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The Phalke Era: Conflict of Traditional Form and Modern Technology

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> However, I had decided to establish this [film] industry in India.
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> Fortunately, I was successful where several others failed. So I decided to establish it on a permanent footing to provide employment to hundreds of worker-artists like me. I was determined to do my duty even at the cost of my life, i.e., to defend this industry even in the absence of any financial support, with the firm conviction that the Indian people would get an occasion to see Indian images on the screen and people abroad would get a true picture of India.
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> Mountains, rivers, oceans, houses, human beings, animals, birds, everything on the screen is real. The miracle of the visual appearance of objects is sometimes caused by the play of light and shadow. This is the magic of the film maker.[1]

With Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), Indian cinema took off in several directions—art form, medium of communication—possessing a reach never before possible and only occasionally envisaged by purveyors of the popular. Film actually brought to the fore tendencies simmering in painting, music and theatre, and so exposed new cultural and political frontiers for a variety of movements already in tussle with each other.

Phalke's own history,[2] pre-cinema, makes fascinating reading and serves as a backdrop to film itself. Born in April 1860, he spent most of his early life dabbling in several media, all of which were then undergoing fundamental technological changes. At the age of fifteen he joined the J. J. School of Art, which taught (and still teaches), according to the principle of British academic art, naturalist landscape painting and portraiture. Moving to Kalabhavan, Baroda, he did a five-year course in drawing and painting, becoming quite proficient in nature-

study and still-life, both in oils and in watercolour. He bought his first still-camera there in 1890. Impressing his Principal with the results he obtained from it, he was sent to Ratlam where, under the tutelage of one Baburao Walvalkar, he learnt the process of three-colour blockmaking, photolitho transfers, ceramics and, of course, techniques of dark-room printing.

For the next sixteen years Phalke attempted a variety of different professions: in Baroda he was a painter of dramatic props (and, it is said, won a competition in Ahmedabad for a set design), in Godhra a photographer, then in Pune a draughtsman and photographer at an archaeology department of the Government. In 1901 he met a German magician and, becoming his disciple, gained considerable skill in several illusionist tricks and an abiding interest in the subject.

He next went to Lonavala where, in 1894, Raja Ravi Varma had started his famed lithography press to mass-print pictures of popular gods and goddesses at the request of one of his patrons, Sir Madhava Rao, Regent and Dewan of Baroda, who urged him to have his works oleographed to meet the enormous demand. One of Phalke's first assignments was to do photolitho transfers for the Ravi Varma Press, which later led him to establish his own Phalke's Engraving and Printing Works, where he pioneered three-colour printing.

In 1909, finding a new partner to run the press, he went to Germany to acquaint himself with recent three-colour technologies. Returning and updating his equipment, his press (now called the Laxmi Art Printing Works) rose to renown as one of the foremost in the country. It was one of only three that did colour printing at all. However, he soon fell out with his partner and resigned.

It was at this depressing point in his life that he saw the film *The Life of Christ*. 'I was gripped by a strange spell,' he wrote years later.[3] 'Could this really happen?' He saw every film he could and read everything available on the subject of film-making. Following a correspondence with the editor of the weekly *Bioscope* in London, he went to England. There, assisted by an apparently incredulous manager of the Hepworth Company, he bought a Williamson camera, a perforator and some Kodak film. On his return, depending heavily on loans and on money raised by pawning his wife's jewellery, he

shot *Raja Harishchandra* in six months. The film, released first in the Coronation Cinema at Bombay, ran for 23 days and the Phalke Film Company was a studio in business.

Even as he worked, Phalke was aware that he was making some kind of history. This was in part an awareness that 'the art of cinematography is the next stage of photographic art',[4] and in more precise political terms: 'While the life of Christ was rolling fast before my eyes I was mentally visualising the Gods, Shri Krishna, Shri Ramchandra, their Gokul and Ayodhya.... Could we, the sons of India, ever be able to see Indian images on the screen?'[5] He felt the need to set up an Indian industry, in line with the nationalist call for *swadeshi*: 'Many industries could languish and die in the villages and towns of India without anybody noticing, but if my Indian film enterprise had died like this, it would have been a permanent disgrace to the *swadeshi* movement in the eyes of people in London.'[6] He wanted to prove to all (i.e., the English) that an Indian working under primitive conditions could make films too: 'These films whose single copy could bring in incomes worthy of a millionaire were produced in only eight months and that also with hand-driven machines, without a proper studio and with technicians who were so new and inexperienced that they were ignorant of even the spelling of the word cinema. It was... surprising that the films made by such technicians were appreciated by people who worked in highly equipped studios. What greater tribute could I expect...?'[7]

SKILL, TECHNOLOGY—INTRODUCING THE MODERN

The consequences of large-scale import of technology into India throughout the nineteenth century, which brought in the materials Phalke worked with before and in film, have long been debated. The alignments that had taken place historically between traditional skill and technology—that is between cultural and economic practices—had thrown up, among other things, a history of perceiving skill itself (in the sense in which new production modes had consistently interpreted for themselves the 'usefulness' of available skills). Already, in the seventeenth century, a disjunction had become apparent. Irfan Habib writes: 'The development of tools

seemed to be in inverse ratio to the skill of the artisans, for in spite of indifferent tools they yet managed to produce works of the highest quality.' He points out that although there was substantial commodity production, and the urban artisan did play to some extent the role of entrepreneur, in fact he was actually converted to an economic wage-labourer. As India in the seventeenth century began visibly falling behind Europe in its level of industrial development, there became evident an extreme skill specialization which cut across caste barriers, but which also reduced artisans to becoming contract workers for *karkhanas* manufacturing mostly luxury goods for the nobility.[8] From the mid-eighteenth century, as cotton manufactures from India were exported to England, the condition of the Indian artisan and the handicraft industry became central to the Industrial Revolution. As India was reindustrialized—in Industrial Revolution terms—mechanization replaced and destroyed what was left of village industries, forcing skilled workers to either find a living in an already overburdened agricultural sector, or migrate to cities to use their skills in factories and workshops. 'This was a major landmark in world history,' writes Eric Hobsbawm, 'for since the dawn of time Europe had always imported more from the east than she sold there. The cotton shirting of the Industrial Revolution for the first time reversed this relationship.'[9]

What it also did was to institutionalize the machine. The machines of the cotton industry that initiated the Industrial Revolution had been designed, among other things, to duplicate the fine weaving of Indian calicos, i.e., to duplicate and then abstract traditional craftsmanship. This acknowledgement of craftsmanship necessarily distinguished its skill from its aesthetic context and now when efforts were made in art practice as in scholarship to articulate the aesthetic and thus contend with the change, mechanized technology became *the* abstract reality for and against which arguments were formulated.

Sir Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy's establishment of art and craft workshops in the 1850s, which later grew to form the J. J. School of Art in 1857, is a major instance. Jeejeebhoy and colleagues like Jagannath Shankarshet, Framjee Cawas and Mohammed Ibrahim Magba were at the forefront of nascent

Indian capitalism: Jeejeebhoy himself owned a large shipping concern and traded—largely in crafts from western India—with several countries, and crucially China, from where he imported silks. He was evidently aware of the threat that modern technology posed to such craft, and therefore sought to establish workshops in which 'basic' technology for utilitarian purposes was provided, skilled craftsmen employed, and their products successfully marketed in the face of competition from British machine manufacturers. Less nationalistically articulated, the Calcutta School of Industrial Art was established in 1854, mainly to train skilled Indian craftsmen in the languages of several new technologies, crucial among them methods of printing, etching, woodcut and print blockmaking. In 1912, E. B. Havell, Principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, leading a frontal attack on the gaining supremacy of mechanization, said, 'Every handloom worker who is driven into a powerloom factory is a lowering of India's industrial efficiency and a depreciation of her artistic, intellectual and moral standard. For though I have said that in the lowest grades of weaving it is possible that hand-labour will eventually be superseded by automatic machinery, it by no means follows that weaving, even in these lowest grades, will wholly cease to be a domestic or cottage industry. In India the official theory is that all Indian industry . . . must be centralized—which means that millions of skilled hand-weavers (who are some of the most skilful artisans in the world) . . . must be concentrated in the great Anglo-Indian industrial cities and delivered, body and soul, into the hands of Indian and European capitalists.'[10] Even as the polemic grew, the reality of the machine led to the increasing unreality of what precisely it was that it replaced. William Morris, who founded the Arts and Crafts Society in England to revive the decorative arts in the face of mass-mechanization, said in 1888: 'You see, I have got to understand thoroughly the manner of work under which the art of the middle ages was done, and that this was the *only* manner of work which can turn out popular art, only to discover that it is impossible to work in that manner in this profit-grinding society.'[11] Some of this was to later develop in India into influencing aesthetic oppositions to modern technology; it would also mark debates on realism, modernism,

and on materialism itself.[13] There is a strong tendency in these writers to directly extend the undoubtedly sharp economic break caused by the import of capitalist technology into a perception of an equally sharp cultural break. This has had at least one unfortunate consequence—that of defining 'pre-capitalist' society almost solely in terms of, and in opposition to, capitalism. No wonder, therefore, that it shortly succumbed to defining the 'pre-capitalist' in entirely idealist 'homogeneous' terms. The impact on the Bengal School of the Leavisite *Scrutiny* group in England, coming at the tail end of a long encounter with Carlyle, Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites and Morris, cemented this idealism. And the Bengal School has massively influenced, through its several strands of nationalist culture, most official positions on Indian culture today.

We would need to re-locate certain oppositions as we now return to the nineteenth century and search for cultural precedents to the 'film age'. I want to propose certain theoretical tools that might in themselves be polemical, especially in the context of the period under discussion.

Firstly, I suggest that there were crucial dissonances between the economic and cultural impacts of mechanization, which led to important linguistic contradictions. The way technology was perceived determined the kinds of meanings invested in it, and the way it was used. Vital interfaces of traditional practices and modern economic genres, and the way modern genres privileged *some* practices over others, influenced the very terms under which technology was sought to be integrated into processes of cultural and therefore economic manufacture.

The extent of dissonance varied, of course, depending greatly on the strength with which traditional practices could contend with a changing economic base. It was often an expression of contradictory desire: feudal patronage giving way to new forms of urban custom had inevitably resulted in the translation—either privileging or extinction—of artisanal skills to fit new production modes. I am emphasizing the reverse of the desire to translate technology itself in its significances to compensate for the meanings lost. (Recall, as an aside, Ritwik Ghatak's *Ajantrik* that situates itself precisely in this divide.)

As I proceed I notice a *history* to perception. The way technology was perceived at different times, if constituted into a history, should reveal a dynamic counterpoint to our perceptions *today* of the history of changing modes and relations of production. This entire area is lost to a historian such as Bipan Chandra, for whom the purely economic overseeing of production relations dominates and explains away all the prevailing material conflicts in this period. (Consequently he has great problems speaking of, for instance, artisanal practice, believing that its strength lay solely in the volume of its output.)[13]

Such an approach should reveal the way the changes that occurred were interpreted at the time they did: which helps us further understand some of the choices made in various forms, from the art of the streets and the marketplace to the art of the nobility (e.g., oil painting). It would open out the evolving of the modern 'traditional', seen from both sides—of interpreting the modern experience in 'traditional' terms, and of the traditional forms themselves in terms of modern genres. I do not believe that this history of perception included a political consciousness, and certainly not a subversive consciousness. In saying so I oppose the 'subaltern' position on the theme.[14] Firstly, I believe I am establishing this history today, emphatically in retrospective terms. Secondly, I am doing so mainly to show a plurality of productions, which used capitalist modes in varying degrees, revealing a plurality of interpretations. Several of these were, for brief periods, in tussle with each other, resulting in survival and change for some and the dying out of others. Thirdly, the manner in which these forms were sought to be interpreted politically includes some of the tussles and contradictions and it is thus part of our perceptive history. I do not believe that there was any one anti-colonial or anti-capitalist response. If we do see, in some forms, any such political response, it is in our terms, in the way this history has informed some debates today, or in the way subsequent art or critical practice of a more self-conscious nature has signified the preceding history.

Most valuable, perhaps, would be the way this dissonance permits us to overcome an imbalance that is today practically institutionalized around us: of exploring that which is 'ours' only through opposing it to what is ironically more real to our

condition. We oppose 'Western capitalism' with Eastern sensibility; the 'laws of perspective' with the great absence of it, the burdensome economic contemporary with 'tradition', privileged simply by having preceded it. I think the question of 'ours' will be best resolved if we return the question itself to history, to see the successive changes that occurred and how they were interpreted to serve different conditions, different aspirations.

PERCEPTION: NARRATIVE

Towards the beginning of his *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* Kosambi takes us for a walk around his house, to show us certain red-daubed stones.[15] Primitive cult objects, these iconic motifs were central in defining several rituals which Kosambi shows us to be expressions of tribal production modes. From rituals that ensure a good hunt to those propitiating the god of fire, which reveal the birth of the iron age, and then to agrarian production that also saw the rise of patriarchal institutions, Kosambi shows how the *articulation* and *sequencing* of the central motif into narrative patterns and practices was really the means by which changing production modes and relations were sought to be formalized. He shows us how these practices have provided cultural resistance in the face of economic submission: e.g., the rise of vernacular literature at the time when Indian trade was losing out to Arabic seafarers in the ninth and tenth centuries. He also shows us how certain forms have atrophied in their modes of production because they were not permitted to innovate, to represent their reality with other than archaic means.

The argument should be worth extending to the history of Indian art. All Indian art traditionally places an iconic articulation as central to it; this is elaborated into a series of elliptical, narrational encounters.[16] As we are drawn into the discourse of universal configuration, we repeatedly encounter the icon; even as we find our place in the world our seeing, mediated by several social exchanges, converges into the discourse contained by the iconic presence. Now, almost inevitably the iconic presence is placed frontally before us; our encounter with it is what sets off the discourse. In most classical

sculptural forms, as in Mahabalipuram or Elephanta, for example, the cosmic discourse is actually condensed into the presence; elsewhere, in the more explicitly narrative forms, the elaborations are more tangible, expressed through rhythm or through story-telling. (Islamic art does not use the iconic presence, but similar principles nevertheless do apply; it can be argued, for instance, that the icon is either *absent* in a straightforward inversion of its presence, as in Akbari paintings that use the absence of the king; or is replaced by a geometric presence that performs similar elaborations.)

The point to be emphasized is the *series of perceptive shifts* that occur, that are set up in our encounter. It is these shifts, when elaborated, that then set up a narrative. This narrative is not defined by any coherent beginning and end; it is defined mainly through a series of convergences, points of rest interspersed with explications of the discourse.

Indian artists therefore faced massive formal, really *ethical*, problems when in the nineteenth century they encountered European technologies that emphasized the Renaissance still-frame. The still-camera arrived in India barely a few months after Louis Daguerre unveiled his invention to the French in 1839. By then there was already a thriving printing industry, mainly in the east (Calcutta and Patna), that employed artisans from a variety of castes to make woodcuts and etchings. Several artists migrated from the courts of Lucknow, Murshidabad and Patna to the new urban centres, and began making 'bazaar' paintings that they sold in the marketplaces. Also, the presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, which housed several British painters, had given birth to a 'Company School' of painting: i.e., painting done by the Indians for a British clientele. By 1870 the famed Kalighat painters of Calcutta had to seriously contend with the oleograph, the photograph, the woodcut print and the news-sheet to make their work economically viable.

The ethical crisis was: how to 'enter' the Renaissance frame, how to directly apprehend the real. This was compounded by the work of British painters in India who had given a specific edge to the technique of painting the 'frozen moment'. These painters usually painted scenes from the Indian countryside, famous monuments, events of political importance, and por-

traits of the Indian nobility and of British officers. Artists such as Colonel Barton,[17] Captain R. Elliot,[18] and later men like Tilly Kettle and John Zoffany, 'froze' a moment from what was defined as a centuries-old, unchanging landscape; this landscape was either itself presented as backdrop or substituted by the native presence. This was always a receding presence, without history, 'Asiatic'. The landscape receded into its perenniality, the natives into their functions of ploughing, fishing or simply standing stiffly to attention. The moment painted was not one of a series of transient moments preceding and following it. It offered itself up from timelessness, and was in turn granted a privileged value against the backdrop. The British saw themselves as introducing history into a land that they thought knew none. The Indian nobility wished to see themselves portrayed with the same conventions of grandeur that the Victorian aristocracy used, and they often hired British painters to work in their courts.[19]

As this value, in political terms, accrued to the painted moment, there was a shift in the meaning of several conventions of British 'academic' art. In the way the Indians used them, several meanings were simply drained out—symmetry, for example, lost most of its associations with perspective by becoming a purely decorative *sign*. Depth, likewise, was flattened out, and middle distances were replaced with flat planes of inaction that duplicated the surface of the painting within its frame. Oil paintings were the crucial repository of political value; they showed the Indian nobility and higher bureaucracy in portraits, in their courts or in battle. And here the centrality of the painted figure/object became increasingly stiff: viewer and painting were trapped in a frontal encounter that permitted no moulding. The stiffness *eliminated the temporal*, the dimension of change. Later, a specific use of still-photography was to endorse and enhance this equation of powers, for in the portraits the flat planes actually resisted potentially disruptive perspective forcelines (e.g., Lal Deen Dayal's work). The absence of a conventional 'point of entry' for the eye permitted the court photographers to efface themselves before the twin powers of technology and subject.

It should be noted in comparison that in numerous pictorial forms which signpost the transition from the folk to the popular (e.g., the Garoda scrolls of Gujarat, Chitrakathi in Maharashtra), it is actually the process of bringing the flat image to life that provides the laws of narrative explication. The meanings are unravelled, sometimes through the intervention of a *shaman*, sometimes through the specific directorial laws of entries and exits.[20] The narrative elaborates the meanings by making the *elaborations* apparent: it extends to the spectators' response the laws by which the narrative itself functions and thus constantly provides an *ethical directionality* to the two-dimensional frontal address of the flat image.

Given this exchange between the iconic and the narrative, the popular art of the urban marketplace during the nineteenth century, even as it succumbed to mass production, employed the very fact to actually *bypass* the problem of the single still-frame. Kalighat painting is the classic example. Each work becomes only one in a continuing chain of production, all of which explores certain distinct themes in work after work. It is as though narrative elaboration, of the sort that the *pat* scrolls employ, is fragmented into stills and transferred into prodigious mass-output.

We thus see the development of a modern genre. It develops through choices of technology determined by economic necessity, which is the standard basis for genre-formulation. As regards Kalighat *pats* W. G. Archer writes: 'In place of tempera, the British medium of watercolour was adopted as more suited to flowing brush strokes. The use of a blank background, as in British natural history paintings, economized time. Folio-sized sheets . . . were convenient for a popular market. Shadings, as used by the British, emphasized volume.'[21] In addition there is the universe opened up by the modern—the railway, the big city, the fashions, buildings, food and clothes of the upper-class men and women, the scandals surrounding them—these were all very much part of the new lexicon.

There were, moreover, interesting combinations of the single original work and of mass production. Almost always, technologies that in themselves emphasized the two-dimensional flat surface—woodcut, oleographs, lithographs—were preferred, and even in forms where depth was possible, such as watercolour painting and still-photography, it was either done

away with or reworked into a *trompe-l'oeil* effect. While each mass-product work would be in some way inscribed and rendered uniquely meaningful (as when the Calcutta woodcut printmakers could elaborate their surface narration into the next print, and would paint each print, even though an exact duplicate of the previous, separately with watercolour) the economics of buying and selling prints would also work the other way around. Raja Ravi Varma's oleographs jettisoned most of his earlier oil painting concerns and his forms turned increasingly abbreviated, finding their energies in the marketplace and in the numerous homes they adorned and in which they became objects for display and prayer.

Further, as modern technology began getting woven into the explication, it was itself invested with several magical inscriptions—in the way it *realized* its subject matter into a new tangibility. Phalke was to equate the real, the realism of celluloid capturing 'mountains, rivers, oceans, human beings, houses . . .', with the magical in the way it brought to life what it represented.

INSCRIPTION: PRODUCTION

Evidently this pictorial process was, in economic terms, one of negotiating earlier forms into a new viability. The late decades of the nineteenth century had seen the growth of heavy industry in India, the vast expansion of urban trade. There was also the growth of an urban-educated middle class, and a social reform movement that fundamentally debated the meanings of traditional and modern. As new genres of popular art came to be established, they did so through specific demands made upon them; demands that involved a reworking of identities to fit new conditions. The question of what modern technology *meant*, the cultural inscriptions it possessed or was provided with, was one part of the economic conflict. The cultural directions that modern production-forms were struggling towards also reflected several conflicting political aspirations.

Still-photography offers one instance. We have seen its use by the Indian nobility who sought to interpret the photographic power of replication in their own terms. Another use, which connects with this but which interpreted technology very differently, was that where its reproductive faculties were used to inscribe apparently individuated symbologies. At Nathdwara, a school of popular painting had flourished for several centuries that depicted a characteristic frontal view of Srinathji with priests and devotees on both sides. Around the turn of the century this was extended into the Manoratha where, for an extra fee, devotees could have their pictures taken and *stuck* on the painting of the icon. These photographs would usually be taken in profile and stuck on both sides of Srinathji, i.e., in the positions where devotees were usually painted in the traditional mode. Here the mechanical-reproductive faculty took on a divine aspect, and the ritual of sticking it on (not permitted except by those authorized by the priests) not only acknowledged the fact of the devotee's presence but denoted his deliverance.

In similar uses elsewhere the inscription also meant a social certification that the person photographed existed and was now perhaps being immortalized. Portraitists used the photographic print to get a good facial likeness and also as a homage: a demonstration that the process initiated was more than one merely consigned to mortal capacity. For they would then elaborate this homage as they painted upon the print in watercolour. They would create flat decorative planes receding to underline the property 'owned' by the subject—a common technique was to open a window at the back overlooking gardens, fountains and terraces which we assume belong to the subject, and to fill in *objets d'art*.

It is arguable that this association of the act of photographic duplication with immortality was a straightforward inversion of a belief, possibly of tribal origin but commonly found even today, in the *malevolent* powers of such technologies that 'abstract' life. Phalke himself faced such a problem when, in 1895, he started a photographic business in Godhra. It failed rapidly because people believed that the 'lens snatched away the life of the person photographed'.[22] The aura of the print was evidently generated in both the fears and desires implicit in the life-awakening of the still motif.[23]

The new economic genres that emerged, like all genres, had to do several things at once. They had to articulate a new

social order, traditions most equipped to handle its demands and, simultaneously, systematize the economic process of meaning production. The sign of the new—industrial technology—had to become the signifier for something else: the generation of a set of values that constitute *an audience*.

As the social order sought to formulate itself, it sought to negotiate its iconic forms and ritual articulations into generic formulation. New gods and goddesses were the expression of new desires and coherences. Ganapati and Kali in all their versions, the two most popular gods in India today, have interesting histories for our argument. Ganapati, according to Debiprasad Chattopadhyay,[34] was originally rooted in the *gana*—primitive tribal collectives—and meant the god of catastrophes. However, in an abrupt shift 'this troublemaker with his bloodsmeared tusk was declared to be a god of success . . . the god of wisdom and learning.' Chattopadhyay reads this as a forcible suppression of tribal forms by an emerging brahmanical class, a crucial consequence of which was the end of matriarchy and the taking over of agricultural production to establish the modern state.[35] The festival of Ganesh Chaturthi emerged in its contemporary form in the days of the later Peshwas of Maharashtra. It ended the period of militance represented by goddesses such as Bhavani (worshipped by Shivaji), to introduce the era of trade and mercantile values. It was also a modern form that suppressed more radical popular articulations, such as Sant Tukaram's Vithoba.

Likewise Kali, associated with fertility, the 'magical belief that productivity of nature is ensured or enhanced by the imitation of . . . female productivity',[36] took on distinctly militant forms with anti-British rebellions. N. N. Bhattacharya writes:

> It is interesting to note that the cult of the goddess Kali was practically unknown before the eighteenth century, a period when a great change was taking place in the social and political life of Bengal. The Kali cult in its present form owes its inspiration to Krishnananda Agamavagisa, the celebrated writer of the *Tantrasara*, and it was popularized by Maharaja Krishnachandra of Nadia before whose eyes the establishment of the East India Company took place. Many of the local rebellions that took place after the establishment of Company rule—e.g., the Sanyasi rebellion, the Chuar rebellion and so on—were inspired in the name of Kali.[37]

As these gods rose to popularity, the frontal 'address' mobilized people physically—with the great Chaturthi and Puja processions—as much as economically. This was to actually influence every form of political address. Raja Rammohun Roy's translations of the Upanishads in 1816 sought explicitly to overcome the practice of idolatry and primitive superstition. The Brahmo Samaj, started by Roy, built its social reformism precisely around debates on how to discourse the modern—which platforms to create, which traditions to resurrect and which to oppose. These debates, running concurrently with the development of new genres, had to pose questions of how to articulate them politically: e.g., Keshub Chandra Sen's replacement of idol worship, and the religious rites revived by Debendranath Tagore, with a variety of explicitly secular influences drawn as much from Christianity as from the Upanishads; and Mahadev Govind Ranade's return to Sant Tukaram while simultaneously opposing idol worship.

The shift from pluralist reformism to a specifically nationalist programme is marked by the political demands made on popular genres. On the one hand there was the coherent effort to interpret them into ideological consciousness. Represented above all by the Bengali novel, its most famous instance is Bankimchandra's *Anandamath*, which used the presence of the goddess Kali as the nation-mother to address a militant struggle. On the other hand, however, there was the effort to make political use of generic audience-production. Militant leaders like Aurobindo Ghosh, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bepin Chandra Pal *revived* certain rituals because of their ability to cohere the masses. Ganapati Puja was revived by Tilak, to be used 'as of old . . . as a vehicle of the quickening of national life and ambition in the Hindu populace of the Deccan', in the approving words of Pal.[38] Pal himself was to find 'in a reinterpreted Hinduism a religion of nationalism, and in goddess Kali a deified expression of this nationalism.'[39]

In both cases it was exactly the inscription of the modern upon the popular that now received ideological thrust. The genres of art began getting identified through *Indian* subject-matter, and were later to mark crucial symbols of *swadeshi*, complementing the claims of *Indian* capital and *Indian* industry. Some forms of production were privileged over others; so, for

instance, Dayanand Saraswati could propagate a 'Sanskritic' culture emanating from this Indianness and yet use highly contemporary forms of dissemination, like modern processions and quasi-religious political meetings. The shift (as the apparent content receded into mere subject-matter, and as the productive dimension came to mean a formless conveyor of messages) acknowledged capitalist relations of production. Several popular genres—e.g., in painting, theatre and music—simply died out for want of economic backing, while others, for instance those propagated by Rabindranath Tagore in his poetry, music and painting, only survived through an increasing political awareness of the need to sustain them.

The Ravi Varma Instance

The painter Raja Ravi Varma was in many ways the direct cultural predecessor to Phalke, greatly influencing his themes, his images, and his views on culture. Varma has posed a consistently vexing problem to Indian art in this century: while he is completely susceptible to attacks of aesthetic incompetence, yet his impact on what we can today call *industrial* art remains massive. From calendars to posters, to the design and packaging of small-scale indigenous consumer products, to street-corner art including cheap film posters, we see this impact.

Varma actively chose the genres in which he worked. He chose a variety of them, on each occasion fitting them, *configuring* them, into the demands made by his specific patrons. The change in his choice of genre, or of emphasis within the same genre, therefore reflects the change in patronage, from the feudal to the urban marketplace. The very choice of his materials chronicles the shift.

His origins were in the feudal Tanjore school, in the princely status he received through the patronage of King Ayilyam Tirunal at the Trivandrum Palace. The Tanjore School itself marks a transition: aristocratic postures merge with European painting techniques; the ruling houses of old Kerala sought, as much as any other in India, to appropriate for themselves a version of Victorian grandeur, even as the upper-echelon bureaucracy attempted to take over some of the feudal magnificence of the nobility, especially at the Trivandrum palace

itself, where court painters like Alagiri Naidu and Ramaswamy Naicker jealously guarded their reputations and sought royal favour, executing portraits on royal commission, borrowing from and competing with European painters who also worked in the court under similar patronage. Here Varma arrived at the age of eleven, and picked up most of his craft.

His princely origins were to stand him in good stead, helping him with his initial commissions. These were usually for portraits: in Travancore and Baroda, where the families of Bhosle and Gaekwad (former feudal chieftains who rose to power with Shivaji's Maratha empire in the seventeenth century) still held sway. He painted the Duke of Connaught, governor of Madras. Even in this work one can sense the way he adopts conventions to fit the self-image of his patrons. Superficially these portraits are extremely inferior, his figurative distortions of a sort that no 'boudoir painter' of even average calibre would allow. But Varma shifts emphasis: the conventions have value only in the sense in which he appropriates them, uses them to expand on the greatness of the person being painted. He does not even attempt what would be a basic naturalist tenet, of integrating background to foreground. The painted individual occupies the foreground; the light sources, the heavy cloth drapery, the sheer weight of oil paint, even some of the figurative distortions, are all used to shore up the individual and his/her 'position'. His patrons appropriate the boudoir through him, and he renders their appropriation *plausible* to them.

Here I introduce the notion of *value*: in the quantifiable sense, like a commodity. Certain forms developed their own value, partly with the kinds of references they brought, partly in the way they integrated these with established feudal values. Varma was able to give this value to the conventions he employed, make them 'available' to whoever wished to hire him. This disengagement of some conventions from their traditional use, and a relocating of their meaning as a tangible accessory to his patrons' ego, is distinctly more significant than his own personal incapacities as a painter.

This is starkly evident in what Varma did next: he researched and came up with 'Indian types', people from different parts of India distinguished solely by their mode of dress, their posture and ambient backdrop. He sent one such

series to Chicago for an exhibition in 1893, where they were commended for their 'ethnological or documentary value'.[10] The painting *Galaxy of Musicians* (Mysore palace) is remarkable in the way he finds a standpoint from where to view the ten 'Indian' women. As the women come together, they 'represent' their regions and background in 'typical' dress and posture, sitting and standing in a unified space rather like a group photograph.

An exploration of a modern standpoint from where to view and portray things 'typically' or 'tangibly' is, therefore, evident in Varma's work well before he made what he is today best known for: assigned paintings of well-known Indian gods and goddesses, or scenes from the Puranas, within the naturalist mode.

When I see these paintings, like *Shakuntala Patralekhan* or *Sri Rama Vanquishing the Proud Ocean*, I am irresistibly reminded of the way my grandmother would tell me tales from the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* in my childhood: 'So they went to *vanavas*. They had to walk, because there were no trains or post offices then. They slept under trees, no hotels in those days....' There are parallels with this even in the motifs Varma used, the realistic pen in Shakuntala's hand, the rocks, lashing wave or bolt of lightning in *Sri Rama*, 'poor' Harishchandra being parted from his son, and dozens of other such instances. Apparently an effort to render 'the past' in a manner that would make it tangible to the contemporary experience, the paintings in fact construct the contemporary response itself. In defining 'traditional' subject-matter as 'the past', establishing the famed genre of the mythological, Varma aligned several motifs from this redefined subject-matter with others specifically from the contemporary.

The technical consequences are worth examining. The paintings are naturalistic, but do not even begin an internal space and time. Instead the naturalist freeze is used in the way it brings together, in an apparently unified frame, the several dissonant references that *add up* to the painting. Now the paintings, like my grandmother's tale, tell a story, i.e., they possess a narrative element. But this narrative, frozen at a dramatic point in it, converges into providing for us a standpoint from

where to view. The 'moment' is the one from where, now, the narrative resurfaces into the modern, bringing with it all its value-loaded cultural references.

It is no wonder then that this moment, quantifying the 'past' as something from which, and possibly against which, the modern itself could potentially be located, was valued by several contending political forces. The feudal nobility fought to appropriate it. Indian entrepreneurs sought to make it *the* symbol of *swadeshi*. But it appears that the highest bidder was finally the middle-class urban marketplace. Varma elaborated his technology from the frozen moment unambiguously into the mass-produced oleograph, thus finally weighing the direction in which the narrative now moved. He saw his oleographs as the progressive *refining* of the genre of the mythological. The idea of mass production came to him in 1884 when one of his warmest admirers, Dewan Sir Madhava Rao, wrote to him: 'There are many of my friends who are desirous of possessing your works. It would be hardly possible for you ... to meet such a large demand. Send, therefore, a few of your select works to Europe and have them oleographed. You will thereby not only extend your reputation, but will be doing a real service to your country.'[11] While the Ravi Varma Lithographic Press, started in 1894, initially concentrated on duplicating his paintings, he later began making works specifically to be oleographed. In the latter, naturalist intention itself is reduced to a near-cipher: it resembles middle-class desire to 'possess' art, like objects for prayer or commodities valued by tradition. Depth here is replaced by motifs on the surface with abbreviations of value like surface gloss, the illusory *trompe-l'oeil* effect, the addition of gilded sequins to round the contours or pasted along the edge.

This work finally replaced the boudoir with the middle-class living-room showcase, as Varma's own work located the 'traditional' into modes within which it was most comfortable, i.e., in which the genres were at their most productive. From here they were to have their impact on *kajal* boxes, matchbox labels, cheap beauty aids, *bidi* packages, illustrations on the walls of houses, shops and streets, the entire indigenous small-scale consumer industry.

Movement

In film, the image physically moved. While there were cultural precedents to this—many in theatre and the novel, as we shall see—it was nevertheless the first time that industrial technology located within its *own* productive processes the temporal explication of the flat image. This was a major shift. Industrial technology, establishing a new regime of economic operation, appeared to *take over* what had so far been an area of skill. As the moving image was produced through a new chain of production, distribution and exhibition relations, its mobility aspired to the several resonances that had already mediated the image into its cultural and political meanings.

It demanded a series of realignments. For example, shortly after taking the decision to make films, Phalke also decided that he wished to let 'the sons of India . . . see Indian images on the screen'. This meant that the physical mobility of the image now had to find equations with the history of mobilization that the image had already gone through, providing the reasons why Phalke wished to film it at all. This had consequences in the two crucial areas of film distribution and exhibition. Film possessed a scale of distributive reach that no art form could previously have envisaged: this was its most crucial, quantifiable 'value'. On the one hand it was a graphic realization of all that Varma had initiated; on the other, industrial production distribution was setting up new terms of quantification which came from a far more elaborated infrastructure of capitalism than in Varma's instance. The dissonances between skill and technology had sharpened and—despite the transferences of meaning—the tensions within *modern* genres of *traditional* expression had sharpened too.

For Phalke all contradictions were resolved in the way he submerged them into the dominant political movement of the day, Swadeshi. 'My films are *swadeshi* in the sense that the ownership, employees and stories are *swadeshi*', he writes.[21] This was in line with growing nationalist thinking. The origins of Swadeshi lay around 1895, in the agitations that took place against the British system of cotton tariffs that clearly sided with Lancashire. As it grew—it was formally adopted as a programme by the Indian National Congress in 1905—it

sought to boycott all foreign manufacture and stimulate the growth of Indian industry. The stakes in the defining of Indianness were therefore vast. By 1911 there had been a rapid growth of industry, chiefly in cotton, jute, coal and tea, but almost four-fifths of all organized productive capacity was directly controlled by British interests. Swadeshi for a large section of growing Indian entrepreneurship meant transferring of industry to Indian hands, in terms of a definition that all industry which was run or managed by Indians, and whose profits remained in India, was Indian. This had been sharply opposed throughout by Gandhi. In 1919 he warned that 'all imitation of English economics will spell our ruin', and in 1938 wrote:

> What are Indian or *swadeshi* companies? It has become the fashion nowadays to bamboozle the unwary public by adding 'India Limited' to full-blooded British concerns. Lever Brothers (India) Limited have their factories here now. They claim to produce *swadeshi* soaps, and have already ruined several large and small soap factories in Bengal. . . . This is dumping foreign industries instead of goods on us. Then there are companies with Indian directorate but with British managing agents who direct the directorate. Would you call a company with a large percentage of Indian capital and a large number of Indian directors on the board, but with a non-Indian as managing director or a non-Indian managing firm a *swadeshi* concern. . . . An industry, to be Indian, must be demonstrably in the interest of the masses. It must be manned by Indians, both skilled and unskilled. Its capital and machinery should be Indian, and the labour employed should have a living wage and be comfortably housed . . .[22]

For Phalke the question of Indianness was clearly split into two: he was extremely concerned with the struggle to establish a film industry, and nurture it into self-sufficiency. But on the other hand he was also preoccupied with the depiction of 'Indian images' in the Ravi Varma sense. This is, however, a static opposition: even Varma, we have seen, weighted it in certain distinct directions. The question really is how the opposites came together, juxtaposed themselves in *movement*. Before Phalke film in India was used only as a recording device (by Hiralal Sen, who filmed plays off the Calcutta stage, H. Bhatavdekar and others); with him it made evident its first aspirations to language. It therefore had to cohere and

find a dynamic logic for the several movements that converged to produce its images.

When I speak of the film dynamic, I refer to Sergei Eisenstein: 'I also regard the inception of new concepts and viewpoints in the conflict between customary conception and particularly representation as dynamic—*as a dynamization of the inertia of perception*—as a dynamization of the "traditional view" into a new one.'[34] I shall argue here that as the accretions of meaning took shape, and were grounded into new social function, the 'Indianness' label in Phalke came to perform a role similar to Varma's naturalist freeze: providing a standpoint from which, against which, the images could be mediated into the present, i.e., into cinema.

Accretions: The Gaze

Distribution, especially in capitalist systems, has usually determined the cinema's most quantifiable 'value'. But it had its aesthetic impact: a large number of people converged upon a single screen, to collectively gaze upon the projected image. Here lay the first inversion, an adjunct of camera-obscura. In place of a series of mass-produced frames that went out to a number of individual buyers/viewers, many people came to collectively view a single frame, and *rendered it mobile*.

Phalke's work, I shall argue, realized a distinct gaze for his audience. What I have called the standpoint, resembling in some ways the 'Indianness' label, was materially used in determining a *point of view* for his viewers, and in elaborating this over the length of his films.

The filmic image exudes an inevitable *lure*.[35] But movement is rent with the contradiction of an audience gaze which seeks at once to pull (a static desire for stability), and push into the desire to attain the object that lures us. In between, as the 'figures of representation' slip, pass and are transmitted from stage to stage, comes the cinematic apparatus itself:

> . . . a *dispositif* articulating between one another different sets—technological certainty, but also economic and ideological. A *dispositif* was required which implicate its motivations, which be the arrangement of desires, demands, fantasies and speculations (in the two senses of commerce and the imaginary): an arrangement which give apparatus and techniques a social status and function.[36]

In the mainstream Western (Hollywood) cinema, the grounding of this apparently transparent mediator into a social status and function had different consequences to what they had here. There, the contradictory tensions of the gaze were manifested by the approximation of the object to identifiable proportions and a continuing deferral of the desire to attain it. Narrative in most cases arrives as a process of opening out the static, congealed approximation to laws (including those that would determine the terms of attainment,[37] and a continuous suturing of the gap between knowledge and desire. *John L. Fell, writing about the state of American film narrative in 1907*, has no trouble in dividing the work produced that year into genres such as Adaptations, Trick Scenes, Reenactments, Dreams, Farces, the Chase, the Motivated Link and so on.[38]

In Phalke's work, as the gaze wedged itself into the perceptive opposition between 'Indian images' and 'industrial technology', and as the simultaneous pressures towards a static and mobilized image built up, features distinct to his production context came to be revealed. Pulling towards the static, the gaze pulled towards the idealist, purely specular *frontal* aspect of the image. The images were condensed into two-dimensional resemblances to what the viewers 'already knew', and what Phalke called 'Indian'. Being vastly amplified, however, they were also rendered unstable: the 'miracle of the visual appearance of objects', as Phalke called the process, had to fulfil a further promise of bringing the unknown *alive*. The gaze, becoming the conduit for earlier productive forms of the popular now inducted into the cinema, sought in *realism* for itself an active process of production of images it already knew and now saw, kinetically transformed.

The regime of industrial operation was here apparently taking over the faculty of the moving image; as it was grounded in a 'social status and function', it had to reciprocally locate the contradictory desires of the audience's gaze in a similar status. I think the oppositions actually provided graphic counterpoints that determined camera positions and movements. And at several stages the mediating process had to ground its own social existence, to surrender itself to the 'miracle'.

The Frame

The screen-frame in between was the first to get grounded. André Bazin has argued against describing the outer edge of the screen as a frame at all.

> The outer edges of the screen are not, as the technical jargon would seem to imply, the frame of the film image. They are the edges of a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality. The picture frame polarizes space inwards. On the contrary, what the screen shows us seems to a part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal.[39]

In Phalke's films the frame functions neither centripetally nor centrifugally but as a *holding constant*. Its defining tangibility is to the viewers' gaze rather like a cane to a blind person, locating spaces as the gaze feels itself plotting out the universe of the imaginary.

The frame locates itself at the intersection of two powerful axes. The flat screen is duplicated within by the horizon, the several planes of the background push up to a dominant, frontal foreground. But the gaze itself is perpendicular to the horizon, duplicated in most shots by the camera position. In mobility, however, the frame actually permits the continuity of action over editing cuts.

This use of the frame comes at the confluence, in cinema, of the separate traditions of visual and performing art forms. In the Indian visual arts the frame has seldom been used in its Western sense of container; instead it is used to punctuate the narrative, to phase its *rhythm*. (In several forms from the Mughal miniatures to popular *pat* forms, the rhythm is duplicated in the verbal narrative.) As the cinematic frame held the condensed image, and as this moved—via the gaze—into time, the movement returned the rhythm to the narrative. We see this in Fattelal/Dalme's *Sant Tukaram*.

In the performing arts, the specific influence on Phalke was the modern Marathi theatre. He took for his frame several characteristics that were ascribed to the curtain: of defining space, providing referents to the main diegesis, or even as a pure signifier. It is generally acknowledged that the curtain was the crucial innovation of *Sita Swayamvar* in 1843. What he

did was to adapt the Dashavtar performance—which traditionally enacted Puranic legends in fairgrounds and temple courtyards—to the stage, which he defined with the use of a single stage curtain. This curtain was held by two men, and would locate the acting areas, introducing the *sutradhara* as he performed his invocations and then the *vidushaka*; it would locate the seat of the gods, then the *rakshasas*, and even the private sanctum of the ladies. In placing these in relation to each other, often in tension with each other, it would locate the continuity of the tale.[40] As the theatre grew (to include two further influences, the Sanskrit and the English theatre), the use of the curtain also expanded to new meanings. The gradual establishment of the proscenium form demanded two separate curtains, an outer and an inner. The outer, with pictures of gods, often copies of Ravi Varma paintings (e.g., Lalita-kaladarsha's famous curtain with *Indrajit Vijay*), was meant mainly as invocation; and it was static. Inside, however, the purpose was different. For example, Annasaheb Kirloskar's *Sangeet Shakuntal* (1880) introduced the genre of *natyasangeet* to Marathi, but it was sufficiently inspired by the grandiose Parsi theatre to have on its own inner curtain a river, a hill behind, upon it a house, and a road leading down with tamarind trees on either side.[41] The curtain was meant to encompass the presented space with a series of referents familiar and acceptable to the growing urban audiences. It actually 'held' narrative space—from the wings that determined entries and exits, to an episode that underlined, or captioned, what was actually presented.

The relationship between presented and suggested space had a complicated growth. Most earlier theatre companies had a standard set of three all-purpose curtains (usually garden, forest/nature, mansion), and it was assumed that these merely constituted a descriptive backdrop that did not interfere with the *mise-en-scène* of the foreground. But a growing realism on stage sought to induct the curtain into its laws as well. On the one hand this simply meant more realistic paintings:

> Some plays would show contemporary places, people and situations; and with local artists increasingly trained in the 'English' style of art, there was an improvement in the paintings, and the huge seven-

storey mansions of Bombay, streets, railway lines, ships and lights, electric poles and industrial mills with smoke were shown.[42]

On the other hand, there was also the effort to extend the apparently real foreground into the curtain, to suggest no break in the continuous illusion. This was epitomized by Lalitakaladarsha's production of Mama Warerkar's *Satteche Gulam* (1922). Warerkar, although functioning within the standard norms of the *sangeet-natak*, was also influenced by Ibsen. And in this production P. S. Rege, who in his own book *Rangabhoomivarel Nepathya* bemoans the carelessness of productions that have a street backdrop but treat the space as though it were a room in the way they walk up and down before it, painted on the curtain a life-size replica of Bombay's Princess Street intersection which he duplicated off a still-photograph.[43]

The Films

I should like to discuss in some detail Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), his own first film and the first feature film made in India. Leading up to it, however, I shall introduce a later film, the episodic *Shri Krishna Janma* (1918) which is his most stereotypical compilation of the array of technical equipment at hand.

Shri Krishna Janma constitutes a series of highly familiar episodes in the young Krishna's life. Told and retold all over India, their 'magical' scenes are intended to evoke wonder and awe, and a highly coded, strongly *erotic* identification with the benevolent play of the young god. The film seeks to make no intervention other than bringing that wonder cinematically alive. It seeks to interfere as little as possible in the transferences that consequently occur: the illusionary encounter of the gaze, as producer; the wish-fulfilment in the mythical 'coming alive'.

The first sequence shows the miracle of Krishna's victory over Kaliya, the demon snake:

Shot 1 is an invocatory shot of Krishna with the famed *sudarshan chakra*; it is purely frontal and iconic.

Shot 2 frames the stage of action: river water moving left-to-right defines a distinct horizon, and there is a vast audience within the frame, waiting, with their backs to us.

Title: 'All human efforts having turned out futile, the Almighty God is never at a great distance when prayed for sincerely and wholeheartedly.'

Shot 3 continues from shot 2 with the sharp layers of backdrop, of sky, water and the crowd of people with their backs to us. And then we see the miracle itself. The demon snake rises and upon it is the figure of Krishna.

Shot 4 cuts a full 360 degrees along the perpendicular axis. We now see the *audience* frontally, presumably (though not necessarily) from Krishna's eye-view. It is a purely reciprocal acknowledgement of the people watching.

Shot 5 cuts back to shot 3.

Shot 6 cuts closer along the same axis, giving us a mid-long-shot of Krishna and the hood of the serpent.

Shot 7 returns to shot 4, giving us the people.

Shot 8 is back to the mid-long-shot of Krishna.

Shot 9 is a re-establishing shot (like the end of shot 3).

Shot 10, a *dissolve*, now includes the goddess Saraswati.

In no other Phalke sequence is the gaze so completely *locked in* on what it sees. Every shot is along the perpendicular axis of the gaze, emphasizing it, reciprocating from within the frame. So total is the frontal grip that the frame quite 'naturally' cuts off all that is not physically evident: the evident is the cosmos of the gaze.

The miracle occurs at the meeting point of horizon and gaze, and really shows us what powers the two axes hold. The mobility of the cinema here lies less in the physical mobility of the object, and more in the specific lure it exudes. The image comes alive in the way the *gaze* is realized; erotic references are now vastly enriched; and there is a tremendous wish-fulfilment in seeing the realization so tangibly manifested. This realization of the gaze into miracle is as much a celebration of its own new-found social status and function as it is an identification with the object screened. Our seeing is underlined, proferred, and *reciprocated* with a hitherto unimaginable directness (shots 4 and 7) and the object further delivered for consumption (shots 6 and 8).

In shot 11 we see Yashoda swinging the crib in which the infant Krishna sleeps. A slightly diagonal wall, offset by Yashoda's own posture, is Phalke's mild obeisance to natural-

ist space. For she is only introduced as a conduit for our gaze: as she sees the sleeping child, she imagines him grown up and we have a dissolve in which the crib disappears and Krishna stands before us as Gopala, with a cow. We are next introduced into the fantasy direct. In shot 12 Kamsa appears before us frontally, evidently very pleased with himself, when suddenly his head detaches itself, rises up and out of frame, then descends to its place once more. Now this fantasy in turn serves as a premonition to Kamsa himself, for we next see him, in naturalist space, as *he* imagines Krishna growing before him larger and more threatening in size. Once again this is delivered to us, for Kamsa returns to the frontal, and amid several dissolves we see him surrounded by figures of Krishna.

It is evident that every continuity is effected *via* the gaze. The intersection of the axes, the site at which the transferences of the expressive into the graphic are affected, permits by its definition a variety of technical devices, as for example the dissolve, which converges several stages of seeing—reality, fantasy, dream and miracle—by finding a common denominator for these in the gaze. Even in his most 'dramatically' constructed sequence, Hanuman's rescue of Sita in *Lanka Dahan*, Phalke has no awareness of dramatic continuity. Each character, however, simultaneously defines his own particular space and the characteristics of that space by the way he is identified by the gaze, by its memory and desire. Sita's space, signified mainly by the platform with the *tulsi* on it, becomes an expression of her confinement; it is also a protective barricade against Ravana's advances. This is underlined when it is statically played against the two very lengthy shots that introduce Ravana. He emerges from his palace, a stereotypically Ravi Varma backdrop, faces us, turns to fling out his arms at a group of *dasis* following him, completes a full circle and exits left. In the next shot he enters right from behind a low garden wall, goes around it, completes a grandiose 'S' turn and again exits left. A little later he comes out at the far side of an angled fountain, moves along its edge to the left and then towards the camera.

The elaborateness, heightening his ownership of his space, is evidently contrasted with the tightly cut shots of both Sita and Hanuman (Hanuman is associated with the tree, as he

jumps, manoeuvres complicated branches, 'displays' his renowned physical prowess as much as his anguish). But it is equally crucial in showing the elaborateness of Ravana's move from background to foreground; the layers of his legend that he has to weave through, to encounter Sita and to offer her jewels.

We might, as an aside, sketch the dominant Western cinema's use of space contiguity in its early days. There *temporality* was, in general, cinema's first major discovery, leading to conventions of cutting as continuities of action. This presented almost immediately the possibilities of cause–effect relationships—typically Lumière's '*Arroseur arrosé*', the sketch with the boy, the gardener and the hosepipe—and then, more gradually, the shifting of audience viewing to different *kinds* of contiguous actions, as several causes rushed towards a final effect. It was the effort to punctuate, or phase the dramatically interlocked narrative by creating contiguities of space, and then hierarchies of space, that defined most of the remarkable conventions the cinema threw up: temporal overlaps as a heightening of causal identification; parallel cutting (*The Great Train Robbery*, etc.); and then a cutting over different sets of reality—the flashback (present/past), then dream/reality.[44]

In Phalke there is almost no definition of time; the contiguities are effected in the different states of seeing as they come together, as they are activated by the static icon. The story, if there is one, is a continuous back-and-forth interaction between the viewers and the object viewed; we are shown the imaginary universe condensed into the object, our seeing is reciprocated. In *Kaliya Mardan* (1919) there is a long initial sequence where the actress Mandakini Phalke, the director's daughter, demonstrates her histrionic ability on screen before starting her role as Krishna. She, like the 'mountains, rivers, oceans, houses . . .', is *real*: her reality is used to establish the illusion that Krishna must be real too. The true reality in all this is, of course, the audience and their desires. In the last scene in *Shri Krishna Janma* the people (we) are blessed by the Lord.

The possibilities of such contiguities of seeing extending into metaphor were only later explored—by V. Shantaram, for

instance, who sought metaphors within the narrative for the gaze itself; and in *Sant Tukaram* where the contiguities are gradually located in space, and their contradictions start surfacing. Phalke lays down the ground-rules for many of these explorations which would later start acknowledging and interrogating the gaze, and return to the frontal address the ethical crises that the still-frame had for so long forestalled.

Raja Harishchandra is valuable in the way it demonstrates some of these rules. The 'Puranic Tale of King Harishchandra', as the opening title proclaims, begins with a long opening shot. Thus in shot 1 the royal family is before us in their full public attire, standing evidently in the palace gardens at a meeting-point of two footpaths. The king is teaching his son to shoot with a bow and arrow, the queen is appropriately encouraging. The arrow goes out, right-to-left, and a *dasi* enters, holding a pumpkin with the arrow in it. Then some people appear from behind. They speak to the king who nods and waves them away. Title: 'At the request of the citizens, the king goes out on a hunting expendition.' The shot continues: we see the king patting his son approvingly and following the men out.

The extreme narrative abbreviations would already be clear. Phalke apparently adhered to the belief that the 'acting should itself suffice to explain the story to the spectators',[45] and that only as many inter-titles as were absolutely necessary to explain the story should be used. By 'acting' Phalke seems to mean a theatrical 'blocking'. Here the royal family is present in their resplendent public image and their benevolent role, as seen by us (the public). Both immediately receive their spaces; the arrow goes out left and produces the *dasi*, the space of 'palatial grandeur', and the *praja* enter behind and take the king back with them. Both spaces are in the realm of adjectives. We know that the family is soon to be rent apart, the king and queen to be banished into the beyond.

The next sequence, of the royal hunt, is the most profuse in the film.

Shot 2 opens on a flat horizon, with mountains at the back, a river in front: the men are moving left-to-right, their movement underlined by a slow left-to-right pan.

Shot 3 shows the king and his men who suddenly go around a tree, and come straight towards the camera at sharp right-angles to their earlier movement. They then exit left.

Shot 4 has the camera placed along the same axis with respect to the horizon as shot 2, now showing rocks. As the men move right-to-left (opposite to shot 2) the camera again underlines their movement with a right-to-left pan.

Shot 5 reveals a position considerably behind what it was in shot 4; now the rocks are in the far distance, presumably to show how far the men have walked. The men raise their bows and shoot arrows out-of-frame left, diagonally.

Shot 6 and the camera again follows the men with its new placement, now shifting left, for we once more see the men frontally before us, a dead leopard before them.

Title: 'Hearing the pitiable cries of some women, the king proceeds on the track of the noise.'

Shot 6 continues and we see the king move left, listen, move right, listen again, move left once more to listen and then exit left.

What *kind* of continuities do we have here? At the absolutely factual level of the graphic Phalke actually maintains continuities of entry and exit; though if one were to plot the actual geography of movement we should find that the men walk a gigantic zig-zag. But we are not supposed to do so, for the continuities have no *time* definition. (While shot 3 appears to link in continuous time with 2 and 6 with 5, there is no time-link between 3, 4 and 5.

There is, instead, a distinct set of spaces created around the frame; we can already perceive the horizon, the flat planes along the perpendicular, the 'wings' on either side. These 'surround' the drama of action that we see. It leads to an overspilling of action into description, where the imaginary can fully locate itself and appear to control the visible action: with wonderment, and voyeurism. It is to this area that the next shot pays homage.

Title: 'On the mere strength of his performance, the sage Vishwamitra achieves the help of the three powers against their will.'

Shot 7 is a classic. The terrible sage Vishwamitra is sitting in the foreground with his back to us; before him is a fire. On

the right, defining a further plane, is a hut; and we see a long movement of a priest, a standard comedy figure on the Marathi stage, coming towards us, entering the hut, coming out, turning round and sitting before Vishwamitra. There is a dissolve, and we see the three 'powers' which had presumably interfered with his meditation now in the fire, formed and bound by the smoke.

Shot 8 is brief: it shows the king and his men move purposefully towards the noise.

Shot 9 shows Harishchandra making a straightforward stage entry from left into the sage's area. The king takes pity on the trapped 'powers' and releases them with his arrow.

Title: 'Whereupon the sage is greatly offended and the king, to appease his wrath, makes him a free gift of his kingdom.'

Note the ascending stages of the gaze. Vishwamitra, with his back to us, performs the miracle: the 'powers' are produced before him/us, are in his/our possession. As he thus focuses his attention and powers on what is before him, we have to situate what *we* see in the spatial configurations of our knowledge; we 'know' the king's benevolence to all in his kingdom, we 'know' that he will shortly intervene. At this point, our responsibility as 'producers' is placed along the horizon, as we wait and see what will happen. The comedy figure of the priest diffuses our entanglement with the encounter.

The conflict, then, is shifted out of its ethics into the locating of the *site* at which it occurs; the locating of our identifying gaze *at* the crossroads. *Harishchandra* lends itself well to such identification as the hero is torn between his desire for truth and his responsibility to his subjects. (The theme has been filmed numerous times, to say nothing of the frequency with which it is staged.) Here the entire ethical conflict between what we see and know is *transferred*, first to the cross of axis and horizon, and then, more significantly, into the reducing of the surrounding uncertainty—the anxieties that go with the imaginary in the process of being realized.

In shot 10, as the king lays down his sword, he looks at us in classic *tamasha* style, as though to make sure we know what is happening and are in sympathy.

The royal family is thus quite literally banished into the

unknown. As Vishwamitra remorselessly and *graphically* forces himself into the wedge, we see the stages through which the king and queen have to wend their way as they depart for exile.

It is possible in this way to formulate the entire film. The subsequent sequence of shots which contain the *deux ex machina* that tests Harishchandra's 'love for truth', do so through a continuous abbreviation of temporal narrative into elements juxtaposed before us in space, each encoding a certain way of looking at them. In shot 16, for example, the king and queen are asleep in the jungle, their bodies sharply angled away, with two trees dividing them further up. A man enters left, wakes the king, who rises to see smoke behind the trees. He wakes Taramati and makes her go and see who it is; it is the prince, who is dead, and whose death the queen will shortly be accused of. In shot 17 Vishwamitra and the priest enter, kill the prince merely by tweaking his nose, and leave evidence to show that it was the queen. After the 'dramatic' is so quickly depicted, there are several long-shots showing a distressed Taramati, her anguish and that of the king, their suffering and the judgement of the people, in considerable detail. Taramati faces the court and protests her innocence; a pillar behind and angled steps to the left create once again the Varma backdrop, a scenario where from the left a man enters, drags her away in a long left-to-right move across the angled steps. By shot 22, Harishchandra is torn apart from the queen—graphically, by a tree in between—who is bound, opposite him, on the left. The man guarding her exits, Harishchandra rushes to her, the man returns and separates the two, Harishchandra raises his sword.

Title: 'The work *falls* on the king who while faithfully discharging his duties is prevented by the incarnation of God Shiva who restores the prince to life.'

Inevitably the *manifestation* of God in *Phalke is in the* assuaging of our anxiety with respect to the spaces 'surrounding' what we see: it is as though, as in the opening sequence of *Shri Krishna Janma*, the seen takes in the cosmos of the gaze. If the conflict in the film is of disputed ethical territory, which splits Harishchandra himself—note his gradual isolation from what is around him from shot 10 onwards—and creates the

division of his 'private' dilemma on the one hand and the dramatic uncertainties that beset Taramati on the other, the appearance of Shiva finally dispels all division. The audience is returned, amid celebration, back to the privileged frontal.

The anxieties that we pass on to the spaces that we do not actually *see*, but know—the spaces in graphic terms that surround the frame—finally concern our responsibility as the producers of what happens before us. Narrative necessarily means, in what I have earlier called the back-and-forth of the gaze and the object viewed, a continuing projective identification into the site of crisis. It means a wish-fulfilment of appropriating the happy ending realized by external intervention (God/us) that finally places *us* back at the frontal helm.

NOTES

This is a revised version of an earlier article with the same title, which was published in the *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 14–15 (1987), 47–78.

1. Dadasaheb Phalke, 'Essays on the Indian Cinema', *Nayag* (Bombay: November/December 1917; February/September 1918). All these essays have been taken from their translations into English, in Feroze Rangoonwalla, ed., *Phalke Commemoration Souvenir* (Bombay, 1971) (hereafter cited as *Nayag*).

   This was a series of four essays written by Phalke on commission. Intended to deal with how films are made, they strongly reflect Phalke's own ambitions and frustrations, his political aspirations and those for the Indian cinema as envisaged by him.
2. For biographical details of Phalke's life I am indebted to Purushottam Baokar and Ratnakar Vashikar, *Tyachu Velu Gela Gagaavari* (Bombay, 1970) (hereafter cited as Baokar/Vashikar).
3. *Nayag*.
4. Phalke's interview to *Kesari*, Pune, 9 August 1913.
5. *Nayag*.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Irfan Habib, 'Potentialities for Change in the Economy of Mughal India', *Enquiry* (Winter, 1971) and *Socialist Digest* (September 1972).
9. E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (London, 1962), 34.
10. E. B. Havell, *The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India* (Madras, 1912), 165.

11. E. P. Thompson, *William Morris—Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York, 1955), 105.
12. In Ananda Coomaraswamy's work, Havell's writings and, most recently, in K. G. Subramanyan's *The Living Tradition*.
13. Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1979), ch. 2, 38.
14. See particularly Sumit Sarkar, 'The Condition and Nature of Subaltern Militancy—Bengal from Swadesh to Non-Cooperation 1905–1922', in Guha, *Subaltern Studies III*.
15. D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1985), 27–44.
16. Speaking of Buddhist *Jataka* narrative, Stella Kramrisch described the central iconic presence as the *receptacle* for the universe around it. See Stella Kramrisch, *A Survey of Painting in the Deccan* (Hyderabad, 1937).
17. For example, his painting, *View of Bombay Showing the Fourth Fort St. George*, 1797.
18. For example, his painting, *Taj Mahal*, 1797.
19. For example, James Wales in the Maratha court of Nana Phadnavis and Tilly Kettle in Shuja-ud-Dowla's court.
20. See Anuradha Kapur's *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and God*.
21. W. G. Archer, *Kalighat Drawings* (London, 1962), 7.
22. Baokar/Vashikar, 7.
23. The photographic print has been likened to a death mask by John Berger, and to an effigy by Roland Barthes.
24. Debiprasad Chattopadhyay, *Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (New Delhi, 1979).
25. Ibid., 3 and 4.
26. Ibid., 296.
27. N. N. Bhattacharya, 'Neo-Tantric Movements in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in S. P. Sen, ed., *Social and Religious Reform Movements in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Calcutta, 1979), 43. See also N. N. Bhattacharya's *The Indian Mother Goddess* (Delhi, 1977), 194.
28. Bepin Chandra Pal, *Indian Nationalism—Its Principles and Personalities* (Madras, 1918), 63.
29. A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay, 1948), 159.
30. Krishna Chaitanya, *Ravi Varma* (New Delhi, 1984), 3.
31. Ibid., 5.
32. *Nayag*.
33. A. T. Hingorani, ed., *The Gospel of Swadeshi* (Bombay, 1967), 19, 118–21.
34. Sergei M. Eisenstein, 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form' (1929), in Jay Leyda, ed., *Film Form* (New York/London, 1977).
35. Roland Barthes, 'Upon Leaving a Movie Theatre', in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, ed., *Apparatus* (New York, 1980), 3.
36. Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Machines of the Visible', in Stephen Heath and Teresa de Lauretis, eds., *The Cinematic Apparatus* (London, 1980), 122.
37. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 6: 3 (1975).

38. John L. Fell, 'Motive, Mischief and Melodrama: The State of Film Narrative in 1907', in John L. Fell, ed., *Film Before Griffith* (Berkeley, 1983), 272.
39. André Bazin, 'Painting and Cinema', in *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley, 1967), 164.
40. Bapurao Naik, *Marathi Rangabhoomicha Tantridrishtya Vikas* (The Technical Development of the Marathi Theatre), in K. Narayana Kale, V. D. Kulkarni and V. R. Dhavale, eds., *Marathi Rangabhoomi Marathi Natak* (Bombay, 1971), 221–3.
41. Ibid., 236.
42. A. V. Kulkarni, *Marathi Lakhanachi Tantrachi Vacchaal* (Pune, 1976), 65–6.
43. P. S. Rege, *Rangabhoomivareel Nepathya* (Pune, 1976), 5–6.
44. André Gaudreault, 'Temporality and Narrativity in Early Cinema', in Fell, *Film Before Griffith*, 311.
45. Baokar/Vashikar, 23.