

Tribute to Kumar Shahani

Amitabha Chaterji

Entropy, Perspective

Everything in this universe moves from order to disorder. Ice melts into water, and air escapes from tires. The reversal never occurs in the language of science; it is called entropy.

In the vast expanse of the universe, as life

abounds and within the realms of its consciousness where art thrives, is entropy the ultimate determinant? Does an artist's mind tend towards disorder? Or is it that the chaos in an artist's mind takes a cohesive form in their art? Does the fundamental order of the universe not extend to this? Renowned scientist Schrödinger, in his book "*What Is Life*", stated that life emerges from the reverse of entropy, transitioning from

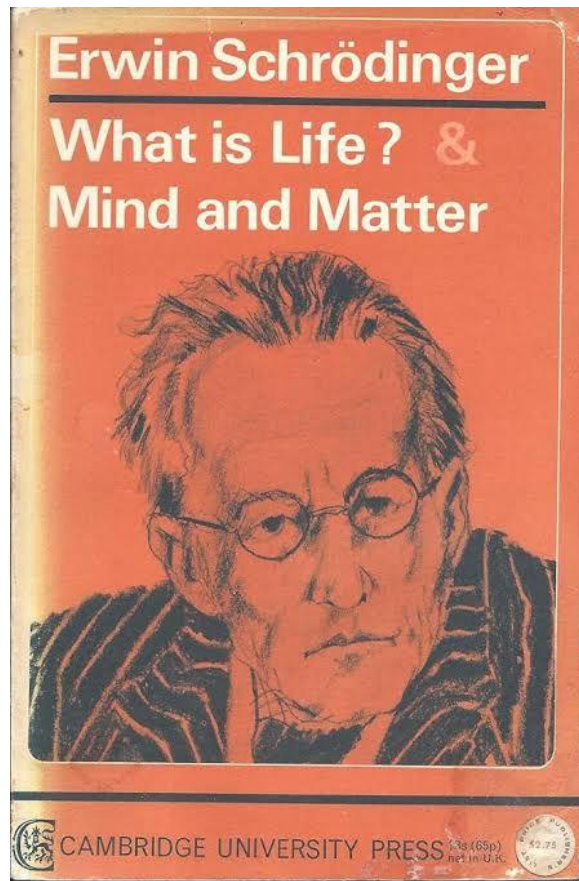
disorder to order. Negative entropy. Did art embrace this notion from its inception? Or did the Upanishads' concept "Atma Sanskriti Barb Shilpani ", meaning knowing oneself is the pursuit of art, lead artists to the ordered precision of the living cell, making them stand precisely opposite to the universe's surmount disarray?

We don't know. Maybe time will tell, but instead, we contemplate what life is. How did Schrödinger imagine it eighty years ago? Perhaps we ponder it differently.

The body comprises many organs,

which are composed of tissues. Furthermore, everything is a play of cells and subatomic particles. But how does life arise within this? And where does it go suddenly after death? Similarly, cinema is a sequence of scenes, ultimately a collection of shots. So, how does cinema conceive that consciousness which lingers in the viewer's mind after the film ends? Just as after death, specific memories linger

in some people's minds. Isn't cinema somewhat like those memories? But then, a question arises. Is death a kind of disorder governed by nature's laws? Death doesn't provide the answer. Cinema does. Viewers romp through their memories of it. Their minds give birth to many shapes, questions, and narratives. All in all, entropy prevails. So, can we say an artist is a cunning creature who



directs the chaos of their mind into the minds of the audience? This is what *Maya Darpan* did in 1972 to me.

Maya Darpan, 1972

It's a film made long before my birth. I don't remember how I came across it, probably on



Doordarshan, just like we used to see Indian artistic films in our childhood. I didn't enjoy it, nor did I find it suitable. That was because I wasn't prepared. But a bit of chaos crept into me that day, similar to seeds anticipating rainfall.

Chairs arranged in a courtyard. The actress adjusts them repeatedly, in geometric order. Cleans the dust settled on them. But shortly after, they scatter as if succumbing to the law of entropy. At the end of the film, the actress does nothing. Surrenders to that chaos. Surrenders herself to it for a moment, then sits back down again. The backdrop of 1947 is seen in this film. Everything is changing after a long period of stagnation. That adaptability to change is absent. So maybe the girl sits down for a moment but gets up again. She faces herself in the mirror in her room and keeps walking. That's Kumar Shahani's *Munsiyana*. His profound sense of life.

Kumar Shahani, 2018

In 2018, my first full-length film, "*Ami O Monohar*," was part of the Kerala International Film Festival. It was the film's first screening in the competition category. The jury was to arrive in a few moments. Kumar Shahani arrived. Most people grow sluggish with age, but he gained a graceful gait. He arrived with other jury members and sat behind me in the line. After a while, the film began.

I wasn't prepared for this event. It was a terrible pressure. Until then, the seeds of *Maya Darpan's* chaos, which lay dry in my barren land, had gained some moisture. I could understand a bit then, '*Kumar Shahani, who and why*'.

After the film started, another disaster began. Due to a low budget, I had never seen a movie on a big screen before. It was only



when I realised that the subtitles were scarce throughout the film, enough to frustrate viewers—a deep embarrassment for a

director. After screening, I tried to keep my distance from him. One day, I met him at a dinner party. He said, *"It's not right for the jury to talk to filmmakers, but I want to say something."* For a long time, I don't know how long, he spoke about various aspects of the film. I merely listened, just like the resonance of Upanishads were listened to in the depths of the forest. He ended with a strange statement. He said, "You should get married. Don't live alone". There was conviction in this statement. Then, one day, we met at lunch. He told us stories of how South Indian cinema owed its success to the cultivation and business of coconut in the region. I

understood the depth of his social thought that day, the same one that moved the chairs in *Maya Darpan*.

At our last meeting, at the festival's award ceremony, he asked if I was happy to receive the award. I was dumbfounded. Smiling, he moved ahead. I didn't understand the meaning of his question that day. Later, I realised that his question "Are you happy now?" that day had sown a seed of chaos in my mind, which would make me restless like a cinema. Buddha said life is full of sorrow. So is cinema. Negative entropy, just like life.

How are we ever going to be happy?

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