

Chidananda Dasgupta Memorial Lecture 2023

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**THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES AND
THE COSMOLOGY OF THE CINEMA**

I thank FIPRESCI-India for inviting me to deliver this talk, particularly to Premendra ji, Vidyashankar and the executive council members. I entitle this presentation ‘The Spirit of the Times and the Cosmology of the Cinema’. At the very outset, I need to explain the nature of my premise. Initially, I attempt to deal with two fundamental components that constitute the thrust of my position. On the one hand, I try to, as briefly as possible, foreground the significance of the forces of history-historical, social, cultural, political, and economic forces. These forces decisively influence creative processes as we know, not just cinema, literature, painting, music, and sculpture, but they also shape forms of expression of creative effect. We do know that there are certain dominant spirits of specific times that we call zeitgeist, and this dominant spirit of the times manifests itself in the philosophical and creative texts, but at the same time, what is necessary is how creative processes retain a degree of autonomy and they remain autonomous in the sense that they operate through intuitive and imaginative areas. So, even as they open themselves to



larger historical developments surrounding them. No creative work or text, for that matter, remains outside the historical frame. Of the powerful transitions that historical changes bring to human consciousness. There is no text outside of this historical framework.

So, all creative journeys and intellectual journeys are embedded in temporal realities, in time and space-specific boundaries of spatiotemporal facts; this is what we recognise as the spirits of the times. However, it is crucial to recognise two essential aspects in the transactions between history and creativity. So, I am trying to suggest that imaginative and intellectual endeavours, broadly speaking, have two trajectories. The first is that the creative and intelligent negotiations with history could also mean, at one level mean, internalising dominant strains of ideas, the powerful ideas of the times. In that sense, by subscribing to them and regarding them as essential civilisational values, they may begin to uphold those dominant influential ideas of the times. In this sense, creative and intellectual ideational explorations can become

ideological. It only means that creative explorations and intellectual discourse can also act as strong vehicles that carry ideological elements of their times.

This is one aspect of the negotiation, on the other hand, and this interests me more than the first; on the other hand, creative explorations, even as they carry ideological currents of the period, do not yield or succumb to the pressures exerted on them by these ideas they interrogate and this is my attempt in this presentation.

Very importantly, creative endeavours interrogate and subvert the dominant ideological issues of their times and the ruling ideas of the historical context. What this suggests for many like me is that great creative works include literature, sculpture, music, painting and certainly cinema, which is the focus of this talk, employ socio-political and cultural ideas and negotiate with the ideas of the times. Still, they do not become mere representations or reflections, so they are not passive representations or reflections of these ideas. Creative works use conceptual patterns, and that's only to signify the historical situation. Still, as I mentioned earlier, through intuitive, imaginative and aesthetic layers, we do notice a strong subversion. This realm truly transcends, so even as they are located in specific units of time and space, they transcend the controlling structures of history. This is to say that they work through history and turn their attention to all the twists and turns of historical influences. Still, eventually, they unfold alternative visions of life through their creative process. It only means that looking at these works would mean having a revelation, an unfolding of multiple realities and contrasting approaches

to history. This is only because my argument is that creative works turned to their rich and diverse experiential realities of human beings of communities and refused to bend to specific ideological positions. In a sense, they constantly reject ideological reductionism; this is why no significant creative work can be pinned down by any ideal logical position, however strong, powerful, or dominant it may be. It's, for this reason, those ideological readings of the literary and cinematic text, however useful they may be up to a certain point, in my opinion, fail to come to terms with the ambivalent visions of creative texts, and these ambivalent visions strongly refuse to be crippled by any dogma. It is this resistance to the dogma that interests me.

When creative works dig deep into the intuitive, imaginative and experiential dimensions of human beings, not that they come just out of the creative but they dig into those elements of what we could even call insouciance of individuals they portray, they open themselves up to the infinite possibilities of human consciousness and quite often they do create experiences and visions that may be truly antithetical to one another. So, it's not just a simplistic opposition to ideology. Still, within a single work of art, a cinematic text of in my interest, you begin to see counter positions contrapuntal positions, and this is important. The greatest danger of academic film studies of theory, especially guided by American academia, is the tendency they create the tendency to lead cinematic texts through ideological and theoretical constructs. They become entrapments, theoretical frameworks of their diversities of cinematic texts. It is through this theoretical entrapment and ideological reductionism that

the cosmos of cinema, the cosmos envisioned by great cinematic texts, contests and confronts. In other words, history, historical processors, and sociological transcend translations do not have a direct linear horizontal role to play in the lives of individuals who live in various kinds of communities that are richly plural in spirit and in trying to capture these does cinema as a work of art overcome historical, ideological and theoretical entrapments.

Now, my whole argument to stretch it a little more is that the paradoxical qualities of human consciousness remain, to a large extent, inscrutable and unfathomable and which is entrapped, enframed and reduced by theoretical jargon. Therefore, my argument is that even if we look at layers of history and layers of ideas, I would come up with an expression saying that there is something of a metaphysical dimension to the human experience. Metaphysical dimensions cannot be theorised, and these metaphysical dimensions also come from the quality of ontology. There are these essences of human beings, metaphysical dimension; now, when I talk of metaphysical dimension, I'm not referring to metaphysics, which is very different; I am talking of the metaphysical in relation to experience in relation to suffering and misery. So, I mean metaphysical in a real earthly sense, not an obscure esoteric sense. Therefore, many strange realities are outside of the framework of our intellectual ideational positions. Therefore, after this initial statement, I turn to, because I layered this, I have divided it into several phases. Still, as I said, I am trying to find illustrations, and the first attempt for me would be to turn to this predominance of social realism of the quality

of social realism that seems to be very important. The relationship between cinema, or any art form, and realism raises questions about social realism, reality, what reality is, and how we apprehend reality. Such important and disturbing questions that we cannot easily settle. Therefore, I begin with this question of social realism with a specific reference to the European Western tradition; I shall turn to the other contexts later on, and towards the end, I shall come to the Indian tradition.

My illustrative segment begins with the Russian masters Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Pudowski, and Vertov. I pass through them to the Armenian Sergei Parajanov and end with Tarkowski. My chief aim is to show that the cosmos of cinema did have strong negotiations with politics, did not keep the political out of its ambit, but did not allow, as I have been mentioning, any political ideology to dominate its thematic and aesthetic concerns. As far as the Russian range is concerned, the exception, of course, is Eisenstein, who, in addition to his theories of cinema, especially his theory on the use of montage, was overtly ideological. But the point is his commitment to his art; just before this talk, I attempted the last fifteen days to watch all the films I will illustrate now. Still, the point is that when you read and watch his text carefully, his commitment to art was such. We do know that despite his overt ideological position, it got him into trouble with the bureaucracy during the Stalin era, though he used Lenin's ideas quite openly. Now, for me, this registers the fact that even political ideology, when it enters the realm of cinema, functions in accordance with the aesthetic autonomy of the director. We cannot

reduce Einstein to simply to mean he was an agit propagandist. Still, if you look at the textures of his works, you begin to see a negotiation, a creative confrontation, an encounter between ideology and the layers of the text. It also means that we know that much as the auteur declares their ideological position, the text may have other layers contrary to the consciously declared ideological positions.

If we admit this significant fact, we must create distance and attachment between the declared ideology of this director, writer, musician, and painter. We must create a distance between the creator and the person who admits to certain ideological positions. Now, this also includes literary figures; now, the point is that it is interesting to see how, even in somebody like Eisenstein, there is a certain aesthetic preoccupation that goes a little beyond his ideological positions. We need to juxtapose, and we certainly need to juxtapose, Eisenstein's political ideology with his aesthetic preoccupations; that is, we need to look at this political-cultural amalgamation. The amalgamation is proof of his aesthetic autonomy, and I would only name his film here: *Long Live Mexico*. The most important fact that you see in *Long Live Mexico* is a great degree of attention towards the Aztecs and the Mayans' several dimensions of deep preoccupations with the ontological elements of the cultures of what he was trying to describe. So, if we do a careful reading of the text as we ought to, we cannot even read Einstein's film through his declared ideological positions.

This is why, for me, a very rich textual analysis of whatever we watch, in this case, the films that we watch, a rich textual analysis

is not just limited to meaning. Still, we broaden our layers of understanding and our frames of understanding by turning to the manner in which several things are juxtaposed in the piece of art; therefore, for me, texture analysis of a text should not become a pretext that you go with a declared ideological positions and characterise texts, that we try to reduce the vast expansiveness of the creative work. If this is true and one could see it to a greater degree, a greater degree of autonomy can be seen in Dovzhenko. I'm talking of these people only because they operated with certain ideological patterns drawn from Lenin and during his Stalinist period when socialist realist writers were controlled by the ideology of socialist realism. Still, a text like *Earth Now* is about the arrival of socialism and, to that extent, contemporary politics and historical events do figure. Still, through this collective farming of kulaks of the rule of collective farming coming into existence in Russia but through these historical events Dovzhenko in the text if you look at the layers of the text, turns to the expensive spirit of nature, the spirit of the earth, in a supremely aesthetic manner. Watching the film is a way to recognise the open invocation of a primaeval, primordial consciousness of the deep ontological elements of life. So, for me, it's not surprising that later on, Tarkowski recognised Dovzhenko as one of his supreme masters and one of his teachers. So even when the burden of the spirit of the time is carried, the film text now shapes their creative cosmos with fundamental dimensions of human nature operating.

Therefore, these certainly make it possible for us to arrive at new theoretical readings (my whole argument is a careful

reading of the cinematic text). It's quite wrong to bring theoretical readings into cinematic texts; they are valid up to a certain point, but more important and more challenging for me is to extrapolate intellectual, ideological, and theoretical positions from out of the multiple layers of the cinematic texts. By this, we also defy we confront the overarching totalising and homogenising theoretical structures. Now, this is very central these days because having taught film theory for several decades, I find it necessary to record that every viewing of a film of a single film helps me arrive at a very new theoretical intellectual position. So, it's not that return to cinematic text through Andre Bazin or the Gestaltists coming down to Giles or Deleuze. Much as I would do it as an intellectual position, I would also like to see cinematic text creative works contesting certain positions. And so, the challenge is to build refreshingly new theoretical positions out of the layers of the text, which also means saying that creative works, cinema in this case, also help us formulate new kinds of epistemological positions.

It's not that we carry epistemology into creativity. Creative works have the power to create new epistemological positions. Therefore, these shifts in time are part of human experience, where the mind travels in time from the present to the present to the present or the future. How do we linearly approach these? How do we approach this as if we understand things linearly and chronologically? Suppose literature talks about the stream of consciousness. In that case, I refer to this as the second aspect of the Russian masters after Eisenstein and Dovzhensky. If the mind travels back and forth from the present to the past to the future,

where everything is mixed up, and in literature, we call it a stream of consciousness, I would argue that this was not a mere technique. Today, if we turn to Christopher Nolan, this is again in operation, but let me not go into other areas. But my whole point is this was the attempt by somebody like Pudovkin to capture these cinematic images to capture memory transitions in time, where the human mind leaps from the present to the future, back to the past and back to the present. Now, it is this that Pudovkin was trying to capture through visual images and these visual images that are imprinted on the human mind. So even when we talk of montage when we refer to the word montage, we will have to see it through creative and philosophical dimensions and not necessarily through the element of technique. So montage for me is not me or editing where you clip where you cut and paste but that you create an assembly, and that assembly is something that mixes up zones of time and space, which also means that the range of cinema was extended beyond the boundaries of simplistic rationalists which also meant that to turn to individuals we would also have to turn to different layers of consciousness the manner in which human mind functions.

Here, I would also talk about somebody like Vertov, much as he talked of cinema verite. This was also an attempt to mix up layers of the documentary form with imagination, memory and intuition. Even when we say cinema verite the documentary form capturing the truth, the truth is elusive and to turn to Vertov for me, including man with a movie, much of it was quite propagandist. It was an attempt to spread the

news to spread the message, but if you look at it carefully, there is a fusion of memory. There is an entry into layers of consciousness, so even when we talk of the documentary, this perhaps explains what we mean by the documentary also being fictional. Even when it comes to writing history. Those write history, and who knows what happened, how it happened, and whether it happened exactly as it is described, so quite a lot of it is related to the relative elements of human consciousness. After all, don't we call history 'itihasa'? 'Thus it is said', but whoever knows what the fact is, I think there is this important element in Vertov to create documentaries that are supposed to be empirical and factual. It inevitably enters the creative element through intuition and imagination; now, this interesting, complex, organic combination of fact, fiction, real, and reality imagination is something that we must try to unravel.

The whole attempt, on my part, is to see the cinematic text as a combination of this. So when we take up questions and issues for analysis at a serious level, what is real, what is reality, notice realism, what constitutes the nature of reality, we run into profound, complex problems. These problems lead us to understand issues better. We turn to problems; we confront problems not to find very simplistic, easy answers, not to understand the range of the problem better. This is where I find two people of great importance. One is Sergei Parajanov because, for me, there emerges the strong presence of what we recognise as poetic realism as it does in Tarkowski. So what is what is the meaning of the real, of reality? Parajanov and Tarkowski to mention it, in brief, to discuss it in brief talk of poetic reality as something

factual; if we read Tarkowski's *Sculpting in time*, Tarkowski rejects easy poetic realism, which comes as fancy as very easy constructions of imagination. There is no poetic realism which is not rooted in reality. For Tarkowski, a tree has to be a tree, and what you create out of this is a very different matter now, which is why Tarkowski calls this poetic realism an experience of the human mind that he uses the word *honoric*, now *honoric*, to mean things that we apprehend, things that we comprehend in a state where we are neither fully awake nor fully asleep, it's a sort of a half-awakened of a sleep dream like sleep. So, if we look at these, if it turned to these, we also begin to understand that there are complex questions of reality, realism, and social realism that cannot be reduced to ideological levels. We need to be open to exploring the possibilities of how cinema as a creative element how cinema creative area tries to turn into these things. Therefore, the creative evolution of the cosmos of cinema is a great journey that filmmakers are attempting even to this day. This curious combination of the real, the unreal, and the imaginary of the empirical realities is why I referred to Christopher Nolan a moment ago. This journey of the cinema of the cosmos of cinema continues and has become the preoccupation of directors now. This is one part of my presentation.

When I talk of the cosmos of cinema, I am also interested in pointing out the presence of politics and political elements. We talk of politics in cinema, and we talk of the political in cinema. For this presentation, I will only turn to some aspects of Eastern European cinema to show how sensitive filmmakers

approach history and politics in their films. In this, it is necessary to recognise the opposition to authoritarianism, dictatorship and totalitarianism, which constitute the major dimensions of East European cinema. I would only ask you to think of Andre Wajda, for instance, so I can only give a couple of examples of his films *Man of Maud*, *Catin*, *Ashes and Diamonds*, and *Man of Iron*, *Man of Hope*. Stalinist period to the rise of solidarity to Valesa, straight political trajectory. Politics permeates the world of cinema, the world of Andre Wajda. The political landscape in a filmmaker like Wajda is not merely ideological but carries all the sensitive dimensions we associate with a work of art. Therefore, in Wajda, in particular, political ideology overcomes the danger of being or becoming a propagandist. Wajda's last work, *After Image*, is the best example of understanding this. It's about the Stalinist period, about the operation, but it turns to a confrontation with political tyranny through art; it is the protest of art, and here is the relationship between art and politics. The supreme autonomy of an artist, the protagonist of the film, who refuses to obey to bend down to the whims and fancies of the totalitarian truth. The painter protagonist in the film only says there is no work of art, no true artist, which yields surrenders to tyranny to totalitarianism. The images or after image drawn from the life of the painter are, in my opinion, Wajda's assertion that eventually, working through historical elements using ideological positions being open to ideological positions a true work of art and cinema does it in great particularity through visual images that it is the primacy the autonomy of the work of art that is eventually

vindicated and this is significant. Such a spirit manifests itself in the two Hungarian filmmakers I refer to here. I turned to Jancso and his films *Red Psalm*, *The Roundup*, and *The Red and the white*; now, look at how politics figures and in what sense is Jancso political and in what sense his films are political. Jancso deals with political oppression and injustice but constantly juxtaposing, so I repeat, I'm referring to *Red Psalm*, *The Roundup*, *The red and the white*, but if one were to ask what's the eventual vision that emerges and what is the political vision so when I use the word political I don't mean politics.

When I use the word political, I mean the ethical dimensions of life, the choices we make, the choices we make in certain situations and the choices that determine the course of life that will unfold before us. So what does Jancso, lyrically and poetically, juxtapose tyranny, oppression, and cruelty with innocent peasants? The joy effervescence of the toilers and farmers, and when you turn to the red and the white through the compassion of nurses, medical nurses who don't recognise enemies, who don't see hostility and these people, small communities individuals, easily transcend the traumatic experiences of political cruelty. Jancso becomes central because he eventually upholds and vindicates only innocence and compassion. Now that compassion and empathy have erased the day of oppression of politics, Jancso 's films have a lyrical quality, a fine element of grace and beauty. Still, they carry all the democratic concerns of the filmmaker. So, the lyricism of poetic realism these are not superficial or transcendental qualities. They emerge from the thick layers

of conflict, bloodshed, suffering and misery. So it's not even a romanticised attitude; these are not romantic visions, and the point is politics is deeply integrated. Political strife and human suffering and misery are deeply integrated with the dimensions of the art, with the aesthetic dimensions. So, what is of great significance? these dimensions of the nature of the times, what I call the spirit of the times?

Most importantly, they are transmuted; they undergo a transmutation when creative film directors convert them into cinematic images. This also exemplifies the complex and organic relationship between history and cinema, but this is the diversity of cinematic culture. Soviet cinema is not of the same kind; East European cinema, when you turn to Andre Wajda, is not of the same kind. The process is very different even when you turn to two Hungarian filmmakers. Jancso is of one kind, and the other person is Bela Tarr. Bela Tarr is ideologically very critical of the failure of socialists and the oppression of Hungary by the communist parties. But he establishes a different relationship with the temper of the times. With the spirit of the times, he created other kinds of spiritual paradigms in his works. Let us begin with his early work *Family Nest* and turn to *Turin Horse* and *Satan Tango*, his seven-hour film. This is what I mean by the metaphysical element: Bela Tarr in *Turin Horse* and *Satan Tango* creates magnificent structures, even if they are rooted in specific spatiotemporal realities and contexts. Bela Tarr transcends the times, and by looming large, by creating universal paradigms which I shall explain by creating timeless experiences that work through the troubled histories of Hungary, Bela Tarr creates and gives us the experience

of the tragic fate of human beings, the existential angst of the human self, the human self that exists in states of darkness, agony, despair and gloom which is not just of the moment but of all times, So this existential angst, suffering, mystery is not related to a specific period. Still, they become paradigms of the human condition. This is why it's important to recognise that *Turin Horse*; I spoke to Bela Tarr at Trivandrum last year when he was there. I talked with him. So, I was referring to the *Turin horse* because the *Turin Horse*, as we know it, is back to the figure of Fredric Nietzsche. it may be apocryphal, but there is this story of Nietzsche in tearing pain when he sees the horse being mercilessly flogged, and his insanity seems to increase when we come from *Turin's horse* with the figure of Nietzsche. We know what Nietzsche suggests for us in the context of Western Philosophy. But when we turn to *Satan Tango*, we look at the alienated figure. The alienated figure in misery and gloom. So how do we recognise *Turin Horse* and *Satan Tango* they are specifically related to a certain historical context. But my argument is out of this specific historical context, the structures of the film the layers of the film also throw up universal paradigms, with Nietzsche being one central figure, and of course, in *Satan Tango*, you turn to the protagonist in deep despair and melancholy, which signifies the tragic state of the human condition. It's exciting, and I shall only mention it, but this Bela Tarr does not regard Andre Tarkovsky because he says Andre Tarkovsky is too passive and slavish. As a spiritual redemption that we come across in Andre Tarkovsky, in *Solaris*, to a greater extent in *Mirror*, *sacrifice*

and certainly in *Stalker*, Bela Tarr recognises it.

This is the plurality that there are antagonisms within the cinematic structure. He sees Tarkowski's spirituality as slavish but would much rather uphold the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder because he says Fassbinder gives us flak. There are contrasting positions; there are contrasting images when you turn to European cinema and when you turn to East European cinema now; the plurality of the cosmos of cinema, what I call the cosmology of cinema, is plural; its varied, diverse heterogeneous and this why I argue that no theoretical position has the right does the business to homogenise, to totalise to create overarching structures of these cinematic traditions. Let me briefly turn to the French new wave, with Goddard being the most radical. The most crucial aspect for me is the confusion and chaos revealed in French society, thanks to today's divisive politics of Charles De Gaulle. The French New Wave did turn to fundamental existential questions involving women and men individuals caught in turbulent times, trying to determine the basis of their being as the existential philosophers existentialists and writers did during those times of Sartre, Camus or Eugene Ionesco, but how the French new wave deconstructs itself into two positions with the Right bank and the Left Bank. When you juxtapose the Right Bank and the Left Bank, you notice the different kinds of structures evolving, and it's impossible to characterise the French new wave, including, for that matter, the Right Bank itself. You cannot put Truffaut, Goddard and others together. When you turn to the Left Bank with Agnes Varda and Alain

Resnais, I must say that there is such a variety in the cosmos of cinema that we need to dig deeper into these specific layers of the filmmakers of their films and look at the diversity each filmmaker has. I am not talking nearly of the diversity between two filmmakers, of the diversity and plurality within the constructs of a single filmmaker. I must also add here that if there is a certain kind of political radicalism in the works of the French New Wave, this is also very important for us to recognise. Alain Resnais shows us this. The man who made *Night and Fog Hiroshima Mon Amour* also makes other kinds of films where memory becomes important, where Resnais digs into the layers of human consciousness mixing up past, present, and future, making it impossible to unravel the nature of human consciousness, *smoking no smoking* and certainly *last year at Marienbad*. What is Alan Resnais spite of this, the Left Bank was more open about its political position, but eventually, even Alain Resnais turned to a very complex area, and that is to discover the unfathomable layers of the human mind.

Of course, if you turn to Latin American cinema, I only ask to be pardoned here because several only referred to a couple of filmmakers and a couple of films. Still, if we need to look at the cosmos of political cinema. In that case, greater radicalism can be seen in the Latin American cinema *Solinos*, *The Hour of the Furnace* and films like *Che*, *El Salvador* and *Toma Alias' Memories of Under Development*. My whole point is that political has moved into greater radical areas in Latin American Cinema. Suppose we need to see this extensive radical development. In that case, I only ask you to refer to Raymond Gavras, Athena, Santiago Mythers, Argentina

1985, the films of Luchino, the films of the Dardenne brothers also to recognise the fact that the political element in cinema now moves on to embrace not larger ideological questions but to turn to ethnic and racial injustice and the Dardenne brothers, *Ladli* all turned to questions involving the blacks in France the misery the attacks on the blacks should be films like *Young Ahmed*, *Les Misérables* and of *Nikita* and *Tori*, these are films that are pushing their dimensions and frontiers of political cinema becoming more and more radical showing violence, and they're less aesthetic, but that's a different matter. If they are less aesthetic, it also means the concerns of the preoccupations are more with principles of equality and justice. To that extent, aesthetics does not seem to matter as much as it did to the earlier generation of filmmakers. But we also need to categorise these things as central to the expansive nature of cinematic traditions. How do we arrive at different positions when we deal with this expansive tradition of cinema? therefore, my attempt hereafter is to look at how the spiritual element also figures to a great extent in cinema. There I turn to significant filmmakers like Pasolini, and later, I turn to the Japanese tradition. Whatever turn may say of the neo-realists, eventually, I would have turned to Pasolini and *the Gospel according to Saint Mathew* for this simple reason much as we have discussed the realism, the concern with the oppressed, the marginalised, the working class, the poor people there is a certain spiritual position that emerges out of poverty, hunger starvation which signifies the indomitable spirit of the common human being, and when I talk of the spiritual I mean it in a fundamental sense of human beings

with dignity with character fighting the loss of freedom and fighting for their self-dignity self-identity this we can see in Pasolini's *The gospel according to Saint Matthew*. And what is this spiritual where the political also mixes, which is part of the mainstream European tradition and part of this inexhaustible nature of the cosmos of our cinematic world? The spiritual functions at a very rooted political and historical level and Pasolini comes later on, but let us look at call Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* 1928 and Breson, *Balthasar*, *Trial of Joan of Arc* for and especially *The Diary of a Country priest*. What I'm trying to suggest is that the deep preoccupation of cinema is with politics and certainly with history. Still, there is also something of the very fine transcendental spirit, and that's why you say Fellaini said the new wave is not just a cinematic movement for us. It is a spiritual quest, but how do I concretise it? I conceptualise it through the dying priest's words in a *The dairy of a country priest*, where he asks for absolution, and the person who gives absolution does not know whether it is right or wrong. But the priest says, after all, All is grace, and there is nothing beyond grace. These are details, but what am I trying to suggest? my whole position is that the structures of spirituality in the cinematic traditions that the layers of spirituality in the cinematic traditions come through historical political layers, but more importantly, working within the framework of religion, they are also attacking institutionalised religion, the dark Puritanism of institutionalised religion, and this is where religion and politics get intertwined. Now, this particular approach in the cinematic tradition is essential for me because when it

comes to religious structures religious layers, it's essential not to lose sight of two things: justice, freedom of human dignity and eventually, if we can use the word in a secular, rational sense of redemption and salvation for human beings; and redemption and salvation do not necessarily come through those Lords and masters of the church, of institutionalised structures now this is the kind of redemption that's important it was being worked out at different levels by Bresson in a very ascetic austere manner.

What this leads us to understand is that this preoccupation with this corruption, degeneration, and degradation in religion and the politics of religion comes very clearly even in films made in recent years a couple of years ago, and I mentioned only a couple of them. *One Step Behind the Seraphim* by Daniel Sandhu, *Magdalene sisters* by Peter Muller, *Corpus Christi* by Jan Komasa and in a very comical manner, the film *God Exists Her Name is Petrunija* by Metevsky, especially in the Romanian trajectory. We know the recent history of Romania, especially after Chuchesco. These are about the huge contradictions; why did young filmmakers turn to religious structures and patterns five and six years ago? The struggle is still going on; the struggle for human dignity is salvation in a very secular rational sense, and to fight the ugly current time is puritanism of decadent puritanical religious institutions. So when I turned back to Bresson, Dreyer, I am extending it to show that five or six years ago, filmmakers of our time service and times were also dealing with these fundamental religious questions in a political, ethical manner. So, this story of this struggle with hierarchies with institutional

structures is part of the cinema experience and continues even to this day. I argue that this range, this spiritual tradition, should also lead us to construct newer theoretical structures about cinema about imaging about narrativisation. It is not that we approach cinema through theories. I have been repeating this different formulation. A different philosophical formulation is possible when we turn to theories through cinematic structures, and this is very true especially when we turn to what we recognise as post-colonial societies, third-world societies and effort to this phenomenon, which means I am moving from the European tradition and the European text to our traditions but let me begin with a closer reading of the extent possible in this given lecture to Japanese cinema.

My whole point is that there is no understanding of the deep philosophical layers that influence the works of people like Mizugochi, Kurosawa of Kobayashi, and then only name *Sancho the Bailiff*, *Roshuman* and *Rebellion*, three films by these filmmakers. It's impossible to arrive at the theoretical understanding of cinema without a recognition of something primary to these filmmakers: their fundamental orientation in Buddhist philosophy, the whole of *Sancho the bailiff* images the aesthetic structures, the layers, the narratives and the experiences of these individuals all these constitute the layers of *Sancho the bailiff* it's impossible to arrive at any cinematic theory without a recognition of what creates these dimensions of cinema. In other words, it means certain dimensions emerge, philosophical intellectual experiential dimensions that emerge from the cinematic text, which we need to extrapolate

and draw on and then arrive at the new theoretical premises. To put it in other words, we are in a position if we are sensitive enough to understand the layers and structures and the complex fabric of cinema, we are in a position to break through to go beyond to resist the canons of theory, the canons of certain theoretical positions and arrive at the new theoretical formulations. These theoretical formulations come from the creative possibilities of cinematic texts. This is the reason why, in the Indian context, it was the great Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay who remarked cinema is as excellent in art as the other first-grade arts and, therefore, when he made this statement, he said our business is to look at the layers structures built into the narrative the aesthetic structures, the imaging patterns of cinema which we cannot regard as secondary to literature or any of the other arts. This is the reason I am trying to argue that we need to arrive at certain fundamental positions that we need to arrive at the theoretical positions, and this ought to be the business of those who teach cinema, film theory, cinematic theory, and film studies as it is closely called. It would not do to dump theories on cinematic texts. I will move a little closer to our context and our situation, and there, I will be quite selective and only turn to certain traditions.

To begin with, I will briefly reference Bengali cinema, turn to Malayalam cinema and Kannada cinema, and talk about the newer dimensions that very important young independent filmmakers are exploring. The last part of my presentation will turn to Bengali cinema, three or four major figures, Malayalam cinema, Kannada cinema brief, and some significant young independent

filmmakers. Let me refer to Mrinal Sen, Ghatak, and Satyajit Ray. India was an independent country that had gained its freedom and had become a post-colonial society, but look at the trajectories of these three directors. If you look at the trajectories, you look at the differences. Many things overlap, but let us look at the differences between Ray, Ghatak and Sen. This, for me, is the diversity not just of Bengali cinema but of Indian cinema itself, and therefore, I am trying to argue to go beyond the simplistic reductionist patterns with which we characterise films including Indian cinema, and this is also the point for me I'm not going to mention all films but its also the point for me to suggest that we had better give up this whole distinction between regional cinema and national cinema because each film in a particular linguistic tradition comes from a specific universe to speak in the language to understand the language, images, metaphors, the idiom of the language is to understand a particular universe. so we have universes, as it were. What are the things that Sen, Ghatak and Ray inherited? The horrors of partition trauma of partition, the existential struggles common to all their films, and the existential struggles of human beings in the modern Indian nation-state are treated in three different ways by these three filmmakers. Ghatak is the one who moves into other layers beyond the historical if you look at *Subarnarekha* or *Mega Dhaka Tara*. You will notice a fascinating attempt on Ghatak's part to bring layers of the collective unconscious into his cinematic text, which I feel he borrowed from his leftist lineage and his understanding of Jung's collective unconscious. Even as Ghatak is telling the

story of an individual, a woman, or a female protagonist, what is important is that he sees that individual as part of the collective unconsciousness, inheriting the burdens of humankind of the periods of those people. In this sense, the drama of partition that affected Ghatak is characterised as something that finds its expression through the creative layers that create universal paradigms, which means that from the local, the specific particular can be moved to universal patterns. When we use the word universal, it should not be seen as a contradiction or as a contradiction to the local and the specific. It is out of the specific that the universal emerges. In this sense, Ghatak is as important as, if not more important. We are not creating a hierarchy of artists to turn to Ghatak; the trauma that Ghatak portrays is, for me, the first move towards the traumas of partition that Sadat Hasan Manto tried to capture in his writings. So, I easily turn to two-period artists and look at their commonalities and differences. It's equally interesting to see how there was an important overlap between Mrinal Sen and Ray. If you look at Ray's films, it is as if they were making films to match each other; just watch *Mahanagar*, *Pratidvandi*, *Seemabaddha*, *Jana Aranya* and contrast them with *Interview*, *Calcutta 71*, *Padatik Akaler Sandhane*, and you begin to see that there is such an overlap because they were functioning within the same historical period sharing the same burdens. Still, the narratives are contrasting narratives. The perspectives are different even when they emerge from the same context. Now, this is the range, the dimensions in the cinematic cosmos. They are the inheritors of the same problems in the same historical period. The approaches to

cinema and cinematic narratives are extremely different.

So, after the aftermath of independence with all the dismal features of their ruling state in a free India, the concerns of the two auteurs are the same. Both of them approached the indifference and opportunism of the middle and the ruling class, but eventually, their cinematic moves converged at a certain point, but they differed. They differ because Satyajit Ray sticks to a particular class of society. In contrast, Mrinal Sen moves into the working class, into the areas of the marginalised and oppressed, but does the vision essentially differ when we raise basic ethical questions? My whole point is that it's also necessary to bring into our cinematic analysis without compromising aesthetic parameters and fundamental ethical questions. I argue that when you turn to Ghatak, Ray, and Mrinal Sen, those parameters we analyse understand European cinema, but those parameters do not operate here. So, we need to evolve different theoretical frames, and we need to evolve different modes of understanding when we turn to the Indian tradition. It's almost like saying we cannot understand and evaluate Indian writers, poets, and novelists as we do when we turn to American writers, European writers, or Latin American writers. I'm asking for this anarchy of criticism and anarchy of theory. We cannot open up new dimensions regarding our cinematic traditions unless we create an anarchic theoretical state as far as our cinematic traditions are concerned. And therefore, Indian cinema, for me, brings us face-to-face with new histories and new realities. For me, Andre Bazin or Rudolph Anheim would certainly not be important

here. I may find a place for the Gestaltists, Anheim, but certainly not a Christian Metz. Munsterberg, I may find a place because they were dealing with the universal dimensions of human consciousness of the Gestaltists. If I turn to Deleuze, I may not find much space for Deleuze unless I am a theorist in an academic structure where I'm obliged to teach. So, this compelling obligation also emerges in me through these exceptional filmmakers who ask me to go beyond my intellectual formulations and theoretical positions, and as I said earlier, the challenge for me is to open newer theoretical possibilities. The filmmakers, the creators themselves, offer us these creative possibilities. In the Indian cinematic tradition, this is where the unfamiliar and the familiar meet, and when I turn to Bengali cinema, Rituparno Ghosh traces one trajectory and very recent filmmaker very young filmmaker of great consequence, making some significant films, Atanu Ghosh, these are the new filmmakers, especially Atanu Ghosh who asks us to create newer dimensions of theoretical possibilities and it's the most invaluable experience for people like me. Many share this view that we should not fit theoretical positions into cinematic texts, and the problem is doing away with canonical and theoretical positions.

Look at the range of Indian cinema, and we talk of the cosmos of cinema turning to Indian cinema. Films from remarkable films from the northeast, and I have been watching films from Assam, Orissa, and Manipur. How does one come to terms with films of the North? East, you cannot even have a theoretical position that would talk of films from the Northeast along with Ghatak, Ray

and Mrinal Sen, so layers and layers of theoretical positions need to be extrapolated. Turn to Aribam Shyam Sharma, especially his *Ishino Sanabhi, Imaginethe*. Turn to Bhabendra Nath Saikia, *Janu Barwa*. Now, what yardstick would we approach these filmmakers with? Even when the talk of North Eastern trajectory, I have just finished reading two books, one on the history of Assamese cinema and one pioneering work on the history and growth of Oriya cinema, you begin to see newer structures and these newer structures do not come out of theoretical positions but come out of new endeavours, new journeys and new attempts. How can I leave out South Indian cinema? not as an act of concession, not out of chauvinism, but to show how rich this tradition is. I would only ask us to consider Adoor Arvindam to trace the trajectory of Malayalam cinema. In this context, I would also mention John Abraham's *Amma Ariyan* to give you a glimpse of the range of Malayalam cinema. But the mark of Malayalam cinema, despite the presence and dominance of leftist ideology the mark of Malayalam cinema as it is of all creative filmmakers, is that it does not allow any social, political, or religious ideology to choke its creative explorations. It's quite a rewarding experience to recognise this diversity and plurality of Indian cinema. What I find interesting is when I turn to Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen, Mrinal Sen, in particular, critiquing the communist movement. Not a leftist in ideology, Adoor does the same. These are the parallels, continuities and rich divergences, so if I look at *Padatik*, if I look at *Calcutta 71*, in fact with an awareness of Adoor, if I turn to Mrinal Sen or from Mrinal Sen, if I return to Adoor, I find

Adoor doing it in a very different manner in *mukamukam*, in *Katapurush*, where there are similarities, there are similar trajectories but more important is to recognise the fact that with these apparent similarities, the creative explorations create a world of diversities. If there is this Bengal experience, there is this Kerala approach to the same kind of lift the experience, and the film registers are not the same kind. Now, it is this rich heterogeneity in this plurality that we must recognise. Recognising this heterogeneity and plurality, we arrive at newer, more creative, imaginative theoretical possibilities.

Look at Arvindan's, especially in *Kanchanasita*. This is a trajectory that he takes up; It is a conscious subversion of the epic *The Ramayana* because he turns to a tribal landscape, transforming the very destinies of the characters. This is Indian cinema, Malayalam cinema, and Aravindan's take on Indian culture and tradition. There is no single defining theoretical position regarding Indian culture, the Indian past, and the Indian epics. You cannot even construct, so it's not just a relationship with politics, cinema and religion. It is also a monolithic construct of the Indian past and its cultural and religious traditions. The cosmos of cinema, therefore, must be recognised for its multiple dimensions, contradicting the singular constructs of cultures and traditions. Turn to that great character is Estapan; if Breson turns to one kind of spirituality in his films *Balthazar* or *The Diary of a country priest* in *Esthappan*, one sees Arvindan dismantling all dogmatic positions and fostered again by the decadent institution through a maverick through a wanderer, through a jangama, Aravindan defines arrives at a very alternative

notion of spirituality. These are elements of Indian cinema, not just Malayalam cinemas that ask us to understand cinema through rooted, historically rooted spiritual, transcendental qualities and dimensions. and therefore, Aravindan, for me, provides a sharp contrast to the paradigms we come across in European cinema, so the whole range of cinematic cosmos we should be saying cosmoses violating rules of grammar and language. Therefore this is also the opportunity for us to seriously reject this whole juxtaposition between unfortunate and uneven and unjust text position between regional cinema and national cinema as if there is any national cinema or as if Hindi is the national language. It's necessary to state that one of the most volatile aspects of Indian society is, in fact, this volatile aspect that we need to uphold, especially when these days, volatile aspects also come into the cinematic trajectory. The aesthetics may not be good. In sociological terms, I am referring to reconfiguring this notion of the sociological treatment of 'Jaathi', the caste. If sociology has its problems, you can define jaathi. Interestingly, the most volatile and contentious aspect of Indian society comes into the cinematic framework. The aesthetic parts of the films may not be very good. They may not be very rewarding and rich, but can you ignore cinemas' preoccupation with one of the most fundamental volatile and very violent aspects of Indian society? this is what Tamil cinema does and has been doing in recent years. Just turn to *Kakamuttai* by Manikandan *Azhargarsamy*, *Kuthiai* by Suseendran *Pariyerum Perumal* by Mari Selvaraj, *Jai bheem* by Gnanvel, *Karnan* again by Mari Selvaraj. I again repeat they

may not be films with fine aesthetic qualities, but then when I write an Indian cinema and then a Tamil cinema, with what position from what framework do I turn to these films? do I dump them as inferior medicore films or do I just uphold their political radicalism do I vindicate them, or support them only because of their political radicalism? I am trying to suggest that these categories create great problems for those who write about cinema. Are we to uphold films only because they are very radical and because they deal with the caste system in such an open manner? Do we temper our political radicalism when I write on them? Do I temper it with my aesthetic structures, with my aesthetic understanding? What balance do I need to create between political radicalism and my aesthetic sense? This question will not be resolved, but I suggest that cinema, particularly Tamil cinema, creates problems for me. It's easy to run them down because they are not aesthetically pleasing or delightful. It is very easy to uphold them resorting to some ideological position bringing in some figure, but what does one do with this dimension of cinema? If I'm a serious viewer of cinema, how do I hold these positions intact without simplifying anything? In other words, how do I construct a theory of cinema that upholds aesthetics with political and ideological radicalism? This is not a question that's going to be settled easily.

I move towards the very last part by saying that we must also look at the kind of relationship cinema has had with literature. There are many examples, but I turn to one example closer home to my home state when I talk of the works of Girish Kasaravalli for obvious reasons, which I'm sure you will

grant. I cannot go beyond these illustrative pieces. My whole point is that in Girish Kasaravalli, you see a significant transformation of the transmutation of the word into the visual image. Girish Kasaravalli's relationship with literature is quite a tentative and open one. In the sense that even a mediocre work of art in the literary world, he picks up and brings extraordinary visual elements which carry traces of history. No film by Girish Kasaravalli is not a direct and creative response to the spirit of the times. In other words, sociological dimensions, political dimensions, and communal dimensions undergo a reconfiguration, and they become part of aesthetics. This is its relationship with politics. Girish Kasaravalli is not a conventional political filmmaker, but does one ignore the politics of his works of art? turn to *Ghatashraddha* based on Ananthamurthy's famous story *Ghatashraddha*. Turn to a very ordinary literary text. It's a mediocre literary text, *Thaayisaheba*, or turn to the short story *Haseena*, which became a film, and another short story, *Koormavata*. Now, the point I am trying to make is that the literary value of the text is not central to Girish Kasaravalli. His central concern is how the word can be rendered through powerful visual images. Still, those visual images are not an end in themselves; they must carry resonances and become echoes that capture the spirit of the times. This is the relationship between literature, cinema, and the spirit of the times. So, the story keeps on unfolding. The story does not stop; I could continue, but I must end by referring to the *New Horizons*, as I said a little while ago.

I cannot end without referring to the significant journeys and the great creative explorations of young independent filmmakers. They are making films in their languages, but this is where they become Indian in content, spirit and aesthetics. We cannot. I'm much against the use of the word pan India. The actors come from other languages, and this story moves in all kinds of directions; there is nothing pan-Indian that is not deeply locally rooted in a specific linguistic and cultural context. This whole notion of pan-Indian has to be dismissed, and what is it that pan-Indian? Every bit of this country, every segment, every unit of this country is Indian in its spirit in its content. So I think these young filmmakers break this artificial division, so I have selected young filmmakers from several languages. Prateek Kuruba in the Khasi language, these are filmmakers who have been making films in the last 7 or 8 years, *Ludu*, Fahim Irshad *Hani mani Kislay Isehi* Pratik Vat's *Eeb Allay Ooo*, Paban's *Nine Hills One Valley* and the magnificent film by Prabhashchandra *I am not the river Jhelum*, Achal Mishra in Mythili *Gamak Ghar* and Miransha Naik located in Goa, *Vat and chus* again in my clip Parth Saurabh's *Pokhar ke dono par* and then Avinash Arun's *Three of us* and of course, the Marathi filmmakers beginning with Sumitra Bhave and Sunil Sukthankar through *Bhaurao karade Khwaja* Nagaraju Manjule's *Fandry* and several others.

Indian cinema, especially through these young independent filmmakers, is expanding its horizons by asking to look at the plurality of the Indian context and to see a film in Mythili in the Khasi language, in Oriya or Assamese is to behold the Indian experience

because there is no part of India is not the centrally related to India as a whole. There is not even a single India; India does not exist as a homogeneous category. So, do I define Assamese cinema merely as Assamese cinema, Oriya cinema, or Neeraj Mohapatra's cinema? So, how do I begin to look at the Indian text? Just as we read literary text, is a Bengali novel merely a Bengali novel? Is Premchand merely rooted in his culture? This, not an act of concession but a recognition of the infinite possibilities of cinema. We must recognise and open ourselves up to the pluralities of Indian cinema, which is why it is necessary to understand and recognise newer issues of form. All these filmmakers and the films I have mentioned are dissimilar in narration, form, content, and, ultimately, meaning. Such dissimilarities don't converge; if they do, they converge only as experiences within us. But we need to raise hundreds of questions infinite questions about issues of form, content, meaning and experience. But this leads us to conclude that I cannot leave it out, though I cannot discuss it. I cannot leave out these questions for form, meaning, and experience, which operate at very different levels, and that is for another session. What do we do with this when we turn to makers like Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, or Kamal Sur? What do we do with this? These are filmmakers who operate at different levels to bring them together, so there is a whole range of Indian cinemas that ask us to create newer, meaningful, expensive, imaginative, intuitive categories of understanding. This means the possibilities for theorists are immense. The possibilities are infinite, provided that this cinematic text matters to them and that the autonomy of the cinematic text becomes far

more important than dead, sterile, barren theoretical positions. I can't leave out that Gujarati film by Ketan Mehta *Bhavani Bhavai*, so if I keep giving examples, if I can give 100 examples, why not 100 more, another 200 or 300? *But* that becomes a futile exercise in the context of this talk. I end only by saying that we must certainly recognise the most important range of Indian cinema. Still, the final point I would make is that let us look at how this phenomenon of the post-colonial world, this so-called third world, spreads itself out in various forms.

Let's return to the African filmmaker Ousmane Sembene and look at his *black girl*, *Xala Moolade Mandabi*, but that's not my point. The African register is of one kind, but more interesting for me is that this question of looking at those who have always been outside the framework and living at the edge now becomes central to films. These become important to films, for example, the stories and the plights of the Aborigines. Why does a

German filmmaker like Herzog try to attend to this in *Where the Green Ants Dream?* Why does he have to turn to these, which means that this so-called trajectory of the post-colonial third-world cinema is moving in new directions, and filmmakers from all over are trying to come to terms with this? Therefore, a certain unifying universality emerges through sharply defined historical context. My whole point is films address the spirits of their times; the spirit of cinema is located in specific historical times in particular specific spatiotemporal realities, and it's because of their deep engagement and their grounding in specific spatiotemporal realities that they film through their aesthetic registers philosophical registers attain this element of universality we need to negotiate between the local and the universal between the specific and the global that I think is the challenge for people for passionate, serious and committed to cinema and its future thank you, everybody, for listening.

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