Article

Tamal Dasgupta

The Political Legacy of Indian Cinema

Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, and Mrinal Sen

Jean-Luc Godard once said of political cinema, 'It is not a matter of "making political films", but rather of "making films politically".'[1] Godard is clearly addressing the intense conflict inherent between these two methods, "making political films" and "making films politically." If analyses the inner conflict of two approaches as argued by Godard, one of the titan figures of the French New Wave *(Nouvelle Vague)* movement, in the context of dialectical contextualization, then one realises that this conflict is a reflection of a profound political ideology. Godard rejects the "language of the oppressor" (traditional cinematic grammar) of the conventional capitalist cinema, in favour of militant cinema on the Radical Process, influenced by Marxism and, post-1968, Mao Zedong's thought, particularly Brechtian alienation theory *'Verfremdungseffekt' (V-effekt)*.

Godard refers to "making political films" as the "Trap of Content". He uses the word "Trap" very deliberately. Godard directly accuses that, at the very outset of making a political film, the political character of the film is bound to be distorted by the trap of content, that is, the theme. In his view, in making a political film, a political idea or theme is chosen, such as a strike, war,

revolution, or any contemporary political event. Yet in presenting this political subject, directors consciously elude a political approach. The adopted political issue is usually presented in accordance with the various techniques or technology of traditional mainstream cinema. The political theme becomes shackled within the traditional narrative structure. Godard, arguing this attempt as a compromise, directly rejects it, stating it's a bourgeoisie's hypocritical tendency. He violently asserts that if the story of revolution is told on the basis of the "language of the oppressor" (traditional cinematic grammar), it can never inspire the audience with revolutionary consciousness. The theme of revolution, as a result of the "Trap of Content," becomes merely a politically infused form of entertainment. Godard has identified "making political films" as "bourgeois aesthetics," controlled by the individualism and escapism of capitalist ideology.

"Making films politically", Godard identifies it as "The Radical Process," stating that every stage of cinema should be evaluated from a political perspective. From theme and screenplay to financing, production, or the technical craft of filmmaking, from acting style to editing or distribution, that is, at every stage of filmmaking, it will advance through dialectics or political re-evaluation, and it is politics, not content, that will shape the film's structure. Godard has uttered that in the initial phase of "making films politically," the story is denied and the method (form & logic) is adopted as the theme. He explicitly states that the camera here isn't a window onto a magical-illusion world; it would be used by director as a "Political weapon of analysis", not just to capture a corrupt reality. In this respect, Godard was influenced by the theory of Alexander Astruc's caméra-stylo ('camera as pen'). With this camera, through jump cuts, the relationship between the actor and the camera, are all ways of breaking the 'language of the oppressor' (traditional cinematic grammar), and through the breakdown, Godard hopes to transform filmmaking into a continuous revolutionary political process or Radical Process. Godard anticipate to involve the audience in dialectical political and social issues by disturbing them in various ways throughout the Radical Process. In 1969, through the Dziga Vertov Group, an organisation formed under the leadership of Jean-Luc Godard filmmaking within the Radical Process took on a new dimension.

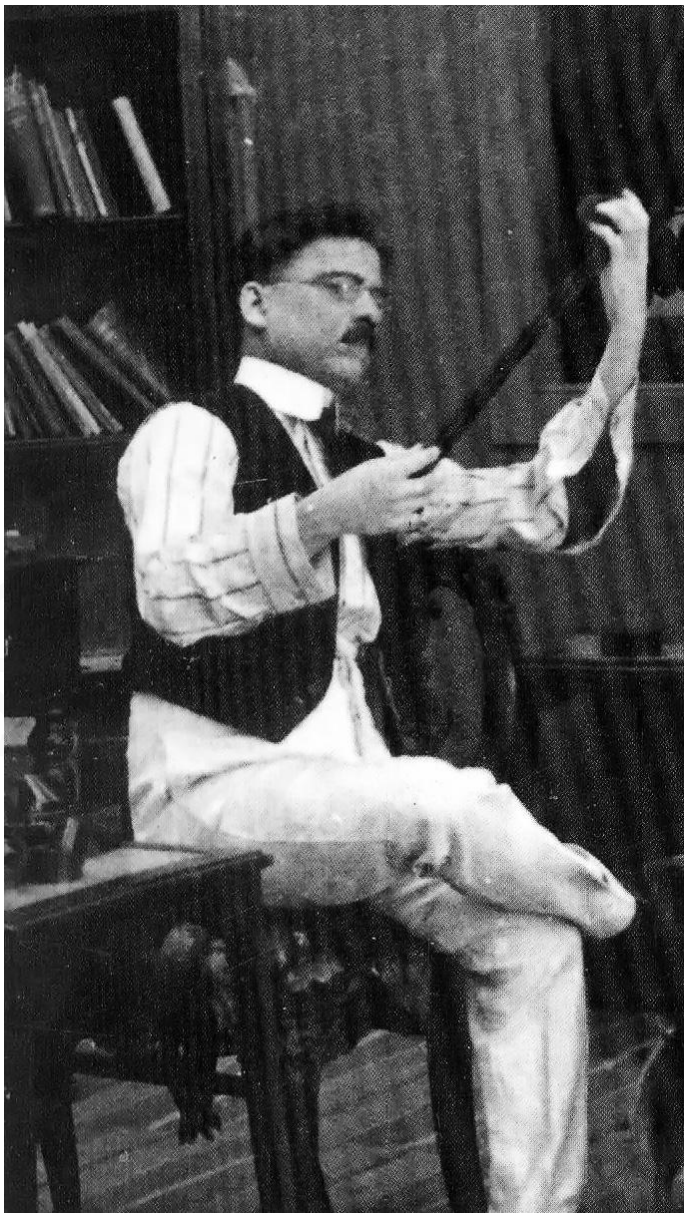
Personally, believe that Jean-Luc Godard is profoundly influenced by the

German playwright and theatre theorist Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-effekt), or Alienation Effect theory, in his concept of the "Making Films Politically" approach. In the V-effekt, Brecht expressed in his theatrical technique, the purpose of theatre isn't to evoke emotional sympathy or to create an illusion of reality, nor to forge an emotional identification between the audience and the characters through artifice, but rather, by employing the V-effekt, he coveted to breaking theatre's 'web of magic'. It is therefore clear that Godard, in his theoretical thinking for Radical Process or "Making Films Politically", drew heavily on Bertolt Brecht's V-effect theory.

Can the political legacy of Indian cinema be analysed in the context of the remark of Jean-Luc Godard on political cinema discussed in the preface? According to the views of Godard, in reviewing the history of Indian cinema, it may be difficult to claim that the legacy of Indian political cinema is profoundly rich. However, from its inception, Indian non-fiction or documentaries have not ignored the social and political context. Several modern Indian documentaries have managed to elevate to the genre of "Making Films Politically" as outlined by Godard. Throughout this long journey of Indian cinema, thematic changes have arisen at various times due to socio-economic and political upheavals. In this discussion, will endeavour to explore the political legacy of Indian cinema in socio-economic and political contexts by analysing it through several key stages.

Pre-Independent Indian Cinema: Nationalist Expression:

On 17 July, 1896, with the assistance of the Lumière Brothers' agency, "Moving Image" was screened at the Western Hotel, Bombay and in December at Calcutta. This event can be identified as the early era of Indian cinema. Two pioneers of the early



phase of Indian cinema, D. G. Phalke in Bombay and Hiralal Sen in Calcutta, witnessed the "Moving Image" exhibition.

The amassed anger against British colonial rule and the anti-imperialist struggle bear witness as a very significant document on the question of the legacy of Indian political cinema at its inception. Newsreels, filmed documentation, metaphorical

mythological fiction films, historical epics, or themes of social reform became a weapon of protest against colonial rule in the pre-independence era through this new medium. We can define this phase of the early days of Indian cinema as National Expression. This period of pre-independence India was an immensely important phase of socio-economic and awakening against colonial rule.

In 1860, the popularity of the play *'Nil Darpan'* by Dinabandhu Mitra became a cause of alarm for the colonial British government. To suppress this nationalist awakening among Indians, 'The Dramatic Performance Act' was enacted in 1876 by the British government. The colonial rulers sought to control the theatre through this act so that the Indian stage wouldn't be used by the nationalist movement. Alongside the theatre, moving images or documentation became a popular new medium. This new medium was used to foster nationalist expression against colonial rule in various forms. In 1902, at the dawn of Indian cinema, the Elphinstone Bioscope Company, founded by J. F. Madan took the initiative to produce newsreels and documentation on Swadeshi movement.

The most significant legacy of nationalist expression against colonial rule in the early phase of Indian cinema was the film *'The Anti-Partition Demonstration' (1905),* directed by Hiralal Sen under the banner of the Royal Bioscope Company, in protest of the decision of Bengal partition. Film historians considered that this documentation by Hiralal Sen is the first Indian political film and the first newsreel entirely produced by an Indian filmmaker. A protest meeting was held at the Town Hall in Calcutta on 22nd September, 1905 against Lord Curzon's plan to divide the Bengal Presidency. At this meeting, a call was made to organise the movement against colonial rule.

Hiralal Sen filmed a documentation of this meeting. Hiralal didn't merely document the meeting; he also took his camera outside the hall to try to capture the public's anger against the colonial British regime.

In 1906, Anadi Bose, founder of the Aurora Film Company, began producing India's first daily cinematic newsreel under the title *'Calcutta Film Gazette'*. This initiative was a momentous step in the history of Indian non-fiction film. In Maharashtra, H. S. Bhatwadekar produced newsreels, which depicted the contemporary political events. Aurora Film Company made newsreels on the Swadeshi movement and anti-colonial British

rule; anti-British movements by Gandhiji, sessions of the National Congress, and speeches by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose against imperialism and colonial rule were filmed in the *'Calcutta Film Gazette,'* which remains a historical record to this day. Jyotish Sarkar, made a documentary titled *'Surrender Not'*, which depicted the anti-Partition boycott movement. Film scholars argued it's India's first political documentary. At this nascent stage of Indian cinema, these newsreels and documentaries became political weapons aimed at organising public opinion against colonial British rule. *'The Great Bonfire of Foreign Cloth'* (1920); newsreels or documentaries of Gandhi's anti-colonial movement: *'Non-Cooperation Movement'* (1920), *'The Dandi March'* (1930), *'Quit India Movement*' (1942); and A.K. Chettiar's documentary *'Mahatma Gandhi'* (1940) bear witness to a rich political legacy in pre-independence Indian cinema.

As like the 'Dramatic Performance Act', the British government enacted 'The Cinematograph Act' in 1918 to regulate the new medium of cinema. This law was enacted to prevent the new medium becoming a weapon of the Swadeshi movement against colonial rule. Rather than outright rejecting the legislation, pre-independence Indian cinema, both silent and talkies, used mythological allegories to convey the message of nationalist awakening in fiction narrative films. An attempt is made to portray the exploitative or tyrannical nature of the colonial rulers through the allegory of various mythical villains, such as Kangsa, Ravana, and Kalia Nag. Dadasaheb Phalke, a titan figure of Indian cinema, never viewed the new medium of cinema as merely a means of entertainment. Phalke sought to convey the message of the Swadeshi movement against colonial British rule to the populace through his films. His three famous films are

'Raja Harishchandra' (1913), *'Lanka Dahan'* (1917), and *'Kaliya Mardan'* (1919). Although based on Hindu mythology, it was used to symbolize and convey a message of nationalism against colonial rule. Through the myth of Hanuman burning Lanka, Phalke created a metaphor and stoked the intense national desire to destroy British colonial rule. In *'Kaliya Mardan'*, uses allegory to portray two mythological figures: Krishna as the leader of the nationalist movement and the Kalia serpent as the tyrannical colonial rulers.

Important films from this period can be cited that revolve around anti-colonial dictum. In 1920, under the banner of the Kohinoor Film Company, directed by Kanjibhai Rathor, *'Bhakt Vidur'* was produced. The director portrayed Gandhi's character through the metaphor of the epic's mythological figure. The film was first banned by the British government for political reasons. In 1930, *'Warth'*, produced by the Imperial Film Company and directed by Raishankar Chowdhury, was one of the films against British colonial rule. The British

government censored numerous scenes of the film. The rise of nationalism against the colonial rule is a theme in V. Shantaram's *'Jyoti' (1936),* Mehboob Khan's *'Roti' (1942),* Bombay Talkies's production of Gyan Mukherjee's *'Kismet' (1943),* Tamil film *'Thyagi Bhoomi' (1939),* Sorab Modi's *'Sikandar' (1941),* and *'Tufan Mail' (1932)*. From 1930 to 1940, New Theatres, Bombay Talkies, and other leading production companies produced fiction films using themes of anti-colonial rule alongside social reform and social issues. Produced by Bombay Talkies and directed by the German director Franz Osten, the 1936 film

'Achhutkanya' is one of the most celebrated films in the history of the first phase of Indian cinema's sound era. The subject revolves around the love between a Brahmin youth Pratap and the Dalit young woman Kasturi, and its consequences. The film highlights Gandhiji's anti-untouchability movement as its central theme. Similarly, the contemporary Marathi film *'Sant Tukaram'* also centres on the struggle against various superstitions. The two most notable films of this period in the history of Indian cinema are Chetan Anand's *'Neeche Nagar' (1946)* and K. A. Abbas's *'Dharti Ki Lal' (1946)*. In both films, class struggle and socio-economic crisis form the central themes. Besides the nationalist upsurge against colonial British rule, many films revolved around reformist themes against socio-economic conditions, exploitation of workers, or social prejudices such as untouchability as a political and social legacy.

Early Post-Independent Indian Cinema and Nehruvian Thought:

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, envisioned a modern, scientific, secular, rational, and truly democratic state. As a profound scholar influenced by socialist thought, Nehru recognized that the foundation of this newly independent country or nation could be laid through history, art, literature, culture, and intellectual pursuits. 14th August, at midnight on the eve of independence, Nehru announced this dream in his address "A Tryst with Destiny." One might say that Nehru's speech is 'the foundational text of post-colonial Indian identity.'

Lenin had given importance to film as a medium in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union; Nehru too recognized the significance of film in the formation of independent India. From this idea, in April 1948, the government's own film production organization, Films Division, was established. Explaining the role of the Films Division, the government stated: 'the official organ of the Government of India for the production and distribution of information films and newsreels.' Nehru sought to

improve the lives and livelihoods of Indians through the advancement of agriculture, industrialization, and scientific temper in the newly independent India through the Five-Year Plans. Along with socio-economic development, he aimed to preserve the secular Indian state structure composed through a multinational and multilingual fusion. Partition and the refugee problem posed a challenge to the newly independent India. The Partition resulted in a massive migration from East and West Pakistan to mostly Bengal and Punjab, and the refugees suffered from socio-economic devastation as well as psychological trauma. It was a very tough time for newly independent India. Nehru's vision to form a newly independent nation on progressive ideals influenced intellectuals, particularly left-wing filmmakers.

The first phase of post-independence Indian cinema was entirely under the influence of Nehru's ideas (The Nehruvian Tryst). Nehru's articulation of the theme of "post-colonial Indian identity" had enhanced the prospects of a larger legacy of socially conscious and Indian political cinema. Now we can see how Indian cinema evolved under the influence of Nehru's ideas:

EARLY POST-INDEPENDENT
1947-Mid 60s
(The Nehruvian Tryst)

⬇

Principal Theme
'Awakening to Life and Freedom / Construction of an Idealistic Newly Born Democratic Nation'

⬇

1950s: Split of Cinematic Forms

⬇ ⬇

The Dreamers	**The Social Realism/ Realistic**
Raj Kapoor / K.A. Abbas	Nemai Ghosh/ Bimal Roy
Create the socialist Myth of the honest migrant.	Exposing structural decay, Debt and Partition trauma

⬇

The Late 60
Complete Disillusionment
'The NehruvianTryst' has Failed

The most popular genre of this phase, influenced by Nehru's ideas or the Nehruvian Tryst, was the Socialist Myth of the Honest Migrant. Director-actor-producer Raj Kapoor and screenwriter Khaja Ahmed Abbas essentially invent the new narrative structure. It is worth noting that K. A. Abbas was a member of the IPTA and a Marxist, and Raj Kapoor's stance was close to left-wing ideals. The duo of Raj and Abbas established a specific structure for

this genre of films, a product of the socialist thinking of the Nehruvian Tryst. The structure of the narrative is designed into three acts:

ACT I
THE ARRIVAL
Migrant Farmer or labourer enters the city with high ideals and an honest work ethic.

⬇

ACT II
THE CAPITALIST TEMPTATION AND CORRUPTION
Systemic poverty forces a choice. The migrant is seduced by
Bourgeois capitalists into white-collar crime/fraud

⬇

ACT III
SOCIALIST REAWAKENING
The migrant realizes his betrayal of the proletariat. He confesses,
rejects wealth, and returns to honest, collective labour.

In this phase, the three films by the duo of Raj Kapoor and K. A. Abbas are particularly noteworthy: *'Awara' (1951), 'Shree 420' (1955)* and *'Jagte Raho' (1956)*. (Bengali version - *'Ek Din Ratree'*). In all three films the central theme is that, owing to socio-economic upheaval in the villages, honest farmers or labourers migrate to the city in search of life and livelihood. Large cities such as Bombay are portrayed here as symbols of the capitalist system, and the people of these cities are greedy and corrupt. *'Awara'* is making history as a post-independence socio-political film. From the film *'Awara'* Raj Kapoor adopted Charlie Chaplin's "Little Tramp" archetype as the icon of the oppressed proletariat. In *'Shree 420',* this archetype character was globalised by the Raj–Abbas duo, not just in India. Through the song *"Mera joota hai Japani, yeh patloon Englistani, Sar pe lal topi Roosi, phir bhi dil hai Hindustani,"* Raj and Abbas sought to portray an international proletarian character. In Russia, China, and the communist countries of Eastern Europe, *'Awara'* and *'Shree 420'* were not only popular, but Raj Kapoor had become an icon of the Indian proletariat for international audiences. *'Awara', 'Shree 420',* and *'Jagte Raho'* are the true followers of the Nehruvian Tryst and the most successful socio-political films on this phase.

The Nehruvian Tryst-or another memorable film inspired by Nehru's notion of a "post-colonial Indian identity"-is Mehboob Khan's *'Mother India' (1957).* This epic-structured film has created a saga of independent Indian feminine empowerment. The resilience of the marginalized Indian peasant woman, the preservation of an agrarian existence, and her commitment to upholding the newly established state-sponsored ideals have marked *'Mother India'* as a remarkable political film in the history of Indian cinema. The central character *Radha* (played by Nargis) isn't merely a peasant

woman; she is the living embodiment of Mother India and the voice of the national struggle to preserve the 'post-colonial Indian identity' in the post-independence era. *Radha's* constant struggle highlights the struggle to be free from the economic exploitation of feudalism and the colonial structure.

'Awara' and *'Jagte Raho'* represent the urban-centric Marxist strand, whereas *'Mother India'* embodies the institutional, agrarian state-building ideology of India. Bimal Roy's *'Do Bigha Zamin' (1952)* and B. R. Chopra's *'Naya Daur' (1957)* are important socio-political films of the early post-independence era.

New Indian Cinema (Mid 50s to Late 60s): Political and Socio-Economical Context:

Film historian Aruna Vasudev defines the period from the mid-50s to late 60s as the crucial prefatory era of this movement in the evolution of New Indian Cinema. Chronologically, the voyage of New Indian Cinema begins with the release of Satyajit Ray's *'Pather Panchali'* in 1955. Some film scholars, however, have sought to credit Ritwik Ghatak's *'Nagarik (1952).* But since *'Nagarik'* was released later, in terms of history, "Pather Panchali" must be recognized as the first instance of the movement. However, as a film student, personally believe that although the mid-50s are identified as the period of the Indian New Wave (Parallel Cinema) movement, its preparation began almost a decade earlier with the New Theatres-produced film *'Udayar Pathé'*, directed by Bimal Roy in 1944. *'Udayar Pathé'* Perhaps the most significant bridge between pre-war melodrama and post-independence modern humanist and social realist cinema. This film attained a complete revolution in the aesthetics and narrative style of Indian filmmaking long before the formal emergence of parallel cinema or international Neo-Realism. The conflict between idealistic thought and bourgeois hypocrisy is the central theme of the film.

New-Indian cinema, according theoretical terms, is influenced by Italian Neo-Realism, which absorbed the post-war socio-political crisis. In a discussion of the characteristics of Italian Neo-Realism, critic Robert Philip Kolker, has said-

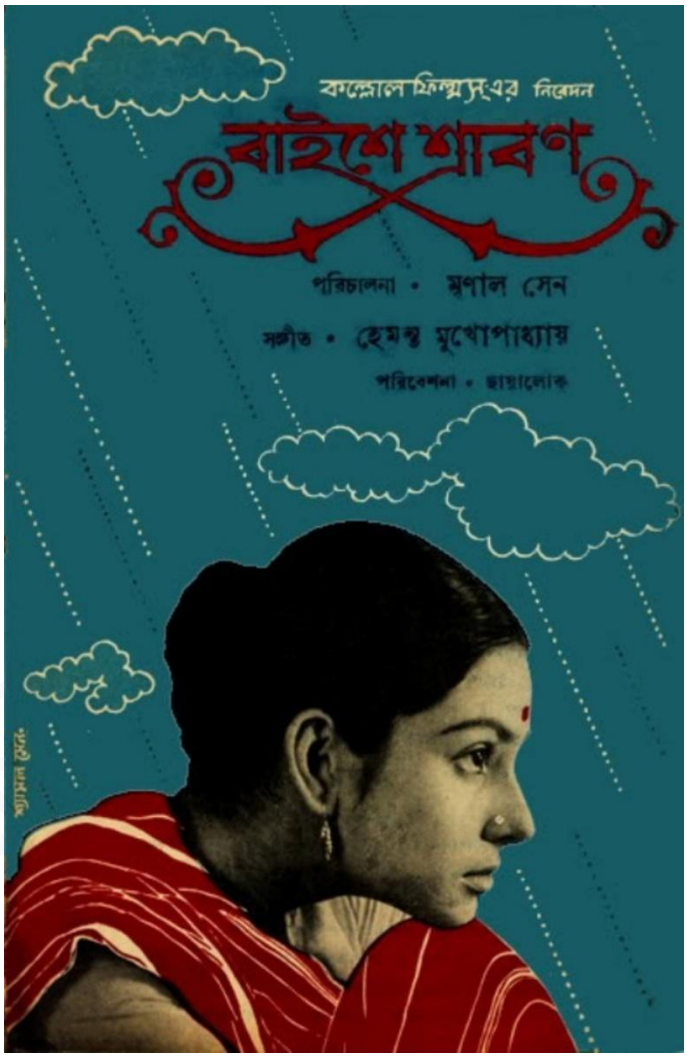
'An essential component of neo-realist endeavours was its concern really for the first time in film to deal objectively with the working class. ----- The fact is that by consciously choosing to concentrate upon socially and economically defined entity, the neo-realists politicized their image and narratives. They replaced the psychological inquiry with depictions of external struggle with the social environment, the government, the economic and political state of post-war Italy.'[2]

In the context of this statement by Kolker, the nature of the influence of Italian Neo-Realism on New-Indian cinema can be

explained. The thematic impact of Italian Neo-Realism first appears in *'Do Bigha Zamin' (1953)* at the preparatory phase of Indian cinema. In the film, protagonist Shambu, a peasant exploited by feudalism, migrates to the city and becomes a rickshaw puller. Through the migration of a peasant displaced by decaying feudal oppression, Bimal Roy, according to the stylistic influence of Italian Neo-Realism, portrays in the film the transformation of the socio-economic structure.

Satyajit Ray adopted Italian Neorealism in terms of form for *'Pather Panchali'*. After meeting with Renoir in 1949, he realized that it would be impossible to make the film *'Pather Panchali'* in the conventional form of either Hollywood or Indian cinema. In London, after watching Vittorio De Sica's *'Bicycle Thieves'*, he was convinced that this Italian neorealist approach was the only way to make *'Pather Panchali'*. It was for this reason that he adopted the form of *'Bicycle Thieves'* as the structural form for Pather Panchali. It's worth noting that around the same time, in first film, *'Breathless'*, Jean-Luc Godard rejects the narrative structure in his views of the Radical Process of cinema. Satyajit, whereas adopting from Italian Neo-Realism, preferred to adopt the narrative form primarily, rather than the socio-economic and political keystone of the movement.

In the early phase of the New Indian Cinema, I would like to cite three films as references in the context of socio-economic or political legacy. Three films are *'Baishe Sravana' (1960)* by Mrinal Sen (war and depicting a war-torn socio-economy), *'Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne' (1969)* by Satyajit Ray (anti-war and protest against starvation), and the Partition trilogy by Ritwik Ghatak. Many films from this era deserve to be mentioned, but due to space constraints, I've only included a few.



'Baishe Sravana' is the story of a newly-wed couple against the backdrop of the 1943 famine. In this film, director Mrinal Sen uses the socio-economic situation, devastated by the famine on one hand and the war on the other, as its setting. Sen illustrates, through stark realism, how the economic devastation wrought by the famine and war is destroying the marital relationship of newlywed couple *Priyanath* and *Malati*. Indeed, the atmosphere of war and famine is even eroding their human sensibilities. Incidentally, it may be said that in terms of realistic portrayal against the backdrop of the 43 famine in *'Ashani*

Sanket', Ray failed to reach the excellence of *'Baishe Sravana'*. Mrinal Sen, on the other hand, made effective use of the socio-economic devastation caused by the famine and war as the film's central theme. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that Mrinal Sen's *'Bhuvan Shome' (1969)* is one of the landmark films of this period, in which he completely explores content and form to create a new artistic language in the New Indian Cinema.

Satyajit Ray's fairy-tale-inspired *'Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne'* is, at this phase, one of the foremost political and anti-war films. Personally, I believe it to be one of the greatest political films in Indian cinema. The film clearly shows how a political system exploits power through war. The state power is keeping people, even soldiers, hungry and exploiting them. Ministers want to seize power and are running the state or the king accordingly. *'Tora judha kare karbi ki ta bol...*' (*"Tell me what you will do in war."*)- This song is a resounding protest against imperialist power. This film's anti-war message, struggle against oppressive state power in power-driven politics, and protest against hunger make it memorable in discussions about the legacy of Indian political cinema.

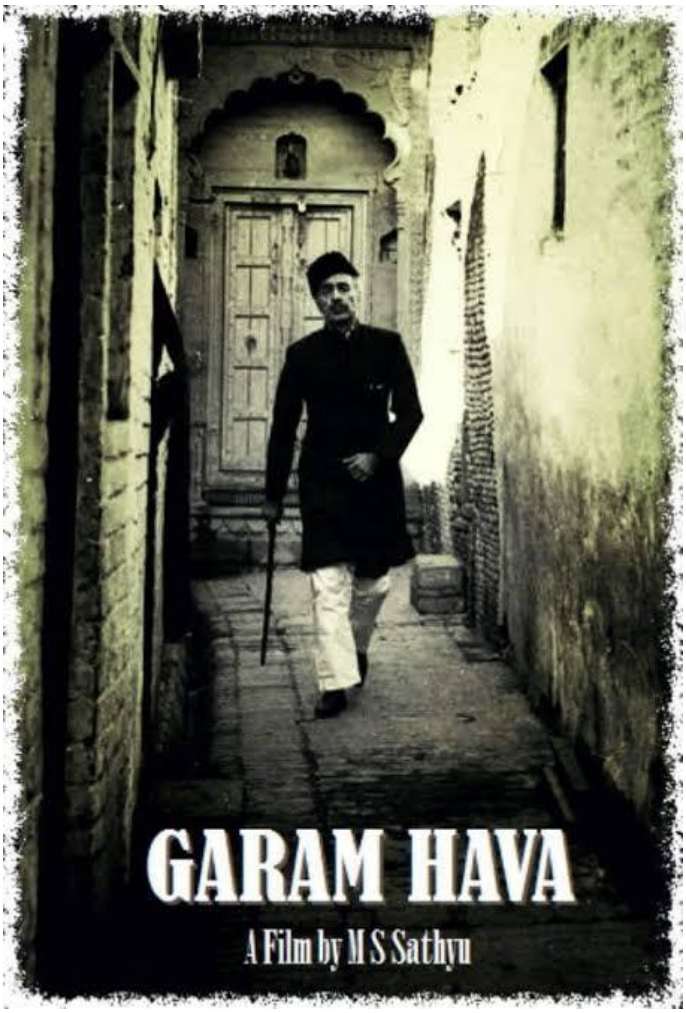
Ritwik Ghatak is an exceptional director of the new Indian cinema. He adopts the tragedy of the Partition as the theme for his cinema. In making films on the theme of the Partition, Ritwik's only reference was Nimai Ghosh's *'Chinnamul' (1950).* According to Ray, Ritwik was the quintessential Bengali in his soul. Ritwik could never come to terms with the Partition. He chose that personal pain for partition as the theme for his films. The three films of the Partition Trilogy are *'Meghe Dhaka Tara' (1960), 'Komal Gandhar' (1961)* and *'Subarnarekha' (1962).* In all three films, Ritwik portrays, in his own unique style, how the Partition shattered the socio-economic fabric of an entire nation and how the trauma of this event devastated their lives. Ritwik, on political grounds, rejected the colonial Radcliffe Line, denouncing the Partition as an artificial, bourgeois transaction that was a conspiracy to sever an organically integrated, agrarian, and riverine culture. In

'Meghe Dhaka Tara,' Ritwik used the character of *Neeta* as a metaphor for the mother force to convey the trauma of Partition; in *'Komal Gandhar,'* against the backdrop of the IPTA dispute, he placed his characters before geopolitically fragmented borders, highlighting a psychological conflict. In *'Subarnarekha'*, Ritwik portrayed the truth that the alienation of *Iswar* (protagonist) from refugee identity is a grave

political omission and that seeking personal bourgeois security at the expense of class solidarity is a heinous crime.

The structure of the Partition Trilogy by Ghatak is as follows:

MEGHE DHAKA TARA (1960)	**KOMAL GANDHAR (1961)**	**SUBARNAREKHA (1962)**
Focus: Economic Trauma The refugee family as an exploitative, economic machine.	Focus: Cultural Fractures The internal divisions within progressive artists' groups mirroring a divided land.	Focus: Cultural Fractures/ Spiritual Disintegration The ultimate descent into alienation, despair, and total spiritual loss



Noteworthy that M.S. Sathyu's *'Garm Hava' (1973)* is a monumental milestone in legacy of Indian political cinema. While the Partition trilogy of Ghatak captured the trauma of the Partition of Bengal, *'Garm Hava'* is the unparalleled cinematic account of Partition's aftermath on the other part of India.

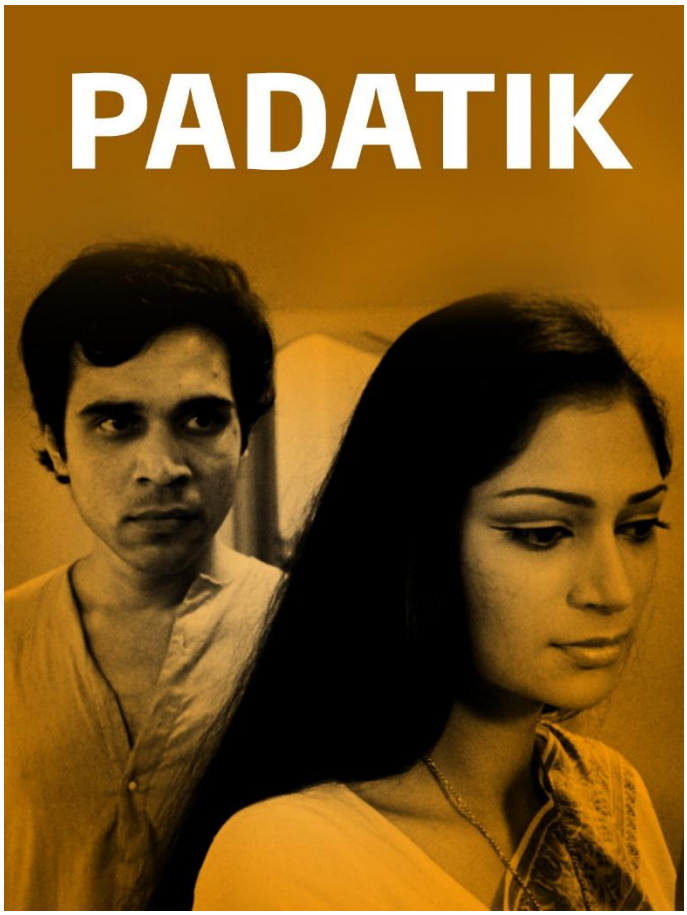
Indian Political Cinema in Context of 70s: Naxalite Movement:

From the mid-60s to the 70s, two decades marked an evolutionary period in the context of the socio-economic, particularly political and social, landscape of the Third World. During this time, Third World countries witnessed aesthetic endeavours to establish the socio-economic and political backdrop as thematic or movement-based motifs in cinema. Film scholar Bill Nichols identifies 'the period of revolutions and the evolution of political cinema'.[3] In the 70s, the socio-economic and political landscape of India endured an eventual shift as a Third World country. It's worth noting that from the mid-60s onwards, the Nehruvian "Tryst" or Nehru's notion of a "Post-colonial Indian identity" began to be exposed as a utopian concept, and resentment against the state arose. The rise of socialism worldwide led to

a significant expansion of leftist movements in India during this period. An ideological split occurred within the Communist Party, leading to the formation of the CPI (M) from the CPI, and in 1969 CPI (ML) was formed with the aim of an armed revolution. The Naxalite movement spread throughout India, including West Bengal. The widely circulated slogan of the time, *"The seventies are the decade of liberation,"* expressed the aspirations among the youth. Analysing the 70s, the renowned Malayalam art critic Professor Janaki Sridhar said that, '...ideal period of political consciousness....'[3] Professor Sridhar's view on the Naxalite movement is that this movement wasn't just a part of Kerala or India; it was an anti-imperialist movement of the entire world. I personally consider Mrinal Sen, maestro of New Indian cinema, a completely political filmmaker. He observed the Naxalite movement closely, and, in his view, the youth, ignoring the brutality of the state and the police, were steadfast in their protest with the aim of changing the state system, which attracted worldwide attention.

From the 70s onwards, the Naxal movement has had a profound impact on Indian cinema, literature, and theatre. V. K. Joseph, a leading figure in the Kerala Film Society movement, stated about the influence of the 70s Naxal movement on the political cinema drive in Kerala: 'Across the world 1960s and 70s were an age of political struggle and liberation struggles. Those winds were blowing in Kerala too; and we are readily welcoming those changes, fresh air, in poetry, theatre, in cinema too.....along the lines of the politics of the 70s, there was a strong desire to have a change in the way we see (vision)'…[4]

Joseph has used the influence of the Naxalite movement in the cultural sphere of Kerala, specifically in the question of the legacy of political cinema, in the sense of "a change in the way we see (vision)." Similarly, Mrinal Sen too didn't wish to describe this movement as an isolated, confused rebellion.



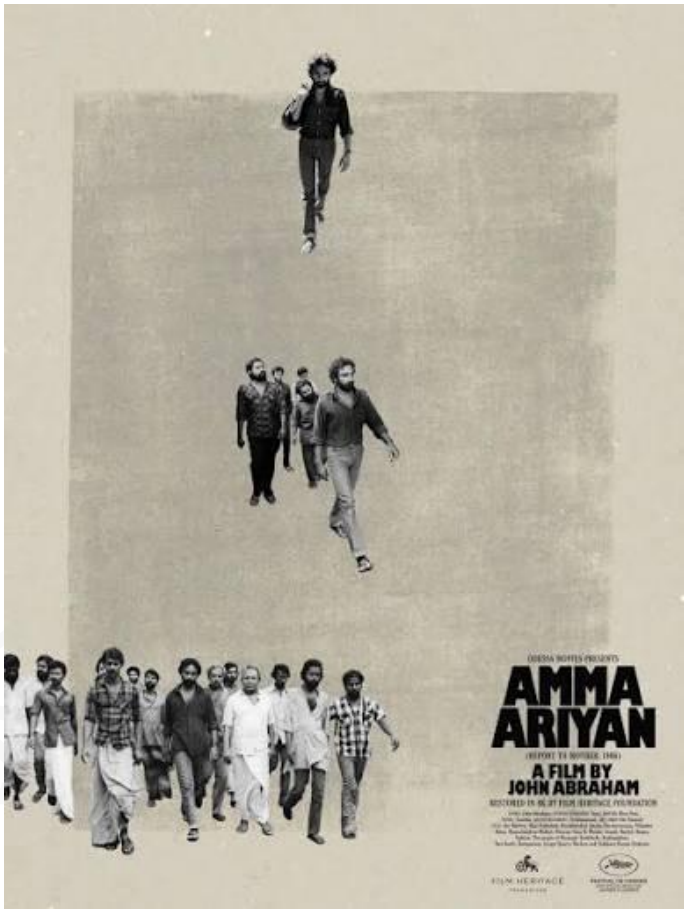
In his film *'Padatik'*, he analyses the Naxal movement with profound insight, views it as a class struggle, and says- '.....that the Naxalite rising against the Indian state was an extension of the independence struggle'[5]

According to Joseph, in the 1970s young independent filmmakers in Malayalam cinema were deeply inspired by the filmmakers of Latin American Third Cinema, such as Miguel Littín, Fernando Solanas and Glauber Rocha. Explaining the political importance of Third Cinema, Fernando

Solanas and Octavio Getino state in their essay 'Towards a Third Cinema':

".....the questions that were recently raised and appeared promising; they arose from a new historical situation---- ten years of the Cuban revolution, the Vietnamese struggle, And the development of a world-wide liberation movement whose moving force is to be found in the Third World Countries. The existence of masses on the world-wide revolutionary plane was the substantial fact---- A new historical situation and a new man is borne in the process of the anti- imperialist struggle demand a new, revolutionary attitude from the filmmakers of the world"[7]

A profound similarity can be found in the context of a revolutionary attitude of cinema between the statement of Solanas and Getino on Third Cinema and "making films politically," or the Radical Process method uttered by Godard. Young independent filmmakers of Kerala such as John Abraham, P. A. Baker, and Rabindran didn't merely adopt the 70s Naxalite movement as a theme for their films; 'a new, revolutionary attitude' created the "Structural Narrative" of their films. John Abraham's *'Amma Ariyan' (1986)* is one of the masterpieces of the post-Naxalite movement's political landscape in Kerala. Deeply influenced by the revolutionary attitude of Third Cinema, Abraham made the film through Radical Process. This film, made in a radical avant-garde style, features a narrative structure, documentary footage, and the use of poetic avant-garde editing. The film was financed through the Odessa Collective, founded by Abraham and his comrades, to produce the film. That is to say, in observance with "making films politically," the method argued by Godard, John Abraham has produced this film through Radical Process without compromising with any capitalist system in its funding, production, distribution, or exhibition. Abraham has repeatedly and deliberately disrupted the



narrative structure of the *'Amma Ariyan'*. The metaphor of motherhood is used brilliantly here. The character of 'mother' in the film on multiple levels. She is the literal mother of *Purushan* and *Hari*, but at the same time, she represents the nation-state, the land of Kerala, and the communist movement. John Abraham shot *'Amma Ariyan'* in intense, high contrast black and white, creating an elegy to the 70s' failed revolutions. *'Amma Ariyan'* is a landmark film produced in India through the Radical Process, and its importance to the legacy of Indian political cinema is immense.

Satyajit Ray stated in a letter to Mary Seton that he didn't believe the Naxalite movement and the youth's anger to be

baseless. Ray adopts this political instability of the 70s as the theme of his 'Calcutta Trilogy'. Before the Trilogy, in 1969's *'Aranyer Din Ratri'*, Ray portrayed the identity crisis of the youth. In *'Aranyer Din Ratri'*, Satyajit craved to reinvent himself as a filmmaker. The conformity of this evolved ideology was the three films of the 'Calcutta Trilogy': *'Pratidwandi' (1970),*

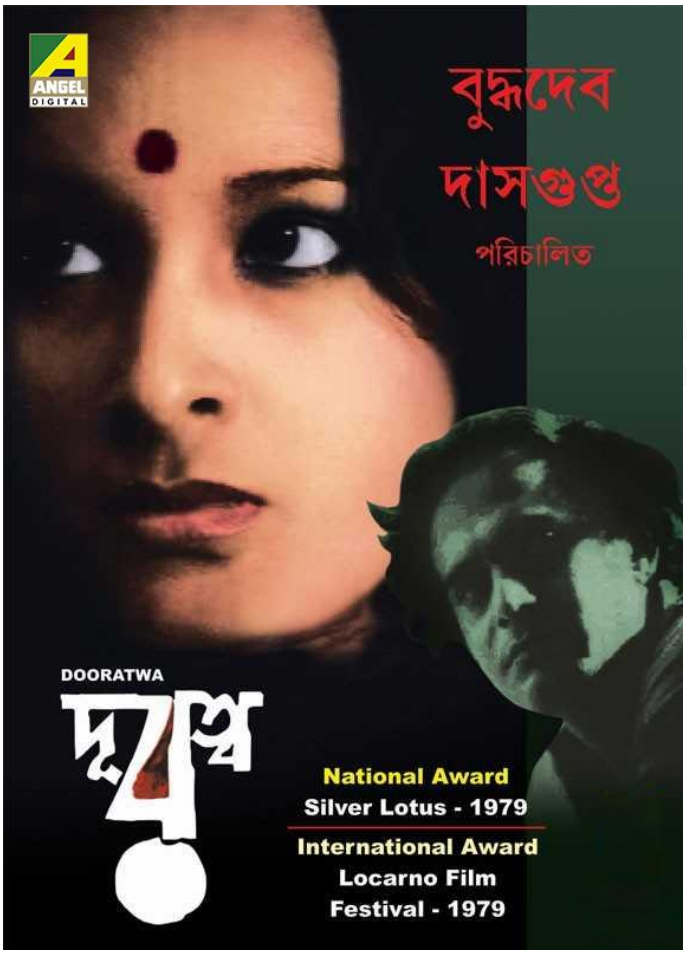
'Seemabaddha' (1971), and *'Jana Aranya' (1975).* On the subject of choice as theme for his 'Calcutta Trilogy', he uttered in the journal "Sight and Sound"— 'There is always something in the story that attracts me. It does not have to be the whole thing, but may be certain crucial things which strike me as being filmic.' [8]

In the 'Calcutta Trilogy', Ray adopts the contemporary Naxal movement as one of the "crucial things." The screenplay of *'Pratidwandi'* revolves around the divergent conflicts set against the backdrop of the 70s Naxal movement. The protagonist, *Siddhartha*, is a young man suffering from an identity crisis of the 70s. He detests tainted capitalism. Yet, unlike his brother *Tunu*, he can't join the Naxalite movement directly to overthrow the system. To sustain herself in decaying capitalism, his sister *Sutapa* is using her own body. In a job interview, Siddhartha chooses the Vietnam War as the most significant recent event, rather than man's landing on the moon. Personally, I feel that this one choice places *'Pratidwandi'* in a memorable term in the discourse on the legacy of political cinema. The film *'Seemabaddha'* shows how the state has succeeded in isolating the middle classes from the Naxalite movement. Raising a new middle class devoid of values, intoxicated by the power struggle of the new corporate world. In *'Jana-Arany',* the state succeeds in suppressing the Naxalites. A horrific genocide was carried out with the state's direct support to annihilate the movement. A perverted education, culture, and society are now controlled by brokers.

Three films of the 'Calcutta Trilogy' by Mrinal Sen are *'Interview' (1971), 'Kolkata 71' (1972),* and *'Padatik' (1973)*-not in any classical method but in the following pure political ideology of Eisenstein or in the radical process of Godard-he used the Naxalite movement as the theme of his film. In *'Interview'*, during the movement-ridden period in the city, the camera follows the protagonist as if capturing a documentary record of the times. *'Padatik'* and *'Kolkata 71'* are made in the style of Third Cinema. *'Kolkata 71'* is one of the remarkable films when it comes to the question of the legacy of Indian political cinema. Regarding the period of *'Kolkata 71',* Mrinal Sen says in an interview- 'I made Calcutta'71 when Calcutta was passing through a terrible time. People were getting killed every day. The most militant faction of the Communist Party-the Naxalites-had rejected all forms of parliamentary politics.....' [9]

Critic Janaki Sridhar has alleged that in most Indian films that are adopted, the Naxalite movement has been treated as "a bit

of a romanticised approach." Because of this "romanticised approach," despite its considerable potential, no political legacy of the revolutionary radical film genre was established in Indian cinema. In this era John Abraham's *'Amma Ariyan'* is one of the exceptional. As argued by Gadar, constrained within the "making political films" genre, these red films have declined into mere politically infused entertainment. Govind Nihalani's *'Hazar Chaurasi Ki Maa'* (1998), Sudhir Mishra's *'Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi'* (2005) and Buddhadeb Dasgupta's *'Dooratwa' (1978)* are prime examples.



Modern Indian Documentary: An alternative Political medium of Indian Cinema:

The golden dreams of independent India began to fade towards the end of the mid-60s. S. Sukhdev, in his documentary *'India '67',* captures the socio-economic evolution of the first twenty years of independence. In 1975, the emergency was declared. Against the Emergency, modern Indian documentary film became an alternative political medium. Filmmaker Anand Patwardhan's role in this is historic. In 1974, *'Wave of Revolution,'* and during the Emergency, he made the documentary *'Prisoners of Conscience' (1978)* about political prisoners held without trial. *'Ram Ke Naam' (In The Name of Gods), 'Father, Son and Holy War', 'War and Peace',* and *'Jai Bhim Comrade'* through his political documentaries, Anand has established Indian documentary filmmaking as an alternative medium against socio-economic and political exploitation and discrimination.

In recent times, Sanjay Kak has emerged as a notable political documentary filmmaker. Sanjay himself has said that Anand Patwardhan's direct influence is evident in this field. Sanjay's first notable documentary was *'Punjab: Doosra Adhay' (1986)* was made against the backdrop of the Khalistan movement. In defining himself as a filmmaker, Sanjay Kak explicitly states, 'I do see myself as a political filmmaker, and if that is where you locate yourself then the struggle is always to find a language in film that is appropriate to one's politics'. *'One Weapon',(1997),* is his most celebrated political documentary. In *'Jashn-e-Azadi',* the director seeks to answer how meaningful independence-or "azadi"—is in the so-called terror-stricken Kashmir. *'Red Ant Dream' (2013)* is Sanjay's celebrated documentary. This documentary is based on India's revolutionary Maoist movement.

Ashwin Kumar is one of the leading figures of a new generation of Indian

independent documentaries. *'Little Terrorist'*, a 15-minute film made in 2004, is one of Ashwin Kumar's most talked-about works as filmmaker. It tells the story of a ten-year-old Pakistani boy named Jamal who crosses into Indian Territory to retrieve a ball while playing cricket. *'Inshallah Kashmir'*, made in 2012, is another of Ashwin Kumar's significant documentary.

Radical Nationalism:

From the early 90s, the Indian political and socio-economic landscape underwent rapid change. In Indian politics, the far-right strengthened their position under the banner of Hindutva nationalism. The current state power is seeking to politicize Indian cinema. They are attempting to promote Hindutva under the guise of nationalism through film. Films such as *'The Kashmir Files', 'Uri* and *'The Kerala Story'* are increasingly becoming popular with Indian audiences as propaganda films of this kind. The evolution of the political legacy of Indian cinema is a remarkable voyage-it has served as a medium for a variety of ideologies throughout history and across decades.

Acknowledgements:-

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Dr. Tamal Dasgupta is a filmmaker and film scholar.