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INDIAN CINEMA AND CULTURE

by

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All opinions expressed in this report, and the recommendations made, represent the personal views of the author.

## I. HISTORICAL SURVEY

In the year 1963, the Indian film celebrates its Golden Jubilee, making the 50th year of feature production. India, with Japan leading, is the second largest film producing country in the world with the United States of America and Hong Kong coming third and fourth in the list.

In 1961, Japan produced 520 pictures to India's 296 and America's 250. Fifty per cent of the films are made in this official lingua franca, the Hindi, and the rest in the 12 other languages of India, chiefly Bengali, Tamil, Telegu, Punjabi, Gujerati, Marathi.

The main centres of production are Bombay, Calcutta, Madras. There are today 4,500 cinema houses in the country and over two million people visit the cinema every day. This figure, though large for a people to whom the cinema provides the only form of entertainment, represents only a fringe of the population, leaving practically untouched the seven hundred villages of India, that is 70 per cent of those people who, to Gandhi and Vinobha, today mean the real India.

The Indian film has varied in length from 13,000 to 16,000 feet, now restricted to 13,000 by Government order to save foreign exchange. Long films are in keeping with the age-old Indian tradition of long sessions of music, yatra (religious operas), Ram Leela (dramatic version of the Ramayana), Kathakali (long dance dramas of the south), Muchairas (poetical symposiums).

The moving picture came to India at about the same time as it was making its early beginnings in Europe and America. The Lumière Brothers, fresh from success in France and England, bore their "magic box" to Bombay in 1896, and on 14 July of the same year their films were shown at the Novelty Theatre. Audiences were amazed and then fascinated by the sight of a moving train, sea-bathers and a parade of the Guards in Hyde Park. At first films were shown in tents, sheds and residential bungalows. However, by 1910, enterprising showmen had started to build studios.

In 1911, Dadasahib Phalke, now known as the Father of the Indian film industry, saw a European film based on the life of Christ. The film made such a strong impression on Phalke that he decided to start making films. He purchased film stock, a camera and printing machine from Europe and eventually started the first film called Raja Harischandra, a story from the Mahabharata. He had to sign on men to play the feminine rôles as no Indian woman considered it proper to act in a film. Eventually after many hazards and technical problems, Raja Harischandra was exhibited at the Coronation Theatre in Bombay in 1913. The 40-minute film packed the theatre and Phalke's fame was made overnight. He went on producing films, encountering hardships till, in 1918, he made a film on Krishna, his daughter playing the rôle of the boy Krisina. The film's popularity can be gauged by its ten-month long, successful run.

Phalke continued to make films: photograph, process and direct them. Fortune did not always favour him even though before retiring he had produced 125 films - many from the great legends of India - and set an example for others to follow. Through his pioneering work, the popularity of the motion picture grew, and could not be satiated by Indian production alone. In the early days of the film production, the pioneers had one thought: how best to cope with the increasing demand. Much time or thought could not be given to the technical side of the industry.

The problem of finding actresses was a great one: for the early pictures, Indian women were not available to play feminine rôles, and it is interesting to note that the leading parts in J.F. Madan's Naland Damyanti (1917) were played by two Italians, Signor and Signora Manelli. A few years later (1925) the Gagar Brothers, in co-operation with the Emelker films of Munich, produced The Light of Asia, based on the life of the Buddha, Himansu Rai, who founded the Bombay Talkies, directed the picture. This picture had its London première in 1926, was shown at a Royal Command performance, and had a run in an important cinema for several weeks.

Meanwhile, the Indian public was regaled and thrilled by many foreign, chiefly American films, especially the humorous and spectacular ones of Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks. At the same time, the Indian public was treated to a feast of mythological religious films where fact and fancy could harmonize without conflict, and to historical films which were invariably unconvincing, especially when dealing with famous Muslim knights and heroes.

About this time, a revolution from silence to speech was taking place. With the advent of the talking pictures in India, in 1931, a new and vital impetus was given to the industry. The Indian film had found a voice with which to speak, and more important for the commercial market, with which to sing, for few Indian features are complete without songs, no matter how serious the theme. This explains the tremendous success through the country - though this was not an artistic triumph - of the first talkie, Alam Ara, studded with a dozen songs, and directed by A.M. Irani.

This was followed by other talkies - Madan's Shvrin Farhad, which outshone in glamour and success Alam Ara, and Prabhat's Marathi and Hindi The King of Ayodhya (directed by Shantara with Durga Khote as heroine), the story of Harischandra launched by Phalke in 1913. The technical problems facing the industry in the change-over to synchronized dialogue was much the same as in any other film-producing country. The sound-proofing of studios and re-equipment of theatres was finally completed in 1933, and no silent film was released after that year.

Shantaram gained wide recognition with his films, notably Amar Jyoti (Eternal Light) in Hindi, Sant Tukaram, in Marathi, produced by Prabhat studios, was the first Indian film to win a Venice festival award.

Barua, in 1935-1936, in Bengali, Hindi and Tamil - three separate versions - launched Sara Chandra Chatterji's Devdas revolutionary outlook on social problems. In all its versions, including Bimal Roy's Hindi Devdas (1956), this story has tugged at millions of heartstrings for a generation. Barua brought into films, unknown till then, a dialogue that came near to common speech. This, together with many other films of the thirties, like Devika Rani's Achut Kanya, were films of protest, the beginnings of the social film of the decade of sound. At this time Gandhi and Nehru asked for a reform of society both from the outside and from within. On the level of popular fable, the social film did likewise. (1)

It was during this period that south Indian languages - chiefly Tamil and Telegu - opened centres at Madras, Bangalore, Combatore and Vizagapatam. Though south India had entered the field of production rather late, by 1937 film production in the languages of the region made as much progress as any other vernacular, with the exception of Hindi.

(1) See Indian film, page 74.

The early Tamil and Telegu films were mythological, but socials were soon added to them. Subrahmanian, a Brahmin producer, shocked his community by producing Balayogini (child saint) in Tamil in 1938. This film, which through the mouth of a child actress heaped ridicule on caste restrictions, was a great success. The child actress, Barby Saroja, became one of the most celebrated film personalities in south India. His Tharasamraksharam (The Defence of Honour) proved a box-office success.

The "Modern Theatres" started with Sundarum's production of Krishna Leela, with 62 songs, three dances. This Company, which first produced in Tamil and Malayalam, later expanded to Telegu and Kannada.

The colour pictures Kisan Kanya (1937) and Mother India (1938) were successful but proved too expensive.

During the Second World War, more and more people flocked to their local cinemas to seek relaxation. It was not unusual for a popular film to run for as long as six months to a year in one theatre. But the war years were years of depression: the Bengal studios were well-nigh dead, the south were satisfied with crude productions, the Punjab production sank into a rut and in Bombay art dwindled and all and sundry, eager for "easy money and quick returns" entered the film market, producing cheap imitations of Hollywood.

The most successful of war-effort films was written by K.A. Abbas and produced in Hindi (Dr. Kotnis Ki amar Kahani) and English (The Journey of Dr. Kotnis).

Gradually, many directors came to realize that social films of a creative kind should supersede "mythologicals". Even Dr. Radhakrishnan, in 1942, declared: "We are getting too much of this mythology. We should retain all our ancient ideals, but they must find out parallels in the life of modern people and modern conditions". But mythologicals did not cease. Shantaram's Shakuntala was lost to the American public - but Uday Shankar's fantasy Kalpana, with 70-80 dance sequences, its shaky story apart, broke new ground in presenting with exquisite artistry a music and dance spectacle. S.S. Vasan's Chandralekha - in Tamil and Hindi - was a box-office sweep. But K.A. Abbas launched in 1949 a series of socially significant films with Dharti Ke Lal (Children of the Earth). It told the story of "rural indebtedness and dispossessed peasantry". This triumph, also shown in Moscow, was followed by Munna (The Lost Child): the first Hindi film without music and song, which at the Edinburgh festival was pronounced by "The Scotsman" to be "the worthiest film of the year" and saluted by "The Guardian" as the most delightful surprise.

An artistic triumph though. Munna was, it was not a "box-office hit" in India. This seemed enough proof to other would-be breakers of routine that the old formula was the only answer, Abbas's Sikandar (Alexander the Great), written specially for the new star in the film firmament Raj Kapoor, was a triumphant box-office success. This was followed by Aivara (The Vagabond) in which the song "I am a Vagabond" was in part responsible for the success of the film in Asia and the Middle East. In the Soviet Union it was dubbed into many languages and Raj Kapoor and Nargis became heroes to the extent that their songs were played even at airports. Shree 420, again written by Abbas, was another stupendous success.

Bimal Roy's Sujata was another noteworthy film, rare for its simplicity and treatment of an untouchable girl brought up in a Brahmin household. All the usual stereotypes and canons of society are broken down when Sujata, in the end, marries the Brahmin's son. The usual self-pity, so prevalent in presenting heroes and heroines, is absent.

In 1949, the Government, recognizing the importance of the film industry, appointed a Film Inquiry Committee to investigate every aspect of the industry and to issue a report of the findings. The Chairman visited several of the major film producing countries of the world so that a comparative study could be made. The report, published in 1951, was hailed as a document of major importance, containing the first comprehensive study of conditions inside the industry. The main criticism made in the report were that in spite of the expansion of the industry it had not fully achieved the efficient organization and business-like management required in relation to its size and importance. The Committee observed that high rates of finance, heavy scale of repayment of artists, shares of the exhibitor and distributor, the long percentage of "flops" and unreleased films, and increased labour and studio charges, made film enterprise a profitable business to only a comparatively small proportion of its producers.

The Committee urged the Government to take a more active interest in the industry, yet at the same time the Committee considered that whatever plan was devised, it must be based on the film industry finding its feet and shaping its destiny in the best interest of the community. (1)

One of the major highlights of 1952 was the organization of the joint Film Festival of India, sponsored by the Government of India and organized by the Films Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The festival, the first of its kind in Asia, was held between January and February and India acted as host to 23 countries and many international film personalities. Over a million people saw 54 feature films in 13 languages and 104 documentaries were selected for exhibition. It was considered necessary in view of the vastness of India and the importance of various centres to hold the festival in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras. So India film festival became the first mobile festival of its kind in the world. Another unusual feature was the establishment of vast open-air theatres at Delhi and Madras capable of seating 7,000 people. These open-air theatres proved so popular that they have now become a permanent feature.

The Government's Film Division documentaries, thanks to the outstanding work of Mohan Bhavnani, Jehangir Bhowmagary and Ezra Mir, received recognition at European, Canadian and British film festivals. The Film Division has received many certificates of merit and prizes for films in the Edinburgh Film Festival, Cannes, Berlin, San Francisco, Venice and elsewhere. It is one of the largest short film organizations in the world. Its average annual output is 170 films, plus 52 news-reels all these in 13 languages. And alongside the feature film, the documentaries play an important rôle in providing an effective means of widening the student's and filmgoer's horizon, of arousing latent curiosities, of developing knowledge, and carrying the message of the New India across the frontiers of the world.

The Film Seminar, in 1955, was a notable event, more especially because Devika Rani, described as the "First Lady of the Indian Screen" came out of her retirement to organize it with great success. It assembled authorities in every field of film craft and its object was well served. It was, as Raj Kapoor put it "how to make better pictures in this country and how to bring about their integration in national life". Another participant, A. Abbas, said that everyone was in a mood for self-criticism which is ... the "beginning of self-improvement. If and when the film-makers assume their social responsibilities, they will get a sympathetic hearing".

(1) India, London 1953.

Since Devika Rani, educated and of high lineage, entered the field in the thirties, the taboo that young ladies from families of social status do not enter films broke down. Other actresses such as Durga Khote and Enakshi Bhavani, came forward and in time, comparable to anywhere in the West, the cult of the star - not always with good consequences - was born. Stars dress and live in style, drive in shining limousines and it would appear that in Independent India, the mantle of the Maharajas and the Nawabs has fallen upon them. In 1962, Premier Nehru and Vice-President Radhakrishnan captained a cricket team for the benefit of charity. The event, with fanfare, raised Rs 30,000. A similar cricket match captained by the film stars Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar raised more than three times that sum.<sup>(1)</sup>

A distinguished sociologist, Kewal Motwani, has this to say on the subject: "The politicians may be the leaders of the country, but the cinema stars are its heroes and heroines".

A historical survey of the Indian film is impossible without a reference to the problem of censorship, a constant subject of Government-industry feud.

### Censorship

On this very prickly point Jawaharlal Nehru's ideas are plain: "It is a dangerous thing for a government to become a judge of people's morals .... I do not take too kindly to too much regimentation ... in matters which are things of the spirit - music, dance ... The creative arts must be encouraged to grow, with as little interference as possible. It is only when they manifestly become a social menace that the government must come in it with a heavy hand."

But it was due to the determination "to cleanse India of corrupting foreign influences" that the censorship, already more severe than in other film-producing countries, became even more rigorous.<sup>(2)</sup> Kissing was permitted in the 1930's, but India became far stricter after Independence so far as Indian films were concerned, but more lenient towards foreign films which were shown in theatres to a relatively sophisticated segment of society. These discriminatory practices were highly criticized.

Various members of Parliament found every opportunity to get Government pledges for renewed efforts to purge the film industry of unwholesome influences. Mrs. K.M. Munshi, a leader in this crusade, formed a Society for the Prevention of Unhealthy Trends in Motion Pictures.<sup>(3)</sup>

It is the general opinion of most serious filmgoers and film producers that there needs to be a much more liberal interpretation of censorship directives. Unless this is done, the artistic potential of the country will greatly suffer.

The greatest conscientious objectors are chiefly interested in preventing drinking scenes, religious misinterpretations and love scenes. Here and there, as in the documentary film Khujarao, no attempts have been made to censor the sculptures, chiefly because the camera, by moving from frame to frame, traces a day in the life of the gods with love and reverence. In a way, every censor would find it hard to suggest any cuts in a film in which man lives in the images of the gods. The sculptures portray the activities of daily life, but life without tragedy. Great

(1) See Indian Film. Krishnaswamy, Columbia, 1963.

(2) Film Seminar Report (1955), page 155.

(3) Indian Film. Columbia, 1963.

men hunt and partake of sport and food. With the fall of evening, musicians appear, the galleries are full, and the dancing of stone feet is about to begin. The evening wears on; lover and beloved find in each other the image of truth - and so to sleep. Life is indeed art; the life of the gods is the example for men.

Yet on the subject of censorship the Government, using an explicit constitutional base, decided it would have to be the only judge of what was good or bad for the people. The Central Board of Film Censor's Report (1952) retained many taboos dating from Colonial days such as "excessively passionate love scenes", "kissing", "exhibition of feminine underclothing", "blackmail associated with immorality", "from travesties of justice", "emphasized bosom", "indecorous dancing" and, more recently "display of extreme poverty".

In reply to protests, Dr. Keskar, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, defended his stand on the ground that films in Indian languages were meant for the mass of the people who are uneducated and have prejudices and their feelings and sentiments must be considered. (1)

Nor did censorship stop there. Many foreign films dealing with Africa and Asia were suddenly uncertified. The official explanation was that these films - The Snows of Kilimanjaro, African Adventure, Below the Sahara, The King and I - fail to portray the peoples of Africa and Asia in proper perspectives.

Censorship does create for producers an endless problem. That censorship in India today is an absolute necessity no one will deny. But imagine a Board of Censors consisting of a lawyer, a soldier, a scientist, an artist, each, when it comes to his turn, using the scissors. By the time the job is finished, pulling a limb here and a muscle there, only a skeleton would be left. On that only a doctor, who is not included in the council, could pronounce a judgement.

The existing code is vague, depending upon the censor's interpretation. The problem is not so much the rigour, but the vagaries of censorship. The producer should not be asked to guess what will pass the censor's vigilant eye; he should know.

But the censor's scissors notwithstanding, the last few years have awakened a deep interest in Indian films, especially due to Satyajit Ray's remarkable social trilogy about a provincial Bengali family. Ray revealed a world so utterly enchanting, so passionately human, that it filled the heart with wonder, awe and compassion, all at once. Ray found truth, beauty and simplicity, not in "the madding crowds" but far from them - away from the humanized souls - "to catch the subtle difference between dawn and dusk or convey the great stillness that precedes the first monsoon shower". Shorn of all superficial gloss, Ray's films have a deep warmth and spiritual glow, and he is acknowledged as one of the great directors in world cinema.

Satyajit Ray is a world citizen, immersed in the culture of Bengal. His success is not only due to his great gifts but also because he gives the honest picture of Bengal where, as he says, his roots are deep. He has warned against pandering to the foreigners love of the false exotic. "A great many notions about our country and our people have to be dispelled. Even though it may be easier and - from a film point of view - more paying to sustain existing myths than to demolish them." The lure of the box-office has been responsible for films like Shantaram's Jhanak Jhanak Paye Baje (Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells) and Mehboob's Aan and Mother

(1) Film Number. United Asia, Bombay, 1961.

India as well as S.S. Vasan's Paigham (Message) and Chandralekha, where fabulous Hollywood inspired box-office shows have come forward. But when a President's award is given to a historically absurd, garish show like Mughal-e-Azam, based on the life of Akbar the Great, one begins to question governmental values.

A study of recent production patterns as well as the avant-garde film-makers Ghatak Sinha, Ranjan Tarajdar, reveals that the one time favourites, the mythologicals and historicals, are on the wane. Topical social problems, musicals and action pictures are in demand. Contemporary themes like Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan work have inspired a documentary prepared by Sukhdev: The Saint and the Peasant. But Vinoba's attempt to bring about a change of heart among robbers and bandits have inspired three star producers, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar and Sunil Dutt, to take bandit conversion themes in three films: Jis Dish Men Ganga Pehits Hai (Where the Ganges Flows), Gunga Jumna (Ganges Jumna), Munke Jeene Do (Let One Live). The problem of communal harmony is well brought out in Dharmaputra. Many off-beat films are under production at Bombay and Calcutta. Satyajit Ray promises to break further ground with his first Hindi film Abhi Jan, and bright young directors like G. Dutt, H. Mukerjee and Krishan Chhokra are busy with experimental films, novel both in theme and treatment. (1)

The Indian film industry is "India in miniature", a common platform for people hailing from all religions, communities, races and groups, at all levels of cultural development.

India, standing as a bridge between Asia and Europe, can contribute through her films an important link in the chain of understanding between the peoples of the world, for the film knows no barriers and speaks to all with the same visual voice.

Satyajit Ray's film Two Sisters was awarded in 1963 David O. Selznick's Golden Laurel for the non-American film best serving international understanding. This story by Tagore was first filmed under the title Ten kanya (Three Daughters) Ray's latest film: Mohan Nagar, was shown at the London festival in October 1963.

## II. BASIC ATTITUDES TO INDIAN LIFE AND THOUGHT

Like all forms of art, the Indian cinema forms a part of the general culture pattern focusing attention on the basic attitudes to life of the common people. Introducing to English readers his translation of Kamban's Ramayana, the great Indian scholar and statesman C. Rajagopalachari declared:

"It is a book universally read with reverence throughout India and is the root of Indian culture ... Even today to try to undo the work of ages and to undeify Rama and Krishna in India would be as futile as positively mischievous. In them are rooted India's living culture, a culture of which the people of India may be proud. We cannot cut off a vital organ and hope to live ... India cannot be India without Rama and Krishna." (2)

Indian cineasts were quick to realize that they could never go wrong in presenting mythologicals to the Indian people, for they were, however crudely produced, "a manifestation of growing national consciousness". These popular legends, taken from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavatam, were familiar to the

(1) Ganga on Indian Films. United Asia, Bombay. Mr. Ganga has just completed a Documentary on the History of Indian Film. 1963.

(2) The Ramayana, by C. Rajagopalachari. Unesco collection of representative works, London 1961. Jawaharlal Nehru declared: "The Ramayana and the Mahabharata were worn in the texture of millions of lives in every generation for thousands of years ... If our race forgot the great epics ... India would cease to be India".



poorest Indian, provided an affirmation of the national sentiment. The "historicals" recreated the Golden Age, was the films way to usher in a cultural renaissance. This renaissance also manifested itself in the humanistic and rationalistic movements of social reform. Thus even the lives of saints and seers came to have a humanistic and reformist character, as the saints were shown, not as miraculous beings but as compassionate and self-sacrificing idealists anxious to help their fellow-beings. But here and there the cinema did adopt stories by distinguished authors - V. Khandekar and Mama Wererkar (Marathi), Munshi and R. Desai (Gujerati), Premchand (Hindi) and Tagore, Chatterji, Bankim Chandra, Nasrul Islam (Bengali). Here were the beginnings of the socials. (1)

### Hindu culture

When one speaks of Indian culture, one speaks by and large, of Hindu culture, because Hinduism has set its stamp on India and pervaded every sphere of life, social, cultural, economic, political. But the cinema has often tried to portray what Tagore called "a figure ever in ablution and prayer, emaciated with fast and religious austerities and cowering in a corner away from the touch of worldly things". (2) Hence films are laden with the many characteristics of the Hindus: conservatism, resilience, passivity, a lack of social consciousness and the proneness to ignore things which one would simply not wish to see or avoid because unpleasant. This would lead to moral inertia or moral cowardice. Whereas the Hindu mind is of supreme serenity, often ascetic, capable of sublimating pain and cruelty, often masochistic. India has different layers of cultures, ranging from the primitive to the modern and thus reflects the myriad reaches of the Hindu mind from the aboriginal to the highly urban sophisticate, a synthesis of the Orient and the Occident.

The Dance of Shiva is symbolic of the emotional and contemplative mosaic: the macabre, mystic, ascetic - all of these reflect the manifold attributes of the spirit of man.

Dharma, duty based on rules of conduct, is an overall code, applied to the situation that confronts her or him, depending upon the caste or occupation.

Caste became the great social expression of Indian civilization: it was labour union, enforcing a rigid social security and democratic equality within the group.

Another important point is the doctrine of Karma, which means action, often incorrectly represented as fate. The Hindu takes upon himself the blame for whatever ill has befallen him. He must have done something in his past life to deserve such punishment. Suffering is the punishment for the sins of the past life. It not only makes pain bearable, but justifies it. It is within the power of man to add to or diminish both his goodness and his badness by performance of certain acts. Since nothing is controlled by chance, and since neither good nor evil may befall him from any morally exterior agent or fortuitously, he has absolute certainty that he himself is entirely and fully responsible for his own destiny. Morally, he is totally responsible for himself, and therefore he must strive for his own salvation. Since any evil he does to others is evil done to himself doubly compounded; his sense of social responsibility, though not altruistic, is firmer for not being so. Since all men are controlled by self-interest, it is better that the interest be enlightened than that it be conceited.

(1) Film Seminar Report 1955. See K.A. Abbas.

(2) India today.

"In the West, one looks for an exterior scapegoat, ultimately the Devil, and evil becomes an exterior force. This frees the Western man from much responsibility, for though it means that he may be tempted, it prevents him from being his own temptation. The Hindu is his own scapegoat, he is absolutely alone with himself, and since nothing can save him but himself, he will less make a scapegoat of others."<sup>(1)</sup>

India's holiest word is neither Knowledge, nor Yoga, nor Love, but Compassion (Karuna) - "the source of all real justice and charity".<sup>(2)</sup> This may be the reason why the Hindus are seldom cynics or humorists.

To an outsider, the Hindu genius, as one critic<sup>(3)</sup> pointed out, seems sombre, and doubtless "to Hindus life is no laughing matter. Active love is too frequently missing for it is assumed that if one loves something one does in some way give one's heart to it". "Those who love nothing in the world are rich in joy and free from pain", said the Buddha. It dispenses with the security that comes from being loved and from giving love which is the groundwork of wholesome existence at any age in life. It becomes a "flight from tenderness", as though to feel (Gefühl ist alles, says Goethe) is to yield. Hence one has the picture of the hero, for the education of India, in the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy, "has been accomplished deliberately through hero-worship". Who is, then, for the Indian, a hero? "He whose mind is undismayed in pain, who is freed from longings of pleasure, from whom passion, fear and warmth have fled, is called a man of abiding presence, a saintly man. He who is without affection for aught, and whatever fair or foul fortune may betide, neither rejoices in nor loathes it, has wisdom abidingly set."<sup>(4)</sup> "From attachment comes desire, from desire anger; anger leads to bewilderment."<sup>(4)</sup>

A good deal of the severity of the Hindu comes from the alienation of self. This makes people accept disease and poverty as natural without trying to remedy them, and is responsible for a diminished zest for life.<sup>(5)</sup> If the Hindu is often shown as mild, it is not because he is less aggressive, but because his conscience is stronger.

### Asceticism

Dr. G. Ghurye would have us add another characteristic: asceticism: "Asceticism and monastic organization are two main contributions which Indian civilization has made to this common stock of culture". Sociologists hold that if aggression does not find release in the family, in fantasy it turns itself towards the self. There is little violence in public life in spite of sporadic communal, provincial riotings. There are some great military heroes - Rane Pantap, Jhansi-Ki-Rani, Shivaji, but the Indian hero is often self-destructive. Hindu asceticism is masochistic. Extreme tenderness is shown towards the smallest living things. Extreme cruelty on the self is matched by corresponding kindness towards others.

### Human rights

Hindu ethics recognize no rights, only duties. Gandhi himself declared that he learned from his wise mother that: "all rights to be deserved and preserved come from duty well done. Thus the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship to the world. From this one fundamental statement, perhaps it

(1) Spiegelberg: Indian philosophy.

(2) Radhakamal Mukerjee.

(3) Professor Alport, quoted by D. Kumar.

(4) Bhagavad Gita.

(5) Vivekananda and Aurobindo fought against "these mysticisms".

is easy to define the duties of man and woman and correlate every right to some corresponding duty to be first performed. Every other right can be shown to be an occupation hardly worth fighting for". (1)

Hindu cultural tradition is preserved a good deal due to such saints and sages, from Buddha to Gandhi, who totally submerged their selves for the common good. Although this is not the path all can tread, the ideals are pitched very high and the masses who cannot reach them look with longing and reverence on those who have attained to these heights. (2)

Such an attitude imposes a heavy burden on the conscience. Also Indians want to take care of others, to be wanted and to be taken care of: consequences of an over-indulgent childhood. Self-help has not been sufficiently encouraged. This troubled Prime Minister Nehru, who spoke recently of "this amazing capacity of our people to ask for help and the amazing incapacity to do something themselves". To a large extent, Karma and rebirth have tended to discourage effort in every sphere. Personal initiative is often removed. By making the acceptance of one's Karma the absolute precondition of any future progress, Hindus effectively lower the level of aspiration to the place where the danger of frustration is virtually eliminated, and make resignation and obedience the primary ideals of life. Helpless resignation is the price one pays for being released from the pangs of frustration.

#### The concept of the mother

The mother land called Bharat Mata (Mother India) (3) plays a very important rôle in India. As mother she represents faith, resignation which sometimes leads to helplessness. The sociologist Dr. D. Narain believes that "it is the Hindu's identification with the mother which gives him this helpless orientation". Woman is recognized as giving strength and fearlessness. Today, in the Aurobindo Ashram, the mother is symbolically and literally revered. A great Indian leader, Lajpat Rai, held that the great feature of Hindu life is passivity. "They have imbibed this tendency and this psychology and this habit from their mothers." In India, woman as mother, gets the supreme place. Sri Aurobindo once said: "If you want to serve India, meditate on her as the mother." Wherever one looks - in ancient social codes and law books like Manu or in the great epics, in legends and proverbs, the mother was held in highest esteem. "Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased", Manu declares. The position of a father is clearly lower, for, says Manu "a mother is a thousand times greater than a father". Obeisance to the mother is therefore imperative. The mother, for her part, must never, however ungrateful they may be, wish her children ill. "No temple" says one proverb, "is more beautiful than a mother."

A good deal of the passivity of the Hindu is due to a certain alienation of self, which is why even in the midst of disease and poverty, there is little panic and no great haste to solve problems. It is quite a task - Vivekananda and Gandhi knew and now Vinohba knows that it is not always easy to enlist the wholesale co-operation of the people for their own betterment. In some ways, one is inclined to agree with Albert Schweitzer's view of the Indian mind as a whole: "Passing from concession to concession", he says, "if men who live the world-view of world and

(1) Human Rights, Unesco, 1948.

(2) D. Kumar; Hindu Character. Bombay University, 1957.

(3) The Indian National Song, Bande Mataram begins: "I bow to thee, O mother".

life negation are to remain alive, the decision is reached that what really matters is not so much actual abstention from action as that men should act in a spirit of non-activity and in inner freedom from the world so that action may lose all significance." In his journal, Amiel described his great affinity with the Hindu genius - "that mind, vast, imaginative, loving, dreamy and speculative, but destitute of ambition, personality and wit. Pantheistic disinterestedness, the effacement of the self in the great whole, womanish gentleness, horror of slaughter, antipathy to action".

### Types of Indian films

Many of these aspects and several others will appear in the analysis of these films. Tricks of behaviour, attitudes, idiosyncrasies, habits, stereotypes - all that forms the Indian way of life is recorded in the Indian films.<sup>(1)</sup>

The Indian proverbs and maxims are practical ethics and living realities, whether they refer to the woman as seductress and temptress or to fate, to the destructiveness of anger; for a heroine, even righteous indignation (e.g. Sita in the Ramayana) is considered a weakness.

The concept of the woman as mother is very high and to this day evokes the warmest response from the common man. A prize-winning film, Mother India, 1958, highlights this traditional approach of womanhood: purity, faithfulness and courage. Here, the heroine, Radha, portrays the ideal wife and mother who bears with infinite courage and fortitude the sufferings that come upon her. She is deprived by the greedy money-lender, by slow degrees, of all her belongings. Two of her four children die, a third is sick. The money-lender offers her money in exchange for her favours. For a moment she hesitates; but no, she will preserve her chastity. The villagers, now moved to admiration, acknowledge her as leader. Time passes. Both her sons are now grown men, one of them still hatches schemes of vengeance upon the money-lender, the architect of all this suffering. One of them, bent upon revenge, organizes a gang of stalwarts. Radha strongly disapproves of her son's plans to abduct the money-lender's daughter. And as he goes ahead with his plans and carries the girl away, Radha disconsolate, shoots her son dead.

This is a tragedy by modern standards. Yet tragedy is not a part of the Indian dramatic tradition. Bengali playwrights, influenced by Western drama, were the first to use tragedy. But tragedy, even then, is only a passing phase before the peace that must come to man, once he has gone through the cycles of birth and death to his final liberation (Moksha). There is no sense of finality about tragedy. Many other Indian films, such as Devdas, make frequent use of tragic themes, but the public reacts to them differently.

The types of films produced are of diverse kinds, ranging from simple action dramas to spectacle films with an infinite variety of themes (see annex). Love stories, considering social problems, top the list in point of production, with mythological, legendary, historical, biographical films - in that order - coming next. Documentaries - in a class by themselves - are of special significance.

"The influence in India of films", Prime Minister Nehru said, "is greater than the influence of newspapers and books combined."<sup>(2)</sup> An authority declares the film

(1) See Hindu Character, Dr. Kumar. Bombay, 1957.

(2) Inauguration Speech, Film Seminar, 1955  
B. D. Garga, Indian Films Today, 1961  
Indian film. Columbia, Univ. Press 1963  
G. Venkatachalam, Dance in India.

caters for 25 million people a week - a fringe of the population. Nehru was not of course referring to the quality of that influence. If films are contributing to culture, why is not greater attention paid to this factor and why is there "such an endless stream of meretricious floss"?

The Indian song film of 30 years ago had coming flooding into it "the river of music" that has flowed through unbroken millenia of dramatic tradition. This did in fact strengthen the film, while at the same time dealing a mortal blow to the Yatras and other kinds of folk drama. The itinerant cinemas shouldered aside the travelling jatras and took their place in the heart of the people. As for the reborn theatre, the sound film almost wiped it out with a brush of its hand. The film appropriated not only folk dance and song to its purposes, it changed them and began to respond, while transforming them, to westernly themes. Speaking of the dance forms, some critics, notably G. Venkatachalam, say: "... and now see what they have done to it. They have prostituted it as no other aspect of Indian life had been prostituted before". It may sound a cruel indictment, an exaggerated denunciation and yet with the exception of Uday Shankar's Kalpana, no really first-rate dance film has appeared, and yet dance and music, especially music, seems to be of the highest importance to the public at large, the box-office, that is, which it is the producer's desire to attract. Films without music were, to the common man in India, nourished in songs and folklore, inconceivable.

The many crusading efforts of "purists" like Dr. Keskar, to encourage traditional music, classical and folk, did not really soothe listeners, because - as a musical director of films, Naushad Ali, pointed out - classical music was born in sacred temples and glamorous courts, inaccessible to the common man to whom film music was the real folk music of India. Gradually, however, All India Radio's crusadings calmed down somewhat and many forms of music, including film music, were reintroduced. Tinker, tailor, potter, priest were being reclaimed.

Well-known critics, like Panna Shah and B.D. Garga, discussing Indian films, have bitterly complained that film producers care two brass farthings for Indian culture. Their concern is for money, for the purveying of slobbering sentimentality, hybrid music, and anything that keeps them from thinking, for a certain amount of music, dance, puritanism and moralizing is enough to make millions visit the cinema, the only entertainment available to them. The greater majority of the Indian people, the 70% who live in Indian villages, the pulse of the nation, are still deprived of the cinema through lack of facilities.

#### Analysis of select films

A consideration and an analysis, from the cultural and sociological point of view, of a few select Indian films based on the work of distinguished writers like Sarat Chandra Chatterji and Rabindranath Tagore are of immense importance. They bring into focus some of the basic attitudes of life of the Indian people, the questions already mentioned: the mother, the reincarnation, the father-daughter-son-mother relationship, the external forces, religion, and several small, seemingly insignificant, but vital characteristics which reflect Indian life today. In taking such stories, one is taking stories which have proved successes in all the languages of India, particularly in their Hindi and Bengali versions.

Hindu society has learned to accept as hero the figure of Rama. The Hero has a thousand faces - so Joseph Campbell has shown in his book, but in India, to a very large number, "the soft, yielding, unprotesting ideal of Rama" is the hero. No one, the Lord Krishna excepted, has had so much influence on so many of the

Indian people and for so long. Rama accepts a decision, which is the result of artifice and foul play, and spends 14 years of his youth in banishment. Rama's heroism lies in his unprotesting submission to an unjust demand. Rama lives up to the Gita's definition of a saint: a man who cannot be angered; he who has not mastered anger; and is incapable of anger. It is not for nothing, therefore, that "Ram, Ram" were the last words of Gandhi, as he fell to the ground, when the assassin's bullets struck him. Even in the Mahabharata, the other great epic of India, the Lord Krishna does not try to arouse the wrath of Arjuna.

The passive quality which reflects a good deal of the Hindu mind is due to its reverence for Rama as the poet Tulsidas portrayed him. Realizing this fully, Vinoba Bhave,<sup>(1)</sup> sage of India today, recently urged that people must shake off their lethargy and should popularize the worship of Hanuman, the monkey devotee of Rama, who personifies speed, vitality and elemental energy, instead of the cult of Rama, as the latter is "a passive worship, while the former is active". Gandhi, however, modelled his life on Rama and the Sermon on the Mount, becoming a man of peace, of non-violence, great humility. Yet in the Yoga Vashishta, the sage addresses his young pupil (the Prince Rama) and there is no passivity there: "Steady in the state of fullness which shines when all desires are given up, and peaceful in the state of freedom in life, act playfully in the world, o Râghava! Inwardly free from all desires, dispassionated and detached, but outwardly active in all directions, act playfully in the world, o Râghava! Outwardly full of zeal in action but free from any zeal at heart, active in appearance but inwardly peaceful, work playfully in the world, o Râghava! Free from Ahankâra, with mind detached as in sleep, pure like the Ether, ever untainted, act playfully in the world, o Râghava! Conducting yourself nobly and with kindly tenderness, outwardly conforming to conventions but inwardly renouncing all, act playfully in the world, o Râghava! Quite unattached at heart, but for all appearance acting as if with attachment, inwardly cool but outwardly full of fervour, act playfully in the world, o Râghava!"

This type of hero, the supreme hero, is certainly an index of the people's mind.

### Parents and children

In Indian films the relationship between parents and children is often shown; in particular, the mother and son relationship receives special attention, and this even when the film does not intend to dwell on this aspect of the problem. The mother is invariably shown as being understanding and indulgent to the son, conscious of his need and overlooking his faults, sometimes interceding between him and the father. She is never seen as the chastiser, nor as a rival for a father's love: she wholly gives. If there is any father and mother rivalry in affection and love, it is not felt; and the father, aware of a mother's feelings for a son, never obstructs; since such a relation subsists in the case of the father's mother, it is understandable. An almost similar relationship exists between a father and daughter.<sup>(2)</sup> Eroticism and sensuality hardly ever makes an appearance in such films. In fact even the marriage relationship between a middle-aged man and a young girl is presented without passion.

In the film Devdas, Parvati, a young girl, is married to an old landowner who looks at her not so lustfully as sadly, for she is in love with Devdas. Both feelings in her coexist, her love for Devdas and her wifly rôle, but without conflict

(1) Bhoodan - June 1957.

(2) D. Kumar: Hindu character. 1957.

and guilt. She submits to sexual love in the one case, and sublimates it in the other. She puts on a mantle of detachment in both cases. In another context too - for Parvati has a stepson, old enough to be her husband, the same maternal quality is depicted. The producer is faithful to the original story. In Sarat Chatterji's Bindur Chele (Bengali), Bindu, the childless wife, brings up her nephew to the annoyance of her stepson, a black sheep of the family. Even this boy's erotic fancies are never brought out. A clear distinction is made between tenderness and eroticism.

The filial theme is treated in many other films such as Birmal Roy's Ma (in Hindi), Atre's Shyam Chi Aiye (in Marathi), Shantaram's Amar Bhupali (in Marathi).

Ma has a variety of characters: the elder, henpecked son, unfilial and ill-mannered; the younger son, devoted, takes the blame (to save his father) for a theft he never committed; the father is weak, helpless, the mother silently endures the hardships her elder son brings upon all, without a word of reproach; for a mother has to forgive, the son has to be filial.

A film of this kind, whatever its faults, has a great appeal - from the moral point of view - to the people. The Indian people are nourished on the ancient stories and legends. A devoted son is highly admired. After all, did not Rama, in greater measure, sacrifice all?

Shyam chi Aiye is the story of the saintly figure, highly respected in Maharashtra, Sane Guraji. It is an attempt to show how wise and noble was his mother. She died when Sane Guraji was yet a boy, but her memory inspired all his efforts till, later in life, dejected by the moral degeneration of his country after Gandhi's death, he slowly withered away.

In another film, Amar Bhupali, it is the triumph of the mother. A young poet's infatuation for a dancer is overcome not by his wife's entreaties or her loveliness, but by the mother's appeal. There is no struggle between the two women; only submission to the mother's wish. The mother is the arbiter of good and bad.

The maternal qualities, sympathy, tenderness, protection, are brought in another film, Chota Bhai, also by Sarat Chatterji. And in this film as well as in Ma and Shyam chi Aiye, the father, like Rama's father, is shown to be weak and spineless. In many Indian novels, men are portrayed as easily submitting to women of strength and character. Poverty is responsible for much suffering in most films and as breadwinners the fathers are feeble, the women always capable of sacrifice. The man, in the face of external circumstances, fails. The man who bends nature to his will, the conquering hero, is rare. The results are obvious: the disappointed lover would rather drink himself to death than challenge his rival: the father will turn fakir or sadhu rather than fight his way out. That is why Devdas, in the film, destroys himself through drink. In Barua's Mukti, the man prefers, through domestic misunderstanding, the cloister to the hearth. Rather than give up his model, his art or his wife, three possible solutions, the hero destroys himself and his art. In another film, Binaj Bahu, the hero, rather than fight poverty, turns to prayer without a care in the world. The wife remains devoted till the end. The father is not only weak, but he is an obstructionist: in Devdas, it is the father who is against the marriage of his son to Parvati. And in Vasiyatnama, a novel by the Bengali genius Bankim Chandra Chatterji, it is the father, who opposes his daughter's marriage to the hero. In Sarat Chandra's Parineeta Aag, the father, is again the obstacle. The mother in another film,

Shaheed, forms her son's patriotic feelings; the father does not. In the whole range of the Indian film, the concept of the mother is always that of a strong, sympathetic, self-effacing figure, who sometimes yields to the negative desire of her husband.

A father, alone and old, is more indulgent as in Tagore Milan, Shree 420, Andaz, Jawab, Hamrahi.

The caste system often interferes in love stories. Sometimes parental objections are slight, of a superficial character only. But it is difficult for films to dispense with mental barriers which persist. The inner rigidity exists because it seems to supply an inner need. "A free, unhampered flow of emotions is taken as dangerous; for the caste system is the permanent obstacle, a sort of inverted safety valve." "In trying to avoid collisions, (India) set up boundaries of immovable walls, thus giving her numerous races the negative benefit of peace and order but not the positive opportunity of expansion and movement." Thus life went out and in its place was left the worshipping of countless compartments she manufactured.

In many other respects says D. Kumar, Indian films are true to type. One seldom comes across the father-daughter fixation, the mother-son fixation. In both cases, anxiety, tenderness are responsible for any frictions, never eroticism. The anxiety is caused by delay, for financial and other reasons, of the daughter's marriage. Nor is there ever a father-son rivalry over a woman. The sacrifice, whenever made is made by the son. Even when two brothers love the same girl, as in Bujdil, either one dies or the element of sacrifice is introduced. (1)

Whenever Indian films are adapted from Western pictures, they do not appear to ring true and the public, in general, is left dissatisfied. The public is clearly only moved by these attitudes which still reflect their day dreams and their ideals.

Many Indian films portray clearly an important aspect of Indian social and cultural life - the joint family system. The child has a great deal of security, but he seems to belong nowhere. There is no total absorption either in his parents for it is an impersonal system. All this hampers the child's growth and retards his maturity, even though it never deprives him of any sense of security. This aspect is brought out in Bindur chele, where the child struggles between his love for his father and his aunt.

In a film version of Tagore's novel Two sisters (1963), a new problem to which society offers no solution is introduced. The story has poignancy and irony. Tagore deals with the problem of mother and wife. He, therefore, divides women into two categories: the mother kind and the wife kind.

"The one is like the rainy season which tempers the heat and feeds life with plenty. The other is the spring which stirs man's blood into waves of ecstasy and makes his heart sing." Man draws strength from the mother and inspiration from the wife. He needs the one and desires the other. When the two do not meet in him, his heart is torn into two and he is faced with a problem to which he has no answer.

Even though the novel presents a balanced picture, in the film greater emphasis is laid on the mother aspect and even Tagore never forgets, even when

(1) See D. Kumar, Hindu Character.



writing to his wife, about the mother. Here are the conclusions to two letters to his wife:

"The tank is full to the brim, the sugar cane in front has grown well, the fields all around are heavy with corn - a flawless green carpet. Everybody asks, 'When will mother be here?' ..."

"Surrounded by the limitless sky and the wind and the light, I am, as it were, nursed in the arms of the primal mother."

#### Dance and music in films

In the majority of films, regardless of whether they are mythological, social or historical, dance sequences are introduced. Most dances, Uday Shankar holds, are not intended for film purposes. They are usually, as in the case of the Manipuri, degraded.

Indian dance is wedded to religion. A verse in the oldest collection of Sanskrit hymns, the Rig-Veda, compares the glory of the rays of the rising sun to the appearance of a lovely dancer. Dance and music go hand in hand. Just as the dance in the films becomes a "motion picture classical dance", so film music has been compared to a perfect marriage between classical and folk music - that is to say between urban and rural music. There is great unity in all these when deftly handled. Even foreign elements can be introduced if they are, in the words of singer Pankaj Mallik, "deftly and harmlessly adapted".

Film songs are often introduced on any and every occasion, threatening the organic structure of the whole. They are, in most cases lyrical, except in the songs of Tagore or of Nazral Islam. Film directors make use of songs in order to introduce certain characters, build up situations, and, as many worthless films have been saved by a catchy tune or a devotional hymn, they never know where a song might win the way.

Anil Binas was right when he said that Indian films have sought to picture both the temple and the field, the town and the village, the classical and the folk traditions in music. There is no conflict except when, through sloth and lack of initiative, hybrid and shallow craftsmanship is imposed from without. The result is "waste land instead of a rich orchard". In the words of Tagore, it is "narrow, domestic walls". Experimentation, as Ami Khusroo and Janson always showed, must go on, from experiment to experiment, dynamically. The film, a democratic medium, is apt to mirror India's national life in its collective spirit. One reason why film music has not quite found itself is because it lacks a uniform system of reading music such as is brought to perfection in the West. What makes such a juncture difficult is that one would need to abandon the principle of inner continuity, of one note flowing into another and of expressing its inner contents through subtler shades of fraction notes called shrutis. But some need to incorporate a few rules of harmony of the West may be worth considering. The Indian National Anthem, composed by Tagore, can and often is played by European bands or orchestras.

Apart from the fact that the song has great influence, music, Raj Kapoor once said, is in our veins. Moreover, marvellous films like K.A. Abbas' Munna failed to score a box-office success and this applies in India to masterpieces like Pather Panchali and other films of Satyajit Ray.

In any vernacular, in Bengali, Telegu, Tamil or any other regional language - except Hindi - it is often a song or a dance that draws a full house.

The Indian public, which seeks entertainment and pleasure, (it is for some the only joy) wants film music. His life is too weary and woebegone to appreciate a work like Aparjito or Apu Sansar. He wants music and song - even though Abbas is right when he insists: "Let us have songs when the story demands them, but not otherwise." This will hold true for some and yet, as we know it, not for a majority of others - at least in "socials", "mythologicals" and "historicals".

The same need for music, though far more effectively worked out, is to be seen in some European films and plays. In one of his plays, The Five Years, Lorca deserted European practice and turned towards the East, an East steeped in music. He exemplified the tendency to a synthesis of art through poetry, drama, music. This represents the finest cultural tradition of India and is the aim of artists like Uday Shankar to achieve.

### Some notes on Indian music

The story of Indian music is twofold. There is the formal music of religious festivals and temple worship and of processions. There is also the great body of folk music which grew up in the villages, music which is the part of the life of the people today as much as it was in classical times. Someone once said that India is a land of singing people. The farmer sings as he goes to his field and shouts in rhythm to the ox who ploughs. The cartman, the beggar, the peddler and the minstrel when he comes to your door sings. Once the famous conductor, Leopold Stokowski, said: "I was literally hypnotized by the music I heard in India. Every musician improvises to his heart's content, which brings to mind a scripture which says 'melody devoid of embellishment is like a moonless night, a river without water, a creeper without flowers, a woman without a sari'."

As in everything in India, there is an intimate relation between nature and art. The modes of Indian music, or ragas as they are called, correspond to the six seasons of the year, and each has raginis, variations appropriate to the days and hour and season. In India, the music of the plain is smooth and rhythmical, slow and usually accompanied by instruments. In the mountains, music is more cheerful, rhythm is strong, full of excitement and breathlessness. Dancing steps become leaps. One can almost compare this with the music of the Scotch Highlanders and the Swiss yodellers. As Rajput painting deals with the legends of the gods and with the dharma of India's daily life, so her music is intimately concerned with both. And as the Indian artist painted for a small coterie of connoisseurs, so the Indian musician with his stringed instruments, flutes and drums was content with chamber-concerts for the elect, or with the small audiences which gathered about village wells and in the shade of banyans. To such audiences court musicians on the one hand and wandering minstrels on the other have sung from time immemorial of the loves of Krishna or of the heroic deeds of Rama. They were India's popular teachers of morality.

Music is rooted in the religion of the people. It is made up of prayers, epics, narratives and expresses need and romance and longing for beauty even though it comes unadorned from the poorest of the poor. This is one reason why it has been extremely difficult to make a film entirely without music, because it is the one form of pleasure which the majority of people, deprived of any pleasures, cannot do without. The cinema has been quick to exploit this need and has evolved a music which is a combination of all forms of music that exist in the country, but which is

in a class by itself. Film music enters into a new category of music. One thing of course is difficult to achieve in film music and this has been frequently noted: it is the essential contact between the musician and the listener. It is for this reason that cinema music has to take on a new colouring which can be highly successful in its own particular way. It is a new approach, but effectively used, it can create the unseen world. What the dance and music spectacle such as Shantaram's Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje (Jangle, Jangle, Sound the Bells) tries to do, is to put this world within our grasp.

There have been films with classical music for the theme. One of them is called Jadu Bhatta, the name of a well-known Bengali musician. The story is about a fine music teacher who is refused entry in the All India Music Conference at Bénarès, the greatest annual event of Indian classical music. The young disciple, Jadu Bhatta, is deeply hurt by this insult to his Guru and vows vengeance. He works hard, but cannot find a teacher amongst the great masters. Finally, he surprises Ali Bux, the greatest vocalist of the time, by reproducing his songs to perfection. The master accepts him as his disciple along with his own son. From now on Jadu wins one honour after another till he succeeds in defeating the master's son, who, unable to bear this disgrace, commits suicide. At this point, Jadu wishes to give up his music as a form of expiation, but is spurred on to his final triumph and vengeance at the musical conference in Bénarès.

The musical interludes are extremely well arranged, but the story is slight and insignificant. Moreover, the masochistic element is still present. The film is an excuse to present classical music on the screen. In some respects, this is quite an experience, though there is not that essential participation between musician and the listener, so much a part of Indian classical tradition.

### Documentaries

A good definition of a good documentary has been given by Paul Zills:

Honesty

Sincerity

A great love for the common people

The craving to find out the facts

The gift of sharing an experience

A great deal of enthusiasm

A creative artistic sense and a strong feeling for rhythm

The technical know-how.

The second is by Jean Bhowgary:

"As for the documentary film-maker the first essential thing is that he be an artist - that like Picasso he leave the sun in his belly.

But this inventive artist, with the sun in his belly, exploring new techniques and lyricisms, must also be capable of digging into and presenting true problems either individual or social, in terms of all mankind.

His aeriest flight must be based on a firm bed-rock of involvement and analysis."

Documentaries is a blanket word to cover information films on a host of subjects ranging from art, architecture, music and dance, industries, child welfare,

community projects, even children's films. The educational or classroom film is as much of a documentary as any other film. It has been described as a "creative interpretation of actuality". It can last from three minutes to 60 or more.

The Films Division which has largely been responsible for these documentaries has, in spite of many handicaps such as Government red tape and so forth, accomplished a great deal. Some people believe audiences were hostile to films of this kind, but Indian audiences are passive and non-critical and need to be trained to see and listen. Among the more successful films in recent years have been those on Indian sculptures, miniature paintings, music and dance. Outstanding among these are J. Bhowmohary's Radhakrishna, Bhaskar Rao's Folk Dances of India, and such films as (Saga in Stone) Khujarao.

As yet most Indian documentary makers are hampered by a lack of style and a lack of depth. They are not really familiar with the various aspects of Indian culture and tend to become too impersonal, much as Western documentary-makers do. Indians like the personal and human touch, but there is something cold in the Government-sponsored films, films which have to be shown. The commentary lacks humanity. Naturally, if the Government itself shows little imagination, the effect of the films educationwise is diminished. The film can be both entertaining and educative without preaching or moralizing.

This is lacking, Jawaharlal Nehru once said: "children's films, really children's films". "Too much preaching does not pay." He deplored the tendency of persons to try to lecture to children on this virtue or that. "I can remember my own reaction as a child to such lectures was to hit the person lecturing. It is not a way to approach children to go about lecturing on the virtues to be cultivated .... There are subtler ways of pointing a morale or drawing a lesson." And that approach, through the stories from the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Panchatantra, the Hitopadesa, the Epics, is particularly Indian. These riches are barely exploited. Instead, the Government has been known to sponsor and finance a film, Dakater Hathe (In the Clutches of Dacoits), which, "as a horrific film", has few equals. Its sponsors even tried to justify it.

There are very few films indeed which in any way deeply present Indian culture to children. A Children's Film Society, a quasi-independent corporation, was founded in 1955, with the purpose of producing and distributing children's films. Criticism of bureaucratic management and ineptness led to its reorganization in 1962.

When the distinguished scholar Pandit Kunzru spoke of the spread of Indian culture through films, he had really films for children in mind, on cultural aspects of India, presenting such stories as Dhruva, Prahalad, Abhiwanyu. Unfortunately, the glorious characters of mythology, legends, lyrics have exploited the religious sentiments of the people. In most filmscripts and literature, so much emphasis is laid on the moral aspect till it has become a mania. One critic said: "If India is to be depicted, it should be depicted in its heterogenous, multifarious colours. That does not often happen: the moral aspect with its mummies and stereotypes dominates: you have an imitation of Western films."

It is not always in mythologicals, or historicals, that the soul of India has been truly mirrored. These are highly overlaid with clichés and a conscious effort to depict the past and history in glorified, idealistic, often unrealistic colours. There are happily marvellous exceptions like Isnar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, Tansen, Kabir, but none of these bring out more forceably the cultural values of the Indian people than the social films or documentaries like the famous trilogy of

Satyajit Ray, his Three Daughters (Teenkaya), Anand Saran's Vinoba Bhava (The Saint and the Peasant), and the new group of avant-garde film-makers, Tapan Sinha's, Lanka Kapat (The Iron Door) and the controversial film Kshudita Pashan, based on Tagore's Hungry Stones, Rajan Taratdar's Ganga, K.A. Abbas' Munna, Raj Kapoor's Award, Shree 420, Bimal Roy's Hamrahi (Fellow Traveller) and his earlier Do Bigha Zamin (Two Acres of Land). A deep study of important Indian films leads us to agree with K.A. Abbas when he says that "the message of social equality and brotherhood and rationalism against superstition and ignorance characterizes the best of our pictures". In this respect, the social films are perhaps the ones that give the truest picture of Indian life and thought today.

In Teen Kaya (Three Daughters), released in 1961, Satyajit Ray explored yet another aspect. Produced during the centennial celebrations of the birth of Tagore, "the film dramatized three Tagore short stories. In each a young girl is the central character, but the tales differ sharply in mood. While the background is again Bengal of the recent past, the three vignettes quickly establish a rhythm totally different from that of the Pather Panchali trilogy".

While Ray was producing Tagore's Three Daughters, he was commissioned by the Governmental Films Division to produce a documentary film on Tagore to celebrate the poet's birth centenary. Thus he made two films on Rabindranath Tagore, both released in 1961. One was a 20 minute film intended for compulsory showing, the other a full length feature meant to be exhibited at film festivals and at special functions in India and abroad. Ray himself, in his rich and melodious voice, spoke in the original English version. He made use of all the material he could lay his hands on; old styles, film footage, recreated episodes, finely and skilfully put together. In order to make a fine job of it, Ray went to Santiniketan and there hunted amongst paintings, letters, photographs and other materials in order to make this film. He even went to Paris for such material as Pathé and Gaumont could furnish.

When the two Tagore films were done, Ray thought of a film in colour and this resulted in Kanchanjunga, produced in Eastman-colour. In order to make this film, Ray went to the Himalayan resort Darjeeling, and there, as in all his other films, set about composing the music, writing the script and finally directing it. The story of the film is about an upper middle-class family who had gone for the summer holidays to this mountain resort to see if they could patch up their quarrel. As always, Ray does not try to judge or condemn, he has a deep understanding and sympathy for the people he is trying to portray and he does this with the highest integrity.

Satyajit Ray's work is such that his personal vision expresses the feelings of a newly independent growing, hopeful country. He is very much aware of the tension between the old superstitions and the new science in contemporary India and able to sympathize equally with the conservative and the progressive element.

One of the greatest rôles many of these films, mythological, historical and social, have played in the country is to bring about a cultural unity and national integration. These films have done more than schools and propaganda to make popular Hindi the national language of India.

One person, however, has conquered the problem of a national language of India by speaking all the 13 languages of the country. That man is Vinoba Bhava, on whom is based a new documentary, called Vinoba Bhava, the Man, presented at the Mannheim Film Week, in October 1963.

This film, in which the story of the saintly figure is told as he has walked from the length and breadth of the country, creating an atmosphere of love and goodwill and bringing about among millions of men and women a change of heart. Such a film can do far more than many others to convey the living message of India throughout the world. From the point of view of the hero, ancient or modern, Vinoba Bhave is a living example. Vinoba is at once traditional and modern. He is as scientific and classical as he is mystical. Therefore his message reaches out to the philosopher or the plebeian, the painter or the farmer. Vinoba is modern in the sense that he brings science to everyday life and shows that man is that alien presence with whom the forces of egoism must come to terms and in whose image the society is to be reborn. It is not society that is to guide and save the hero, but precisely the reverse, and so everyone of us has the power to transform the world by first transforming himself. For most people in India today, Vinoba is the symbol of the cultural tradition of the land.

### III. INDIAN FILMS IN ORIENTAL COUNTRIES

In a number of countries of Asia, especially where their own film industries are not highly developed, and where there is an Indian minority, Indian films have a large audience. In general, the following Asian countries and regions regularly show Indian films: Aden, Bahrein, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Philippines, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand and the United Arab Republic.

The demands greatly differ. In Aden, for example, Hindi films are very popular, but it has been found, after much research, that the audience wants the film to be dubbed or sub-titled in Arabic and the maximum length limited to around 10,000 feet. If these two requirements are fulfilled, the audience accepts the song and dance or action film without much ado. In Bahrein the situation is somewhat similar.

In some countries, like Burma, action-packed spectacular pictures attract the crowds. In Cambodia, too, the taste for adventure and action is considerable. As no dubbing takes place, the sound track, with the exception of music and songs, is shut off. Instead, a running commentary by one or two voices is given over the microphone.

Wherever in Asia there is a large Indian population, as in Ceylon, people who contact their own country through films regard them sentimentally and with little criticism. It is not the same, however, for people who do not understand the language and for whom only an action picture or a picture consisting of a song sequence, provides real entertainment.

In Ceylon, on the one hand, long films are preferred, though scenes of action - war, adventure, mystery - are preferred, always with plenty of music and song. Whereas in some countries, of South Asia in particular, tragic and mythological stories are in demand, in Ceylon they are not particularly appreciated, although there is a large Tamil-speaking audience, which means an audience nourished in Indian traditional culture.

In Indonesia, Hindi films, always with plenty of action, music and song, are in particular demand. Here too, they are not always subtitled. This greatly diminishes their success and the story is clearly lost to the audience. Apart from the question of market for Indian films in Indonesia, there is yet another problem which the Motion Picture Year Book of Asia (published in Japan) takes out. It

refers to the ever-increasing import of Indian films causing a major threat to the domestic film-makers and to the Indonesian film industry as a whole. All the 80 imported Indian films obtained higher earning than domestic releases. As a result, the industry quarters have reduced Indian products to only 30 annually. In addition to these restrictions, Indonesia has been demanding reciprocity, which has put Indian exporters in a quandary, because even if they wished to import Indonesian films, they could not do so, as a result of the foreign exchange difficulties. This makes further difficulties for Indian festivals abroad, because exchange facilities between one country and another do not normally exist. It is considered odd, in some quarters, that India should import a large number of films from the United States and Great Britain, who hardly ever import Indian films. The reason for that is not far to seek. It is thanks to Western contact that the Indian film industry developed in the first place. Far more is known about the cultures of the West than about the cultures of neighbouring Oriental countries. In many respects, the film would be a marvellous medium not only to promote international understanding amongst Asian people, but to make them aware of their problems.

One great difficulty which presents itself to distributors of Asian films is the question of providing more and more means of escape from the dreariness of everyday life. Films of pageantry and action seem to provide these remedies in large measure.

In Iran, a large number of cinemas exhibit Indian films. Social films have a particular appeal. Comedies like Awara, Shree 420, have proved great successes. As the films are dubbed before they are shown, the audience is more varied. Since the social problems deeply interest the people of the country, for a social revolution is in progress in Iran, the life and society of the Indian people, a country with age-old connexions, has an appeal.

In some regions and countries, Hong Kong, Iraq, Japan, Jordan among them, few Indian films are shown. In all three parts of Asia, subtitling into the languages concerned is a vital necessity. One might also say that, as in the case of Japan, where the audience is, by and large, sophisticated, quality films, like Pather Panchali, and some short duration musicals, are particularly appreciated.

In countries like Kuwait, the censorship is severe but here too a film a week is shown by the Kuwait Film Company. The Philippines, from amongst Asian countries, do not show any Indian films; but there is a scope for some films which do not require any knowledge of Indian background. A certain amount of dance and music can also be introduced. In the case of Malaysia, there is an Indian population of nearly a million, so a well established market already exists. In this area (now Malaysia) historical films and films with a dramatic story interposed with music and dance numbers are preferred to those of other types. Here, too, the market could be further exploited if Hindi films had English subtitles, and the time of showing reduced to two hours.

In Pakistan, musicals and social films are particularly successful. The number of films exported is governed by the Indo-Pakistan Trade Agreement. It is natural that religious and mythological films are in general less in demand than artistic films or those which treat problems of everyday life and society. Films treating the life of great kings like Shah Jahan, or poets like Mirza Ghalib are highly appreciated. In any case, the exchange of films between the two countries, at the present time, has been reduced to a trickle.

In Thailand, since there are no import restrictions, a large number of Indian films, in their dubbed versions, are highly appreciated.

A good deal of scope exists in many other regions, notably in Bahrain and Syria. The problems are always the same: inadequate or no dubbing and selection.

Indian films abroad if properly selected are foreign exchange earners, but many Asian countries at present importing Indian films are asking for reciprocity. To save and expand export markets, the Government is urged to import practices and, in effect, to play an active rôle in distribution. Deeper Government involvement is now seen, for since the Indian film earns foreign currency, a substantial portion is taken over by the Government and the exporter reimbursed in rupees.

Many solutions are now being put forward, some urging solutions based on private control, but many more urgent voices hope only in a greater Government rôle, others for the complete nationalization of the film industry. K.A. Abbas has been such an advocate. "Unless the film industry is nationalized", he said, "there is no hope for Indian films ... To the argument that there will be regimentation of thought in a nationalized film undertaking I will say that there is no thought in Indian film today".

The Government has appointed a Committee in 1962 to consider a plan for the nationalization of the film industry.

#### IV. THE TECHNICIAN IN THE INDIAN CINEMA

About 45 crores<sup>(1)</sup> are invested in this industry which employs over 90,000 people in 73 studios covering a total space of 900,400 square feet and 43 laboratories. There are well over 400 cinemas, about 100 producers and over a thousand distributors. The annual earnings amount to 28 crores.

Achievements apart the industry is passing through hard times. Only 15 per cent of feature films either make profits or barely cover costs: 32 per cent lose money and 39 per cent just about balance on the brink. Out of the gross income of 40 crores 14 goes towards taxes. The cost of production amounts to 12 crores.

There is little planning or organization and not much co-operation. The efforts are individual rather than collective, there is heavy taxation, no clear cut policy of the Government and an endless chain of controls.

Studios and laboratories are too many and too ill-equipped, and as they are not often used they keep on changing hands. As producers and owners cannot always pay their men, there is chronic unemployment. Eighty-two per cent of those working in industries are not only underpaid but live in a state of great insecurity.

As India has to depend upon other countries for its raw material and as there is little available foreign exchange, the necessary technical improvements are slow. Add to this the fact that the public, because uncritical, accepts whatever entertainment is provided them. There is no yardstick with which to measure the appeal films make to the majority of the people. The State helps little where help is required but often intrudes in small matters.

Yet these many handicaps have not prevented this industry from making headway technically and artistically.

(1) One crore is about 2.5 million dollars.



The annual State awards to the best film, started in 1954, have encouraged the cinema in some respects. The awards had for object "encouraging the production of films of a high aesthetic and technical standard and of educational and cultural value". The impact of these awards has been negligible. It is true film-makers have rejoiced at receiving cash prizes, but there is no evidence their existence has influenced the decision and choice of producers and financiers. In the absence of a first-rate entry, the Government has often honoured second-raters.

"The Film Institute of India, says Krishnaswamy, is yet another film-improvemental device through which the Central Government in 1961 undertook film-training. For this training experiment, the Government bought the long idle studios of Prabhat, on the outskirts of Poona. Once these studios were the training ground of many an artist, they are now governmental institutions for teaching film techniques."

The curriculum is noted for its narrowness of approach. Indian producers "consider that a few tricks of technique can open the door, as if by magic, to the immense world market. This notion has been responsible for leading people to think a few instruments such as splicers, lenses, alone can reveal the mysteries of film".

#### Technicians and the artist

It is wholly in keeping with Indian cultural tradition to accept science and technology as part and parcel of philosophy and religion which amounts to the same thing. That all Indian activities and disciplines have one source is well brought out in a philosophical work in which Narada lists to Sanat Kumar a string of subjects he has studied. He has mastered the sources of knowledge and literature, the sacred scriptures, grammar, rituals, policy, chronology, science of elements, archery, astronomy, archaeology, singing, dancing, music, painting and architecture. "What else shall I study?" he asks. "There is yet another science, said Kumar. It is the Science of the One. Go then and study that Science."

It is because people have lost that sense of oneness, the interconnectedness of things that one branch of knowledge is held superior to another rather than in itself equally worthy; that technicians, say, are considered less worthy than writers whereas in fact every branch of knowledge is equally significant.

There needs to be a widening of horizons, a real understanding and co-ordinating of all the arts. If a film technician is to improve at all, he must, in the basic traditions of Indian culture, learn many other arts.

The Institutes are no real answer to the problem; otherwise diploma holders from the Institutes in, say, Bangalore and Madras, could find employment, but that, in view of the monopoly of a few leaders in the business, is difficult. Since the technician is a creative artist too, he is part of the cinema and what it represents in its completeness.

The cinema, as a co-operative effort, involves, at least in India, a knowledge of drama, music, architecture, painting, history, physics, chemistry and psychology.

Some suggestions

There are many ways of remedying this unfortunate state of affairs. To begin with, these technicians will need to go through theoretical and technical education in different aspects of the film - film direction, cinematography, audiography, art direction, cutting and editing, film processing, etc.

The giving of regular scientific training in theory and practice in all the different branches of film production will indubitably raise the standards of Indian films.

Once the technician has gone through the mill training and completed his studies, he is in a position to profit from contact with authors, dramatists, musicians, painters - it is indeed vital that he should.

One remedy that has been suggested is that technicians and trade unions get together for the purposes of discussion and research. In general the technician, as we see him today, is far in advance of many of the visitors, directors, artists who have just entered the cinema industry without any special training. There have been writers who have learned to write scripts of some excellence without any previous experience, an impossible thing for a technician.

Too often in the film "heterogeneous elements are yoked by violence together", whereas they need to be fused together. In order to achieve that the technician needs to have a balanced knowledge of the arts and sciences, as a good physician does of the whole body of man, and as a director does when he sees the total picture.

In this sphere, a national working study group in the country could be arranged. Here, educators, writers, musicians, historians, sociologists and technicians can get together with a view to making the cinema a cultural, social and educational experiment, not forgetting the commercial and entertainment aspects.

A few days ago, this writer received a letter from Devika Rani, First Lady of the Indian screen and Director of the Film Seminar (New Delhi - 1955). The following extract from this letter outlines some problems and contains some useful suggestions.

"The whole point is that we in India do not get the chance of meeting people at all, people in our country who matter in the fine arts. For many reasons, one is that film people have hard work, they must produce films to live, and it is a constant rush. Another reason is that we are not as yet settled in our life, that is, we have not got over restrictions, etc., and there is no association formed to make us meet other people from other countries, not in festivals, but in a way when we are able to meet even one person a month who has done a fine film in his country. We should be able to see other films, and to have them in every city, with the director of the film, so that he can give talks about his work. If we are to really prosper, and if we are to give of our best, we must not only know about the cultures and work done in other countries, but we must have a good background of our own country, and the work done, and its future trends. Our tendency is to just go on doing films, and we do not have any time, nor the opportunity to widen our knowledge, nor do we get the chance to make contacts in a real way. Most film festivals have been sponsored by the Ministry of I & B, they have been nice, but they have been quick affairs, and thus no real contacts were possible. The young people

should have the possibility of even working in studios abroad, only those who are properly trained. All these things are very complex and they can only be solved in the right way, if people are serious, and trained, with the background of good training in films."

ANNEX I

CLASSIFICATION OF INDIAN FEATURE FILMS

- I. LOVE STORIES - In which the love element is predominant, stories dealing with marital problems and difficulties:
  - (1) Character portrayal and psychological drama - where love element is present but not necessarily dominant;
  - (2) Parental love and devotion - including stories of filial love.
- II. SOCIAL - Films which tackle some Indian social problem such as untouchability, dowry system, other marriage problems of child widows, polygamy and divorce. Problems of prostitutes, drink evil, poverty and unemployment, rural uplift, slums, conflict between capital and labour, and so on. In these a large proportion of love element is present, but the underlying idea is to expose social ill; stories which teach a lesson, allegories, stories depicting Hindu-Muslim unity. Here it must be pointed out that in current film terminology, "social" is used to describe all types of films which are modern in dress and setting as distinct from mythological and historical. Here, however, the term has been restricted only to those films which deal with some social problem.
- III. MYTHOLOGICAL AND FOLK LORE - Stories and legends from Hindu mythology.
- IV. DEVOTIONAL AND RELIGIOUS - Depicting lives of religious devotees - very often the character is more a mythological figure than a historical one; films emphasizing faith in God; films which depict the higher values of life.
- V. HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL - Including historical romances, historical in character and setting; lives of great people excluding those of saints.
- VI. STUNT AND ADVENTURE - Including action dramas, thrillers, jungle thrillers and fantasies.
- VII. CRIME - Including stories of blackmail, bribery, feuds, of smugglers, thieves, murderers, pickpockets, kidnapping, intrigues, plots and counter-plots.
- VIII. MELODRAMA - Romantic and sensational dramas with more or less equal proportion of love, crime, murder, revenge or other sensational elements. A picture with a strong emotional appeal of the popular kind.
- IX. COMEDY - Including satires and farces, the humour side being predominant; musical comedies.
- X. WAR - Including films about spies, saboteurs, enemy agents, scenes of warfare and war propaganda.
- XI. MYSTERY AND HORROR - Pictures with an eerie atmosphere and in which the weird and mysterious elements predominate.
- XII. CHILDREN - Pictures in which juvenile and child stars play the leading rôle.

ANNEX II

In August 1948, the Bombay Board of Film Censors, in consultation with the Indian Motion Picture Producers Association and with approval of the Government of Bombay, issued to film producers a set of suggestions "with a view to ensuring that the cinema industry plays its proper rôle in the building up of a healthy national life". Instead of giving instructions to publishers, the Board set forth certain suggestions for the producers to adopt, thereby hoping to avoid the initial filming of certain scenes and lessen the possibilities of deletion.

The instructions read: "Profanity to God or to religions, or faiths, or to their founders, or accredited ministers, shall not be permitted; salacious incidents, obscene, ambiguous and irreverent titles, obscenity in talks, songs or gestures, distasteful or prejudicial to good taste, shall not be permitted. No picture, which will lower the moral standard of those who see it, shall be permitted. Presentation of history, mythology, legends and classical work shall, as far as possible, be based on recognized documentary evidence. Characters of India's or other mythologies, of gods and goddesses, of historical heroes or of sacred personalities, shall not be presented in a frivolous manner. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation. No crime shall be presented in a way which will create sympathy for it, or inspire its imitation. Sympathy of the public shall never be thrown on the side of crime, wrongdoing or evil. Illegal forms of sex relationship, such as free love, companionate marriage or virgin motherhood shall not be permitted. Adultery or illicit sex-relationship, if necessary for the plot, shall not be justified nor presented attractively. Kissing or embracing by adults, exhibiting passion repugnant to good taste, shall not be shown. Though common in Western countries, kissing and embracing by adults is alien to our country. Dancing is acknowledged as an art. It should, therefore, be presented beautifully, in keeping with the finer traditions of our country. Incredible and crude presentation of feats in stunt shall not be shown. The use of miracles permissible in religions and mythological pictures shall, like the exercise of supernatural powers, be severely restricted." (1)

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(1) Journal of the Bengali Motion Picture Association, May 1949, pp. 19-21.