has gained such a grand and an attractive status. We have been rearing this monster that has amazing power. But, do we understand what we need to do with it?"

The creation of any art definitely needs a medium that is conducive to the creativity of the artist. It should have the ability to awaken our critical sensibility and stimulate our emotions. Does cinema have such qualities? It is beyond doubt that cinema has them in abundance. Here, bits of the film reel are its medium. They contain exact images of static and mobile objects. They can be joined and the content required for the creation of emotion can be easily produced. The Russian film director Kuselev says, "Every art is made of one or the material. The materials gain power when they are arranged according to their nature. In cinema, the film reel which carries the images that light has produced is its material; editing is nothing but arranging the different bits of film reel according to the desired purpose".

As Paul Rotha opines, no other creative medium requires the knowledge of various disciplines as the making of cinema. We shall come to know why it is so later – "Cinema is basically a kind of creation that is obtained by the convergence of various kinds of images that are secured from nature. (The material used for this purpose may be natural). In terms of the use of light, and movement as well, all the pictorial images here form a series of visual images that cannot be measured from the perspective of psychology. Cinema can be created using imaginary images too.



Now, let us examine the features of cinema which is a new medium. Before that, let us observe how the media of transmission in familiar arts like pictures, sculpture, architecture, music, dance etc. lend themselves to the creation of emotion. Among these, painting, sculpture and architecture are static forms of art. They can last long. Music, dance and drama have duration of time. But, they exist only for a short period of time. The elements that can give a form to an abstract concept in a static art are as follows: the flow of lines, the shapes that are written or placed in harmony and the movements suggested by the images in the picture. For example, the horizontal lines seen in a picture inspire the emotions such as peace, leisure etc. The vertical lines that stand straight suggest majesty, power and other characteristics. Similarly, if a large portion of a picture has shadows and the illuminated portion is less it indicates sorrow; the abundance of light suggests joy.

In arts that stay for a short time like music and dance, the features like the cycle of beats, rhythm, harmony etc. can invoke the emotions like bliss, grief, peace, anxiety etc.

Cinema possesses the abilities that these two types of arts have in them. Every picture evokes emotions from its pattern of lines. The confluence of shadow and light in it can produce the same effect. Similarly, dance can take one to a high state of emotion with the aid of time and pace. The various kinds of movements of individuals or objects in a picture, the movements by which the camera moves towards or away from ornaments and the resonances that are produced when objects are viewed from different angles can evoke emotions. Moreover, as the film reel moves, it has a very different ability! Emotions can be generated even by exhibiting the pictures of static objects one after the other in a suitable rhythmic manner. It is no wonder that Charlie Chaplin called this art medium that has such astonishing abilities an "amazing monster".

However, there is a need to generate people who understand the secret of this immense power. Such an understanding can bring about an amazing revolution in our lives. The profundity of the arts has such great capabilities. Therefore, it is difficult to check the flood-like flow of the arts. Since cinema can divert us from our usual state of wakefulness and stimulate new emotions in us, one cannot neglect the accomplishments of cinema these days.

Translated from Kannada by M.R.Rakshith



AN INDIAN NEW WAVE?

■ *Satyajit Ray*



There is a belief gaining currency in film circles that a New Wave of sorts is lapping on the shores of Indian cinema. One reads about new directors, about low-cost and non-star movies; one perks up at the sight of unfamiliar, unadorned faces in the pages of film magazines; one even hears of Art Theatres being planned to provide an outlet for off-beat films. All of which is heartening indeed. It is high time we had a Movement along the right lines, and one wishes all power to those who are working to keep the Wave from subsiding. The FFC, in particular, are showing admirable courage and enterprise in providing loans to young, untested applicants - as well as some old hands aspiring to make off-beat films.

While I have seen some of the results of this new enterprise, I do not wish to discuss them here in any specific terms. The purpose of the present piece is to examine some of the ideas which seem to be motivating the new movement. These are being expressed by the film makers themselves, as well as by some of the critics sympathetic to the trend. One can see them getting into a sort of credo.

A key word in this credo is Experiment. Since experiment is at best a vague term meaning different things in different contexts, it may be worthwhile to take a closer look at it before going on to other things.

The early stages of the evolution of any language must necessarily be a process of trial and error; in other words, of experiment. Thus it would be right to say that the pioneers of the cinema were all experimenters. The cinema having



been from the outset a visual medium of mass communication, experiment here took a special form. It was directed mainly towards tapping latent responses in the audience. It did not call for the evolution of new symbols, but for the pinpointing of familiar fragments of visible reality and endowing them with a particular meaning in a particular context. The audience was expected to 'read' a film in the way its maker intended it to be read. A film was thus a string of shots which worked like words and sentences and chapters in the unfolding of its story. And once it was realised that a cinema was a direct relation of the epic and the drama suitable for consumption by a large and varied public, the grammar of film making developed in a remarkably short time.

This rapid growth was possible because of a three-fold pressure on the film maker. There was, first, his own urge for self-expression, common to all artists. Then there was the need to establish rapport with an audience, which brought it in line with the performing arts whose traditions stretched back two thousand years. This second pressure led to the evolution of a simple but forceful language, and to a choice of subjects with a broad appeal.

The third pressure was that of commerce. From the very beginning right down to the present, film makers have had to depend on sponsorship to provide them with the means of expression. It was really a case of mutual dependence: the film maker made his film from which the sponsor hoped to make a profit. Luckily this profit motive did not prove such a crippling handicap for the artist, because it was soon realised that, as in all other performing arts, it was possible in the cinema too to strike a satisfactory balance between art and commerce.

The question of esotericism simply did not arise in the early days. The cinema was accepted by all concerned as a popular art which drew its sustenance from the paying public. It was as simple as that. In the circumstances, naturally, all experiment was directed towards enriching the language in order to heighten its impact. The fact that we laugh at the films of Chaplin and Keaton is not just because they were funny men doing funny things in funny situations, but because they were great artists and great experimenters who discovered the cinematic methods to turn a funny scene on paper into a funny scene on the screen.

There is no such thing as an effect for its own sake in the films of the old masters. The true artist is recognisable in his style and his attitude, not in his idiosyncracies. Occasionally, a great artist failed to make contact with his audience. Such was Erich von Stroheim, and we now know the reason for it. Stroheim was trying to purvey a ruthlesseyicism to a public which was simply not ready for it. Today Stroheim emerges as a giant, a true experimenter.

Experiment in the period of sound was directed precisely towards the same end as in the

silent era - namely, how to make the medium more eloquent. The pressures were the same as before and the progress just as rapid.

Sound, as we know, brought the cinema closer to nature. It also did something else. By introducing the spoken word, it took away some of its universality and introduced an element of regionalism. The concept of a national cinema with a national style emerged more forcefully now than in the silent period. No wonder that the nation most noted for its sophistication should at this time have seen the most sophisticated developments in its cinema. For experiment on an adult level in the early period of sound, one has to turn to France and, more particularly, to Jean Renoir.

It is significant that Renoir has named only one director as his mentor : Erich von Stroheim. It was not Stroheim's cynicism that Renoir imbibed, but his sharp observation of human behaviour, his use of details, and his fearless probing of truth. These are qualities which one associated with the serious novel rather than with the erstwhile cinema. The film that best epitomises Renoir is *La Regle du Jeu*, made in 1939. More than any other film, *La Regle du Jeu* contained the seeds of the avant-garde that was to emerge twenty years later. Under a genial and relaxed exterior, the film was a mordant satire on the French aristocracy of the time. There was a lot of talk in it, but it could never have been a play; there was much searching analysis, but it could not have made a novel; even the screenplay reveals only a fraction of its treasures. *La Regle du Jeu* is wholly cinematic. Its plot is of a kind that defies summarisation in seven words (Hollywood's one-time criterion of a good screen story). Although perfectly comprehensible on the surface, *La Regle du Jeu* is a difficult and demanding film. In its various layers of meaning, it achieved a density which was unknown in the cinema of its time. One has constantly to read between the lines and, like all great works of art, one has to go back to it again and again to discover fresh nuances of meaning. Even if there had been : no technical and syntactical innovations in the film, *La Regle* would still have been an *advanced* film by virtue of its content alone. But there are other innovations as well, and they are so well integrated into the texture of the film that one hardly notices them. For instance, deep focus - a common enough device nowadays - was used by Renoir for the first time in *La Regle du Jeu*. This came about when Renoir found that the nature of the story occasionally called for different actions un-folding simultaneously in the same shot in different depths of field. The only way in which equal emphasis could be bestowed on these actions was by extending the focus to cover a greater depth than was customary in indoor photography of that time.

Within a few years of Renoir, and independently of him, another innovator - this time in the United States was to use deep focus extensively in his very first film. In *Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles wanted an overall sharpness in all his images, and his gifted cameraman Gregg Toland had to devise new lenses in order to achieve it. Welles wished, in a sense, to 'spare no details' in this ruthless study of an American tycoon.

Both *Kane* and *La Regle* treaded on too many corns for their own safety, and both were denied immediate success at the box office. Today no one questions their right to be regarded as milestones in the history of the cinema.

The first emergence of a school with a name happened in Italy in the immediate post-war years. The Neo-Realists were led by writers who were professed Leftists (Zavattini, Sergio Amidei). Their experiment consisted in bringing the film story down to the level of everyday reality. To match the treatment with the concept, directors like De Sica, Rosellini, Lattuada and Castellani took their cameras out in the streets and engaged non-actors (mostly) to play leading roles. We know that the films won both success and acclaim, but perhaps not enough thought has been given to the reasons for it. The main reasons were three (a) the scripts turned out by the writers had superbly organised classical structures; (b) they were deeply human in content; and (c) the directors, particularly Rossellini and De Sica, were first-rate craftsmen with years of solid achievement behind them. If *Bicycle Thieves* looks shoddy, it is only on the surface: the post-war film stock and processing in Italy were both less than satisfactory. Anyone who studies a film by De Sica will marvel at the ease and fluency of his mise-en-scene.

The fifties found Hollywood shaking in its shoes while TV slowly lured the audience away from the movie theatres. The only experiment that took place at this time had to do with the inflation of the screen ratio. The adult and serious work in the cinema was confined to a handful of directors in Europe and-as *Rashomon* proved-in Japan.

This was the time of the emergence of the New Wave in France. On the crest of the wave rode some young critics from the staff of the most distinguished film journal in Europe- *Cahiers du Cinema*. The reason why the New Wave happened in France and not elsewhere is the same as why *La Regle du Jeu* happened in France: it is the only country in the world where a departure from the norm in art is not immediately scoffed at.

Not that all the New Wave directors were unconventional to the same extent. Some of the early films of Claude Chabrol, for instance, have the surface of slick Hollywood products. Truffaut's

beautiful *400 Blows* has passages of great originality; but the structure beneath the apparently episodic story is fairly conventional. The one thoroughgoing iconoclast in the group was Jean-Luc Godard. As an innovator, one has to put him not far below D. W. Griffith, and any analysis of the New Wave unorthodoxy must in the end boil down to an analysis of the methods of Jean Luc Godard.

Godard decided that films could be made cheaply and quickly, and then set out boldly to work out what conventional items of expense could be dispensed with without destroying the essential purity of the art form. In effect, this was a fresh exploration of the fundamentals of film making, and it involved the questioning of all known methods and trying out new ones in their places. As *Breathless* and subsequent films proved, Godard was perfectly justified in applying rough and ready methods to films which dealt basically with unconventional people in an unconventional era. In other words, the Godard form grew out of the Godard content, and the Godard content has always embraced some aspect of contemporary European youth - journalist, soldier, prostitute, working girl, intellectual- caught in the whirl of modern living. The syntax is new, the pace and rhythm are new, the conception of narrative is new.

Godard is the first director in the history of the cinema to have totally dispensed with what is known as the plot line. Indeed, it would be right to say that Godard has devised a totally new genre for the cinema. This genre cannot be defined, it can only be described. It is a *collage* of story, tract, newsreel, reportage, quotations, allusions, commercial short, and straight TV interview - all related to a character or a set of characters firmly placed in a precise contemporary milieu. A cinema of the head and not of the heart, and therefore, a cinema of the minority.

The means by which Godard is able to discard plot is simply by doing away with the kind of obligatory scenes which would set the audience speculating on possible lines of development. This forces one not to anticipate but only to watch and absorb.

Let me give an example. *Masculine-Feminine* opens in a restaurant where a boy and a girl, sitting at separate tables set at least twenty feet apart, strike up an acquaintance. They talk, but since the camera is at a distance from them, and since there is heavy traffic on the street outside (seen through the glass door), we do not make out what they are saying. Godard here reverses convention by keeping the noise of the traffic deliberately and, if I may say so, realistically, above the level of conversation. This goes on for some time when suddenly a man gets up from another table, walks out of the restaurant, and is immediately followed by a woman who takes out a pistol from her handbag and shoots him down at point blank range. The boy and the girl



make some inaudible comments on this, and the scene ends. It remains to add that the boy and the girl continue to be the focal point of the film, while the murder is never brought up again.

At a cursory viewing, it would be easy to dismiss the scene as pointless and incoherent. But on second thoughts (or perhaps second viewing), it might begin to dawn on one that the scene not only presents actuality in a more truthful way than one is used to in the cinema, but it also makes some valid comments on our life and times. Film grammar tells us that essentials should be stressed, and enumerates the various audio-visual ways of doing so; but what if a director has a totally new angle on what is essential and what is not? In the scene just described, what has been established beyond dispute is that a boy and a girl met in a restaurant and talked. What they said is, to Godard, inessential. It is also established that while they sat talking a woman murdered a man (Husband? Lover? inessential) within their sight. Now, it is customary for directors to arrange background action for their scenes where such action is called for. This usually takes the form of unobtrusive but characteristic bits of business which make up a credible atmosphere without disturbing the main lines of action in the foreground. But what if someone uses an extremely violent bit of action in the *background*, if only to suggest that we live in an age where violence is all around us? And the youthful pair's apparent unconcern - does it not suggest the apathy to violence which can grow out of a prolonged exposure to a climate of extreme violence?

It is important to note that with Godard the reversal of convention is not a gimmick or an affectation, but a positive and meaningful extension of the film language.

Godard is fully aware that he treads on dangerous grounds when he drops all pretence of telling a story. But being as much concerned about the audience as anybody else, he provides attractive handholds for them to latch on to in the absence of a story line. Among these are the telling details which breathe life into the shots, superb acting from all the performers (stars even - for what else is Jean Paul Belmondo?), and quick changes of mood achieved with wit, grace and style.

In his recent films, Godard has sacrificed art for politics; but even in his best and most characteristic early works, he has been a bad model for young directors simply because his kind of cinema demands craftsmanship of the highest order, let alone various other equipments on an intellectual plane. In order to turn convention upside down, one needs a particularly firm grip on convention itself. This Godard had, thanks to years of assiduous film studying at the

Cinematheque in Paris. Those who have seen his first short story film *Every Man is Called Patrick* know what a sure grasp of narrative he had before he made *Breathless*.

The late sixties have seen the collapse of the System in Hollywood and the rise of young unconventional directors in place of the Old Guard. *An Easy Rider* shows how far Hollywood can move away from convention and yet pack them in. The new US youth audience is of course a special breed. We cannot yet measure exactly what drugs have done to alter the response of this audience. Part of the success of a film like *Easy Rider* must be due to a qualitative change in this response. At the same time, one should not discount the presence in the film of elements which would be affecting even for a conventional audience with its conventional demands. *Easy Rider* may not have a story, but it does, after its own fashion, make a statement, and a moving one at that. It also has its quota of sex, some violence, a pop song in the background, and three superb performances by potential stars.

It is significant that in the cinema of the west the veering towards unconventionalism has been exactly simultaneous with the growth of permissiveness. All young directors, whether in Europe or USA or Japan (even Eastern Europe, as some Czech films have shown) have exploited this permissiveness in their so-called off-beat films. It is also significant that 'fragmentation' — a modish cinematic device which chops up a scene or a statement — has rarely been applied to scenes of sexual encounter. In other words, the new experimentalists and iconoclasts abroad have come up — thanks to changed social attitudes — with their own formulae for survival in a commercial set-up. So the breaking of convention goes merrily along, while the box office is taken care of by permissive sex.

Which brings us to our own country where, alas, such permissiveness is still a long way off. And yet the New Wave is being talked about and the off-beat film on the way to becoming a reality.

The first question to ask at this point would be : how does one define off-beat in the context of Indian cinema; or, more specifically, Hindi cinema, since much of the activity seems to be centred in Bombay?

The ingredients of the average Hindi film are well known; colour (Eastman preferred) ; songs (six or seven?) in voices one knows and trusts; dance - solo and ensemble — the more frenzied the better; bad girl, good girl, bad guy, good guy, romance (but no kisses); tears, guffaws, fights, chases, melodrama; characters who exist in a social vacuum; dwellings which



do not exist outside the studio floor; locations in Kulu, Manali, Ooty, Kashmir, London, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo. . . who needs to be told? See any three Hindi films, and two will have all the ingredients listed above. This may well be the classical nine rasas prescription carried to its nth limit of crudity. But the fervour and frequency with which this prescription is applied suggests that it has become like a game with a set of rules which is being played by both the backers and the makers of the films, and played in a spirit of intense and engrossing rivalry. Although one may play for very high stakes and lose, one never thinks of questioning the rules of the game, as one never questions those of bridge or chess or cricket.

In the circumstances, assuming that you are given a chance to make an off-beat film in Hindi, you will have made one by just leaving out any four of the ingredients listed above. And such films are made from time to time (*Anand*, and the first part of *Mera Naam Joker* are recent examples). But surely this is a far cry from the off-beat in the European sense? This provokes my second question : is an avant-garde in the European sense a viable proposition in India? In France, the Malraux ministry at one time subsidised some eminent but 'difficult' directors. Bresson was one of them. Is there any likelihood of such subsidy here, assuming that we too have 'difficult' directors of the widely acknowledged calibre of Bresson? I doubt it.

If one studies the young *avant-garde* abroad that functions within the 35 mm commercial set-up (as opposed to Underground, where the normal laws of supply and demand do not operate), one notices the element of permissive sex applied as a safeguard in nine cases out of ten. The established serious directors are spared this constraint simply because their names carry their own guarantee of reliability, which usually also implies the guarantee of a well thought out, well made, well cast, well advertised product.

We in India would be wise not to ignore the implications of this overall pattern. I am thinking particularly of the young iconoclasts who hope to find that 2 or 2½ lakhs of rupees for the non-conformist masterpiece they have been dreaming of. I should have thought that such a sum of money would be a heavy burden for an artist to carry for any length of time. I am glad that the Film Finance Corporation have taken the stand that they have; and it is because they have done so that it now devolves on the film makers to bear in mind certain limitations they have to face, the 'conventions' that even they have to follow. Having worked for twenty years on as many films, and seen both success and failure over a wide range of subjects, I think I have earned the right to set out what these conventions and limitations are.

Two assumptions are necessary before we can proceed: one — the off-beaters will have no access to permissive sex for a long time yet, and two - art theatres will come into existence to provide an outlet for their films when the need arises. In other words, we shall continue to toe the puritanical-hypocritical line, and not depend wholly on normal channels of distribution and exhibition.

I think one has also to assume that when our young film makers talk of non-conformism, they are not thinking of minor deviations from the norm, but of radical ones. Whatever the extent of deviation, they have to remember that off-beat, like most other things in life, comes in three varieties - good, bad and indifferent. The second has no chance of success anywhere at any time. Trash of the *conventional* type may succeed, but never the off-beat. I understand the new film makers are pinning their faith on the perceptive minority, and the hunt is to track them down and turn them into patrons of the proposed art theatres. Do these film makers seriously believe that this minority is tucked away in odd corners of the country and have only to be ferreted out of their holes to make a beeline for these art theatres? My own belief is they are all around us, within easy reach and in enough numbers to make a two-lakh proposition pay, waiting for the right kind of off-beat movie to turn up.

What is this right kind of off-beat? Here, I am afraid, the film makers do not help us very much. They talk of experiment without clearly specifying what lines the experiment is to take and how far it is to go. One only hears of low budget, of short shooting schedules, and of the avoidance of stars. One also hears occasionally of improvisation, and of doing away with the story.

Experience would suggest that some of these are mutually annihilating concepts. But let us first examine them, starting with the most dangerous and deluding concept : Improvisation.

To me the word can mean one of two things: one, the film maker has thought it all out, but because he has not 'set it down on paper for others to read, he can *pretend* to be improvising. This is a form of artistic dishonesty which may or may not work against the film. But when one works with small funds, writing it down beforehand cuts costs. The second meaning: the film maker does not want to think ahead because he is confident of being inventive at the last moment. This provokes the following set of questions : (a) If the film maker is not thinking of the film he is about to make, what is he thinking of? (b) If he does not think ahead, how is he going to plan and work out how much it is going to cost? and, (c) If he does his thinking at the



last moment, where is the time for the others to think — the actors, the cameraman, the assistants? Or is the thinking of all these people of such small concern that it can be dispensed with?

Every director who is not a hack improvises to a certain extent within a defined scheme. Actors' gestures, camera movements, camera set-ups, bits of dialogue, background action — not all of these can be set down in advance precisely on paper. Striking ideas may turn up at the last moment and be used. But the person who talks of improvisation as a guiding principle in film making is more likely than not to be incapable of thinking at any time.

Let us now take the convention of the story. Considering its lusty existence for well over two thousand years, it seems naive to believe that the last ten years or so have somehow seen the demise of the story. Only when human beings undergo mutation to a new species will their normal collective demands be replaced by something else. The love of narrative, in no matter what disguised form, is too deeply ingrained in the human species. It is true that the audience has changed in the last fifty years, and equally true that film makers have discovered a hundred different ways of telling a story where there were only a dozen. This is a phenomenal growth compared with, say, that of literature. The development of language from Griffith to Godard in films is roughly equivalent to that from Chaucer to Joyce in English literature - a matter of 600 years as against 60 in the cinema. Godard ushered in the contemporary idiom. This idiom has been partly absorbed into the film language of today. But in spite of the changed idiom, the convention of narrative in whatever shape or form has remained. Every film is *about* something—usually about people, who pass through various phases and events which give the film a shape. This, to me, is a story. Anyone who thinks that a story is a lot of plot that twists and turns and rises and falls has got the wrong definition for today. By discarding the story altogether one would be destroying the very basis of a film that a lot of people are expected to see and like.

I would even suggest that a film maker who wishes to use the modern idiom has even greater need of a simple framework. As I understand it, the modern idiom is marked by a greater density than the old one. More is said in less space and less time. A terse, muscular, elliptic idiom. But the trouble is that for an audience to catch up with it, there is a difficulty that is inherent in the film medium itself. Let me explain by drawing a comparison with literature. Here is a random extract from *Ulysses*:

Flood of warm jimjam lickitup secretness flowed to flow in music out, in desire, dark to lick flow, invading. Tipping her tepping her tapping her topping her. Tup. Pores to dilate dilating. Tup. The joy the feel the warm the. Tup. To pour over sluices pouring gushes. Flood, gush, flow, joygush, tupthrop. Now! Language of love.

This cannot be read like light fiction if one is to make any sense of it. A reader who refuses to grapple with this kind of language is free to shut the book and put it away. One who does not must be prepared to take his time. *But a filmgoer's time is not his own time.* Everything in the cinema, every kind of film — comic, tragic, light, serious, conventional, experimental- unreels at the constant speed of twenty-four frames per second. One cannot shut the film and think. One cannot go back to that passage, savour that imagery or turn of phrase, ponder over that allusion and trace it to its source.

If this is understood, my plea for a simple subject to go with a modern idiom will also be understood. After all, even Joyce needed the framework of a classical myth. Even the most elite minority audience will look for something to get their teeth into. Assuming that our *avant-garde* do not wish to alienate this audience, they will have to provide a balm along with the irritant. Such a balm is a simple subject, and such another is a star.

Perhaps the shrillest voices of the new film makers have been raised against the stars. I do not know what definition of a star these film makers have been using, but mine goes something like this: a star is a person on the screen who continues to be expressive and interesting even after he or she has stopped doing anything. This definition does not exclude the rare and lucky breed that gets five or ten lakhs of rupees per film; and it includes anyone who keeps his calm before the camera, projects a personality and evokes empathy. This is a rare breed too, but one has met it in our films. Suhasini Mulay of *Bhuvan Shome* is such a star; so is Dhritiman Chatterji of *Pratidwandi*; so are the two girls of *Uski Roti*.

The advantage of having such a star, especially for the off-beat film maker, is truly immense. One has only to remember the magnetism lent to unconventional films by actors like Belmondo, Jean-Pierre Leaud, Anna Karina, Jeanne Moreau, Czybulski, Jack Nicholson. There is only one director in the world who has made an absolute fetish of using non-actors, and anyone who has seen a Bresson film and observed the Bresson faces knows with what care he chooses his 'types'. Care in the casting of actors — professional or non-professional- is a *sine qua non* of the healthy existence of an *avant-garde*.

And care in craftsmanship too. By craftsmanship I do not mean the superficial gloss, which



one can well do without. I mean the most effective use of the means at one's disposal. I am thinking particularly of the avoidance of the kind of shoddiness which is the equivalent of clumsy prose in writing which can mean either lack of education or lack of clear thinking or both. If the shooting is haphazard, if the images are shoddy, how can it all add up to an effective and meaningful statement? By inspired editing? Is it possible to arrange a series of clumsy sentences into meaningful literature?

One can cut out the conventional story with its conventional line and substitute a patchwork of ideas *a la* Godard. But even a patchwork has its own aesthetic laws, violating which will only result in a grotesque. And we know what that means in art. 'Take the head of a horse, the torso of an elephant, the hind legs of a camel. . . .' began Da Vinci's recipe for drawing a monster. It is doubtful if the discriminating minority will go for a hybrid if they can find the meat in a conventional movie.

The temptation to try and get away with it is strong in the unconventional film maker. Since there is no norm for the off-beat, his work cannot be measured against one. Therefore, he can always *claim* that he has done something new and meaningful. But unless his claim is endorsed by the perceptive minority, the work of art will remain unvindicated. Individual responses are of small ultimate value to a film maker. If his own claim is justified, sooner or later endorsement will come from perhaps an even wider circle than he bargained for.

Unfortunately, the kind of movement that we need here must set its targets in the present and not in posterity. That is why the film maker must be prepared to deal with the collective mind, with collective response. This collective response is a peculiar thing which may have nothing to do with what a certain critic or a certain member of the film maker's coterie thinks of his work. Let us say that X is the individual response that extols this work, and Y the one that runs it down. X will provide the film maker with the boost that all artists need, and Y the exasperation that is also his heritage. Both X and Y may be contained in the collective response, but the sum total of response is likely to be neither X nor Y, but Z — a third new entity. All film makers aim at arousing that mysterious thing of the mind in the audience called empathy, which is the opposite of being left cold; Z is in direct ratio to this empathy. And it is Z which ultimately decides the fate of a film even under ideal conditions of making and showing it.

In the circumstances, the only sensible thing for the artist to do is to be objective to the extent that he may rise above his personal idiosyncracies. The audience will put up with the showiest of directors provided his matter justifies his manner. The modern idiom, unless backed by a genuinely modern attitude to life and society, is apt to degenerate into gimmickry and

empty flamboyance. Renoir revealed this attitude in *La Regle du Jeu*, so did Welles in *Citizen Kane*, so does Godard in film after film. It is necessary to point out that the New Wave was marked as much by a new syntax as by a new philosophy.

All in all, I am less worried about the film makers aiming too high — which is not a bad thing — than aiming the wrong way. I am not sure I am happy about the minority audience syndrome either. This seems suspiciously like a defensive manoeuvre on the part of the new film makers. Why not aim wider? I do not know of a single film maker who has been dismayed by a wide acceptance of his work.

However, if the film makers insist on this elusive minority, they must remember that this minority, in India, is likely to be somewhat less educated filmwise, and for obvious reasons, than its European counterpart. This audience will expect, firstly, a modicum of craftsmanship, which can be achieved within a low budget and a short time only with the help of knowhow and meticulous planning; secondly, they will expect a star or stars (vide my definition), and thirdly, a subject with the basic attributes of contrast and interplay of credible human emotions capable of arousing empathy. The film should also cover the conventional minimum of a ninety minute span without undue and obvious padding. One can think of shorter features only under conditions of lowered seat prices to go with them. This is logical. In the book trade, for instance, other things being equal, a slim book costs less than a fat one regardless of author and quality.

Among recent films, *Bhuvan Shome* is cited widely as an off — beat film which has succeeded with a minority audience. My own opinion is that whatever success it has had has not been because of, but in spite of its new aspects. It worked because it used some of the most popular conventions of cinema which helped soften the edges of its occasional spiky syntax. These conventions are: a delectable heroine, an ear — filling background score, and a simple, wholesome wish — fulfilling screen story (summary in seven words: Big Bad Bureaucrat Reformed by Rustic Belle).

However, there may be a pointer here for the new film makers. *Bhuvan Shome* may well define the kind of off — beat most likely to succeed with our minority audience — the kind that looks a bit like its French counterpart, but is essentially old-fashioned and Indian beneath its trendy habit.

Extracted from the book : *"Our Films Their Films"*, © Orient Blackswan Pvt Ltd, India

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THEATRE AND FILM

■ Satish Bahadur

This essay presents a frame of ideas about the nature of Film for a conceptual examination of its relationship with Theatre. The text can provide useful discussion material for courses in Aesthetics of Film.

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Everything is what it is, and not another thing.

-Joseph Butler; Fifteen Sermons

Introductory : The Problem of Identity

Film is a matter of the last eighty years only. The first silent film was the Lumiere Programme of 1895 and sound film came after 1927, while Theatre had been in existence from sometime very early in the human civilization. When Film was just emerging, Theatre already had a corpus of theory, and, of texts and traditions which had matured through many historical-cultural cycles of growth, to name a few, the Greek Theatre, the Sanskrit Theatre, the Elizabethan

Theatre..... In short, the art of Theatre had a self-identity. Despite this, the confrontation of Theatre by Film led to much confused thinking about the nature of the two.

Sure enough, Film had certain apparent similarities which made it look like Theatre. For instance, both could show fictional stories of human interaction; both appealed via the eye and the ear; both needed actors, and so on. Such similarities led some to think that Film was an extension of Theatre; it could do everything Theatre could do and more; by recording a theatrical performance, Film could make a play reproducible at will for audiences anywhere, any time. An extreme prediction even made out that Theatre would be entirely absorbed and wiped out of existence by the future development of Film.

None of this, of course, ever happened. Over the last 80 years, Film has co-existed with, not swallowed up Theatre. The ancient performing art of Theatre has continued its modern growth as a performing art. Also, parallel to this, has been the growth of the new art of the Film with an identity quite distinct from the art of the Theatre. Despite this, confused arguments about Film and Theatre still continue. This essay attempts to locate the sources of such confusion in two areas, as follows.

As a recording medium Film is like a neutral transparency on which anything with a visual and auditory component can be recorded with photographic and phonographic realism. The quality of photographic and phonographic realism gives a film-recording such visual and aural "sameness" to the original that the recording appears like the thing itself. Film has, in fact, been used for making Filmed Theatre, which looks superficially like Theatre itself. A distinction, therefore, needs to be made between Theatre and Filmed Theatre. This is the core idea in Section I : Theatre and the Recording Function of Film.

Section II : The Art of Theatre and the Art of Film attempts to discuss the basic differences between the two arts. The Art of Film lies essentially in composing fragments of recorded photographic moving pictures (by the camera) and fragments of recorded sounds of different kinds (by recording machines) and, further, of composing (in the editing process and the re-recording process) these fragments of pictures and sounds in an expressive continuity. The movie camera and the recording machines are the very basic creative tools without which the Art of Film cannot exist. In contrast, the core of the art of the Theatre without which it cannot exist, is the live actor performing for an audience. The core distinction between the two is in the fact that Theatre is a performing art whereas Film is not a performing art.



Section I

Theatre and the Recording Function of Film

Man has always wanted to make a permanent record of facts and events of the transient world. Memory of an event is fickle, making a record of the event is a device to make the memory permanent. Writing of speech sounds and linguistic forms developed as recording media early in human civilisation, and so also picturing in line and colour; photography, Cinematography and Photography only in the last 150 years or so.

Writing like Language itself which it records, is arbitrary and abstract-and therefore, versatile; its very abstraction, however, prevents the record of a thing say, the written word Tree from being like the thing - the beautiful green thing out there. Moreover, its conventions and symbolic rules are confined only to a linguistic group and have to be learnt. Drawing as a recording of a tree is like the visual shape of the tree, but it is still not quite like the tree. Man was constantly striving to develop a medium capable of recording an exact likeness, a direct, sensuous medium which could record the myriad details of the moving world of sights and sound around. In short, one was searching for Film, the medium of photographic and phonographic realism.

Film did come but only through the slow discovery over the centuries of many scientific principles and their application to the machines of cinematography, viz the movie camera and its counterpart, the film projector, and the machines of phonography, viz. the sound recording system and its counterpart, the sound reproducing system. By their very nature, Photography, Cinematography and Phonography are based on complicated machines and scientific technology.

As experience, photographic realism was something new in human consciousness. The first film ever made, the Lumiere Programme was shown in Paris on 28th December, 1895, and a newspaper headline next morning declared : "This is life itself!" Some spectators ran out of the hall for their lives when the Lumiere film showed a railway train rushing towards them. Some early names of Cinema like Vitagraph, Biograph and Bioscope celebrate the connection of the medium with life, with reality.

And these were, by no means, primitive reactions to photographic realism: even modern audiences are gripped precisely by this property of Cinema, You actually see on the screen a moving picture, of say, Manojkumar walking in a garden singing a song, but it appears as if Manojkumar himself is walking in a garden singing a song. Further, you see Manojkumar from the viewpoint of the camera, which was in the garden next to Manojkumar when the shot was

taken. Hence, you not only see Manojkumar walking in the garden singing a song but also have the additional feeling that you are there in the garden, in the same space where Manojkumar is. They say that to see is to believe. Cinema enables you to see and hear a thing as it is and on the spot and the moment where it is.

The quality of photographic realism of cinema gave rise to the non-fiction genres of films, which instantly distinguish it from the art of Theatre. Films like the documentary, the newsreel, films of travel and of events like pageants and sports and educational and instructional films use the photographic and phonographic realism of cinema to record and interpret problems of social, economic and cultural life around us. Theatre did not have any non-fiction development for the simple reason that Theatre is not a recording medium at all. It is an expressive performing art.

Ironically enough, it was precisely the quality of photographic realism (in the days of silent film) and of phonographic realism (later, in the days of sound cinema) which attracted Cinema to Theatre. The logic was as follows: Film was an expensive medium and the businessmen who quickly recognized cinema as a medium of mass entertainment were constantly looking for potentially attractive material for the largest possible audiences. Theatre provided ready stories, sometimes based on well-known plays written by well-known authors and acted by well-known actors. The film camera (and later, the microphone) could record theatrical performance with photographic accuracy; in multiple copies it could be shown to mass audiences, anywhere, any time. Moreover, Cinema was a struggling newcomer with no pedigree in the hierarchy of the arts: by including within itself the high art of Theatre, Cinema could attempt to improve its cultural status. This is how Filmed Theatre was born, curiously enough in the silent period when the words spoken by the actors could not be heard, but had to be read in brief titles. With the coming of sound Filmed Theatre came in its own since the spectator could see the actor's performance as well as hear the words spoken by him.

They appear very incongruous now, but actually several hundreds of films on plays were made in all countries during the silent period. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for instance, was made in an 8-minute silent version in England, the Bard's famous lines cut down to a few written titles interspersed in the scenes here and there. When Madame Sarah Bernhardt, the great French actress was invited to the filming of her play *Queen Elizabeth* in 1911, she is reported to have declared with glee: 'This is my only chance of immortality!' Madame Bernhardt was correct in the limited sense that she can be seen with photographic accuracy even today after she has



been dead and gone but the film failed to preserve the theatrical skill of the great actress. The fallacy in Madame Bernhardt's thinking springs precisely from the lack of understanding of the distinction between Theatre and Filmed Theatre. Theatre is a live performance by actors for an audience present at the time of performance. The actor projects for the audience, which gives a live response, and this in turn, energizes the actor's performance. This live projection response relationship is the heart of the theatrical experience. When a film makes a photographic and phonographic record of a theatrical performance, the live immediacy of the theatrical experience is missing. Filmed Theatre is only a recording of the theatrical event, and therefore, cannot give any clue to the theatrical experience.

But Filmed Theatre has been done extensively in the Cinema of all countries of the world. Nearer home, one could mention two examples. Sohrab Modi's *Khoon Ka Khoon* (1935) was a straight filming of Agha Hashar Kashmiri's rendering of *Hamlet* for the Parsi Theatrical Company. The first shot of the Film showed the opening of the proscenium curtain with a whistle and the bang of a cracker, and the play began. The dominant camera composition was the full frontal view of the whole stage, but often the camera could move in to closer angles on the actors. Bal Gandharva's play *Sadhvi Meerabai* (1936) was also filmed with the same technique and disastrous results. The film fails to show any of the legendary theatrical genius of the great actor who cast his spell on an earlier generation of Marathi theatre-goers; in absence of the live theatrical event, this film-record maroons in time a middle-aged impersonator masquerading as a painted, costumed woman. It looks like a caricature of the tribute: 'There would never be another Bal Gandharva!' (Asaa Bal Gandharva aata na hone- Madgulkar).

These are, of course, extreme examples of Filmed Theatre in the early history of Cinema. Even now Filmed Theatre continues but with considerable cinematic sophistication. The concept is as follows. The basic thing to be filmed is the play, the author's original lines enacted and spoken by the actors. But the stage is no longer the fixed space behind the proscenium, but rather an extended area with numerous possible locations over which the camera can roam. The camera need not take the ideal spectator viewpoint of the whole stage, it can bring the audience closer to the actor for greater viewing and hearing comfort; the acting can be modified to suit the changed camera position. The entire range of skills of cinema would be brought in for the basic effort of filming of the play. Outstanding examples of such Filmed Theatre are Sir Laurence Olivier's three Shakespeare films *Henry V* (1945), *Hamlet* (1948) and *Richard III* (1954).

As illustrations of excellent examples of filming the plays of modern writers one could

mention just three : George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* by Anthony Asquith (1938) Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Elia Kazan (1951), who incidentally also produced it on the New York stage, and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Mike Nichols (1966). Such honest examples of Filmed Theatre do serve a certain amount of social and educational function for the mass audience. After all, the recording function of Film is to bring events which occur elsewhere at another time for the benefit of the spectator who is here and now; a newsreel is valuable precisely because it enables you to see now an event which occurred elsewhere at another time. Likewise, you can see Laurence Olivier on the stage only if you are in London when he is playing and if you are lucky enough to buy a ticket for a performance. Filmed Theatre brings the recording of Laurence Olivier's performance for any spectator anywhere, any time. filmed Theatre uses the recording powers of Film pressed in the service of the dissemination of Theatre in a situation which is otherwise impossible since the performing art of Theatre exists only for the duration of the performance, and has no existence, after that.

The relationship between the art of Theatre and the art of Film are issues of a different kind altogether.

Section II

The Art of Theatre and the Art of Film

The core techniques of Theatre are connected with the performance of the actor for an audience present at the time of the performance. The core techniques of Film are connected with the pictorial composition made by the movie camera, sound compositions made by the microphone and recording machines and the combination of pictorial and sound elements in editing composition and re-recording. Herein lie the main distinctions between the art of Theatre and the art of Film.

Analytically speaking, the actor in Theatre performs two distinct functions as follows: (i) the actor is the concrete incarnation of the *dramatis persona*. By his mime and verbal acting the actor, in addition, creates the theatrical event and the space and time in which that event occurs. (ii) the actor projects to the live spectator as a communication device to bridge the psychological distance caused by the separation of the stage area and the audience area.

Let us see in some rough and ready examples how these two elements of acting actually operate in Theatrical performance.



First: the creation of the theatrical act by the actor. The curtain goes up, and you see the lighted box of the stage with some properties on it, say, a few cardboard cut-outs of trees and the background curtain. Then, a painted, bewigged, berobed actor enters the stage; he mimes a limping, tired walk across and takes up a stance of anxious expectation behind a cardboard cut-out of a tree suggesting that he is waiting for someone who is offstage and he starts speaking his lines...and so on and so forth. Let us assume that the created theatrical event is that this is the king escaped from the enemy; now he is hiding in the forest waiting anxiously for the messenger for further news from the battlefield. It needs to be recognised that this event is created by the presence of the actor on the stage and his performance on the stage. Further, it is due to the actor's act of taking a hiding stance behind a cut-out that the cut-out "becomes" the tree and the space "becomes" the location of the forest for us. Still further, the actor, by his mime and spoken words also creates the sense of stretched-out time in which the event is taking place; the limp across the stage area may be made to feel like a long trek through the forest, and not appear the mere two minutes of chronometric time taken by the actor in doing the act on the stage. The event and the space and time in which the event occurs are created by the actor's acting on the stage. Let us now suppose that the curtain had opened and no actor came on the stage and we kept on seeing the stage properties for a long time, say, four or five minutes, we would have thought (rightly) that something has gone wrong with the play, since we would see the cardboard cut-outs as cut-outs. The play cannot come into being without the live actor on the stage.

Theatre uses many accessories like the proscenium stage properties, lighting, costumes, make-up, music, etc. These are used in some styles of production but not in the others, since they are not necessary to the form of Theatre itself. Perfectly good theatre, modern as well as old style, can exist without them. An actor's acting can invest the bare boards of a modern stage the flexibility of becoming any location, a sea shore, a crowded street or a thick forest. Much of modern theatre is without make-up or costumes; in the folk theatre one has even known of the actor who refused to shave off his moustache for a female role and succeeded in playing a perfectly winsome Subhadra! Theatre is, by its very nature, a highly symbolic art. It demands from the spectator a high degree of willing suspension of disbelief; the spectator expects to receive from the symbolic stage area symbolic images of human characters in conflict, but the kingpin of the entire ensemble of Theatre is the symbolic acting of the actor on the stage which determines the level of symbolism of the other (elements of the ensemble of the stage presentation).

Now, the second element : projection in stage acting. The actor acts in the stage area while the spectator sits in the auditorium area. The proscenium distinctly separates the two areas. While the intimate theatre, whether folk or avant garde, may tend to diffuse this, but the aesthetic and conceptual distinction is valid there as well. Now, the compositional problem is that many elements on the stage, like several characters, properties, sets, backdrops, lights, etc., compete for the spectator's attention. Hence, it is necessary to create a focus of attention for every segment of a scene so that the spectator may not only see the scene in terms of what happens but also receive the significance of what is happening on the stage. For instance, in the scene of the defeated king in the forest, the spectator should not only see a physically exhausted king hiding in the forest but it is equally important that the actor must pitch his mime and words at a level to ensure that the spectator receives the quality of danger, fear and anxiety of the king's situation. Even if a character on the stage sits quietly on a chair for two minutes in a scene, he has to project through his acting stance to the audience the significance (whatever it might be) of the character sitting quietly in the chair. This projection aspect of acting is not strictly concerned with narrative import. Its function is to seek the level at which the communication of narrative import would be effectively registered by the spectator who is separated from the actor by the psychological distance of being in another space. One of the important things that the director of a play attempts to achieve in rehearsals is to balance out the relative acting projection done by different actors in any scene so that the dramatic essence of the scene may be clear to the audience. In performance, the actors continuously keep on making adjustments in relative projection amongst themselves as they receive the response signals from the audience. This projection-response relationship is characteristic of all face-to-face communication situations, in inter-personal talking, or public speaking, or a music performance, or on the live stage. Over projection results in exaggeration and imbalance in performance; under projection leads to casualness and lack of clarity about what is happening on the stage.

The relationship of the actor with the total ensemble changes drastically when we pass from Theatre to Film. The symbolic nature of Theatre makes the performing actor the central creator of the art work; in Film, the film director is the central creator of the art work, presenting on the screen audio-visual expressive images of various themes conceived in terms of the photographic-phonographic-realistic requirements of the medium. The film director composes the art work through three distinct technical stages as follows:

- (i) He uses the movie camera to create shots which are recorded fragments of visual images, the expressive quality of which depends on the way they are composed as two dimensional visual design in movement. The actor, of course, is in front of the camera, but the very process of photography reduces the actor's live performance to an optical element in the visual composition of the shot. Hence the acting registered on the film as a moving optical image depends very much on the director's technical decisions, viz. the position of the camera in relation to the actor, the movement of the camera, the lens used in the camera, the lighting of the shot, the duration of the shot and the way in which the actor is related in the pictorial composition to other elements in the shot like other actors and other animate and inanimate objects. And it should be stressed that the effect of these technical decisions of the film director are not optional extras (comparable to the sets, the properties, lighting etc. in the stage composition), but the precise devices through which film composition is created. Further, the camera is a neutral machine and any live response to the actor from a live spectator is cut off by the neutral machine. Hence, the compositional devices as described above, are the director's methods of generating feeling in the spectator. The intervention of film camera, therefore, makes very different kinds of demands on the film actor's skills. He has to act in small fragments of acting since the shooting is discontinuous. The actor has always to be aware of the position of the camera for every shot since he has to act relative to the camera position. Moreover, during shooting, instead of live audience response, the actor is subject only to the cold glare of the camera lens and the abrupt gesture of the film director.
- (ii) The film director uses recorded sound of many varieties: the speech of the actor, effect sounds and fragments of music to make composition of sound elements which would eventually fit the visual composition of shots placed in relation to each other. Thus the film actor does not usually have the same kind of support to his acting skill from his voice as the stage actor invariably has. The film actor has to speak his lines for the recording machine and not for the audience. It is the director who would eventually manipulate the recorded speech of the actor with respect to the other sounds for achieving the desired audio component of the finished film.
- (iii) Finally, the director arranges the shot fragments and sound fragments in relation to each other in the editing process and the re-recording process which leads to the finished film. Thus, in film the actor's live acting in front of the camera gets thrice removed from the

original through several compositional stages: reduction to an optical element within the shot, the relationship of a shot with the other shots, and finally the modification of the visual image by the addition of the sound component. The event seen in the finished film is not created by the actor's act but by the director's compositional devices at various levels. Similarly, the space in which the event occurs is not created by the actor's act since the event, itself might not have taken place at all. In point of fact, there is no space in which the cinematic events exist beyond the pictorial space created in the camera shot for audience perception. Similarly, the time duration of the cinematic event is controlled by the editing of shots.

The actor is important in the cinema because he enacts the persona in the story content of the film. However, the compositional devices of the form of Film are independent of the actor and are controlled by the film director. When it is said that Theatre is the actor's medium, while Film is the director's medium, we are referring to this peculiar relationship of the film actor within the total framework of the devices of cinema. In fact, a film may not even have actors. The documentary film and the abstract films are examples of this kind.

Similarly, the use of the camera and the microphone makes projection by the actor unnecessary in film acting. The reason is as follows. Any spectator of a film is conceptually looking at a shot from the position of the camera and hearing from the position of the microphone. This places the spectator right in the "middle" of the scene, at the conceptual psychological centre of the drama which is being created by the interaction of the characters. Hence, there is no need to overcome the distance between the audience area and the event area, since there is no such conceptual distance. Projection in film acting is unnecessary because the task of projection has already been taken over by the camera and the sound recording machines, which have brought the spectator right in the "middle" of the action. And, the responsibility of communicating the narrative and the expressive import at the right level lies with the director who chooses the focus of attention and its subsequent locus.

With these basic distinctions between the two art forms, We can see how the problem of transforming a play for the screen is qualitatively different from the problem of presenting it on the stage. The author's play text is the original vision (created through words) of the commanding form of dramatic revelation of human conflict which has eventually to be realised in stage presentation when the author's words would be interpreted by the actor in speech and mimed action. The play is originally conceived for symbolic presentation in Theatre. The task of the theatre director is to discover a style of staging appropriate to the vision which is inherent in the author's text and to rehearse the actors to realise it in performance.

But adaptation of the play-text for the film screen involves the transformation of something which exists within the symbolic matrix of Theatre into the direct sensuous matrix of photographic-phonographic realism of cinema. The recording possibilities of cinema provide an easy short-cut to circumvent this essentially difficult aesthetic-creative problem, and most film makers take this easy course. They stage the play for the camera and the microphone and film it, and then of course, we have the familiar Filmed Theatre, done crudely or with cinematic sophistication. The genuine problem of adaptation is one of identifying the commanding form which exists in the structure of the play, lift it from the symbolic matrix of the play and find an equivalence of the original form in the medium of cinema. This has rarely been achieved in the entire history of international film making. One can talk of a few outstanding achievements. Akira Kurosawa's *The Throne of Blood* (1956) is a film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Kurosawa transposes the action from medieval Scotland to medieval Japan. But he preserves the original dramatic conflict of the play expressing the tragedy of vaulting human ambition. Consistent with the photographic requirements of the film medium, Kurosawa's characters are Samurai personages moving against medieval Japanese castles and landscapes; consistent with the phonographic-realistic requirements of the cinema, these Samurai characters speak harsh, guttural, clipped Japanese prose. Shocking though it may appear to purists, the Kurosawa film entirely discards the great poetic language of Shakespeare. But at the same time one also notices the miracle of transformation of the poetry of one medium into the poetry of another medium. The images in Shakespeare's words which were to be evoked by the mimetic and verbal skills of the actor on the stage are all there, intact; in the Kurosawa film. But they are transposed into the physically palpable environment where the action takes place: images of violence and serenity, of light and darkness, of blood, of the moods of horses and of nature, of mental confusion and clarity. *The Throne of Blood* is a truly unique adaptation of a play on film: it does not use poetry in the film, as Filmed Theatre does, but rather achieves a valid equivalence in the poetry of the film. Kurosawa achieves something very similar in his adaptation of Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths* (1957), where he maintains Gorky's words in Japanese translation, but treats them cinematically by embedding them in the concrete social physical context. The visual shapes of the cramped environment of the ramshackle pauper's dwelling are used in film composition with such consistency of design that the environment itself achieves the status of a persona. Kozintsev's Russian adaptation of *Hamlet* (1964) and *King Lear* (1972) have the same quality of cinematic transformation. In Indian cinema there has been little experimentation in genuine problems of adaptation or plays to film, but Mani Kaul's adaptation of Mohan

Rakesh's *"Ashadh Ka Ek Din"* (1972) attempted to achieve this transformation. Kaul's yet unreleased adaptation or Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1977) which has been re-scripted for the screen by the playwright himself promises to be, from all reports, promising.

As the youngest art in human history, Film has gratefully borrowed values from the older arts, but transformed and absorbed them within the requirements of film form. Drama has contributed to film form the principles of dramatic structure, which are invariably used in composing films of themes displaying dramatic human conflict, But, it should be recognized that while a stageplay cannot but be dramatic, a film is free to be dramatic or not. What we have just discussed is the possibility of the truly dramatic film which rises above being Filmed Theatre. But a film does not have to be dramatic in quality to justify itself as a film. A film is never free to be other than cinematic. But that is another problem : What is it to be cinematic ?



TRAGIC WALK OF HEROISM

*Reflections on M T Vasudevan Nair's
Film Literature*

■ P.S. Manoj Kumar



(1)

The socio-religious movements subjected the Kerala society to serious changes during the early decades of the 20th century. These changes had produced a deep impact on the social, familial, cultural and personal lives of Malayalees. The impact of the socio-religious movements was so profound that it produced recurring impacts and influences on the social institutions that existed in Kerala. The feudal institutions and ties were seriously challenged, particularly in the post-independence era.

Family and familial relations were the major areas of contestation. The large/extended families were seen as prisons that checked the freedom and independent growth of persons and there was a major shift towards micro/small families. Life in large/extended families or taravadus lost its charm, and these social institutions faced wreckage. The spread of kith and kin to distant zones (emotionally, economically, physically, socially and culturally), and sprouting of micro (patriarchal/ paternal) familial institutions became common. It was on this backdrop that the 'new individual' struggling to get out of the clutches of a feudal régime and bondages emerged in Malayalam literature. 'He' was trying to liberate himself from all the bondages, values, norms, economy and other essential features associated with a feudal society. This 'new individual' was highly patriarchal and there was an attempt to cast new values and norms around this 'new individual', thereby projecting him as a stereotype. This 'new individual' was dealt with in detail by Malayalam literature.

Even though this 'new individual' tried to represent or disseminate the new ethos, he was incapable of representing a new régime. This was because of his feudal cultural and social affinities. The shaking off of the feudal bondages was deeply selective. This 'new individual' tried to keep in him some feudal elements which boost up his personal morale and make him culturally and socially rich as a powerful man. That was the cultural gene in the persona of the 'new individual' that blossomed out of the fertile soil of feudal régime, socio-religious movements and the political and social awakening which occurred during the post-independent period.

This is the cultural and social background in which M T Vasudevan Nair (fondly referred to as M T or MTV) has located his major literary discourses. In other words, it was this socio-cultural background that informed his literary sensibility and produced the aesthetic vision. As such, most of his literary discourses were set in the backdrop of families and familial relations, and these were, of course, accompanied by a visualisation the cultural fall and challenges faced by these social elements.

(2)

Going through the screenplays written by M T Vasudevan Nair and the films produced in Malayalam prior to his arrival on the scene, it could well be said that M T is the first screenplay writer who led Malayalam cinema to a strictly Keralite atmosphere and transformed the aesthetic form and content of Malayalam films.¹ Of course, M T has revolutionised the aesthetic sensibility of the Malayalee community with respect to its attitudes to cinema. He has tried to give a realistic dimension to the visual, dialogic and geographical contents of Malayalam cinema. Everything in praise is apt as far as M T's screenplays are concerned. But, there is a need to rearticulate what this Keralite atmosphere implies, and what the form and content of the aesthetics mean? These are the major questions for which answers are sought in this paper. As these questions demand the analysis of the socio-cultural atmospheres in which these scripts are rooted, this study attempts at scanning these backdrops too.

For convenience, the scripts of M T can be broadly classified into two (not forgetting the individuality of each screenplay). Firstly, the scripts in which the contemporary society is focused, and secondly, the scripts in which mythical/quasi historical protagonists are portrayed. *Nirmalyam*, *Panchagni*, *Nagaram nanni*, *Iruttinte aatmaavu*, *Kuttyedathi*, *Oru Cherupunchiri*, *Kadavu* etc belong to the first category and *Oru Vadakkan Veeragadha*, *Vaisali*, *Perunthachan* etc belong to the second.



In this study, the focus is on two scripts which I think are seminal. The first is *Nirmalyam* and second is *Oru Vadakkan Veeragadha*.

(3)

Nirmalyam is M T's directorial debut film. It was released in the year 1973. The protagonist of the film is the oracle of an abandoned temple. Through him the socio-cultural atmosphere of a Kerala village is visualised. The film is set in the post land reformation period. The film visualizes the deterioration of the ethos of an era and the value system associated with it. The abandoned temple is the symbol of a vanishing culture in which the temple was the centre of all activities. The reason for the deterioration of the temple was the drastic social change inflicted upon the Kerala village society and economy as a result of the economic changes induced by the land reforms. As a result of the land reforms in Kerala, there was a shift in the ownership rights of land. The devaswom lands and the landed properties owned by the upper caste sections of society were subjected to redistribution. The land reforms in Kerala paved the way for the loss of feudal prestige and charm.

The temple was not a place of worship as far as the feudal society was concerned. It was the pivotal seat of cultural, social, economic and political discourses in a village. Most temples were under the custody of Brahmin *uralas*. The temples acted as a seat of prosperity and charm. Almost every social position was designed and executed going by the access one had to the temple. In the particular village in which M T locates his story, such a powerful social institution is seen abandoned.

The film portrays the changes that occurred in the mentality of the people. The emergence of a new section in the society which thinks beyond the patterns suggested by the earlier belief system is portrayed. This section is the one which has internalised the value of money and labour. The people who have internalised the value of these had acquired the will power to assert their rights on wages. The film portrays the growth of a mentality which recognises everything that is valuable in terms of money. It also traces moments which depict the high handedness of money/finance than human relationships. The extreme level of this mentality is traced in the words and deeds of *Urala Nambuthiri*. He chants his opinion as a mantra: anything which is capable of producing profit is sustainable; everything else will perish. It is this mentality which made him order the storekeeper (a former Kathakali artist) of Kathakali materials to dump it upstairs and to quit the post. This Nambuthiri had switched over from paddy cultivation

to rubber estates and bus services – the Keralite form of capitalism in those ages – thus overcoming the enactment of land reform laws. He was not the only person to recognise the value of money in the emerging social scenario. There are characters in the film who have liberated themselves from the feudal value systems, relations, rituals and beliefs like Varrier - the one who brings flowers and garlands to the temple - who refuses to give milk to the daughter of the oracle; Marar – the drummer in the temple - who refuses to accept five rupees for his services in the temple and quits the temple; the priest who hands over the keys of the temple to Varrier and starts a hotel; Appu – the son of the oracle - who tries to sell the sword, anklet and belled waist belt of the oracle and Narayani – the wife of the Oracle - who turns to prostitution to repay debts and earn a living. In *Nirmalyam* M T portrays the pains and sufferings of these people in a touching manner in the backdrop of a social reformation process. The film also visualizes how the land reforms in Keralam affected a particular section of the society.

An analysis of the film and the social segments upon which the narrative of the film is constructed reveals that the Keralam which has been portrayed in the film is that of upper castes (who were directly related to various functions/ ritual jobs in the temple). The drummer who asks to find a Pana (a low caste who too performs percussion) for five rupees portrays the upper Jati complexes and complexities working among these sects.

The financial crises confronted by various segments of society after the enactment of the land reforms Bill constrain the relations at social, familial and personal levels. These constraints are reflected in the relations between Appu and the Oracle (the son and the father), Narayani and the Oracle (the wife and the husband) and Ammini and Unni (the lovers). The film portrays the demonic and powerful inflow of money shattering relations at all levels.

This crisis manifests itself with the thwarting of positions of individuals in the village community. The film portrays the journey of the Oracle in his ritual dress for earning paddy from well-to-do families. Parallel to his journey, the film depicts the roaming of Pulluva spouses (low caste people who sing the praises of nagas, snake gods) and beggars. The people see no difference among beggars, pulluvas and the Oracle. The deterioration in the position of the Oracle (who once claimed prestigious social position as the living presence of the goddess) in the post land reformed Kerala society is evident. Narayani, the wife of the Oracle, who turns to prostitution for earning a livelihood, too, portrays the deteriorated status of the oracle in the contemporary society.

The characters of the film are those who try to find a space for themselves in a shuffled society where socio-personal relations are shattered. Even though they try to hide in their own world, the cultural gene of feudalism swells in them and haunts them. Urala Namboothiri, who appears as the spokesperson of capitalism and business, internalises this cultural gene through the feudal practices and life styles of medication. The same is the case with Appu who tries to sell the sword, anklet and belt as bronze items. With agony and contempt, he too is internalizing this cultural gene.

Nirmalyam portrays the pitiful conditions of the upper caste people of the village. The Keralam in Nirmalyam belongs to these sections of society. Their grief is the grief of cinema. All others joining the pantheon of characters of the film are outsiders/ antiheroes who do much to damage the reputation of these upper caste sections. This Keralam portrayed in the film is the pathetic present of a rich Keralam which has been called occasionally for reference with a nostalgic tone. The pathetic present of a rich past is portrayed through the elder Oracle (father of the protagonist) who is bed-ridden after a massive stroke.

The pitiful situation to which the upper caste sections of society are thrown due to the land reforms outlines the aesthetic sensibilities of the film. More often the pathetic present is portrayed through nostalgic laments over the past glory. The narrative which juxtaposes the rich past and the ruined state of the present informs and disseminates the aesthetics of Nirmalyam.

(4)

M T Vasudevan Nair's reworking of mythical/quasi historical characters in Malayalam folk tales and The Mahabharata having a negative aura has been accepted with ovation. Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha, Perumthachan and Vaisali fall in this category. Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha narrates the life of Chanthu whose name has been used as a synonym for a cheat. Similarly Perumthachan portrays the life of mythical sculptor and architect whose name is used as a synonym for paternal jealousy. M T showered rational light into the stories that gained currency in the society, and has produced wonderful results. The process of demystification and demythification re-portrayed the characters. After the production of the films, Chanthu and Perumthachan are no more the synonyms of cheating and jealousy in Malayalam language. These mythical/ quasi historical characters gained a refined identity after several centuries of captivity in the prison of vicious names/habits. The liberation of these characters, and transforming them from antagonists to tragic heroes is noteworthy and awesome.

(5)

The families and familial relations are the bases of all narratives of M T Vasudevan Nair. M T concentrates on these basic elements, be it a village or a city, a contemporary one or one from the remote past. The cracks and breaks in the familial relations are the thrust areas of his narratives. Apart from the films discussed above, in films like Nagaram Nanni, Vaishali, Parinayam, Uyarangalil, Midhya, Utharam, Sukrutham, Nakhakshathangal, Panchagni and Iruttinte Atmavu one can discern the portrayal of the disintegration of families and relations. All his films are marked by the march of heroism through utmost negative circumstances. The tragic vision applied to the familial atmosphere informs and produces the aesthetic sensibilities of the film literature written by M T Vasudevan Nair.

1 Johnny, O K, 'Prasadhakakkurippu', in M Tyude Anchu Tirakkathakal, (Mathrubhumi Books: Kozhikkod), 2005, p.7.



M.T. VASUDEVAN NAIR

■ *Dr. Chandrasekhara B. Kambara*



Dear friends, :

It was probably in the seventies of the last century, I saw M.T. Vasudevan Nair's famous cinema 'Nirmalyam'. It was the time of new wave cinemas. We started understanding the symbols, images and metaphors used in cinemas as they were used in poetry earlier. If a cinema was produced it was received with a great pleasure by arranging seminars, symposiums, discussions, writing reviews and readers letters in news papers and periodicals. So releasing a cinema was a kind of a significant cultural ceremony for us. I too had participated in two seminars and presented an essay (paper) on 'Nirmalyam'. It really caused a big friction of words among the two factions divided then and there. I can vividly remember the incident which shocked us was the protagonist of the cinema spit on the idol of Goddess at the end of the cinema. And, that sequence in 'Nirmalyam' had been the main subject for our debate and to make a judgment whether it is right or wrong and it ultimately gave vent to a friction among the people assembled in the seminar.

In Kannada U.R. Anantha Moorthy's novel 'samskara' was made into a new wave cinema. But it was not so effective when it is compared with 'Nirmalyam'. Then a few cinemas came on the same track. (But 'Nirmalyam' was of its own kind and it started growing in the depth of our minds. Meanwhile I read some Kannada translation versions of M.T.'s novels and stories and I was greatly influenced by them. We were much addicted to the English writers and their techniques of writing so far. We were following them as our role model for our writing. But M.T. Vasudevan Nair had cultivated his own distinct style

of writing which was the creation by his own individual talent. We were satisfied thinking there was M.T.; the biggest role model writer before us from our own nation.

Kerala is very unique in having a vast majority of readers of literature. They cautiously read literature with a different perception. Kerala is also known for the complete achievement in

literacy. Kerala is known as God's own country. Here we see the orthodox people whose life is filled with a variety of old religious practices. This orthodox old culture in Kerala is still nourishing the priestly adorations, fine arts, architecture, sculpture and temples. However, the people of Kerala have developed their strong bond of kinship with their 'rich legacy of culture.' I am told the typical Tharwada, houses in Kerala are specially taking care of and handing over their cultural heritage to the younger generation. The folkways, norms, etiquettes, religious feelings, rites and rituals and such other local matters of the soil virtually find their places in MT's literary works.

This is briefly the landscape or the environment for the characters breathing in MT's works. MT's aesthetic sense and artistic creation evaluate and criticize his environment., This kind of life has a background of joys and "sorrow" of many generations for centuries. It is very striking that in a Tharawad joint family the son-in-law's words are unquestionable and ultimate. Such Tharawad" houses are the pivotal subject or the centre for the fabric of MT's stories.

The gloomy world of Tharawad houses is filled with masks. Here we see both pseudo richness and the life -killing hunger. We see a superficial respect towards traditional values and ways of life. And also we see an artificial gusto of following the traditional practices. The queer world of such houses was exposed for the first time in MT's stories.

In his many stories we see the violence is glamorized where humanity loses its meaning. The traditional life brutally supplants, suppresses or wholly rejects the desires and dreams of new generation. With the lapse of generations and ages, in the inner structures of the tradition we see hunger and bread, mother and child, Home and mind, Head of the house and his family and such other relationships become sterile. And these sterile relationships will have no humanity, so they will be haunted by the feeling that they are deserted, orphaned and abandoned. As far as my knowledge is concerned it is very rare but only in MT's stories we could see such an effective expression of sterile relationships which caused the downfall of the organic Tharwad families.

The enlightened educated youths in the last century protested against the traditional practices

in their families and they suffered the defeat, some over came the exploitations, some lost their love due to the quarrels, envy, inequalities and absurd memories, some are languishing with broken relationships, some protested and wasted their valuable moments of their life, some were disgusted when our independence has not helped change but it has given only the false assurance and promise of welfare life or we see some win over this helplessness and built their personality finding jobs in far away hotels. All these have taken rebirth in MT's literature.

I read the translated versions of MT's literature which is really heart-touching. Now I would like to illustrate two examples from his stories I liked. 1) 'The soul of night' (Irutinde Aathmay). This story depicts the inner emotions of a young man who supposed to have become mad under the circumstances. Here, Velayudhan is not really a mad. He was in a position to become the legal heir for all the property of his house. But such a young man was prisoned in a room and was made a maniac. Running after the desire of wealth, property and status they killed humanity and kept Velayudhan in a dark dungeon and ultimately he was made a mad. The young boy was suppressed with his natural desires and ambitions and his life was filled with darkness. Here we see people refused to let a young man to have his independent existence. He doesn't see even night or soul. In night he is the soul of night. The outside world cannot hear the spell of his cry.

He tried to proclaim the truth by falsifying all convictions made against him but was defeated in his attempt. When his one and the only ray of light Ammukutti failed to understand him Velayudhan really became mad. Further, he decided himself to remain the soul of night.

The inhuman situation of sticking an unsuitable iron mask forcibly over the face of Velayudhan covers the entire story. And it creates an environment of an evil dream in our minds. The depiction of such a young man chained to the circumstances from where he could not escape or aware of the situation invokes a feeling of pathos in the minds of readers. The mad Velayudhan tried to escape twice from there. Even before this, the illtreatment he suffered, the bitter life he experienced, his agony and anguish, fear and frustration, hate and dream - all run like noiseless moving pictures on the screen of our mindscape and fill us with over whelming emotions. It is really a distinct artistic creation of MT. This is a rare story which I could never forget in my life.

Another story I liked is Akkayya (Voppol) which means the elder sister. It is a strange case where due to illegitimacy, a boy is unable to call his mother 'Mother'. Instead she calls her

Voppol' (sister). The boy does not know who is his father. He endearly calls his own mother as voppol and he believes that the kinship between brother and sister is stronger than it would be in the case of children and mother.

At last in the end of the story we see, that the sister (Voppol) has to get married to someone else under circumstances. Because she gives birth to a baby of an illicit sexual relationship, the sister has to lose her relationship with her brothers and other relatives. This lady who is finding the satisfaction of her motherhood with her son, even if he calls her 'sister'(Voppol). Yielding before the circumstances, she has to keep him aloof, after she gets married to a man. This story by MT openly projects the bitter truths and makes us sorrowfully pity for the sterile relationships.

We see a boy who does not know the love of his mother on one hand and we see a mother who can not openly declare her own son as her son on the other. The psychic friction they underwent is pictured very fantastically in this story.

In the story 'The Marriage of a Fox' (Kurukkunde Kalyanam) we see a boy who cannot openly call his own father as his father and so he is disrespected by his neighbours. He cannot get the social status of his caste into which he is born. But he is a young boy burning with indignation, hate and fury against his father. His father is a goldsmith, so that, the young boy cannot openly call the man as his father. He lives a life of shame and hesitation. Even his elder brother, the son of the first wife of his father does not respect him as his brother. Ultimately he develops a passionate hatredness against the inhuman social system, he musters up his strength and courage and kills the people who have ridiculed and ill-treated him.

I can go on listing my favorite stories written by MT, for which it may require a separate seminar. MT is known as the best writer accomplished a great achievement among his fellow writers in Kerala and all other contemporary writers of various languages in India. He started a kind of literary renaissance in Kerala. Similarly, MT has influenced the writers of other languages into to which his works are rendered through translation. It is true, if I say he has helped their literary development. He dedicated his entire life to literature and made the lives of the people of Kerala a serene existence through his works. In addition to this I would like to add that he has extended his generosity to other languages and filled in divine pleasure. My life becomes fruitful after reading his works in my mother tongue Kannada. He invokes such a feeling of divine satisfaction about my existence after reading his stories. I am very grateful to him on behalf of the readers of my mother tongue. Respected MT once again I thank you on their behalf.

In this wonderful occasion I feel it is my privilege to let you know how I am influenced by MT and his writings. I was greatly influenced after reading his 'Nalu Kettu', which means 'Chowkattina Mane' in Kannada. 'Nalukettu' was published in the year 1972. It reminded me the Local Fudal Lord's palace of my homeland and enabled me to write, my novel 'Singarawa' and (Singarawa matthu Aramane). And that novel was serialized in the name of 'Chingari' in Mathriboomi periodical heralding under the editorship of M.T. MT himself has written an eloquent foreword for the English version of my novel and blessed me thereby.

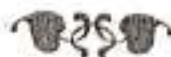
I want to recollect some wonderful moments I spent in the past days with M.T. on an extensive tour to China. A troop of six -seven writers went on a tour to Chin, of a ouse MT and myself were included in that tour. It was then I personally and closely came in contact with MT. We were going for morning walk in every place we stayed. Morning walk became an unbroken routine work for both of us.

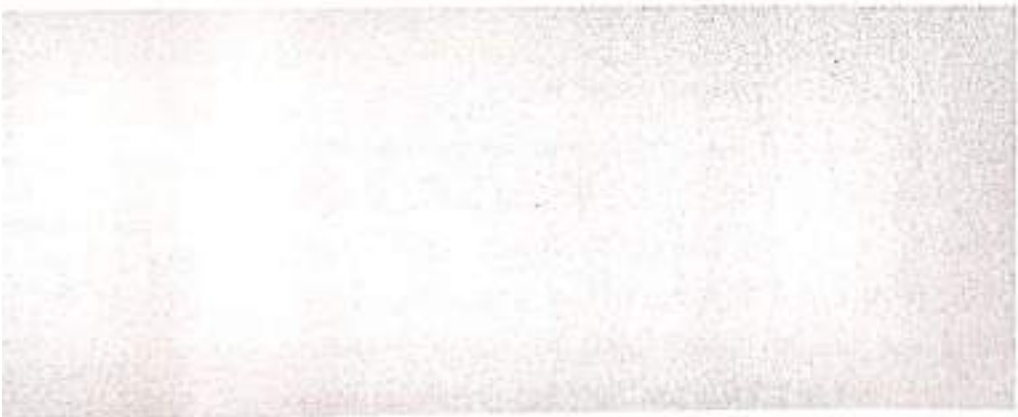
In one particular place, MT started quarrelling with our interpreter. It seems the quarrel happened in Beijing if I could faintly remember. MT had cultivated a habit of keeping a detailed list of places always ready with him that a writer should see in each place we visited. His homework was very excellent. But our organizer had his own list of places to show us. But the Grocery market that MT intended to see was not mentioned in his list. MT persisted to see the market place selling the foodstuffs. The organizer did not obey to which MT did not budge at all. There went on a quarrel between the two. At last the organizer obeyed and showed us the market place. It was indeed a terrific market for Indians to see! The Chinese dietary items like snakes, scorpions, cats and rat mice were there for sale; both dead and alive! We cannot forget the scenery of the market we saw there. We thanked MT for making it possible to show us the market place. From then on he became our leader and led us forward in the rest of our tour.

Virtually a friendly natured MT has a vast majority of friends and readers in Kerala and other neighbouring states outside. He commands a lot of love, regard and respect from all of them. He has fans all over the world which is rasa for my writer.

I pray, long live MT, always blessing and encouraging us. I also wish still many other national and international awards shower on him. With these words I conclude my speech and thank the Kerala Academy for giving me this opportunity. I thank one and all who have gathered in this function. Once again I thank all of you.

Translated from Kannada by Vaddagere Nagarajaiah





Word to Image



I TOO MADE A FILM

■ *P. Lankesh*



Cinema! I was crazy about cinema since my childhood. I must have been six or seven years old, when my father started carrying me on his shoulders to a small town three miles away to see cinema in a tent. Just as I had sat on his shoulders and watched Nalvadi Krishnaraja's last procession, I sat on the same shoulders and went to see Sadaarama, Bhaktha Kumbara, Chiranjeevi, Maarkandeya and many more movies the memories of which are still etched in my mind.

Likewise, when I was in middle school, after the late night show was over I was fascinated to see a man roll up the screen. I was surprised that 'Samasaara Nouka's Panthulu, Dikki Madhav Rao and others weren't behind even behind the screen. Upon realizing that cinema was a play of light and shadow, and that it was nothing but a series of still photographs, I was rather disappointed. Later, however, I realized that cinema was not just a form of story telling or mere entertainment, but that also a form of art.

In my youth when I saw English films they made my youthful blood boil and overflow with creativity. Among the many films I saw then, Bergman's 'Wild Strawberries' remains my favorite. I gradually learnt that cinema which cast light over darkness, also fired the imagination and mingled with dreams. And the desire to become a cinema actor! You might not be aware, but every man, at some point or the other, would have secretly nurtured the desire to become an actor. I have come across many people who were decent, unselfish, introverted, and even successful and yet harboured the desire to stand before



the movie camera. Some even pleaded with me to give them a 'chance'. I once thought of writing a story. It revolves around a film shooting taking place at the "math" of a holy man. The man who is supposed to do the role of the holy man has gone missing. The director of the film is, predictably, helpless. At that point, the real holy man starts to convince the director to cast him as the villainous swami. In the fallacy that he is a good actor and prodded by the flattery of his pedagogues the holy man starts ignoring his religious duties and tries to land another role in a film. You might not have heard the story of 'Blue Angel'. That is another favourite movie of mine.

I laughed aloud. When the film I had directed was shown on television many who saw it wrote letters saying the movie was not only good, but also that I had acted well in it. They do not know that among the many unfulfilled aspirations of mine the urge to act was one! The 'disappointed actor' that I am, I have now learnt to laugh at myself. Just like acting, the ability to dance and sing are two of my other unfulfilled dreams.

But let that be.

Recently, when Doordarshan telecast my film 'Pallavi' some people viewed it. They later informed me that in order to fit the film into Doordarshan's time schedule it had been liberally cut, many important scenes were missing, and what was finally shown was a poor version of the film. But just like love, even trust is blind. Some people who had seen this distorted version of my film even wrote letters appreciating it.

Among those who had appreciated the film are R.K.Narayan, British film critics and some Kannada intellectuals. Those who criticized the film found its narrative style different from the regular films and hence they thought it lacked cohesion. Here, the story narration, scene order, characterization and everything else is different from the traditional style. Without any inhibitions or fallacy, I will tell you the reasons for the format of my film later.

But before that I have to tell you something. Nine years back a few communists friends of mine from Kerala formed a film organization and started purchasing new wave films. They enquired about my film 'Pallavi'. Since I was facing financial constraints then, I sold it for about Rs. 25,000.00. By this time the film had won several awards: and through these awards I also got about a lakh and twenty five thousand rupees. Since I cleared the loans I had taken to complete the film I did not think this film would be of any use to me in the future. Anyway, I am not a man who thinks too much into the future.

After a while, Doordarshan became popular. My Keralite friends who had bought several

new wave films such as mine had not made any money through that venture. On the contrary, they had taken a loan of 8 to 10 lakhs and were struggling to repay the interest the loan had accumulated. They told me that my film will be a hit on Doordarshan and I might end up making 3- 4 lakhs and hinted that I could buy back film 'Pallavi' by paying a little extra.

I could have easily bought back the film from them and earned more from Doordarshan. But there were other obstacles. Doordarshan is owned by the Government. So I could not bring myself to go through the process of begging for the film to be shown on Doordarshan, submit copies of the awards it had won and all the other hassles it entailed. Besides, my Kerala friends were in need of money. I told them "When I was in dire circumstances you had helped me by buying my film. Now I will not think about it for even a second. Whether my film earns two lakhs or ten lakhs, the money is yours. You should keep it."

This reaction of mine was not due to generosity but because of my desire to avoid all kinds of hassles. My friends applied to Doordarshan and it was accepted. I came to know that the film was going to be telecast the previous day. My son (who was only six years old when the film was made) said "Tomorrow afternoon Pallavi is being telecast." But 'tomorrow afternoon' I was not home to watch it.

I still remember. Twelve years ago on the day emergency was declared in India we had started shooting the film. I had completed the script of the film prior to that. I had very little money. If foreigners hear about the film shooting, the budget, etc they will laugh. People who liked my literature and my students were supportive of my venture. We had searched for about a month to finalize the female lead. She was Vimala. She was so thin that you could barely see her. In a sari she looked like a woman, in any other kind of dress she looked like a high school girl. Daughter of Ranganath of Malleswaram, Vimala was an intelligent girl. She was so sharp that she remembered every little detail she saw or heard.

I was new to the film industry. Though one has watched many films and knows the basic technicalities, strange things happen. When reality mingles with the world of art a few compulsions arise. Only the director knows what form the film will ultimately take. Though I had written the screenplay based on one of my previous novels, in order to add a new element to the film, I had changed the role of the protagonist. While the novel was seen through the eyes of a modern but an angry young man, the film was seen through the experiences of a young woman. Even in telling her story I did not follow the usual format of one episode following another but chose to capture all the elements of an environment.

During the shooting of the film some people were indisciplined and I kept them at a distance. I had no money to edit the film. After viewing the rushes I decided to redirect the film on the editing table. We had been able to shoot only 26 rolls. I had no option but to put the scenes we had shot in a kind of format which would be closest to my original idea. By this time an article I had written on B.V.Karant was published. Karant, who appears to be a picture of kindness and vivacity to his followers, started hating me because of the article. One of them was my cameraman. He started bat mouthing me everywhere and did not venture anywhere near my film.

When faced with a challenge my nature is to stand up with rage. I used all my intelligence and strength and convinced some friends that something good would come out of this film. I even found a person to distribute it. I selected a person who had some experience editing new wave films. I started putting all the scenes we had shot in some kind of order. I was totally alone in this. I could not afford to re-shoot some scenes. Those who had acted in prominent roles had all gone away. All I had in front of me were innumerable scenes of a life. I needed a voice and music to put it all together. I wrote some lines for the female protagonist to be used as a voice over and decided to complete the film. This should have been decided during the shooting of the film, at the editing table, even at the stage of providing background music. Due to all these reasons it truly became a writer's film.

When I think back now, I feel that along with the costumes, sets, make up, etc the film contains many amateurish elements. Normally to shoot an entire film about forty rolls are used; we had used only 26 rolls. To shoot a film such as this at least thirty days are required; we had finished it in twenty. But along with the poverty in the style of shooting, the film's story of poverty, anger and confusion had somehow imprinted itself and come out in the end product. The male protagonist is unable to provide his girlfriend with some assurance and peace so he vents his frustrations through fury. But he is unable to face the consequences of his fury and keeps running away from difficult situations. Unable to get her boyfriend, the girl and her protestations wither away. The girl understands both their tragedies and keeps questioning it.

Today I feel all this happened in some dream a long time ago. My only hope is that despite its many drawbacks my film was somehow different from the rest. Though I even tried to act in the film I now feel embarrassed about it and want to stay away from the film.

It is possible for a big budget film to be a bad film. Just as it is possible for a simple film to

melt people's hearts. Then what is the real difference? How is commercial cinema different from good cinema? According to me there are no real commercial films only films which are made with the intention of making money. Such films are different from films made with good intentions. A passionate cinema maker sensitive and utilizes his actors faste fally. The way he narrates the story, and the way he uses different aspects the go into the making of a good film. He will knows that people do not live through actions and false anger. He knows that silence, deep anguish and loneliness are part of human life. Both tragic and happy endings of a man's life are much more than stringing together ugly dances, songs never heard before in real life and unrealistic dialogues. Cinema has the capacity to show life in all its vastness and its intimacy through extreme close-ups. A man's body, especially his face, more so his eyes reflect his inner self. This is how a film can become a poem.

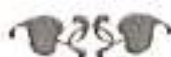
I am not saying all this to praise my own film. I made the film more than a decade ago (and I haven't seen it since). But I am sharing the memories and the thoughts which the film evoked in me.

... even as I am recalling all that her face appears before me in close up. She is standing at the threshold of her life. She is a beauty who is filled with both apprehension and curiosity. There is rebellion in her delicate face. There is also the realization of the futility of such a rebellion. Disappointment, which is unrelated to rebellion and its futility, is also reflected in her face. Before her face mesmerizes me and makes me feel like making a film again I put aside my pen and laugh.

To feel jealous about people who can sing, dance and act, or to appreciate them, or even to simply laugh at them with all the generosity of a heart broken lover, I feel, is a useless task.

(August 2, 1987)

(Translated from Kannaday by Kavita Lankesh & Gowri Lankesh)



BETWEEN THE ABSTRACT AND THE CONCRETE

■ *T.S. Nagabharana*



"If we lose the words, do we lose Shakespeare?" asked a film critic while reviewing Akira Kurosawa's 1957 classic *Throne of Blood*, one of my favourite films of all time.

Though an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* does not have a single line or dialogue from the play. Kurosawa transposed the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to medieval Japan. From the staging, to the characterisations, to the editing and direction of *Throne of Blood*, Kurosawa relied heavily on Japanese traditional theatre *Noh* and the stylistic influence it had on him. Despite the many liberties Kurosawa took with the original play, it has been hailed as "the most successful film version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*". World critics have agreed that "*Throne Of Blood* turned *Macbeth* into breath taking visual exploration of the warrior traditions of Japanese myth" and that "Kurosawa's parallel eloquence matches Shakespeare's completely and even outshines."

A closer look at the film shows that Kurosawa replaced Shakespeare's words with visual poetry rather than use a more literal translation. Many of the images Kurosawa uses are suggested by Shakespeare's text. For example, Lady Macbeth says "I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry" and in the film we hear an owl hoot and later birds flock to the castle, suggesting doom. Kurosawa interpreted Shakespeare's work echoing a meaning that hid beneath. This stylised production and remarkable interpretation took it beyond the original literary work. I consider that a great achievement.

Hence it is an excellent film to study the differences and similarities of the mediums of literature and cinema. Coming from a theatre background, it gives me an added advantage to explain how a literary work transforms into a play and how a play acts as a bridge to a film.

Any literary work, be it a novel, short story, play or a poem, when adapted into a film has to measure up to two important aspects. One is that the literary work already has specific readership and when it is transformed into a film, the viewer, who has already been a reader comes with certain expectations and it must be satisfied. If a director is faithful to the literary work cent percent, then he may not be able to do justice to the film, which is a visual medium. Secondly, a director has to take up the challenge of considering the viewer's expectations and adapt it, incorporating all the elements of the visual medium, as well as present his own interpretation. That is a tough call.

Literature and cinema are predominantly different mediums. Where words are the unit of expression in literature, in films it is the visual shots. Both work in different ways. In literature, words are first grasped and thoughts follow the words. In films, scenes first appear and even before the thought process starts the eyes are already attracted to it. While reading a novel or a short story I am greatly disturbed by the incidents, characters and their journey through the plot. I think it is this disturbance that is the core intention of a literary work. This disturbance wakes up the intellectual in me. However the disturbance is still abstract. It becomes concrete ideas when it is transformed on to the celluloid and I can see it. The characters slowly start building up gaining flesh and blood and take full form. If my audience slip away from me (during the film) even for a second, it indicates my failure. When the process of building up flesh and blood in the charecters is inappropriate, then the film fails. Probably that is the reason why several excellent authors failed as film makers, even with their own works, because their capabilities to transform abstract images into concrete ones were limited.

However, literature has taught me how to focus my eyes on smaller details which are the essence of building an ambiance for the film. For example the inter-relationship of characters and sometimes between a character and an object, start developing as the plot develops and their behaviour patterns emerge. A director assimilates his own experiences into those of the character, even when the character is based on a literary work and the author has well defined it in his own manner. For example the way K V Puttappa (Kuvempu) has used a dog as an image in his novel *Kanuru Subbamma Heggadati*. I realised the impact it has made on me, when, unaware, I used a calf in *Mysore Mallige* as an image.



Literature gives me a vision which is beyond my experiences. That actually is the purpose of literature. In films to grasp and execute this vision requires crossing over several layers of production hurdles. To elaborate, reading poet K S Narasimha Swamy's poems *Mysore Mallige* takes you into the romantic world without having to define an ambiance. When I made a film based on these poems, I had to create characters, a plot, ambiance and expand the emotional world to give a total experience to the viewer. Simple picturisation of the poems would only result in visual poetry. That is what happened when I attempted, for the first time on television, in 1983, *Geetha Madhuri* where I picturised 52 popular Kannada poems. It was the first experiment with regard to exploring the possibilities of visual media in Kannada. I engaged paintings, dance, choreographers, artistes, dramatised scenes, documentary and every possible art form to create another visual art form. My experience of that was, while some picturisation of poems excelled my own expectations and communicated better, some other -poetically much acclaimed - poems fell flat.

To give a specific example, D R Bendre's popular poem *Bangaar Neera Kadalaache Teera* which talks about reaching the other invisible shore(s). I picturised a boat carrying dreaming men and women across, exploring, which even I knew, was a very limited interpretation. But when I picturised his *Kurudu Kaanchana* I used Yakshagana artistes and dramatised the descriptions in the poems, excellently performed, resulting in different dimensions being added to the interpretation beyond my expectations. In another instance in *Mysore Mallige* the way a poem *Deepavu ninnade gaaliyu ninnade* was used, acquired a totally different dimension just by placing of it in a context.

I have adapted novels, plays, poems into films. Some of the novels I have chosen were placed in a society different from my own. As I place a lot of importance on regionality in all my works, I relocated them in a ground familiar to me. For example my film *Janumada Jodi* is based on Pannalal Patels' Gujarathi novel *Malela Jiva*. The main intension of Patel was to document the changes that follow industrialisation in a border area between Gujarat and Rajasthan. His hero is aged 40 and Patel had no intention of making it a love story. He talks about the story of a civilization and the novel has multilayered dimensions. It captures the gradual destruction of simple rural life caught in the grip of industrialisation.

I had to chose a definite point of view from the novel and frame it to suit the film medium. First of all I had to set it in a place familiar to me. I chose Mandya, in Karnataka and rooted the story in its earth. The clashes between the class and caste are very prominent in that area. I chose to debate who is more important, an individual or the community. I used a metaphor in

the film that initiates a dialogue between the individual and the community. It is present in the novel too. But it has a different purpose in the novel. I gathered the essence of the debate in the novel and expanded it as a metaphor and applied it.

The assimilation of the individual with the community differs in book and film. Hence the vision also differs. I made it predominantly a love story. I played up the love angle to imbibe all other intentions of the author and it beautifully carried my message, without losing out on the romantic angle. The film can be viewed as propagating feminist ideology, when the heroine is taken as the focal point and can be interpreted as depicting alienation, isolation and a feeling of being orphaned when seen otherwise. The different dimensions that the film carries with it is a result of controlled adaptation of a novel, which is much larger in its canvas.

Since film is a performance based medium, like all other such mediums, it too depends on the audience for fulfilment. A film that no one views is as good as not made at all. Also even as a maker I too have the dual role of being a director as well as a viewer of the film simultaneously. My search is also the search of the viewer. This realisation has made me go nearer to the viewer and that is why people have recognised me as a bridge film maker.

However, the truth is I have never tailor-made my films to any theory or style. Each of my films is different in every aspect from the choice of the subject to its interpretation, especially as the film is a visual media that has to take up the challenges of the technical world. As a director, the technicians I hire and their creativity should also contribute to my interpretation. Even in this aspect literary works and film differ. For instance in Nagamandala, a play by Girish Karnada that I made into a film, the climax of the play arrives much before the play ends. In the film it would not have worked out well. The audience know that Nagappa and Appanna are two different persons. They don't encounter each other in the play. In the film I used the technical support and had a duel fight between the two characters. The double acting and the technician's expertise added a new dimension to the situation. Also, whereas in the play the playwright depended heavily in imagery that could be shown on the stage, I had the freedom of innovating and sometimes expanding them to suit my intentions. I showed a raging fire to indicate Appanna's jealousy. The always locked up front door of the house, Appanna entering the house only after unlocking the door, the heroine talking with the old lady through the window are all symbols of her sensuality kept under check. This was not there in the drama or in the original folk story. The movement of Nagappa was also conceived keeping in mind the movement of a snake, which was effective as it was a visual medium, playwright Girish Karnad himself complimented the film, calling it a well interpreted film.

Another instance I would like to recall is my experience with the well known English novelist R K Narayan. His comment about the Hindi film *Guide*, based on his novel is well known; he called it a 'mis-guide'. What attracted me to R K Narayan's *Financial Expert* was its dramatic element. However, I realised from the beginning that my *Banker Margayya*, had to be different from R K Narayan's *Financial Expert*. The very opening of how when the financial expert goes to open the account, he is not allowed to, I changed it to a time-lapsed cheque being presented which is rejected, which inspires *Margayya* to start a bank of his own.

All the subtle elements in the novel I converted into dramatic incidents and it worked in my favour. Finally the difficult-to-please R K Narayan himself accepted that his novel could be interpreted in this way too. On the contrary even if he was not satisfied, I would still say *Banker Margayya* is a success as a film.

My literary interest and the flexibility that a written work allows has given me a wider view to make my own permutation-combination of novels. For example I may like a character or an incident in a novel, which I may feel emerges into something bigger and more meaningful in the context of another novel. As a film maker I have the freedom to take my characters anywhere I want, not necessarily where the author has forced them to go. Of course I may arrive at the same destination as that intended by the author. I once took three novels by Ta Ra Subbaraya (Ta Ra Su) – *Akasmika*, *Aparadhi* and *Parinama* – and blended them into one story called *Akasmika* and made a film. Dr Raj Kumar who heard the story, which was actually first narrated for his son Shivraj Kumar, liked the story so intensely that he wanted to act in it. Now, the story was totally reworked to suit Dr Raj Kumar, his stature, age and acting skills. However, the film still retained the core of Ta Ra Su's novels and yet remained different. It went on to become a box office success too, as the audience who came with the expectations of seeing a culmination of three popular novels were not disappointed.

Another factor that plays a major role in adapting a literary work into films is the casting, which incidentally is a major step. The author has a definite form, looks, behaviour etched about the characters that he creates. As a director if I also have my own perception and stick to it, it may not always be possible to find an actor who will fit the bill totally. Sometimes a director has to compromise on the choice of artistes. When those actors fail to deliver according to my instructions, then the entire film collapses. A director has to be smart enough to identify and work in such a way as to extract the best from the actor according to his (actor's) capabilities and use it to the best results.

This can be best illustrated by explaining about my film Singaravva, a novel by Dr Chandrasekhar Kambar, that I adapted into a film. The novel is a complex network of dense imagery. First of all I had to create my own script based on the novel, suitable for filming. It is impossible to film a novel as it is. Secondly I made a decision that all the characters and incidents in the novel should be retained to the extent possible. When adding flesh and blood to the characters magic happens. However, here, I faced a lot of problems because not all the actors I had cast had the body language that would facilitate the depiction of a character in a particular way. For instance the role played by Avinash. I had cast him as he is a good artiste but his body language was not what would facilitate the description of the character in the book. It was not even close to what I had conceived of that character. Then I made an innovation. I used Avinash's natural body language and developed the entire character based on it and even enhancing it. It worked beautifully and in fact, the result is astounding.

An author creates his work in isolation. He has immense freedom. A director has a freedom very different from that of the author. So also an actor. He can take in all the instructions given by the director but still he has to deliver it in his own way. At a very basic level acting is all about a director and an actor meeting at a specific point, satisfying both. Like in theatre, where the director's role ceases the minute the curtain rises and the actors are on stage. Then on it's the actors who take the play on their shoulders and the director becomes a mute spectator. Being a theatre director for a long time has taught me when to push and when to retreat, seeing what the actor is giving me. Cinema too is similar.

My first love is still cinema because I am the author here. It still poses a creative challenge to me to get hold of a unit and "write" my work. An author does not build a team, a director does. An author does not necessarily want to assimilate several minds but as a director I need to collect a team and instigate the team to create what I have to say. Once upon a time they used to say that cinema is a director's medium and that director is always right. But of late director is over-ruled by several factors. Now a director's biggest challenge is to balance between several creative forces and evolve an art work that primarily reflects his interpretation. Now, we are moving towards films without any literature. Experimentation is the essence of any art and not all directors can boast of success at the first go. My belief in regionality that played a major role in all my works has allowed me to experiment. As long as my mind likes to experiment, I shall continue to make films that will reflect my regionality, my Kannadaness.

Narrated by Prathibha Nandakumar



VISUAL LANGUAGE AND...

■ **B. Suresha**



The task before me is to talk about the changes that take place when a written material is transformed into visual and about the problems and compromises that occur during the process.

This is a topic much discussed in our film industry, probably a cliché. However, it is a topic that is current as well as never resolved. It would not be wrong to classify it as a topic that is evergreen. In the Kannada context it is even more discussed, because several Kannada films, based on literary works, have won national and international acclaim. On the one hand there is a conflict whether the acclaim is for the film or the literary work, on the other many want to engage in value judgment of the two mediums. We often read write ups about Kannada film directors wherein the author recommends that a "director should be like Puttanna Kanagal". But of course Puttanna Kanagal is one of the great directors of Kannada and invariably his films are based on literary works. Another great director Girish Kasaravalli also has made his films mostly based on literary works. It is but natural that many are curious as well as suspicious of literary works being transformed into films.

Cinema is a medium that has a language of its own that is self contained. In such a case why should a medium like cinema depend on the language of another medium? The question that is bothering me and many others like me, since a long time is, why does cinema, that carries within its language all possibilities of communications, need another language? Hence, many of us have made films based on our own adventures. Sometimes we may have narrated

a story inspired by something, but by and large we have stayed away from making films based on either novels or stories.

Let me share some of my experiences as to how I acquired my visual language, being a literary personality and as someone engaged in film making.

I strayed into film making through my involvement in theatre. When I was a small boy, I tried to convert everything that I read into plays. I have even adapted poems into plays. During those times, I identified the dramatic quality in everything I looked at. I cannot say I have got over it completely. Everything I conceive first gets into me as a play and then takes other forms. Lets say this is a habit which is "my own".

With such a background, when I started learning film making coming into contact with Girish Kasaravalli, K S L Swamy, G V Iyer, I had already spent 15 years of my life in theatre. I started learning cinema and in the beginning it was the dramatic elements that captured my attention. I learnt cinema language through theatre. To this day, some recognize it even in my films. Some call it my limitation. This is not the forum to discuss about limitations. However, with in this "limitations" let me reveal my experiments with transformations in the context of three of my films viz Harakeya Kuri, Mane and Artha.

Harakeya Kuri (Sacrificial lamb)

This is a play by Dr Chandrashekhar Kambar. When it was adapted, I wrote the screenplay, dialogues and co-directed the film. By then I had already directed it as a play that had more than 150 performances to its credit. I also had the experience of having worked in two or three films. I had watched several films acknowledged as Classics by film critics. I was strongly influenced by them. Hence even as I started writing the script, I had decided to make it as an Expressionistic film. It is evident in the film.

It tells about the contemporary political and social state of affairs. The crux of the story is how political leaders gain entry into our minds and also into our residence and how, as a result, marital suspicions occur. Such a play when adapted into film had to be shot mostly inside a house. Probably the playwright may have made this limitation for the purpose of theatre. However, I extended it to the film too. I may have imagined that it would save on the production cost. Hence, I first wrote a screenplay which was not very different from the original text. I tried to narrate incidents that occurred outside the house also by incorporating them into the conversations. As a result the film has more dialogues than the original play?

Preparing the screenplay was one aspect of the film and the other responsibility was executing the images. I had to deal with the effects of visual details on the mind. Several film directors have spoken about it. A senior like Eisenstein has said that the strength of visual language lies in its way of juxtaposing one image with another. A film maker cannot discard this method of juxtaposing of images even if he wishes to. Hence he resorts to making a film by breaking up thousands of images and then reassembling them. Its an adventure. Since I was aware of these details, I attempted to achieve a flow that was devoid of such break ups. It was not the first attempt in the film world but surely it was a first attempt for me. Majority of the shots in Harakeya Kuri are too long. I doubted that if I broke the details of how the politician enters into the house through the window after the couple go out for work, and how he sits in the drawing room of the house along with his followers and talks and how he uses someone else's house to execute all his misdoings, it would be deceiving. So, I wrote the drawing of the house where we were going to shoot and made my characters move through the house and only then wrote the scene. Hence I had to pre-decide which part should be lit up, what should be the source of light. This made me take longest time to write the screenplay of a play that I had already acted in hundreds of time. (I think it took nearly six months). My good friend & assistant director of that time, Prakash Rai, who is now a popular film actor, also acted every scene with me while writing. Later, he essayed the role of the hero in the film.

When I started writing the screenplay, even before I could imagine making it into a film, I believed that I would be the director of the film. But it was not to be. As I could not find a financier I gave the script to KSL Swamy, another director. Then a fresh problem cropped up. How to transfer my concepts in to his mind? It is always a huge problem. Communication between two persons coming from varied background is never easy. What I considered Expressionistic turned out to be Realistic for him. The conflict is present in the film too. The structure of the film took a drastic change and became realistic soon after the entry of a new character Naxalite. The fact that the role was sketched by a very popular actor could also be a reason for it. These 'popular' actors usually do not like to experiment. In safe guarding their image they detest new experiments. Hence in Harakeya Kuri, there are two styles of narrations. The initial predominantly blue and brown shaded scenes move slowly and the three scenes where a Naxalite called Sidlingu appears film moves closer to the concept of magical realism (read heroic realism) which is obvious in the popular film genre. For this reason, there is a problem with the total structure of the film. The story that started with the protagonist and his family details, all of a sudden takes a turn towards Sidlingu's Naxalism and glorification of the

popular Leftist ideologies. Glorification of the very subject that has to be subjected to debate creates confusion in the film.

However, the creation of the scenes with political characters is very distinct. The way a manipulator uses a middleclass woman, the whiteness of the locale where they sit, the checkered floor resembling a chess board were implemented as Expressionistic thoughts. In the hero's dream scene, the steps constructed of wooden logs, the white sari clad Indian woman, and everything turning to Red are all details beyond the text. The art director of the film had to quit all of sudden on another assignment and I had to step in, in his place. The colour codes, the costumes used were all a part of the planned method. Many are surprised at the use of colour and the movement of camera in this film. We placed the camera on a swing to capture hero's oscillating mind. We used a wide angle from a low level to picturise the villain. The method the film was shot and how it was edited could be discussed at length.

In conclusion, the film attempted to interpret the subject beyond what the original playwright had thought of.

Mane (House)

Mane is a film based on a novelette by T G Raghava, directed by Girish Kasaravalli. I wrote the screenplay and dialogues for the film. Before I was asked, Kasaravalli had already written a screenplay. I wondered what I was to write. But when Kasaravalli said 'write something new' I took it as a challenge. It is always difficult to rewrite a script. It feels like you are copying. It was first of all difficult for me to forget Kasaravalli's script, which is a hurdle faced by all beginners. I suffered it while writing for both Mane and Swamy Vivekananda. After erasing the already written material I had to collect material to put my stamp. Well known American screenplay writer Dwain Swain says "in order to create a new script from an existing one, which most new comer's have to do, it is necessary to juggle with the construction and to change the thought process of the existing characters and to change the point of view in each scene" (Practical Guide to Screenplay Writing by Dwain Swain Published by RKP) I read this book much later. But I followed the same method. (Ofcourse some hints & ideas were given by my Teacher, Kasaravalli).

I first started looking at the screenplay prepared by Kasaravalli from a different angle. In his version the protagonist and his wife were already living in a rented house and were accustomed to all the noises of the surrounding. I started with the hero searching for a house. In the original story the hero is a good man. I made him to be selfish, who uses those around him. In the original hero's aunt comes to his house only once. She was mentioned during conversations. In



the changes that I incorporated, the hero goes to her house and also uses her for his comforts. So, the details that had to be worked out when she comes to his house in his absence had to have a different connotation. We had tried not to engage in proto-types with regard to the construction of dialogues. I need to elaborate on this to make it clear, however it eludes explanation in words. Watch the film to observe how colours and dialogues are used.

Even while shifting from one scene to another, we had juxtaposed the scenes in such a way that a character would be doing exactly what another character in the previous scene had restricted it. We had attempted to interpret a sickness called "necessity" that the urban life imposes.

These were superficial details. More important were the attempts at attributing personalities to characters and filling up colours. The main characters in the 'House' were husband, wife, aunt, neighbor old woman, house owner and the people in the opposite shed. There were several other characters in the original screenplay which we eliminated. The shed opposite to the hero's house and the characters there became mystical, since they do not appear on the screen at all. In the first half of the film, we had several curious stages like in a detective film. We used the suspicious character of the hero as a motive. We planned several stages where colour yellow was used through out. Like the yellow gloves on the worker from the shed, a shot of hand pulled trolley full of yellow drums when the hero suspects he is being followed. Even when the hero starts suspecting his wife he sprinkles yellow (turmeric) all over the house to keep away big ants. In the final scene when the hero goes in search of the people in the shed, the bull dozer in the slum too is yellow. Yellow takes over the film.

We had dissected the screenplay of Mane into several stages. We shot each stage as if it were independent entities and then joined them together. It gave us a definite clue as to how to decide the speed of the film at what stage. This facilitated not only writing the screenplay but also during editing.

I had written 13 versions of the screenplay, the final shot version was the 14th, which was the Director's version. But of course it was long back and working with a talented director like Kasaravalli, thoughts do get exchanged. It is difficult to make separate claims on them now. There is no limit to creativity. If the same screenplay were to be written again, I would bring in an entirely new dimension, incorporating what was not include then and what new that can be added now.

Artha (Meaning)

This is a story I wrote based on a small news item published in The Times Of India. I wrote and rewrote the screenplay several times and for six years put it aside for not being able to make it into a film. Artha was to be my first film. But I could not find a financier and finally my friends invested and I made it as my second film. When I made it I was one and half film old. (My first film was shelved half way through).

There was 'original' story that I had to deal with in this film. It was my own imagination. My first version had the son playing the main role. In the second version the autorikshaw driver's wife was the main protagonist. In another version auto driver's girl friend was the main character. The same story revealed several perspectives when viewed through different characters. I made all these experiments with the screenplay with the belief that it would never become a film. Finally when my friend Prakash Rai said he would act in it, my dreams took wings and I wrote the screenplay fresh from the auto driver's perspective. By then Prakash was so busy with his films in other languages that it was difficult to get him. Since Prakash had promised he would somehow make himself available to do it I had selected a boy who resembled him to play his son's role. I prepared to shoot the film and on the previous day of going to the shoot Prakash said he was not able to come. Finally Rangayana Raghu played that character and Walter played the role that was to be played by Raghu.

Amidst all this chaos we were engaged in several experiments with regard to converting words into visuals. Even while writing this screenplay I had made the mistake of writing long scenes and I first reduced the number of characters, which had nothing major to do with the plot. I also placed the story in the contemporary. When I was writing the final version, I suddenly decided that I must write the film as if viewed from a single person's perspective. Earlier I used to consult seniors while taking such decisions. Now I was alone. My assistants were unable to grasp my experiments. Finally I wrote the final screenplay and dialogues, drawing heavily from my experiences of the theatre. I prepared the screenplay, like an actor offering himself to the arch lights, imagining that there are eyes beyond the darkness. It is difficult to explain it in words. Any stage actor can perceive it. It's the feeling when you are 'not alone, yet alone'.

After limiting the story to be the perspective of a particular character, I divided it into five major stages. Each stage moved towards a specific target. Each stage was independent. But the experiences of the previous stage witnessed the expansion of the next. This is a game played by the author, where he first gets entangled in knots and then attempts to free himself.

I wanted to clearly communicate to the viewer the different stages. To number them or to name them was to consider that the viewer is stupid. Hence I identified each stage by a Vachana, poetic form, of a different poet saint. Also I narrated the entire story with the bird's eye view, of depicting the cry (scream) of a man, lost during a communal riot. While traveling from one stage to another, the scream and the Vachana blended to create pathos. But this created problems to the total structure of the film and prodded the viewer to rush to the climax from the very first scene. Hence I have cut flash back technique and re-edited the film as a straight narration. This is the version that is available now.

I also attempted to weave the scenes dedicating a specific rhythm to each of the stages. It was not possible to picturise all the stages exactly like I had written. One reason was the budget constraints and the other was the place, Gulbarga, we had selected to shoot. It is a land of hot sun and we never had the privilege of cross-light. Hence, even the scenes that had to be shot in the cool backdrop of sky blue, acquired the yellow or dark brown shades of the afternoon. So, I attempted to restrict my cameraman S Ramachandra to shoot a particular scene within a specific time frame. This resulted in not keeping to the decision of allocating a specific method of division for a particular stage. However, from the rhythm's point of view we could achieve all that was possible. Especially the last two stages synchronized beautifully.

We had another problem; that of the 16 mm camera. With this camera, it is difficult to control long shots. We decided to shoot the final communal harmony through still photographs like photorealism. It reduced the time of shooting on the one hand and on the other there was no need to use dupe-negative as we first shot still photos and then shot them through the 16 mm camera. We could also maintain quality. I am offering this explanation remembering how in the Singapore film festival, when the film was screened, people asked how we managed this particular sequence. Usually documentaries use this technique while capturing shots from various locations, but it is rare to use it with in a sequence. Definitely in Kannada no one has attempted it. It was possible in Artha, because I took a decision during the screenplay stage itself.

I attempted another experiment in this film. The narration that opens with a person, then covers the house and then his ambience and later the entire town. Eisenstein calls this 'intellectual montage'. It is difficult to execute on the screen. However, I had made use of this technique in my television serial Chiguru, and I used it with more confidence in this film. Girish Kasaravalli also has used it in his award winning Gulabi Talkies. Artha came first.

Artha also has accomplished another experiment, of repeated usage specific imagery. Artha

used water and fire in the background through out the film. There are only one or two scenes without any of these in the film. In all other scenes they come either in the beginning or at the end. Usually in art films, an imagery that appears in particular scenes would later be identified by critics. In Artha you don't require assistance from the critics to identify it. All details are self explanatory in the film. I acquired this knowledge through my experiences in the street plays. This was an extension of it.

Another technique that I adapted from the theatre is that of Brecht's Alienation. Anyone familiar with his plays will remember that he used titles to appear on a half screen between the scenes. In Artha too titles appear between scenes, which as I said earlier are Vachanas. They are not mere poems but inspire a thought in the viewer corresponding to the scene just seen and make him relax. This relaxation takes the viewer to another stage towards the climax. As far as I know even this was not used in any kannada films till then. My theatre experiences, especially that of Brecht and street-plays have made such an impact that it is difficult for me to get over them. Let me see what I will do in my future films.

Finally, it is difficult to explain how a creative activity occurs. It goes through different phases and finally an order emerges. However, in all my films, along with those I worked with Ravichandran in the commercial set up, I have ventured into constructing a story and a scene with certain preparation. Some are recognized by the viewers. Some are still in my thoughts. Talking about them will not help in implementation. To experiment time and again is a die hard habit.

Translated from Kannada by Prathibha Nandakumar



9 YEARS AGO...

■ *P. Sheshadri*



It was 7 am when the phone rang at my house, I could make out it was an outstation call from the way it rang. I received the call

"Hello..."

"I am Bolwar speaking, Sheshadri, could you tell me your address?"

Without any formalities Bolwar Mohammed Kunhi had come directly to the point.

I gave him my address. After writing it down, he said: "I am returning your Advance payment for Rupees one thousand...I don't want my story to be filmed."

My heart skipped a beat on hearing this.

"What happened? Why this decision?" I asked agitatedly.

"Nothing happened, I have come to this decision so that nothing happens in the future"

"I don't understand"

"You don't need to understand. Two days ago you came to my home, you were my guest. That's enough for me. I don't want your company. I am going to hang the phone now" he cut the call without saying another word. That was his habit. Too impulsive with his decisions.

My mind refused to function. I sat silent for a while. Everything was almost ready for my first film. Convincing friends with the story, arranging finance, the

script almost ready, at that critical moment if the author backs out, imagine the state of the filmmaker.

It was failure at the first step itself!

* * *

I don't need to explain about Bolwar Mohammed Kunhi. He is well known among Kannada writes. When the above conversation took place my relationship with him had not reached an affectionate level. I had met him only for story discussions and some paper work. Two days ago I visited his Parkala home near Manipal. Who doesn't know about the hospitality of the Dakshina Kannada people? They filled my tummy with an array of ethnic dishes including Chicken Curry & Fish Curry.

After lunch I put forward my proposal to him

"Bolwar, I wish to make your story 'Muthuchera' into a film"

He didn't speak for a moment. You could easily say that he was quite shocked.

"Why didn't you tell me about this earlier?"

I said "What would you have done if I had mentioned it earlier?"

He replied "I wouldn't have let you inside my house."

He was not joking. He always speaks and his mind. However, since I had to get my work done, I took his words lightly and chuckled.

"What is wrong in making your story into a film?" I asked

He replied equally seriously: "Look! I have my job in a bank, I have a small family, a wife and two girls they need to get married, till then I am not going to take any risks." It took one whole afternoon and all my tricks to get him to agree. His wife Zubedas advocacy of my cause was a big help.

Even after I returned home, a doubt persisted in my mind whether Bolwar would still back out. Just like in a village fair where the oxen are paid the rope money advance. I paid him a thousand rupees by cheque as advance. I did not even write the name of the drawee. The phone call came just two days after this.

I tried to talk to him once or twice after this but failed. I was really upset. Which else do I go now for a story?



I waited for the cheque to come in by the next post. Thank god, It didn't!

This happened almost nine years ago. Neither the cheque was returned, nor was it debited from my bank account. However, in between, there was some progress with the film and one fine morning, "Munnudi" came out of the cans.

* * *

Till today, out of the five films I have made, four are based on stories written by different writers. I wrote my own story for the other film. Three of these stories were written exclusively for my film only my first movie "Munnudi" was based on Bolwar's short story, "Muthuchera".

I came into the film industry with a strong desire to make a different kind of film, but the right story eluded me. Though I had on my own written some stories, none of them met my requirements for my debut film. It was at that point of time that my eyes fell on Bolwar's small story, "Muthuchera".

Bolwar had ahead become famous through his Muslim oriented conversational stories. "Muthuchera" is taken from Bolwar's anthology called "Devarugala Rajyadalli" meaning 'In the Kingdom of Gods'. Interestingly in the 80's when I was working for a publishing firm I had proof read the same story. In those days I had not dreamt that I would become a director some day and make a film on the same story. The story, however was deeply ensorced in my heart.

In 1996 we conceived a program for Doordarshan called "Kathagara" (Story teller). This project was for the At the period my desire for movie making was not so strong. I had to film a story written by Bolwar for this program. Again I landed with "Muthuchera" and had to study it. To shoot "Muthuchera" in the boundaries of Doordarshan's guidelines was difficult. So, we decided to shoot a different story written by Bolwar.

I need to tell about "Kathagara" before I talk about "Munnudi"

"Kathagara" is a series of 150 short stories brought to the visual medium. Each literature has its own desires. Giving life to words in a visual medium is not an easy task. I realized this completely while I was shooting for "Kathagara". We tried some tricks here and there so that the original story is not altered. We used at the start of the episode a note by a critic. As for the rest we shot only scenes which were absolutely necessary for the narration we used voice-overs to explain some stray shots we juxtaposed into the narration. This concept was highly appreciated as it didn't hamper the main story anywhere.

However when I started shooting my first film, "Munnudi" I realized this trick would not work. So, to present "Muthuchera" on the big screen became a challenge. There was a distinct possibility of this movie turning into a documentary even if there was a slight step-up in the narration.

"Muthuchera" is the name of a village. The story is based on an obnoxious tradition followed in this village. Actually, "Muthchera" itself is a fictional village. Most of Bolwar's stories are set in this village only the characters change.

In every society, men normally tend to exploit the social laws which are supposed to be beneficial to both men and women to their own advantage. According to Islam laws adultery is an unpardonable Crime. Is stringent punishment is meted out to the guilty ones. So men use the law of "Nikah" (Marriage) and "Talaq" (Divorce) to suit their own end and use women as objects of lust. 'Munnudi' is the story of woman who stands up to her right against this pernicious evil.

Tradesmen from Arabia, land at the shores of "Muthuchera" a beautiful village in the west coast of Karnataka, in a particular season every year. The women of Muthuchera fall an easy prey to the practice of these men shacking up with them in some posh hotels in the vicinity for a couple of months after a temporary "Nikah" and obtaining a "Talaq" from their husbands when the time comes for the men to return home. The women then goes back to her village Muthuchera hoping to get another man for a 'husband' in the next, season. This loathsome practice has been in vogue for centuries now, with no questions asked.

Contrary to this practice, the young Trader of "Munnur" actually starts loving his temporary wife Rukhiya. As he prepares to travel back he promises her to return next year and does not give her talaq. She bears a child named Unnisa from him and announces that she hasn't received talaq from her husband. This stops her from getting married to another person. But the trader never returns. After some years Abdulla a wealthy local man, tries to get Unnisa married to an Arab trader with the help of Hassan, a local agent. Rukhiya has no means to stop this outrage and becomes helpless.

On the day of Unnisa's marriage, Abdulla sends all the dresses and jewellery to Rukhiya's house. At the same time Unnisa's friend Ameena, who had similarly "married" a visiting Arab, is found dead in the backwaters, kindles the spirit of protest and rebellion in the mother and daughter and they instantly raise the banner of revolt against the system. Rukhiya charges into

the hall where a "Mikah" is in progress and sets fire to the simpal paraphernalia. Taken completely unawares by this rare act of defence, the men in the most of the "Nikah" concedes defeat and the long suffering women triumphs over them.

The story of this unique protest by women is based in the coastal region of south Kanara which is akin to the coastal region of Kerala. People living here are called Byar's. They are natives of Kerala and are fishermen by occupation. The lifestyle of Muslims living along the coast and of those Viling in the hinterland is entirely different. This is an environment I am totally unfamiliar with. Besides, choosing a Muslim subject for a film is like playing with fire. This is exactly when Bolwar was extremely reluctant to agree to my filming his story.

Yet the story being very unique, I gathered the courage to take the risk. Even though Bolwar had rejected I made bold to approach him again. He also thought it fit to open up this time to explain his reluctance.

"Look Sheshadri, I gain nothing if you film my story on the other hand. I will be targetted by my own people for pinpointing the aberrations in my society. You don't know much about life of byaris, moreover you are a Hindu. People will mock at you for making a movie on our religion. Even if you make a minute mistake, your film will be a huge flop... why do you want to spend lakhs of rupees and get into trouble?" ...he asked, showing a lot of concern.

But I didn't let go.

"you as writer of the story can also write the script for the film. I will be with you. Let us sit and discuss, all sensitive issues, next you can even write the dialogues. We shouldn't face any problems after this," I replied. But he didn't agree.....

"I am happy working in the bank, don't damage it. Moreover, it's been long since I wrote the story. I only know how to watch a movie, and not how to write for one. I cannot do something which I know nothing about, sorry" he signed off in a huff.

I then sat with my friends, discussed with them, and then prepared the script of "Muthuchera". I went to Udupi with the script sat with Bolwar in a hotel and presented it to him. He listened silently, and left "promising to be back by the afternoon". But he returned only the next morning, with sheafs of paper under his arm. That was the parallel script he had prepared!

The whole day we sat with the two scripts and edited them again and again. Food and sleep didn't bother us. The same writer who had earlier said he never wanted to be with film

makers, had melted considerably and even stayed in the hotel with me. Atlast we had a draft script! We presented the script to the Muslim youth society for reading. They were happy with it. We sat again, and worked on finer detail. A reformed version of the script was ready. I returned to Bangalore after convincing Bolwar to write the dialogues for the film.

As luck would have it, Bolwar got transferred to the Bangalore branch of his bank. In Bangalore we had several rounds of discussions and many more readings, Bolwar and I met half way, braving all tensions and made some compromises. We named the film "Munnudi". My friend Manohar agreed to compose music of the film. We haded through the folk literature of Byaris and collected a number of Ethnic strains. We also got a small drum called "Dappu". Now we faced a new problem. Who will write the lyrics for the music we created?

Bolwar went scurled home screening that he wanted no songs in the movie, but came back the next morning with four song under his belt! Atlast The songs were also ready. However we had one problem. We didn't know the prayer of the Byaries. We tried recording the sound coming from the mosque, but the quality was bad. We brought a Muslim youth mosque singer from Mangalore to the recording studio and requested him to sing the prayer. He didn't agree. He said these prayers are sung only at the mosque, moverover there are different prayers for different times of the day. Morning, afternoon & night. "If I sing it outside the mosque Allah won't forgive me, he said. Finally we managed to convince him and by 11 in the night we made him sing all the prayers.

"This wont be heard outside, right?" he asked nervously. We pacified him saying. "don't worry! The studio is sound proof". CDs of the song hit the market after some time. We are toto it is played in some mosques even today.

We traveled to Mangalore and Kasargod to hunt for locations for shooting. "Munnudi" The author was always with us watching us give a shape to his imagination. This explained why "Munnudi" made a smooth passage to the screen. Any story which is transformed from one medium to another has got to undergo some changes. But we need an open mind to accept them.



LITERATURE AND CINEMA

■ *Dr Baragur Ramachandrappa*



-1-

Cinema is a Federal Art. A film is a collective collaboration of several art forms. Literature, music, painting, acting, photography, editing and other arts come together according to the needs and take a different form, creating a film. It is also a democratic art as it engages various art forms. Undoubtedly the director is the focal strength of a film. However, he cannot create a film in a vacuum. Only when, according to the possibilities of the focal strength, other supporting strengths get activated can the federal art called cinema take a definite shape. It is inevitable that a democratic form evolves as experts of various art fields come together and contribute in support of the focal strength. However, this democracy is not anarchy; it should not be, too. Even with due freedom granted to the various arts, the focal strength is the deciding factor. Like though the different states in a country have independent existence, the Centre plays a decisive role, the focal strength called the director is the deciding factor. The rest of the arts should engage in both independent as well as centrifugal creative act. Hence cinema is a democratic federal art.

Literary creation is not like that of cinema. Folk literature could keep itself alive in the community. But mainstream literature is a private creation. No literary creation is federal. The individual supremacy prevailing in literary creation is not available to cinema.

A literary work has to take on a different form of art when it is being adapted into a film. It is subjected to the process of shedding its original form

and taking a rebirth in cinematic consciousness. Hence a literary work being adapted into film cannot be termed just visualization but is actually a trans-mediumach. It's the process of one medium becoming an integral part of another. In this process it is not necessary that the original intentions of literature are defeated. However, it is inevitable that the original form of literature merges and becomes a part of the new federal design.

Literature has a long past, unlike cinema. Literature existed even before it took the form of books. The history of literature can be traced from oral tradition to terracotta plates, leather, palm leaf, printed books and now microfilms.

Cinema requires technology even during its creations. For literature technology is required only for documentation after creation.

There is no rule that literacy is indispensable to a film crew. Even if one is literate it is not the only criteria to evaluate it. For example matinee idol and actor par excellence Dr Raj kumar never completed even primary education. However, as an actor he scaled great heights, surpassing everyone else. He was even decorated with an honorary doctorate by the Mysore University. He was conferred titles like Karnataka Ratna and Padma Bhushan and honoured with the Phalke award. He could be an exceptional example but it still goes to prove that in cinema and theatre literacy is not mandatory. Talent and hard work can jointly mould an artiste to great heights.

An important factor to note is that community efforts construct a folk art. No folk art is a result of the efforts of a single person. Even cinema is the result of collective efforts. In folk art, both effort and creativity excel. In cinema too various artistic expressions like cinematography, composing lights, art direction, acting require creativity and hard work.

Folk art that takes its birth from amidst the community is performed amidst the rural folk and becomes a communication medium. Similarly cinema that takes shape through collective effort is preserved on the screen as a community art and becomes a communication medium. In this context I consider cinema to be a modern folk art.

One may ask how cinema, which is produced with the use of technology, can be termed a folk art, which is a natural medium of expression. In fact, several accompanying paraphernalia that folk artistes use are the result of rural technology. Similarly, the (gadgets) used in cinema are the outcome of modern technology.

Another factor worth noting is that folk art consists of various art forms, along with using



diverse ingredients, like song, dance, costume etc. Similar is the case of cinema. Hence cinema can be termed a synergy of inter-disciplinary art forms.

-2-

Is cinema an art like literature? This is a question which seems to have been formed along with cinema, because this debate has been going on for a very long time now. The main arguments of those who do not agree that cinema is an art can be condensed in two points:

- 1) As that cinema does is to copy. Hence it cannot be an art.
- 2) Cinema is a medium that takes shape through machines. Hence it is not an art.

[So, it is clear that these arguments say that since cinema only copies and as it is also shaped through machines it is not an art.

To answer the first question, it is true that cinema does not picture a specific reality like literature, where every detail could be etched. There is no limiting frame there. However, in cinema a specific area is captured within the limit of a frame. It is not possible to provide more and more details here like in a piece of writing. The artistic camera-eye captures a specific view in a frame.

A writer's eye can see everything but a director's camera-eye has limitations. But this limitation also makes the picturisation of that specific area very artistic. Because a specific area is elevated to an art work being framed. Hence the limitation of a frame actually becomes a supporting factor for creativity.

However, one must also observe the way 'reality' transforms in cinema. In literature every detail unveils like a real world, whereas in cinema reality is captured and, thanks to the possibilities both colour and possibilities. Supposing, we are watching a black and white film and a scene where there is blood shed. In the film it looks black. Here we accept that it without any questions, complaints. However in literature we will not accept black blood. In the film we will accept black blood as a 'reality'. Rudolf Heymer describes this as "Fractional Illusion". (In colour films, blood looks red, but the possibilities of various colours and their limitations are different).

Reality is depicted in films in a modified method. However, one cannot complain that it is far from reality. Each art has mastered the possibilities of capturing reality in its own way. To quote Lev Kuleshov, who inspired celebrated director V I Pudovkin, "all arts primarily require a

material. Then, (comes) a method of composing the material. This method is the special adaptation of the respective art".

Viewed in this context and since cinema has its own methods of material and their compositions, it can be termed as an art.

However, there is a need to answer the question if cinema is an art form like literature. Cinema today is in the grip of an "industry" and is suffering as a "medium".

In this context, a major classification with regard to cinema is taking place. Cinema is being classified into commercial and artistic films. As far as it is used to indicate the major characteristics of the film, there is no harm. However the classification is being applied to such an extremity that it is erasing the very sensibilities of a creative process. The supporters of cinema as an art are at one end arguing putting forth concepts like "Personal Cinema" and those who consider it mainly as a commercial venture are preoccupied with the numbers. In the attack and counter attack of these two groups cinema as a powerful medium of expression is losing out.

To come back to the point made at the beginning, cinema is a federal art, a coming together of various art forms. It is not only a communication medium but also a medium possible only with collective efforts. Director is the central focal point of intellect and emotions who channelises these collective efforts in a particular direction. Literature, music, theatre and dance and other art forms are assembled by the director. It is a special point of observation that this assemblage occurs through a machine. Cinema itself is the contribution of a modern industrial world. Machine and creativity come together, under the leadership of a director, using the creativity of several people, to create a film. Unlike man, machine is not creative on its own. It is not even active on its own. In cinema the contradicting factors are the coming together of a machine that is not creative on its own and man who is a creative force on his own. This contradiction is inevitable for the creation of cinema.

Utilisation of machine is the characteristics of an industry. Along with it come the nuances of economics. For any kind of film, machine and money are essential. Hence, entrepreneurship is an integral part of cinema's creativity. This does not mean, it is inevitable to produce commercial commodities as cinema. My intention is only to draw your attention towards the fact that creation of a film consists of both creativity as well as entrepreneurships.

For this reason, cinema is not a cent per cent an artistic creation nor an industrial commodity. It is a culmination of both at a very sensitive level that makes it an "art industry". Probably this explains the creation of a film.



For this reason, it is wrong to classify cinema only as a pure art or business. It is both. It is an art form because it engages an artistic point of view and talent. The other possibilities and expectations of film make it an industry. Anyone arguing cinema as a pure art or industry can not explore the creative problems of cinema, as they will be unable to encounter the contradictions. This also leaves them ignorant of the sensibilities of the creation of a film.

In fact, the conflict that a director encounters while making it his medium of expression, even as he faces the two contradictions, is the ground on which he works. This plays an important role in giving a definite form to his creativity. This contradiction in a real director reaches a harmonious level by the time he gives it a clear form; it merges. In other words it is the conflict that causes the birth of a new form. This exploration is possible only under the realistic intensity of cinema being an art business. This is not the patch up of best of the artistic and commercial films but a form that takes birth in the exploration while encountering a creative challenge.

To explain further, in cinema both emotional as well as economic worlds are present. Those who consider the emotional or the mind world rely heavily on individual exaggeration like in literature, to argue upon, and those who argue on the commercial aspect stress on the trade possibilities. For the propagators of the mind world, the ideal at the pinnacle of creative freedom is essential and for the arguers of the economic world the profitability is the ideal. In fact, the creation of a film relies on the over coming of the contradictions of the mind and the economic worlds. If not, the mind world feasts on the exaggeration of the emotions of the people and the economic world feels fulfillment in the exaggeration of the intellectual.

Both here forget that the exploration of the reality is possible only when internal conflicts of the mind and intellect come together. It is natural for the economic world to forget because it mainly depends on the search for money; whereas for the mind world has to realize the self-cheating if it only becomes a reaction to the economic world. It is important to retain the internal struggle, without getting lost in the exaggerations of the business world.

Hence, the cinema should be an art business that takes birth in the churning of the mind and intellect.

Let us compare some aspects of literature and cinema

1. Words are essential for literature. But words by themselves do not contain meanings and suggestive strength. Only when those words are put together in a specific manner do they come alive and possibilities of meanings enhances. Words are for literature like shots are

for film. Shots by themselves do not contain meaning. When shots are woven together in a specific manner, meaning evolves. The ways shots are aligned make an impact. Podovkin calls this "completed film shots work like words to a poet." He explains the method of shot alignment like this:

- a) A man is smiling.
- b) A revolver is aimed at him.
- c) The man is scared.

When the shots are like aligned in this manner one can see that the man is scared when a revolver is aimed at him. If the same shots are reversed then it can show a scared man smiling carelessly when a revolver is aimed at him. Hence editing is an important aspect of film making. However, the alignment is pre determined in the script. During editing, marginal changes can take place but not the entire film.

- 2) Literature is the private expression of a single person, whereas cinema it first takes form in the mind of the script writer and then is recaptured through various mediums and persons. In my opinion while literature is a straight creation, cinema is a re-creation. The actual 'original creation' of the film ends after the director completes the shooting. Editing is recreating it after adding music etc. Just a script is not called a film. True. However the real script has already formulated the film that has to be screened. Hence the director recreates it with the help of other people and means. Film in this manner is different from literature because of its creation and recreation.
- 3) In literature there is the possibility of systematic narration of emotions. In films there is no such system. For instance, consider a sad situation. The small scene is cut into dialogue and emoting. Sometimes the last part is shot first and the first part shot last. Also between shots there is a break. The method of splitting an emotion into pieces, shooting them at random, later editing them in a systematic manner and breathing life into it as a scene is unique to the art of cinema. Hence it is the process of rejuvenating emotions.
- 4) Literature and cinema which are different in creation are even more diverse when it comes to the nature of effects of experience. While reading a book, one cannot go back to the previous page. While watching a film, it is not possible to go back to the previous scene. (Unless of course, one is watching a DVD at home). A book is read in solitude. Film watching is a community activity. Mass viewing can also influence how a person reacts to a scene. Or a person may react against his or her wishes. Sometimes the mass mentality may act even

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without a person knowing. For example a person may wish to laugh but may hold back because everyone else is laughing. Or may decide to be a part of the serious viewing even when feeling like laughing. The effect of viewing cinema is very different from the experience of reading a book. While literature is from man to man, film is a collective effort for collective viewing. Literature has to depend on a different medium for it to be able to reach collectively. Cinema incorporates other mediums even at its creation.

- 5) Finally, with regard to creative freedom, literature scores over cinema. I am not talking about the money required for producing a film, which is controlled by the producer. Keeping aside the producers' control over the film, and considering only the creative process, also reveals that literature enjoys more freedom than cinema. A writer can create anything as per one's own wishes. He or she can put his or her strong stamp on the work. But in cinema it is not possible. The director here depends on actors, cinematographer, music director, editor and others to make an impression. Hence whatever freedom a director enjoys, it has to be shared by all. In literature there is no such sharing. A film director has to accept the challenge of sowing the seeds of his creativity in others' minds and reap a harvest. This is the reality of creating a film.

The link too exists

Cinema does have a relationship with literature. It could be with an independent literary work or a work created especially for the film. Feature films mainly depend on a plot and hence it can be said that all films need literature. Literature here does not necessarily mean words that can be read. Even silent movies have a plot of their own. Even after talkies arrived on the scene we have had films that have not used talk at all. One such example is "Pushpaka Vimana" made by Singeetham. It is a film without spoken words and hence it is also a film without spoken literature.

Some directors are grateful to literature. Says director Fred Zimmerman "a writer gives an unique gift in the beginning of the film. My job is to transform the literary essence and effects. I work very closely with the author". (The Work of the Director, By A J Reynertson, page 110). He also says "directing a good film means a matter of getting a good story" (ibid, pg 14).

Directors like Hitchcock placed a lot of importance on screenplay. He said "when the screenplay is finished my film is too". However Antoni Man said "screenplay is only the beginning".

It is John Boorman who stood at the other end with regard to authors and literature. He said "My views of authors are doubtful". He made it very clear that he does not want to be a puppet in the hands of the author. He declared "I just want to use authors; I want to squeeze them, exploit them, steal their ideas and then discard them".

He is very honest in admitting that he gets perturbed when he reads a good screenplay or a good write up. One can identify the eccentrics resulting out of personality (clashes) behind his remarks.

In Kannada too there have been several instances when a director has not liked to give credit to the literary work. In 1975 well known director Puttanna Kanagal directed a film "Shubha Mangala", and said "I have only taken a single page from the novel" and took his freedom to the extreme limits. Even here the restlessness that a director undergoes in front of a book or an author is evident. When a book is made into a film, the director need not be faithful to every page. It is sufficient to understand the intention of the book and base one's film on it. However, to make a film based on a literary work and making a statement derogatory to the author and the work is a definite case of false prestige.

Some directors sincerely believe that literary works should not be adapted into films. Director Vachel Lindsay totally condemned it. He cautioned "the act of adapting literary works into films works against the specialty of the film media".

There are many authors who do not like the linking of literature and films. According to Virginia Wolf "the contract between cinema and literature is unnatural and dangerous to both the mediums. By relating the two mediums, the books become a casualty and the film becomes a parasite". This is an opinion made keeping in mind the specialties of both the mediums, but naturally her love for literature is evident.

There used to be a grievance that cinema did not command as high a regard as literature. Even now the situation has not changed. Some authors hesitate to permit their works to be made into films. To write specially for film is not valued like other literary works. The reasons may be several. There are differences between literature being a medium of expression and being adapted into another medium. There was a time when an author commanded respect than a director. However the situation has changed now. In 1940 André Bazin in his essay "The Evolution of the language of Cinema" said "finally the film director is considered equal to an author". This reflects the situation during his time.



In Kannada film industry too there have been many instances where the talent of the director is questioned. If Lindse felt adapting a literary work into film actually spoilt the film medium, some writers were annoyed that their works were badly treated as films. Ta Ra Su, a well known Kannada novelist alleged that his novel "Nagara Havu" (cobra) had actually turned into a lowly "rat snake". He later went silent.

Novelist M K Indira was annoyed not because she felt her novel "Gejje Pooje" was badly filmed by director Puttanna Kanagal but claimed that the national award for the screenplay should actually go to her, as the film is a faithful adaptation of her novel. Authors should realize that their works and films though resembling in essence are not actually one and the same.

Cinema and literature have had both complimentary as well as destructive associations. Both the mediums are different and to quote Lindse again, "in films thoughts are conveyed through metaphors and in literature thoughts are expressed as metaphors".

Talking about literature and cinema cannot be complete without mentioning Hollywood. Even as some say sarcastically that "Hollywood was never famous for literacy", from the beginning it looked at literature for inspiration, adapting several books into films. May be the thought that "literature is a proven property" could have encouraged it.

Apart from literature the relationships cinema has with other art forms should also be taken note of. This enables one to clearly know about the possibilities of cinema. To quote Joy Gould Boyum, "a film shares its visual aspect with painting, its dependence on movement with dance, its ability to produce kinetic and emotional effects with music, its reliance on performance and spectacle with theatre, its technological basis with architecture. But the art with which film (or at least narrative film) clearly shares most from its use of plot, characters, setting, dialogues and imagery through its manner of expressing theme to its tendency to manipulate space and time is LITERATURE" (Double Exposure).

Translated and condensed from Kannada by Prathibha Nandakumar



BETWEEN DIFFERENT GENRES

■ *Nagathihalli Chandrashekhar*



Cinema and literature are two different mediums of expressions that are not related, totally independent of each other, complete by themselves, following different grammars, however, when blended they have the ultimate authority to explore new possibilities. Realising this truth will avoid any conflict. However, sometimes conflicts are bound to explode when personalities, who are totally biased, disrespectful to knowledge other than one's own, self centric and egoistic believing that his is the best, indulge in both the mediums.

The explorers of new possibilities alone need to engage in these experiments. It is like blending two strong colours to paint a picture. Both the colours give up their 'identity' and a new image is created. Similarly, coming together of literature and cinema gives birth to a new work. The birth of a new colour is possible only when the two colours give up their original traits. Unless both the colours, as well as the artist, give up their 'ego', blending can not take place. Success can be achieved when expectations of pure form in literature are limited to the original medium and expectations of commitment in films enables accepting literature only as a reference and underlining its intentions. No need to explain that success is a relative term. Whether success is commercial or artistic, depends on the individuals who are engaged in such experiments.

What inspires literature?

Literature is the psyche of a person. He deals with his experiences, those he could grasp and interprets them in the present. If they are already interpreted then he re-interprets them. That interpretation depends on his creative

capabilities. He creates characters that define the values that he believes in. He facilitates a debate by creating conflicts between characters. The words that the characters mouth, are actually the words of the writer. He first creates a vast creative canvas to reflect his vision. He travels through various stages like the beginning, preamble, development, end and the after word. In every writer there is an invisible editor, a cinematographer, a sound recordist, a make up artist, a dancer, a music composer and also an audience working. As a writer I have experienced it all while writing a novel or a short story. A writer works alone at all levels which makes him to be possessive about his works. The ego that makes the writer think that only 'he' can create something like that indicates both his limitation as well as his strength. A writer's vision is decided by his reading, childhood, travel, views and perceptions.

What inspires film?

Though it is imperative that director is the captain, film still starts as a collective business. While a writer himself is engaged in the physical activity, a director is like a supervisor who makes others perform by giving instructions to them. He could also be a supervisor who has no practical knowledge. What he instructs, could be delivered not exactly in the way he instructed and could be lost during the transfer of instructions and the understanding of it. Or else something much more than what the instructor wished for could also result. It could even result in an artwork evoking an all together new meaning. A writer may tear up a page and write fresh easily but for a director to trash the films he has shot as NG (not good) and re-shoot requires enormous amount of money. Along with money comes the commercial world of profit, loss, marketing etc. And the non-creative dimensions like luck, gamble also materialise. Even those who shun profit, plead for compensatory discounts like 'at least an award'. Money and awards become the alternative intentions and goals. Even if one were to put aside the commercial angle and argue, projecting ideological points of view like art for arts sake, art as a social commitment, art for the betterment of the society etc, the film identifies itself as a product. One need not hesitate to define film, which was discovered as a result of technical innovation just a hundred year ago, as a product or commodity. But as this is also a commodity crystallized by art, one needs to consider it with extreme precaution and commitment, beyond its production and marketing. While literature is complex in its creation and simple at marketing, film is complex both in its production as well as marketing. Hence it is also a symbol of the modern life that is getting more and more complex.

Hence, when literature and cinema, which have diverse inspirational sources come together,

cinema arrives as a technique, naturally, riding over literature, that recedes as mere content. Hence, the writer who cannot tolerate this riding fumes that his story has been 'spoilt'. This intolerance takes its birth from the expectations of the pure form of literature. In fact, stories enter into cinema for distortion; to get distorted and then take a new birth. A director may brush aside the point stressed by the writer and stress on something else. An insight of the writer may lead to thousand other 'insights' for the director. At a point that the writer slips through carelessly, the director may linger and extend the story for, even, two hours. The visual medium takes in whatever it desires, digests it completely, then decorates it and splashes it across the big screen. A director who does not believe in decoration and grandeur may stay away from exaggeration and without succumbing to make it very obvious may picturise with all sensitivity. A twenty page description may be contained in one scene. Or may be a single line may be picturised in twenty shots. The idioms used in literature and cinema are entirely different.

The practical approach of Purnachandra Tejasvi, well known writer, who used to say, "I have discovered literary medium of expression in my way, now you do what you want in your way. However, give me remuneration for my efforts", seems to be right. It would be wrong to ask Tejasvi to write the screenplay. It is not right to take a decision on it without verifying if Tejasvi is suitably equipped to write a screenplay.

According to me, it is always best for the director himself to ready a screenplay with appropriate revision. He would have visualised thousands of shots and attempted to communicate something specific. These shots and the scenes that are formulated by these shots, and the total film comprising of such scenes, reflect the intentions of the director and hence cinema indicates the personality and dignity of the respective director. Like one can evaluate a writer through his book, a director is evaluated by his film. Also, like a writer's worth is not decided by the number of copies of the book sold, a director's value is not decided by the box office collection alone. Value judgment depends on various factors. The relevance of the artwork, social commitment, aesthetics, sense of intellect, timelessness, rejuvenating capabilities and vision are some of the aspects that are integral to the value judgment. However, the critic who applies these measures should be aware of their limitations and also have a clear knowledge of how to apply them. In the present context, literary critics are also accepted as film critics. Literary criticism and film criticism have totally different terminologies. Literary critics also qualify themselves as film critics, which is like an expert cricket commentator considering himself to be an expert election analyzer.



A film critic requires certain qualifications. A person who has not entered an editing room, not touched a camera, has no idea about the essence of music, not stepped into the world of sculpture and architecture, and who has not attempted to understand various art forms can never become a good critic. Today, any impulsive, first impressions that one registers soon after seeing a film is being called criticism. However a real criticism should be as dignified as the film and must be as worthy of preserving as the film.

Theatre is closer to cinema than literature. The main reason being both are performing arts. Most of the artistes and technicians of both Indian as well as Kannada film world are from the theatre field. Theatre installs certain discipline and basic regulations. And yet the theatre and cinema criticisms use different terminologies. In the modern times hundreds of experiments are being attempted and forms are being merged into one another. Literary works are being staged and plays are being made into films. Even poetry is made into films. However, rarely do we find a film being reworked as a literary work or as a play. Looks like various art forms have come to stay in cinema. Despite accepting all these inter relationships, it can not be forgotten that each art form has distinct identities and challenges. Many of us who explore several mediums do face such multiple challenges. It is for this reason that literary and cinematic expressions of people like me encounter the danger of belonging "neither here nor there". However, multifaceted nomads who rush from one field to another, donning several costumes have to "ignore" the probable danger of being "ignored" and offer themselves to varied experiments in various fields.

In the past 23 years of my cinema life (1985 – 2008), I have consciously encountered the clash of literature and cinema at three levels. They are unique. The first was to adapt my earlier literary works into film. The second was to adapt other's works into films. Third was to directly convert an unpublished subject into screenplay.

To the first segment belong my short stories "Kamangipurada Kathe", "Bhumi Gundagide" and a novel "Baa Nalle Madhuchandrake". Even when the author himself is the director modifications are imperative, with due regard to the needs of the medium and the structure of the film. Cinema resists certain details and at times creates new ones.

In the second category figure, mainly N De Souza's "Kadina Benki", Kum Veerabhadrappe's "Kotra Highschoolige Seriddu" and B V Vaikuntaraju's "Udbhava". One of the biggest responsibilities of a director while adapting works of contemporary writers is to clearly explain

to the author what changes one is going to make and why. With such transparency one can avoid any conflicts. It is necessary that only the works of such author who agrees for changes, of course with due reasons, can be adapted into films. While adapting my own works, as well as those of others, I strictly follow a uniform stand: that of being committed to the medium. It is due to this commitment that it is possible to justify an author's intentions as well as a director's vision.

In "Kadina Benki" and "Kotra Highschoolige Seriddu" I have not used several pages from the book in the screenplay. The weird physical passion in "Kadina Benki" and the long detailed account of mating of two dogs could not be accommodated in the film.

Cinema is not a photo copy of literature; nor is it an extension. It is not even an explanation of literature. It is the rejuvenation resulting from the melting together of each into other.

Like I said in the beginning of the write up, they are both independent. They have diverse 'grammar'. Each one's expression is the ultimate. They are the arts that draw from life and nature and gain strength. The sounds of nature become talk and music in cinema. Literature too is equally unrestricted. A reader is different from a viewer, though both could be one and the same person. If it is possible for the two to be the same person, then why not two mediums become one and a new experiment and new ideology emerge?

Translated from Kannada by Prathibha Nandakumar



MULTIPLE STORIES' OF ' A STORY

Umesh Kulkarni, Director



Twenty five years ago, writer S.L.Bhyrappa, at a cinema workshop made an observation which implied that a director instead of being a parasite depending largely on a literary text for his film ought to evolve or create his own script or story. However, the fact is that cinema borrowed heavily from the literary text in its initial stages.

The medium of company theatre drew heavily from the Sanskrit plays and the movies produced during that time were similar in their theme, content, and plot to the plays produced by company theatre. A while after, a plethora of novels, solely written for the mode of cinema, were successful in attracting the directors. These stories generally revolved around the institution of family. Also, many of these plots were patterned after those of earlier films which were successful. At this juncture, it is neither a value judgment nor a criticism, but only an acknowledgement of an important development of the period.

While selecting a novel for a script, the yardsticks employed by the makers of a commercial and art films have always varied.

The interest of a director of commercial film lay in incidents and melodrama. In fact, melodrama was the hallmark of such films. The narratives revolved around music, dance, and fights and the movies had to have a happy conclusion. The presentation was a very stereotypical. The commercial director displayed doubts regarding the capability of the audience or to word it better, he undermined the capability and understanding of the viewer, saying "The viewer cannot comprehend a complex theme or narrative." Consequently, the film ended up

filmsy or loud, totally lacking in serious sensibility and devoid of images. Exaggeration became the favorite technique of the director. Eventually, literary elements or images were lost.

On the other hand, the quest of an art filmmaker was for those texts which comprised themes dealing with emotions and offered the possibility of cinematically and artistically putting it across to the viewer.

Commercial and art cinema: A shared problem

Similar problems, gnawed at the minds of directors, of both directors. The expectations of the novelist whose work formed the base of a script and those of the reader, the critic and the audience and the comparison of the movie with the literary work, and dissection and evaluation of visual version in relation to the text, and the final conclusion whether the transformation is worthy of the original or not. The conflict continues. Such comparisons however are rather unfortunate, since literature and cinema are two different creative forms. yet no one seem to realize that comparison was unnecessary between both the mediums. For instance, puttanna kanagal's, film 'Naagaraahaavu'(cobra) appeared to some men of letters as 'kere haavu'(rat snake) and to some others as Kolakamandala(Viper).

When puttanna, remark that for his film 'Shubhamangala', he had merely extracted two pages from novelist vani's work, it appeared as an arrogant statement to the film industry, while his statement did nothing more than explaining, in confident terms, a cinematic possibility.

But now, in the present situation, where re-make is the dominant trend, all that is required for the director is to adapt the script from another language into Kannada and give it a regional touch or appearance.

Short story: The ideal genre for Filmmaking

Film based on short stories best symbolizes the synthesis of a writer's power and a director's creativity. In Hollywood it is experts who handle the job of such adaptations. But here in India the director for himself.

I shall elucidate on the importance of adaptation, about which the director ought to be careful, with reference to a couple of instances.

I had not by then viewed the short film 'Avashesha' by Girish Kasaravalli, which he had directed while studying at FTII, Pune, and so was ignorant of his narrative technique and his ability to create visual images.

Sometimes later, when I was assigned by him to edit his film 'Ghatashraddha', I could not help but wonder, having read the work 'Ghatashraddha' as to how he could craft the incident packed text, in to a movie of mere two hours. I realized the answer only after I watched the rushes of the movie and also realized the limitations of my own understanding. It is a different matter that later I had to employ my own editorial skills, to further enhance the pace and rhythm of the movie.

A question surfaced in my mind, while working on this movie, regarding a situation involving Yamunakka, which is present in the original text, but had not been included in the film. In the concluding parts of the text, yamunakka after having undergone an abortion, is writhing in pain. At this point, a Christian missionary tries luring her into conversation, offering her a more comfortable life. Nevertheless, yamunakka refuse to buckle under pressure, though she is fully aware of her if she does not embrace conversion. The reply I received from Kasaravalli, when I asked him about the new inclusion of this episode in the film, threw light on his deep sensibility and his ability to employ the visual medium with a sense of purpose and responsibility.

He explained that, if the episode had been included it would have diverted the viewer's attention when the film was heading towards the climax apart from diluting the effect of the narration and intensity. Further, when his thrust was on holding a mirror to our own society, he didn't want an extraneous element, however important to make inroad into the narrative. What he was keen on having was a dialogue, and not an argument, with the audience.

Another example 'SHANKHANADA', a movie I directed, is based on a Marathi story where the protagonist, who procures a caste certificate to derive certain benefits from the state, pays just a lip sympathy to the cause of the downtrodden and departs. In a manner of speaking, he is an escapist city dweller. But in the film, the same character becomes a catalyst of social change. He launches a protest against discrimination on Gandhian lines.

Though the main plot of the movie deals with the exploitations of Dalits, I felt that this alone could not capture the interest of the audience and so added a sub-plot, depicting the condition of the exploited character of Oora Basavi (a woman about town) To drive home the point that instead of confronting the all powerful upper castes with a violent conflict, the oppressed classes should clearly weave a counter strategy to show them their place, I made the Oora Basavi win the election of the panchayat president. Dasayya the protagonist becomes the vice-president and the real power behind the throne. He holds all the reins. The movie concludes leaving the audience pondering over the question whether Basavi's dreams would come true.

This visual presentation deals with a gamut of issues –the language of the common man and the administration, the voter's plight, an elected representative's responsibility towards his commitments, the minority Muslim community that is split, decentralization of power and the Gandhian tool of Satyagraha, non-violent protest which is losing its meaning and value in today's context, bureaucrats who have become silent spectators, mere persons who have stayed away from all of reality, the relationship between liquor and elections and so on. The sound of the conch was consciously employed as a symbol of basayya's appeal for alms, a means of communication, and a vehicle of protest and a harbinger of a better marrow at different times.

The two songs integrated into the movie are not for mere entertainment; instead, are employed to effectively put across the statements of the director. One of the songs pours out the agony of the protagonist, who is totally as the ineffective because of the abhorred caste system, and the other sensitively showcases the various faces of exploitation of an oppressed woman and her craving for the much needed change.

In the film, though comedy might seem to be the dominant, beneath the veil of humor, is an undercurrent of agony, grief and pain.

Since the protagonist (Dasayya), is a religious person, the scene of his wife being sexually abused was not incorporated, despite suggestions from several quarters. Even employing of weapons like clubs or lances was avoided, though the original text consists of such elements, since for a mild character like Dasayya, employing too much violence would be out of place. Considerable research was done about the way dasayya's dress, talk and lives before the screenplay was finalized. Dasayya is humiliated by members of the panchayat who represent the religious minority. The consequences of these scenes would have been disastrous, had they been used merely for the sake of humor. This stresses the need to deviate from the original text in certain situations, having regard to the direct impact of the visual medium. The narrative style or technique of the written medium may not always hold water to the visual medium.

The exploitation of Dalits and the obnoxious practice of denying them freedom to exercise their constitutional powers even when they are elected by the voters to position of authority is a national phenomenon.

Several observations and recommendations made by the inquiry committee on the functioning of the panchayat system headed by thinker Ashok Mehta, inspired many sequences in the film



The original story of the film was written in Marathi, but the fact that the Kannada Script had a stamp of ethnicity and regional authenticity and came to be accepted by the viewers as such was indeed a bit of a miracle.

Hurdles and Limitations: Choosing a story for the Script

In the context of Kannada, the problems which arise and the self created imitations which surface while adapting a literary work to a film can only be described as peculiar.

Firstly, the government stipulates that a film should be of a certain length to be entitled to the several incentives offered by it, like subsidy, awards and tax exemption.

For the film to attain that length, the director is forced to stretch the storyline and create sub-plots. Parallel story lines incompatible with the main plot are also not uncommon. There ought to be four shows in a day, the theatre canteen has got to have optimum collections between shows and the man who has taken the car parking area on contract has got to make his money, and so the film should run for 12 hours a day in four shows. To keep the film going, the director has to take recourse to gimmicks and tight rope walks. At the same time, nothing should be done to rub the censors on the wrong side, critics should be had on his side, any hurt to the powers that he should be avoided, nothing should be done to anger the activist groups and more important, the heterogeneous audience should be kept happy and pleased. And the film maker's creativity has to flower amidst all these severe challenges!

Those in the literary domain have none of these hassles. He doesn't work under such myriad pressures, his success or failure is not measured in financial terms, he has none to please except his own inner being. He is the master of all that he surveys and can create literature of lasting value on his own terms.

A film script in any Indian language, when transformed into another language will never appear alien to the viewer in the other language, thanks to the fact that the ills of the caste system are similar in all regions of the country.

There is a plethora of traditional problems like untouchability, female foeticide, bonded labor, discrimination against widows, dowry killings, while social evils like terrorism, prostitution, naxalism, farmers' suicides and corruption are recent additions. Ironically, it is these problems which made for unity in diversity when stories and scripts are spun around them.

Films like 'Janumada Jodi', 'Benkiyalli Aralida Hoovu' (Kannada originally made in Tamil from a Marathi story), strike a chord in all the regions as human documents thanks to the 'shared conditions'

If somebody undertakes a story of Kannada films which have been transposed from other languages and vice-versa in comparison with the original film, it might turn out to be a worthwhile research effort and the subject for a comprehensive thesis.

Cinema: A visual language

Singitam Shreenivasa Rao's 'Pushpaka Vimana' reinforced that cinema is an altogether different art with a different language – A visual language. The film's new Narrative technique and script is a valuable contribution to Indian cinema.

In the movie, 'Pushpaka Vimana', the protagonist (Kamala Hassan) who is leading a life of Penury, desires for a comfortable, luxurious life and fulfills the desire. The method he adopts to attain his dreams, is however interesting, for the luxurious life that he leads in the movie for sometime, is neither a flashback nor a flash forward. It is not even a dream that he dreams in his sleep nor a fragment of his imagination or hallucination, instead it becomes a 'Lived' experience for him, wherein he is living in both the worlds- one, a life in ivory castle and the other in poverty. Here it is very interesting to note that his past and present co-exist.

Technically such a method is termed as 'Extended or Borrowed Reality'.

This rare narrative technique attempted in the movie, is probably what made the movie both meaningful and popular, thereby also winning the praises and interest of the viewer. The movie might not have been a success, if the usual, regular narrative style had been employed.

The cinema, 'Pushpaka Vimana', is a good example to prove, that to this visual art form, a script is far more important than merely trying to stuff in a literary text into the frame of cinema.

Translated by Bhumika Rajan



FILM AS LANGUAGE

A. N. Prasanna



In the past it was only in 'real' time that any art was performed. Thousands of years later, 'representational' art - which includes aesthetics of the pictorial arts and literary arts - came into being. In literature the language is manifested in various ways depending on the persons indulging in the use of the language or the pictures for their desired expression and communication achieved in respect of the subject to the reader or observer. During the said process how anything is said gained equal importance to what is said. It is true that the basic human emotions such as love, hatred, anger and others are more or less common the world over barring variations regarding cultural and historical context. The talent of the individual writer or the pictorial artiste was in his ability to successfully communicate in order to bring about the intended experience in the reader or the observer. This mattered the most. It is mainly the degree and means of achievement that marked them either 'ordinary' or 'great'. This also takes into fact that over a period of time the conceptions in different forms of literature kept on changing and what was considered as 'great' in a particular context and period was relegated to 'ordinary' position in some other context of time. In spite of this, many have stood the test of time irrespective of cultural and geographical considerations. Hence the works of writers like Tolstoy, Hugo, Tagore, Marquez, Puttappa and artists Michelangelo, Picasso and Bill Brandt (British photographer) to name a few have survived for ages.

The birth of 'recording arts' - which included the use of photography and sound together with language - provided a simpler mode of communication between the subject and the observer.

Kannada, as a language, is nearly two thousand years old whereas as the language of film is only just over a hundred years old. It is necessary for any writer to know and understand the difference between literary language and film language as they differ in the very nature of expression and allied things associated with them. Film is not a language like any other language. Also it has no grammar but evolves its own. This surprises anybody. But it is very much like a language. It is said that even infants understand moving pictures well before they develop the knowledge of language. It is also known that human beings can perceive and interpret it differently in different cultures. There is an intellectual process when one observes an image. We know how to read a printed page in Kannada or English, from left to right and top to bottom. But we will not be conscious how precisely we read an image of a film. It is needless to say that it is impossible to understand or enjoy literature unless we know how to read. But with respect to film it is grossly mistaken that anybody can read it. While it is true that anybody can see a film it does not mean one has read it. Ever since the beginning of film history, theorists have been comparing films with verbal language and it is only in the fifties and sixties that emphasis was laid on the study of film as a language. Let us consider a word in literature which is called as a sign in a film. A word 'Smile' for example. It is a collection of letters and is termed 'signifier'. Representation of it is the 'signified'. In literature the relationship between the signifier and the signified is always the primary factor. The pleasure of poetry, in particular, is in the manner in which the poet has structured the poem relating the two. But in a film the signifier and the signified are almost identical. It is precisely this fact which makes it very significant.

A film is difficult to explain but very easy to understand says the famous critic Metz. We cannot modify the signs of cinema as we modify the words of the language system. In a film the image of an object like a 'Table' is that particular table. Nothing less and nothing more. But in the literary word it could mean a table, to put-up, to notice, to serve and more. Persons reading the word 'Table' may think differently. It does not happen so in a film. In a film both see the same object. However the artists choice in cinema is without boundaries, but in literature it is circumscribed. Herein lies the power of cinema. Therefore it is essential for the one who creates images to make proper use of the images, and it is equally vital for the observer to learn how to read the images. It is needless to mention that both the creator and the viewer have to 'perform' successfully in this regard.

The narrative aspect of the film obviously draws it closer to a novel than to a drama. Generally, both the novel and the film incorporate a series of incidents with abundant details – individual, historical, socio-economic and cultural. This is carried out generally from the perspective

of a narrator who interposes in many ways between the story and the viewer/reader. It is normally believed that whatever is in print can be shown in images. This is not true. In the stories of Jorge Luis Borges, and a host novels wherein the writer makes use of the stream of consciousness to express the state of mind of the characters, it may not be possible to communicate through images, even if special effects were made use of.

It is unimaginable to think that any novel could be written in a totally linear manner or in present continuous tense. The non-linear aspect of the state of mind of the characters is easy to negotiate in the novel, and it is almost impossible to do so in a film. What a character thinks or what goes on in her/his mind with reference the related characters cannot be put across in a film, except to a certain extent in shots of stylized nature. This is because, as against the emphasis on the inner world of a character in the novel, in a film the emphasis is on the outer or external world. Each element pertaining to the individual - image/shot/scene which involves the behaviour of a character - needs to be 'created' in specific manner and incorporated in the script. But, however good a script is written, it is generally observed that many additions and improvisations take place during shooting.

A writer may have to omit or delete certain characters and episodes in the novel if it contains very many of them because a film functions in real time. Films like 'War and Peace' and 'Anna Karenina' based on the novels of Tolstoy and 'Kaanuru Haggadathi' of Puttappa are good examples to mention in this regard. This necessitates a writer to recast his/her creative ingredients from one form to another whose demands are different although many aspects remain common. The contribution of the music in a particular to film needs no special mention. This supplements to a greater extent to evoke the desired emotion in the viewer, in turn make him 'experience' and 'understand' the film.

It is true that the difference between a given novel and a film made out of it is the greater focus on "mind" given in novel as mentioned above. But this is a difference that is really only palpable when otherwise the novel and the film have much in common and makes it possible to adapt the novel to a film because both depict the characters, setting and plot in more or less conventional ways. Taking all these factors into consideration many highly successful films have been made based on novels such as 'To Kill a Mocking Bird' by Robert Mulligan based on Harper Lee's novel, 'One Flew over a Cuckoo's Nest' by Milos Foreman based on Ken Kesey's novel, 'Blade Runner' by Ridley Scott based on Philip.K.Dick's novel and 'God Father' by Francis Ford Coppola based on Mario Puzo's novel to name a few. It is known that that Ingmar Bergman

would initially write his conception of a particular film to be made in novel form and do the rest as necessary for cinema. Satyajit Ray made the famous 'Pather Panchali' based on the novel by Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay, to name only one. Almost all the films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan are based on novels and short stories. In Kannada too many films are made based on novels. Most of the films by Puttanna Kanagal were based on novels of Triveni. Also almost all the films of Girish Kasaravalli and Girish Karnad are based on the novels of U. R. Ananthamurthy, Yashwanth Chittal, S.L. Byrappa, Vaidehi and others. Writers like P. Lankesh, Chandrashekara Kambara, Baraguru Ramachandrappa and others have made successful and meaningful films based on their works.

T. S. Nagabharana has made a film based on Girish Karnad's play. There are many such instances in world cinema like 'Becket' by Peter Glenville in 1964 based on the acclaimed play of the same name by Jean Anouilh which won twelve Oscar awards including Best Direction. Sometimes films use plays as their sources. William Shakespeare is considered the most popular screen writer. There are not only film versions of most of his plays, but also multiple versions of many of them including 'Throne of Blood' and 'Ran' which are adaptations by Akira Kurosawa.

In order to transform the perception from literary medium to that of cinema one needs to know the ingredients of the language of cinema. In the beginning there was a theory that a shot was the 'word' of the film, scene its 'sentence' and sequence the 'paragraph'. Later it was understood that the above notion was wrong. A shot takes certain duration. Also, within this period there could be a good number of images. A single image of a film does not constitute the basic unit meaning in a film because, unlike a written word or a spoken word, the film is not a composition of units of letters and sound, but is a continuum of meaning. A shot consists of as much information as one tries to read in it. We understand these factors better when we notice the famous murder scene in Alfred Hitchcock's 'Psycho'. It consists of twenty shots of varied duration. Another significant factor a writer needs to know is that like the written word the image in a film has denotative quality and this is easy notice in the film. There will be an enormous difference between the description of a person or an event in words and the cinematic record of the same. Most of the times, a film can communicate precise knowledge that a written word cannot achieve. It is to be understood that a film has connotative capabilities also. An object or an artiste can be filmed from a certain angle, with specific illumination; the artiste can be filmed in a prescribed costume, making use of properties in a specific manner. All these indicate the cultural factors of the film as a whole. Also, various forms of art like literature,



music, theatre and dance can be drawn to its fold and therefore becomes a comprehensive product pertaining to its origin.

In addition to the general culture, a film has some specific connotations which are almost impossible to accomplish in literature. A film maker has to make certain choices pertaining to the angle of the camera - whether the camera is stationary or has movement; illumination - whether bright or dull; and the duration of the shot. If this is one aspect of the shot, the other choices are regarding the behaviour of the artiste in association with others and the related objects or properties. This, of course, depends upon the character attributed to each. These could be accomplished perhaps equally well in a novel also. These two aspects collectively indicate what the character 'is' in a particular context of the film or the inner self of the character which is called Index. The more the care is taken regarding the structuring or editing of indexes properly the more is the power inducted to the film; these are called cinematic qualities.

A writer needs to re-mode his imaginations while indulging in a creative work like cinema which is an art form that utilises mainly indexes and other extensions. Much of its meaning comes from what is not seen rather than what is seen. This is very ironic because cinema appears like an art which is all too evident; it is often regarded as one which does not leave anything to imagination. And needless to mention these are the factors which determine whether a film is good or bad.

Once I decided to make a film I tried to learn, digest and implement most of the above basic things apart from many more that I learnt while making the film.



SCREEN WRITING: LITERATURE OR THE FILMMAKER'S ART?

■ *Prakash Belawadi*



Below is an excerpt from Budd Schulberg's screenplay for Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, the last part of the legendary Marlon Brando - Rod Steiger taxicab scene, followed by a few quick scenes.

The scene, probably the most famous in Hollywood history, was supposedly an improvisation by Brando, but Schulberg, in an interview, denied it: "Marlon did not improvise it. That is a grand myth. During the filming, he would improvise a word here and there, but he didn't change lines. He was good about it. Much later, Brando said he had improvised the cab scene. That's absolute nonsense. The scene was intact before we sent him the script."

In fact, it was revealed later, many of the Steiger solo shots were taken after Marlon Brando had left for the day. So much for the improvisation theory. That particular scene, from that particular film and by that particular writer is useful for this discussion in many ways.

The year was 1954, very close to the absolute middle point of cinema history, from the beginning to where we stand now. Budd Schulberg was a novelist himself who also wrote screenplays, although most people would say it the other way round. The film itself is very Hollywood, but a classic and Kazan was a powerful director - a filmmaker.

Here is the excerpt. Terry is the prizefighter gone to seed, Terry Malloy (Brando), who turns against the mafia and, Charley (Rod Steiger) is his brother, who is with the mob: The driver is actually a mob guy himself. The shots are inside the taxicab.



TERRY : Charley... you wouldn't take me to Gerry G...?

Charley continues looking at him. He does not deny it. They stare at each other for a moment. Then suddenly Terry starts out of the cab. Charley pulls a pistol. Terry is motionless, now, looking at Charley.

CHARLEY : Take the boss loading, kid. For God's sake. I don't want to hurt you.

TERRY : (hushed, gently guiding the gun down toward Charley's lap)
Charley... Charley... Wow...

CHARLEY : (genuinely) I wish I didn't have to do this, Terry.

Terry eyes him, beaten. Charley leans back and looks at Terry strangely. Terry raises his hands above his head, somewhat in the manner of a prize-fighter mitting the crowd. The image nicks Charley's memory.

TERRY : (an accusing sigh) Wow....

CHARLEY : (gently) What do you weigh these days, slugger?

TERRY : (shrugs)...eight-seven, eighty-eight. What's it to you?

CHARLEY : (nostalgically) Gee, when you tipped one seventy-five you were beautiful. You should've been another Billy Conn. That skunk I got to manage you brought you along too fast.

TERRY : It wasn't him! (years of abuse crying out in him) It was you, Charley. You and Johnny. Like the night the two of youse come in the dressing room and says, "Kid, this ain't your night— we're going for the price on Wilson." It ain't my night. I'd of taken Wilson apart that night! I was ready — remember the early rounds throwing them combinations. So what happens— This bum Wilson he gets the title shot— outdoors in the ballpark! — and what do I get — a couple of bucks and a one-way ticket to Palookaville. (more and more aroused as he relives it) It was you, Charley. You was my brother. You should of looked out for me. Instead of making me take them dives for the short-end money.

CHARLEY : (defensively) I always had a bet down for you. You saw some money.

TERRY : (agonized) See! You don't understand!

CHARLEY : I tried to keep you in good with Johnny.

TERRY : You don't understand! I could've been a contender. I could've had class and

been somebody. Real class. Instead of a bum, let's face it, which is what I am. It was you, Charley.

Charley takes a long, fond look at Terry. Then he glances quickly out the window.

MEDIUM SHOT—WATERFRONT—NIGHT

From Charley's angle. A gloomy light reflects the street numbers — 433 — 435—

INT—CLOSE—CAB—ON CHARLEY AND TERRY — NIGHT

TERRY : It was you, Charley...

CHARLEY : (turning back to Terry, his tone suddenly changed) Okay—I'll tell him I couldn't bring you in. Ten to one they won't believe it, but—go ahead, blow. Jump out, quick, and keep going... and God help you from here on in.

LONGER ANGLE — CAB — NIGHT

As Terry jumps out. A bus is just starting up a little further along the street.

EXT—MEDIUM LONG SHOT—RIVER STREET—NIGHT

Running, Terry leaps onto the back of the moving bus.

INT—CAB—RIVER ST.—NIGHT

CHARLEY : (to driver as he watches Terry go) Now take me to the Garden.

Charley sinks back in his seat, his hand covering his face. The driver turns around, gives him a withering look, steps on the gas, and guns the car into—

EXT—MEDIUM LONG SHOT—RIVER STREET—NIGHT

They have reached a garage, and now the car zooms through the entrance. We catch a glimpse of Truck, Sonny and Big Mac.

MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT—EXT—JOHNNY'S LIMOUSINE —NIGHT

Johnny is watching from across the street.

MEDIUM CLOSE—ON GARAGE DOOR—NIGHT

Big Mac and Sonny pull the big black sliding door shut until the screen itself is blacked out. Inside there is the roaring sound of a motor racing.

QUICK DISSOLVE

INT—EDIE'S BEDROOM—NIGHT

Edie is in bed. There is a pounding on the door.

.....and so on.



That is not like a novel. Not that the novel can't do it, but the narrative is not imagined in the same way. The imagination here concretizes the images in specific detail, not as aesthetic preference, but because it has to be filmed for concrete images. The 'big black sliding door' is Elia Kazan's absolute and final image of it (made in concert with the cinematographer) and given to every reader to visualize as he reads his or her own garage door. The 'roaring sound of a motor racing' is similarly mixed and fixed by the director and sound expert.

Years on, with, say, *Speed* or *Mission Impossible* (sticking to Hollywood), the concretization is even more complex and nuanced and the novelist who does not imagine filmic narrative could be bewildered and hurt, as they all tend to be, with the way the story turns out. So, is the good film script good literature? In fact, is it literature at all?

Sure it is made of text in some language that can be read. But when does it become available to literary critics for critique, like poetry, novels and plays? It has been argued that the screenplay is literature, that it is the "blueprint for a film" and that a film is driven by visuals, dialogue and theme being secondary. Offering this the other way round, when we do find the case where movies are fully comprehensible just through dialogue and the visuals aren't really necessary, are we not talking about bad cinema?

What Budd Schulberg's work seems to suggest and what is even more critically the need now is that the screenwriter must serve his part in the 'filmmaking' itself. He needs to know not just the techniques of filmmaking, but even the technologies that determine new cinema.

It means that we would like to say "a small room with a single window on the second floor, overlooking the railway station" rather than "poor quarters near the railway track" or more beautiful abstract descriptions, however evocative they could be in the literary medium. When the man leans too close, the girl would, perhaps, draw back to say, "Please!" or "Don't!" rather than "Please, don't...you are crowding me!" or give a speech more accurately describing what all she finds objectionable about the man..

We wouldn't have much use with, for instance, "He could feel the anger welling up inside him." The description would have to be physically precise for action, suggesting itself to the director for appropriate framing and magnification. The screenwriter, aware of the environment of actual filming, ideally would suggest – directly or indirectly – point of view, distance from camera, and angle of view, magnification, tracking and light. The narrative then is a part of filmmaking, not literary production.

It's not even like on the stage, where a character probably will need to say, "You are beautiful!"

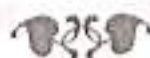
The screenwriter could write: "As she turns away from the window, the late afternoon light illuminates here partly averted face, she brushes away a strand of hair. He stares at her. She seems to sense his gaze, looks at him and blushes." It becomes possible in the screenwriting to suggest that the character is either unwell or unhappy with a close-up of the half finished meal, noticed (through PoV) by somebody close to the character.

The narrative of the film is constructed by the screenwriter, even if the director himself must play that role. Actors making up their lines and directors turning up with great ideas on the shooting spot will happen, but all that needs to be inside the structure of the screenplay. Someone described this well: "Designing a cinematic narrative can be compared to composing a piece of music: it's all about bars, beats, pacing, with mathematical proportions determining the efficiency of the result. Film is movement, movement is rhythm, and rhythm has rules."

What must be common ground for the novel and stageplay would be story construction (and it must be mentioned here that this article is not about documentary filmmaking). Which means we should step out of the medium itself for a moment and look at what makes a story. The chief character or protagonist or hero needs and wants or wills something, sets out accomplish it, meets obstacles and adversaries, finds friends who help or betray, meets random and startling interventions that thwart or further progress and finds or not the goal.

Here literary critics and pundits of literary theory will happily find ground for articulation. But skirting concepts like 'imagism' and explorations through the mazes of literary studies, it could still be said strongly that cinema is story told predominantly through moving images and uses prose in ways fundamentally different from that of literature.

But we must acknowledge what the novel writer already knows. The screenwriter is not the sole or even the chief creative artiste of the film, unless he is the filmmaker too.



CAMERA EYES IN LETTERS

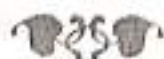
(ALPHABET)

■ *Krishna Maasadi*

'Fermina Daja' is The Character in Marquez's 'Love in the time of Cholera' which was made into a film, The portrayal of her character in the film was such that, I was frustrated and dejected and it took me weeks to come out of it. It means the female character in the novel was not there on the screen as I had imagined and dreamed. Therefore, the disappointment.

The Difference between a literary work and films made based on literary works would be like the above mentioned. It is not possible to capture visually what is reflected in literature because, the visual medium and medium of literature are different. Visual has a limitation but not literature. That is why I am not happy with 'Avasthe' the film based on the novel 'Avasthe' by U.R. Ananthamurthy. Also I am disappointed with the film based on my own novel "Nambikegalu". The infinity created through a literary work cannot be created by cinema. My doubt is that perhaps cinema ends in narrating the accuracy of a period. Because of this Romeo & Juliet has been produced innumerable times and it continues to be produced.

Letters are the basics of literature and visuals are basics of a film. In the present scenario there are few outstanding films with a proper blend of letter and visual. Dr. Zhivago is one of my favorite films, based on the novel. Still I believe that literature cannot be completely captured in films.



FIFTY YEARS OF THE

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50 Years of
JASA

FIFTY YEARS OF FFSI

Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI), the parent body for all the film societies in India was founded on December, 13, 1959 when representatives of the pioneering Film Societies in India, namely Calcutta Film Society, Delhi Film Society, Patna Film Society, Roorkey Film Society, Bombay Film Society, and The Madras Film Society affixed their signature to form the FFSI. Satyajit Ray was named the founder president.

On this occasion of completion of 50 years of its service to the Film Society Movement in the country the FFSI is launching its year long celebration with various activities to promote a healthy film culture in the country through formation of Film Societies at different centers and particularly in the universities and colleges. FFSI is also planning to document the achievements of this movement through a book titled History of the Film Society Movement in India. An international seminar will be organized in Mumbai, and it is also proposed to make a short film on this movement in digital format to mark this occasion.

Suchitra Film Society, Bangalore which is closely associated with the FFSI in various activities has taken the initiative to celebrate this event during the 3rd Bengalooru International Film Festival, on 20th January, 2009.

As a part of the celebration of Golden Jubilee, Suchitra Film Society, Bangalore will be happy to felicitate five veteran Film Society Activists who are associated as founders from the beginning with five pioneering Film Societies functioning actively and vibrantly for four decades now.



Mr. K.S. GOVINDARAJ

Formed in 1957, The Madras Film Society is the oldest Film society in the South. Mrs. Ammu Swaminathan was its founder President. MFS celebrated its golden jubilee in 2007 by screening more than 250 films in the year. This organization has made immense contribution to the Film Society Movement. Sri K.S. Govindaraj, born in 1929, is associated with this society from the very beginning as its founder member and to day he is continuing to serve as its executive Vice president. Sri S.Mahadevan is continuing the noble heritage of this film society as its secretary for over 35 years now.

Mr. Govindaraj has served the film society movement in various capacities both with the Madras Film Society and in the FFSI, as office bearer for over four decades now. We are greatly privileged to honor this esteemed veteran Film Society Activist.



Sri SADHAN CHAKROBORTY.

Cine Central, Calcutta is a film society formed in September 1965 as a non-commercial, apolitical organization in Calcutta (or Kolkata), which is the capital city of the state of West Bengal in India, in the wake of a thoughtful culmination of the endeavor of the noted film personalities of Calcutta, who felt the necessity for a platform to showcase the best of world-cinema and a forum to celebrate the works of young emerging filmmakers and bring their achievement to great prominence. To day it is the largest Film Society and the credit for realizing the dream of conducting an annual International Film Festival annually by

a private organization for the first time should go to this institution. It needs quite a big volume to write the history of this film society. Sri Sadhan Chakroborty, aged 75, the present General Secretary, and a close associate of late Alok Chandra Chandra, a noted film society activist, is one of the founders of this institution and it is really commendable that he continues to serve with the same enthusiasm which he evinced during its early years. We are grateful to Sri Sadhan Chakraborty and to Cine Central Calcutta for accepting to be with us to receive our felicitations.

Sri SUDHIR NANDGAONKAR

In early seventies, cinema as an art form was little known to most of the people working for film industry. This is when Sudhir Nandgaonkar, a young passionate cinephile, a journalist and critic entered the scene. First as an active member of Film Forum, a society that was trying to build bridges between the art and commerce of cinema. Later as the founder of Prabhat Chitra Mandal, a film society that played a pivotal role in spreading the movement all over Maharashtra.

Forty years hence, the cinematic landscape of Mumbai has changed beyond recognition. Prabhat Chitra Mandal, the film society that Mr. Nandgaonkar established opened new vistas to the world of cinema. a world that most of Mumbaikars were deprived of. The thinking filmmakers and film fraternity joined hands with Prabhat and its various other initiatives. Prabhat, quite true to its meaning marked a new dawn in Mumbai. One of the oldest film societies in India, Prabhat has not only survived the test of time but continues to thrive and inspire others.



Sri Sudhir, born in 1939, is the present General Secretary of FFSI and has many plans on the anvil to promote a healthy film culture in the country. Suchitra feels it a privilege to felicitate him.



Sri H.N.NARAHARI RAO

Sri H.N.Narahari Rao, born in 1940, and his close friend Sri S.Raghavendra Rao saw Satyajit Ray's Pather Panchali at a Film Society screening in Bangalore in 1970, and got inspired so much that they started dreaming of forming a film society of their own in Bangalore. With guidance from late Sri B.N.Narayan, (Nani) this dream became a reality. This is how Suchitra Film Society, Bangalore took its birth in the year 1971. As its founder secretary Sri Rao took so much interest in it, he became literally obsessed with its growth for more than three decades. Suchitra became the first film society in India to have its own auditorium complex which today stands as a cultural hub of Bangalore. Suchitra has now become a house hold name in Bangalore and also an internationally recognized film society for its service in the cause of good cinema.

Sri Rao has also served the Film Society movement as the Regional Council member of FFSI for over fifteen years and then as its Vice President for the last ten years. His books -Film Society Hand book, A Glimpse of Kannada Cinema, My Days with the Film Society Movement, and Most Memorable Films of the World from the Diaries of the Film Societies have played a significant role in promoting film society activities in the country. We in Suchitra feel proud to felicitate him and seek his continued guidance in our activities.

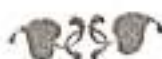
PHILIP

Sri Philip, born in 1939, is a noted film society activist who took interest in cinema during his career in Air Force and joined Osmania and RRL Film Society in Hyderabad. He later started his own film society Hyderabad Film Club in 1974 as its founder secretary. His good work in the early years is followed by Sri Bh.S.S. Prakash Reddy who is holding the fort for Hyderabad Film Club as its Secretary for over two decades now. Today Hyderabad Film Club is one of the leading film societies in the country



Sri Philips took keen interest in revival of the FFSI (South) along with Sri H.N.Narahari Rao, late ISK Devarayalu, late A.V.Rajagopal, and Sri R.K.Pal in the early 1970's. His interest in the movement is something amazing. Several times in the past during 1970s he actually carried films on his two wheeler and travelled to different cities and towns in South India to organize film screenings. He was the first to represent FFSI, SR as delegate at the International Federation of Film Societies conference held in Havana Cuba, in 1985. In recent years he met with several accidents but that does not dampen his spirits. He continues to see films and enjoy them as a passionate cineaste. It is Suchitra's pleasure to felicitate him.

*(The President and Executive Committee members
of Suchitra Film Society Bangalore.)*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

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Associate Chairperson

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Artistic Director

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Executive Director

N. Vidyashankar

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- Nitin
- Parimila
- Annie
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- Bindiya

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- President, Members & Staff Members of Karnataka Co-operative Urban Federation
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- Events India, Bengalooru
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- ABAI, Bangalore
- Chikka D S Suresh
- Ravi Ajjipura
- U T Suresh
- Shashidhar Adapa
- Chandranath Acharya
- Shivananda
- Vision Cinema Management & Staff Members
- All the Volunteers



3ನೇ ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು ಅಂತಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರೀಯ ಚಲನಚಿತ್ರೋತ್ಸವಕ್ಕೆ ಶುಭಾಶಯಗಳು



ಪ್ರೀತಿಯಿಂದ
ರಮೇಶ್ ಅರವಿಂದ್



ಕನ್ನಡ ಚಿತ್ರೋದ್ಯಮವು
ಅಮೃತ ಮಹೋತ್ಸವವನ್ನು ಆಚರಿಸುತ್ತಿರುವ
ಈ ಶುಭ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ
ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು ಅಂತರರಾಷ್ಟ್ರೀಯ ಚಲನಚಿತ್ರೋತ್ಸವ
3 ನೇ ವರ್ಷಕ್ಕೆ ಅಂಬೆಗಾಲಿಟ್ಟಿದೆ.
ಈ ಚಿತ್ರೋತ್ಸವವು ಯಶಸ್ವಿಯಾಗಲೆಂದು ಹಾರೈಸುವ



ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಚಲನಚಿತ್ರ ವಾಣಿಜ್ಯ ಮಂಡಳಿ