

Article

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The New Wave Cinema of Odisha*Matira Manisha (1966)*

The term ‘New Wave’, rather ‘Nouvelle Vague’, in the case of cinema, we all know, started in France in the late 1950s and 1960s and was pioneered by the directors like Truffaut, Godard, Resnais, Rohmer,

Chabrol, etc. But there are disagreements about the exactitude of the form and function of the French New Wave—was it only about ‘politics of form’, whether and up to what extent the signatures of ‘New Wave’ can be traced back in the films before the officially designated period of New Wave, or about its avant-gardist nature. Through a process of culturally differentiated osmosis and as a part

of shared post-imperial or post-colonial consciousness, different parts of this cinema-producing-planet came up with their assertions and claims to this prestigious intellectual coinage and their versions of the New Wave. New German Cinema and American Independent Cinema flowered, Brazil came up with Cinema Novo, and in India, we also had Indian New Wave. Like all the different modes of modernity of various spaces, all these ‘New Waves’ were also bound to vary with each other to a great extent. In official historiography, the Indian New Wave is marked by the emergence of the

film ‘Bhuban Shome’ by Mrinal Sen in 1969, but the term is still confusing.

New Wave cinema is a movement in Indian cinema that originated in West Bengal in the 1950s as an alternative to mainstream commercial Indian cinema, represented especially by popular Hindi cinema, known today as Bollywood. Italian Neorealism inspired it; Parallel Cinema began just before the French New Wave and Japanese New Wave and was a precursor to the Indian New Wave of the 1960s.

Bengali cinema initially led the movement and produced internationally acclaimed filmmakers such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, and Ritwik Ghatak. The films of Ray, Ghatak & Sen which formed the core of our New Wave cinema not only put the Indian cinema firmly on the world map, it also enabled us to see the realities of life in their various aspects in cinematic terms. It helped the Indian New cinema and its minority audience to emerge. It is known for its serious content, realism, and naturalism, symbolic elements with a keen eye on the sociopolitical climate of the times, and for the rejection of inserted dance-and-song routines that are typical of mainstream Indian films.

The contemporary New Wave in Indian cinema is distinguishable from previous movements through several factors, the most relevant of which are the issues and themes it concerns itself with. Unlike in the past when India’s existence was a story of nation building, and thus the works of Avante Garde filmmakers were entirely socio-political where the plot and characters served only as commentary on worldly matters concerning the Indian nation, today India is a nation that has made its mark on the global landscape and

is now debating its identity. It is a relatively more affluent and secure state, and consequently, the concerns of people have moved away from the world outside to the world inside—or perhaps it is a reflection of the egocentric times we live in, that matters concerning the personal well-being of the individual have taken precedence over the well-being of the state as an overarching entity. It is the characters and their unique psychological issues that take the forefront in contemporary New Wave Indian films. Of course, the socio-political climate still plays an integral part, but as a backdrop.

An early example of this was Bimal Roy’s “*Do Bigha Zamin*” in 1953, which was a commercial success and also won an international prize at the 1954 Cannes Film Festival paving the way for Indian new wave cinema. “*Garam Hawa*” also made in 1973 strengthened the new wave cinema in India. During the 1970s and the 1980s, the Indian new wave cinema entered into a much wider extent.

This was led by directors like Gulzar, Shyam Benegal, Mani Kaul, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Kantilal Rathod, and Saeed Akhtar Mirza, and later on, Basu Chhatterjee, Mahesh Bhatt, and Govind Nihalini becoming the main directors of Indian new wave cinema.

The impact of the rise of the New Wave cinema was felt soon in the contemporary Odia scene. In the sixties Mrinal Sen’s moving neo-realistic film, ‘*Matira Manisha*’ (The Man of Earth-1967), which first caused a handful of Oriya artists and intellectuals to take a close look into the possibilities of cinema as both an art form and a tool for critical social discourse, it is likely that the picture would have been even more. Oriya

cinema then traveled with spiritual, social, and folklore-based themes and in the 60's witnessed the advent of 'New Wave' cinema with Mrinal Sen's "*Matira Manisha*".

Almost around 1980, 'The New Wave Cinema of Odisha' was heralded by some of the FTII (Pune) graduates prominent among whom was Manmohan Mohapatra in (1980), followed by Nirad Mahapatra in (1984), Saghir Ahmad and Sadhu Meher in (1984) A.K Bir in (1990), Sushant Mishra in (1994), Malay Ray in (1995) Chakradhar Sahu and Himanshu Khatua in (1996), Raju Mishra in (2001) and Gadadhar Putty in (2003) Sambhi Mohanty (2017)

Addition of FTII directors:

Among others filmmakers Pranab Das in 1985, Parbati Ghosh in 1986, Prafulla Mohanty in 1987, Sabyasachi Mahapatra in 1988, Santanu Mishra in 1990, Biplab Ray Choudhury in 1991, Gouri Shankar Dash in 1995, Bijaya Ketan Mishra in 1997, Subash Das in 2003 and Prashant Nanda in 2011 contributed a lot for new wave cinema of Odisha

The personal and poetic artistry of some of these directors has helped encourage a resurgence of serious interest in the cinema. The New Wave Cinema of Odisha has created a new atmosphere and environment enriching and strengthening the traditionally strong cultural ethos of the State. It is also a significant contribution to Indian cinema.

Two successful alumni of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune, Nirad Mahapatra, and Manmohan Mohapatra played significant roles in changing the face of Oriya cinema and led from the front to establishing art filmmaking in Odisha.



Manaswani in Maya Mriga

Eleven years after passing out from the Pune Film Institute in 1971, Nirad Mahapatra with productional assistance from the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) made "*Maya Mriga*". The narrative that deals with a broken Oriya joint family can be truly called the first Oriya alternate/parallel cinema. "*Maya Miraga*", The influence of Ozu shows in the meditative pace of the film, its detached observation of family life in a small town in Odisha, and the undermining of traditional structures as new ways gnaw at its foundation. The style is restrained, and understated; medium shots and slow, lingering pans match the elegiac temper of the subject, suggesting a nostalgic regret for a secure universe with the joint family as its center, when relationships could be taken for granted and individuals fitted conveniently into given slots, no decision was required, no special effort needed to be made.

The one who instrumentally continued to carry parallel cinema of the 80's was producer-director Manmohan Mahapatra. Mahapatra, who began his creative odyssey with the path-breaking film, *Seeta Raati* (1982) has continued to make films, despite heavy sods and odds, and has made twelve feature films in just two decades. Suppose his *Seeta Raati* shows his imagination and innovative ideas. In that case, other films such

as *Neeraba Jhada* (1984), *Klanta Aparanha* (1985), *Majhi Pahacha* (1987), *Nisidhaa Swapna* (1988), *Trisandhya* (1988), *KichiSmruti Kichi Anubhuti* (1989), *Andha Diganta* (1990), *Agni Veena* (1991), *Vinna Samay* (1993) *Muhurta* (2002) and *Bhija Matira Swarga* (2018) have surely proved his agility and aesthetic sensibilities, '*Niraba Jhada*' is a narration of the looming tragedy of an uprooted rural community while '*Nisidhaa Swapna*' deals with a family redefining life in the context of a social change. '*Kichhi Smruti Kichhi Anubhuti*' is a depiction of the past, present, and future of the psyche of a representative village.



Seeta Raati

Dhare Aluo (1983) is A courageous low-budget feature by Saghir Ahmed who teaches scriptwriting at the FTII. The film addresses questions of rural oppression in ways markedly different from its usual treatment in Odia cinema. A joint family is partially fragmented when the patriarch's only son (Mishra), a political activist, has to spend much of his time avoiding the police. The

family informally adopts two children and is then blamed when one of them commits suicide while escaping from Panchanan (Ghosh), the children's oppressive legal guardian. The children's mostly absent journalist father (Mahapatra) causes the activist to be arrested, but eventually, all the players in the drama come together. Children are devoid of the irrelevant complexities and the failed ideologues, the blind adherence, and the mindless radicalisms. They are the rays of new light that was "*Dhare Aluo*" was based on a story by Manorama Das

Another front runner of the Odia new wave Cinema is the Mumbai-based famous cinematographer turned director Apoorva Kishore Bir. In his NFDC produced "*Adi Mimansha*" (1991). The theme of this film is unanimist in tone though without didacticism. At the edge of an Oriya village, in the countryside of breathtaking beauty two middle-class families, one Brahmin and the other of a low caste. Both the families share the same dilapidated house divided into two. Bir was back with an Oriya film in 1997, '*Shesha Drushti*' is an adaptation of Ramchandra Behera's short story of the same title. This Oriya film is considered to be his most accomplished film.

Most of the Oriya art films are made on a social backdrop and few of them draw their narratives from the psychology of women. In this phase, Susant Mishra's "*Indradhanu Ra Chhai*" (1993) Chakradhar Sahu's "*Nila Mastrani*" (1996) and *Meemansha* (2017), Bijay Ketan Mishra's "*Ahalya*"(1997), Dolly Jena's "*Tara*"(1991) Gouri Shakar Das and Malay Ray's "*Mokshya*"(1995) and Himanshu Khatua's "*Kathantara*"(2005) & '

Krantidhara'(2014) can be taken into consideration as remarkable pieces of work.

In Odia's new-wave cinema, another significant direction is child psychology. In this frame, Apoorva Kishore Bir's "*Lavanya Preeti*"(1993) and "*Nandan*(1998), Raju Mishra's "*Laxmi Ra Abhisara*" (2001) Subash Das's "*A Akare AA*"(2003), and Gadadhar Puty's "*Puja Pain Phula Tiye*"(2006) can be taken into consideration.

In the world of Oriya parallel cinema, another successful maker is Prafulla Mohanty. Under the pseudonym "Upagupta", Prafulla Mohanty gave direction to "*Bhanga Silata*" (Broken Slate) and created quite a furor. Projecting the societal standard on one hand and the radical opposition to it on the other. In the later time, he gave a cinematic shape and texture to Godabarish Mohapatra's wide-read story "*Maguni Ra Sagada*"(2002) With the flow of time and progress in civilization, how *Sagada* (bullock cart), the most important transport of yesteryears in the villages becomes a useless product, is the internal echo of this film.

Sambit Mohanty's "*Hello Arsi*' (2017) is a film that falls into the category of 'road movies' and is set against the backdrop of industrialization and land acquisition in the name of development. Shot evocatively by Prasantanu Mohapatra in and around Rourkela on a deserted highway, the film wears a sparse, minimalist look that may take a little time to sink in, but once it does, one is captivated by the beauty of its images which contrasts with the theme of the film that emerges gradually as the film proceeds with its languid pace – that of desolation and ennui in the face of development.

Addition of Non-FTII directors:

In the 70s, it was Biplab Roy Choudhury who freed himself from the traditional boundary and made a film called "*Cheelika Teeray*"(1978) on the lifestyle of the fisher folk community of Cheelika. This film raised incisive questions about corruption and exploitation in Odia society but despite the significance of its subject and its superb camera work, it was made with the box office in mind, an interest that dilutes the serious intent of the work. Later on, his two films "*Aranya Rodana*" (1993) and "*Nirbachana*" (1996) contribute significantly to the world of new wave cinema. and "*Nirbachana*" is an adoption of Bengali writer Prafulla Ray's short story and "*Aranya Rodana*" is a cinematic reform of Eminent writer Satkadi Hota's novel 'Asant Aranya', While "*Aranya Rodana*" concentrates on the story of a hardworking lady journalist surviving in a tribal dominated place, "*Nirbachana*" as the name suggests exhibits the vote bank politics and the malfunctioning of black money. This film is a stunningly controlled and uniquely cinematic metaphor of rural India an impending environmental catastrophe shown with compassion and satire

Based on Bibhuti Patnaik's novel,' *Hakim Babu* 'directed by Pranab Das was made in 1985. The landmark film explores the subject of land acquisition by the poor and depicts the dismal picture of displacement owing to industrialization. *Hakim Babu*" can be considered as a middle road in Oriya cinema. While his "*Sesha Pratikshya*"(1985) deals with the psychology of women in a different direction, "*Agni Sanket*(1992) reflects the pains and problems of an Oriya

joint family residing in an extremely rural locale of Orissa. There is a humanist theme which makes the presentation of this film brilliant.

In 1990, with “*Mukti Mashal*” Shantanu Mishra joined the bandwagon of directors of the alternative mold. The story which evolved a mass consciousness, according to Mishra, was only a depiction of his own village life in Kendrapara. In this film, *the* daughter of the Zamindar raises her voice against his atrocities.

Shantanu Mishra’s next venture “*Mu’ra Murchhana*” (1995) is a wise experimentation with dreams, ambitions, and material aspirations of a lower-middle economic class family, the plot dwells with the psychology of women treated in a different direction. His next film “*Dure Digante*” focuses on traditional fishermen's resistance to the mechanization of fishing as a metaphor, the conflict between modernization and human existence till perturbed over the denigration of the environment. In Alaya Mohanty’s produced “*Aasha*”, director Mishra has given a cinematic shape to the dreams and aspirations of lady journalist Aasha.

In 1989 Sabyasachi Mohapatra added a new chapter to the history of Odia parallel cinema with the making of the artistically brilliant “*Bhukha*” in the Sambalpuri language. *Bhukha* is about the conflict between upholding traditional values and the onset of modernity. After that, Sabyasachi made a film called “*Jhili*”(1996) on the Paraja community of Koraput district in Orissa. Both the films didn’t do well commercially but managed to grab appreciation at the national and international levels.

After “*Bhukha*”(1989) & “*Jhili*”(1996)Sabyasachi’s *Sala Budha (The Old Stupid Man)* and *Aadim Vihchar (The Ancient Justice)* were released in 2013 and 2014 respectively, they garnered rave reviews owing to their sensitive treatment of the Indigenous life of Kondha community of Sambalpur, Odisha. For the tribal community of Sabyasachi’s visual conception, nature is the ultimate gift from the creator which is elaborate; In 2019 he made “*Salabudhara Badala*” which is a trilogy of ‘*Sala Budha*’. Like *Sala Budha* and *Aadim Vichar*, *Sala Budha Ra Badla*, too, is an adaptation of a story by the filmmaker’s father, Kapileswar Prasad Mohapatra

Jianta Bhuta (2008) movie was produced by A.K. Parija, under the Mitra Creative Arts banner. Veteran director Prashant Nanda is the story, screenplay, dialogues writer, editor, and director of the film. The story of the film revolves around a young girl from the tribe, Singari, and a boy Bangru intends to get married by customary development. In an uncongenial situation, Bangru implicated in a court case by the Sahukar (Money Lender) is put behind bars, meanwhile, Singari gets a new newfound sense of her body as her innocence gets destroyed and exploited. *Jianta Bhoota* (The Living Ghost) depicts the plight of the Dongaria Kondh tribal of the Koraput region to the Niyamgiri hills from being taken over for mining activities. This film is a bright example of the sensitive portrayal of innocence in the name of development.

Recently few young directors like Amartya Bhattacharya, Nila Madhab Panda Anupam Pattnaik Vishal Mourya,

and Debi Prasad Lenka. have joined hands to promote Odia's new wave cinema.

Directed by Amartya Bhattacharya; *Capital I* (2015) & *Khyanikaa – The Lost Idea* (2017) and *Adieu Godard* are three Odia films. “ .“*Capital I* revolves around a mysterious and unknown artist and depicts the transformation of a young girl’s mind whereby she finds herself trapped between the attractions of a realistic relationship and a strange relationship with her hallucinatory lesbian partner, while *Khyanikaa – The Lost Idea* revolves around fantasy driven tale of two men, a poet, and a painter, claiming possession over the same idea, in a rural village portrayed as a wonderland. *Idea* is personified as a beautiful young lady, free of all bondages. Amartya Bhattacharyya’s “*Adieu Godard*,” about a porn-addicted Indian villager who chances upon the French classic “*Breathless*” (1960), tries to milk comedy from a condescending premise: that uneducated villagers are too dumb to understand the cinema of Jean-Luc Godard. Instead, this limp satire only proves that no one fails to understand Godard as spectacularly as filmmakers who *think* they do.

Nila Madhab Panda’s first Odia film in the year 2019, ‘*Kalira Atita*’ (‘Yesterday’s Past’) was a story of the struggle between man and sea, highlighting the issue of seawater ingress. Gunu (Pitobash Tripathy) a disillusioned young man from Satavaya village, travels restlessly towards death, memories of a past cyclone propelling him into the eye of one that is coming. Hoping to reunite with his lost family, he returns to his village, five days before the cyclone, to find that it is now underwater. Gunu’s struggle to

survive the fury of nature is a portrayal of emotional trauma and human triumph.

Young filmmaker Anupam Patnaik’s movie ‘*Pratikshya*’ (2021), inspired by a short story of eminent writer Gaurahari Das narrates the life of an unemployed graduate who struggles with the dilemma of securing a government job to save his family after they meet with a medical crisis. It’s quite a relatable and emotional film and has the essence of Bhubaneswar. , ‘*Pratikshya*’, has resonated with a vast majority of cine lovers because of its unique ‘Indian-ness’ and astute portrayal of the reality of the nation's middle class.

Daman (2022) Written and directed by Vishal Mourya and Debi Prasada Lenka is a timely prescription for those who want to watch cinema with a cause. *Daman* probably marks Ollywood’s resurgence with a strong populist overtone. An inspiring tale of a fearless young doctor whose initiative helped bring down cases of Malaria in the remote areas of Odisha.

The new wave cinema movement – identified with filmmakers like Manmohan Mahapatra Biplab Raychoudhary, Nirad Mahapatra, and A.K . Bir is fast losing ground. Rising costs, bored viewers, and TV and video threaten to wipe out serious cinema. Like an extended dissolve at the end of a mildly absorbing film, the new cinema movement in India is gradually fading out from screens across the country. Producers are no longer willing to finance good, small-budget films. Distributors and exhibitors are more than ever reluctant to risk showing films by even the established ‘new wave’ directors. The filmmakers themselves are being lured increasingly by the seductive power of

television. Accomplished actors and actresses are once again in search of good roles. After more than two decades of controversy and promise, the alternative cinema movement appears to have reached a blind turn, if not the end of the road, uncertain about what to expect in the future.

If judged at a larger level, the success of Odia New Wave cinema of the 1980s has got a stoppage in the present time. The first and foremost reason behind it is the lack of governmental interest and patronage. In the past, many successful art movies were made with the monetary assistance of either the National Film Development Corporation or Orissa Film Development Corporation.

Now, the Orissa Film Development Corporation has become defunct. Other than that, two three film societies that are still running, prefer foreign films for organizing film festivals and have never given serious thought to taking Oriya parallel cinema into account. Moreover, theatre halls, which play a significant role in taking an art film to the wider audience's viewership have failed to do it. Another weak point of the Oriya parallel cinema is the limitation of theatrical release, for which the common audience never gets an opportunity to know about them. Has the Orissa government ever given it serious thought to proceed further in a constructive way, to lend a helping hand?

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