

Mythic Material in Indian Cinema

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I

I WANT TO put forth an interpretation of two films, *Sant Tukaram* (Damle/Fattelal, Marathi, 1936) and *Devi* (Satyajit Ray, Bengali, 1960) with a view to understand how the desire for social emancipation may be expressed through cultural creation during and immediately after the struggle for national independence. And especially how the past, in the form of mythic material, comes to be handled in the process.

On the assumption that the primary function of myth is to define and sustain the specific identity of a community, its investigation occurs at points of historical crisis when this identity is embattled — as at the breaking point of colonialism. But rather than undertake this investigation at the level of naivety, believing the symbolic to be sitting fixed and luminous at an imaginary source, we have to proceed along mediating processes recognizing the mythic nucleus by what is said (discourse), by what and how lives are lived (praxis), and by an understanding of the hierarchical structuring of a society and the levels along which the mythic elements are distributed. Only when these are mapped one upon another shall we be able to follow the trajectories that the symbolic yields to the social and vice versa.¹

It is this process of reinterpretation that we call tradition, *the living tradition*. What I want to emphasize however is that the recuperation of a tradition is not just an ideological operation; that it must be perceived at the level of aesthetics proper. While trying to understand how the synchronic structure of a myth may be opened up, and its symbology set out as a series of motivated signs within the dimensions of contemporary history, we must also be able to recognize the ingenious use of genres, the inflection of motifs, their symbolic extension and formal deconstruction. And to recognize also the narrative strategy whereby an inherited iconography is transfigured and sometimes radicalized.

This paper was presented at a seminar, 'The Indian Revolution in Perspective' held in Leningrad in August 1987.

Of the forms of cultural creation we have at hand, the forms of art which the symbolic and imaginary unconsciousness takes, the *narrative* is the one that is most closely analogous to, indeed interchangeable with, the order of human action. Quoting Marx in *The German Ideology*, Paul Ricoeur says :

When men produce their existence in the form of praxis they represent it to themselves in terms of fiction, even at the limit in terms of religion (which for Marx is the model of ideology) The referent of narration, namely human action, is never raw or immediate reality but an action which has been symbolized and resymbolized over and over again. This narration serves to displace anterior symbolizations on to a new place, integrating them or exploding them as the case may be.²

II

Regarding the two films under consideration I would first like to put forward a proposition figuratively. The proposition is that the rising tide of nationalism encourages myths and legends as indeed all aspects of tradition *to surface*, to literally come up front and take on new or newly adapted forms in the various arts. The tradition thus shows itself (and I am talking primarily of the visual and performing arts), seeking beholders, native and foreign, who have hitherto turned away from it in ignorance or embarrassment.

There may be some chauvinist defiance and naivety in the way this visibility is established. But taking the figuratively worded proposition about the surfacing of tradition a little further, I should like to see it in terms of a formal category of *frontality* : frontality of the word, the image, the design, the performative act. This yields forms of direct address; flat, diagrammatic and simply profiled figures; a figure-ground pattern with only notational perspective; repetition of motifs in terms of ritual 'play'; and a decorative *mise-en-scene*. A review of these features provides, still further, a schematic rendering of the aesthetic principles of the *popular* in the Indian art tradition.

Although every aspect of the artistic tradition may be pressed in for use in the affirmative urge of nationalism it is often the *popular* that comes in most handy —and of course the popular will include 'reduced' aspects of the classical as it will the urbanized aspects of the folk and tribal. The popular is in that sense a catch-all term. However it can be reasonably well defined in art history³ as an eclectic impulse accompanying social change, eclecticism itself conveying a kind of artistic nerve and wit to construe a hybrid form that is at least hypothetically iconoclastic.

Contrasted with this desire to figure forth the archetype and induct it into a nationalist history, there is in the post-independence phase a need to question and *excavate* mythic material; even more to exorcise mythologized reality. We are still speaking figuratively. The hermeneutic of suspicion thus *follows* the hermeneutic of affirmation. Thus from the 1950s the problem of ideology takes

much of the place tradition took in aesthetic debates; the degree of false consciousness in traditional values is now sought to be revealed. (What should be added quickly is that the terminology is not drawn from Marxism as from literary existentialism though of course in the work of Sartre, for example, that has already involved Marxism.) What is interrogated in contemporary Indian film, as also literature with its longer history, is bad faith in inter-personal relationship; bad faith of a man to a woman; bad faith among the progressives; bad faith of political parties. The ruling class and its ideology and the existential problem are put at par, which is to say class analysis is not the basis but one element among others in the social critique. What is certain is that while in an earlier phase of nationalist consciousness there was an ebullience of self-discovery through mythic archetype, folk and popular forms (as for example in the Indian Peoples' Theatre movement), there is now the travail of the middle class worked out in psycho-social terms. Solutions are no longer at hand. Whether it is portrayed sentimentally or with dignity and rigour, *reality* is now constantly handled by *realisms* of various persuasion.

Only in the hands of a few novelists, playwrights and film-makers does the critique go far enough to show how myth, which derives from the notion of the collective unconscious in the Jungian schema, may by rational inversion be seen as part of the superstructure of a society. And that either way it has, like all cultural creations, the degree of autonomy to develop its own secular/aesthetic dynamic. Only a few artists are able to achieve the reconstruction of an archetype as a device to speak about the 'type' of a class or, rather, to present the problematic of a class-constructed psyche which so quickly appropriates mythic elements. Certainly in cinema only one man dares to put his stakes so high and that is Ritwik Ghatak (1925-1976). The cinematic means he uses for the purpose are many and bold and hybrid — *not* realism proper. But this paper does not deal with him. It deals with his more famous, internationally celebrated compatriot from Bengal, Satyajit Ray (1921-), who does develop the finest most discreet version of a realist form. And I take the one film in which he most conscientiously exposes the underside of mythologized reality, *Devi*, to contrast it with the popular iconographic mode of *Sant Tukaram*.

III

Although in filmic classification *Sant Tukaram*⁴ may be placed along with the entire set of saint films as a mythological,⁵ it belongs more correctly to a sub-genre of special significance. The saints' lives are, as legends, quasi-biographical material; and with their message of spiritual equality these lives are expressly adaptable to historical ends. We know of course that in the nationalist ethos the saints' lives were made to light the way to social justice. The need to publish new editions of Marathi bhakti-poets was emphasized as early as in the mid-nineteenth century by M.G. Ranade who, like the middle-class nationalists of the period, would see the seventeenth century movement as a kind of protestant movement where caste differences were sought to be transgressed by the saints.⁶ Other eminently historical figures, not least Gandhi, were at this historical junc-

ture, in the 1930s, making the message of spiritual and *consequently* social equality a part of the political campaign itself. From 1932 'Harijan' welfare became one of Gandhi's principal concerns : it included the establishment of an All-India Anti-Untouchability League; in 1933 the weekly *Harijan* was started; during 1933-34 he went on a 12,500 mile 'Harijan tour'.⁷

This contextual factor was evidently recognized by the makers of the saint films at Prabhat Studios. Certainly Shantaram's film about Sant Eknath titled *Dharamatma* (1935), meant among other things to propagate the message of non-violence, truth, and national consensus. Contemporary reviews and discussions around the films argued about the social content of the films. K.A. Abbas, for example, a leftist writer and film-maker (of the Progressive Writers' and Indian Peoples' Theatre movements), commented on the degree of 'realism' in the film praising it for its naturalness in the first part, criticising it for developing into a series of miracles in the second part — the directors succumbing as he said to the conventions of a popular mythological. 'A saint is something more than a magician.' Abbas says in the review.⁸ In this one sentence Abbas is of course pitching the argument into a vexed area of the ideological aspect of religious traditions, as also the techno-magical possibilities of the cinema; and, with reference to both these aspects, the political import of popular culture as such. The replies in the *Bombay Chronicle*⁹ by an unnamed critic indicate the fact that this was already in 1940 an ongoing polemic, one with which we are not as yet done. And the point that I shall be making at some length is that the bhakti saints and their portrayed lives have to be seen not in terms of realism, nor in terms of the mass appeal of miracles to which the defenders of such a film resort. The films have to be seen as socially symbolic narratives. For, the literature, film supplements the primary representation of the social with its own narrative representation but through a process which may be called 'iconographic augmentation'.¹⁰

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Now it happens that the pictorial convention on which *Tukaram* is based is such as to give its imagery an *iconic aspect*, taking iconic to mean an image into which symbolic meanings converge and in which moreover they achieve stasis. An iconic image according to this functional definition may or may not be mythological or religious, but it does suggest an iconographic process wherein morphology — a dynamic principle of aesthetics — takes on the gravity of the symbolic and *thus* grounds itself into a given tradition.

The immediate antecedent to the Prabhat films, including *Tukaram*, are the films of Dadasaheb Phalke (1870-1944), the pioneer cinematographer of India, also from Maharashtra.¹¹ Phalke had projected the iconic image in a rather more literal sense. He drew on a traditional iconographic repertoire as such, this



Vishupant Pagnis playing Sant Tukaram

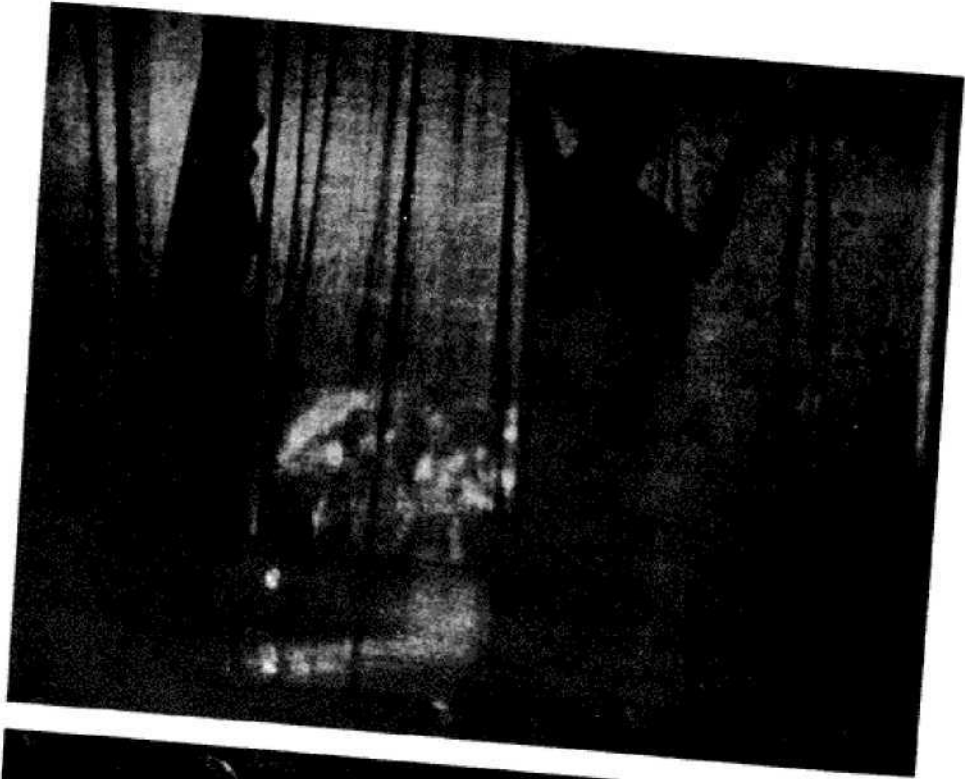
being his express aim : to figure forth the Hindu pantheon through the technical magic of the cinema, to actually revive the gods of the Puranas albeit as shadows, to fortify and gladden the Indian masses in a moment of national self-affirmation. But what then were the visual sources he tapped for the purpose ?

(i) At the immediate level the iconic aspect had to do with the naive element in early photography itself where the subject is positioned up front or, rather, where subjectivity itself takes on a frontal aspect the better to allow its magic capture as image. (ii) On the other hand, the formal positioning and frontality of Indian photographs of the nineteenth century have of themselves a longer convention. I am referring to the pictorial conventions of idealized portraiture of pre-Mughal and Mughal, to mid-nineteenth century Pahari and Sikh schools of miniatures. That is to say the iconicity comes from the very opposite of the naive response of the subject photographed; it comes rather from the sophistications of the artist's idealizing imagination. All quotidian folly is sought to be shed on behalf of the subject in order to achieve a transcendent, and where justified majestic, repose; the subject is also always a type or even archetype. Certainly the photographs of Indian aristocrats carry over this pictorial convention. (iii) But, further, this positioning is passed on to Company School painters of the nineteenth century and thence to the foremost painter of his time, Raja Ravi Varma, and the image becomes in this paradoxical relay peculiarly over-determined.

Ravi Varma (1848-1906), a prince from Travancore, was admired alike by the colonial English for the way he learnt to imitate *in oils* the manner of the Royal Academicians, and by the Indian princes whose portraits he was commissioned to paint. Here was pastiche twice over. But it was for the Indian middle class that he performed the ultimate feat of the culturally eclectic artist : of drawing on mythology as it had been revived by popular Hinduism while giving the gods features as accessible in space and time as the actors in the rapidly growing urban theatre of the period, especially the Parsi and the Marathi theatre. Ravi Varma's paintings thus acted out a dumb-charade drawn from Indian mythology just occasionally displaying the odd turn of the hybrid genius which colonial cultures present.

What Phalke did with these several sources and especially with Ravi Varma whom he greatly admired is a long story. It is mentioned here because the Prabhat producers, coming close behind Phalke, drew on the same sources as Phalke (or received them materialized as cinema via Phalke). Except that by the time we come to the late 1930s, the *cinematic image itself*, however naive it may seem in retrospect, was gaining a self-regard and a language of its own. And *Tukaram* is the prime example of this cinematic acculturation.

Let us then look at the characteristics of the image as it comes across in *Tukaram* to recognize how religious iconicity is mediated to secular effect in the filmic process. Even as *Tukaram* adores the black-faced Vithoba and witnesses



Salo Malo's mistress

his miracles in wonder, the cinematic image is composed for us, the viewers, to 'adore' the saint and witness his sublime speech and song. There is thus a transfer of iconicity, if one might put it like that, between god and saint to the viewer. More importantly, there is a transfer of effect by a *frontal contact*, with all the implied qualities of such a relationship: the film for instance succeeds in transmitting a non-voyeuristic gaze as also the alertness and dignity of sacred protocol, especially as it results in a unique and direct address.

The fact that *Tukaram* works with this iconicity makes sense in the film in the way it develops into *iconic sign*. Now the iconic sign in the language process, as here in the language of cinema, does of course derive its characteristics from painting. I am referring to the way figurative imagery, especially portraits, rest on a norm of likeness or *resemblance*, but equally on an *economy* of representation, and with that an *autonomy* of positioning and structure which includes the way the figure-ground relationship of images is worked out. But the inevitable distancing that is implied in the relationship between the pictorial image and the real world¹² acquires additional, specially cinematic virtues in the transfer between painting and cinema. The *iconic sign*, which denotes precisely this transfer, helps in breaking down a rigid assumption: *that the cinematic image upholds ultimate verisimilitude*.

I have already noted how Indian figural painting, especially portraiture, establishes degrees of 'ideal' alienation. This factor goes into the very style of representation and performance of Vishnupant Pagnis as Tukaram. How does this man 'play' the saint; what subject-image-sign does he transmit? I ask this with the intention to move on from a relatively formal to a phenomenological description of the image on the screen; to grasp the existential meaning that accrues from the choice of certain language conventions, especially where the instance of a rare subjectivity, indeed of saintliness and grace, are involved.

To describe this aspect a brief digression into comparable films is required. Writing on Robert Bresson's *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1950) Andre Bazin the great French critic mentions¹³ how *The Diary* was in the usual Bressonian fashion constituted of a cast of amateurs or beginners but even so resembled not so much De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1947) as Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928); that is to say it resembled not neo-realism to which it was closer in time but a silent film composed of monumental, severely stylized, close-up images of Saint Joan and her interrogators. 'Naturally Bresson, like Dreyer, is only concerned with the countenance as flesh' Bazin says, 'which, when not involved in playing a role is a man's true imprint, the most visible mark of his soul. It is then that the countenance takes on the dignity of a sign. He would have us be concerned here not with the psychology but with the physiology of existence'.¹⁴

Thus designating the subject-image-sign function of the human person in cinema, one might say that if Pagnis is memorable as Tukaram (like Marie Falconetti as Joan) it is because he becomes transparent in his soul and is yet



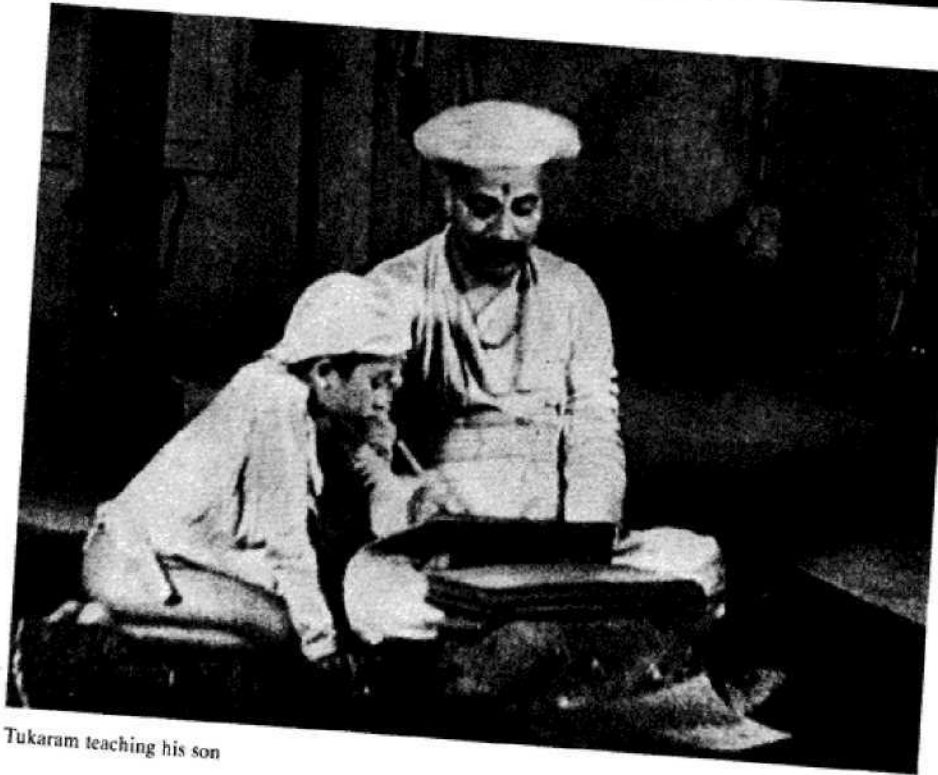
Tukaram singing to Vithoba



Tukaram addressing the idols



Tukaram



Tukaram teaching his son



Tukaram with his wife Jijai

opaquely present as image. Or, to put it the other way round, Tuka is realized in the material countenance, in the features and stance of this unique performer, Vishnupant Pagnis. But it is by subverting the very actor that a sign is made.

The point I want to bring up via Bazin is how privileging the countenance as sign (as icon or portrait or a player's actual physiognomy), allows an extension from the pure iconic to what is called the indexical sign¹⁵ where the image refers to the object in the real world by virtually pointing to it, establishing a direct link, a contiguous and thus existential relationship. Bazin regarded this indexical function of the photograph (where the 'truth' content of the image is supposed to be entirely manifest) and by extension the cinema, to be its proper and supreme function, and he gave it by the phenomenological process of inquiry *a spiritual and a realist basis at once*.

Bazin was a Catholic; so were the themes of the films he was describing; it is no wonder that his words resonate with the qualities of medieval aesthetics where, as Ananda Coomaraswamy showed through a lifetime's scholarship, the difference between eastern and western thought is little. Both traditions in their reliance on metaphysical principles seek to define the process of *transposition* between the idea and image; but further, both traditions as material phenomena seek to define that interface between the idea and image where the contours become resplendently, sensuously visible. But the fact that Bazin speaks as a contemporary Catholic, posing the ontological questions in existentialist terminology, in terms of the soul's living truth, should also be distinguished. Coomaraswamy dispelled the concept of soul in favour of a less personified figure of thought; being as he was a medievalist of clearly oriental/Indian intent, his metaphysics favoured monism and what he called 'self-naughting'.¹⁶

As defined by the *Natya Shastra* tradition of Indian aesthetics, the actor is a *patra*, a vessel, conveying the attributes and emotion of a 'character' to the viewer while himself remaining intact. He is at once deity and man; he is a pair of signs — the iconic and indexical — by virtue of the fact that *what* is conveyed in performance *is discourse*.¹⁷

In several Indian theatrical traditions, for example in the Ramlila at Ramnagar (Varanasi),¹⁸ the little boys who are apprenticed to play Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, are treated as both deity and child and nurtured on that account for over two months, but their apprenticeship entails training in reciting the verses of *Ramacharitamanas*, not in acting. Once the performance begins they must simply be, and they must simply *speak* the text. They raise their voices and intone the text in an unvarying but astonishingly clear and lofty manner and they succeed in reaching the thousands in the audience. The god is sheer presence, at once a ghost and a sign; the enunciation is the determining factor; the text into discourse establishes symbolic paramouncy.

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I will not try and take the argument to the point of conjuncture of the symbolic and the social seeing it function in the nationalist context as such. The presentation of the saint's discourse within the *historical regime* and one might say, *spiritual hegemony of Gandhi*, makes even so naive a film as *Tukaram* uniquely significant. I want to draw attention to the way cross-referencing between cultural creation and political history may take place; and at the risk of sounding presumptuous I would say that the same tradition yields Tuka, Gandhi and the ingenuous saints of Prabhat, the film-makers in question making their own contribution as they saw it to national popular culture. Thus what may on first appearance seem far-flung instances can have, by the relay of word and utterance, of consciously positioned discourse,¹⁹ a cumulative effect. Thus it is that in a slightly de-registered but closely packed *voice* — in speech song and exegetical recount — Tuka himself gives to the humble actor, Vishnupant Pagnis, an existential force (Tuka says, 'listen to Tuka preaching — like a shower from a cloud descending').²⁰ And thus too Pagnis's surrogate presence extends itself beyond a fine, nearly beatific countenance, beyond his actor's reverie, beyond even his being into becoming through discourse a reflective symbol within a political situation already conditioned by a contemporary 'saint', Gandhi.

It is sometimes said that Gandhi's discourse was analogous to or even derived from that of the bhakti saints. He himself was most attached to Tulsi, Kabir and Narsi Mehta but take the figure at hand, Tukaram, and the analogies with the *message* will be easy to establish. Consider for example how Tukaram demolishes bogus claims to religious power by his own spiritual intransigence, even as he, a Sudra by birth, is saying that his Lord makes no distinction between castes. But consider also how he hesitates, indeed declines, to upturn the social hierarchies of the day — including *varnasramadharma* — and opts for social stability in the face of an imperial power that would on an excuse uproot the entire tradition.²¹ The common cause Gandhi makes with this attitude is self-evident. It is Gandhi's belief in balancing voluntaristic change with a containing symbolism (or on the other hand, heretical utterances with cautious action) which makes him close to a certain aspect of the bhakti tradition and thus to large sections of the Indian people educated through this literature.

But as much as the message it is in the style of being and the form of discourse where the semblance lies. Gandhi is, in a sense, the actor-pedagogue on the nationalist stage. But this has less to do with any banal notions of communication and more to do with the ability to present two contrary aspects of a spiritual presence: the distanciation that comes from sainthood (especially in the form of a sanyasi as Gandhi was seen to become by the peasantry) and the intuitively correct and quick *yielding*, by the force of conscience.

Like his presence, which is recalled by whoever met him to have had a quality of humour and intimacy, of a swift grasp of reality and attendant grace, his speech took the form of direct address. The factor which in fact he himself put forth as the source of this address is what he calls his 'inner voice'. Received directly from god in the manner of the mystics, it was transmitted to the listener by

way of the *actual* enunciation — the choice of words, the tone, the length of the sentence, the duration of speech — as 'unmediated' discourse.

(For the very reason of course Gandhi did not present causally structured arguments drawing on history — he was not interested in history and not even in politics as such except that he conceded that it so encircled modern man that he must inevitably deal with it in order finally to annul it. Consequently he preferred not to speak of nationalism as such, not at least in the way it was spoken of by the west and its colonized opponents alike since this showed a process of corrupt symbiosis that would lead us to the same malaise : the nation state and its material structuring on a monstrous scale which destroys individual dignity, communal values and spiritual truth. Instead he put his faith in utopian communities, like the ashrams, constituting them as models for the truth seeking polity of the future.)

I need only reiterate the transfiguring procedure in Gandhi's leadership to conclude the argument about coincidental sainthood; how the person, the utterance, the word, the miracle and *praxis* are instantly relayed, making the personality in question open to quick and changeful appropriation — like a rumour — but how it also always remains elusive and intractable when judged in terms of historical causalities, how it gains transcendence.²²

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I have spoken about the nature of the image in *Tukaram* and the cinematic signs it yields; then about the discursive aspect of the film and how discourse may be existentially conveyed, in person, but how it also belongs to systematic language and its model of meaning production which is conveyed by tradition. I shall now look at the narrative procedure of the film as the means by which it takes account of all these aspects and becomes what I have termed a socially symbolic act.

(1) It is of course in the narrative that the content of the discourse, the meaning of the words even as they may be uttered in passionate song, is decoded. (2) Second, in so far as the saints' lives are perceived in the Indian tradition as historically 'true' but also emblematic (closed off by the self-realization of the saint through voluntary death, suicide, samadhi, or some form of mythic assumption), the retelling, or replaying of this life will tend to follow the allegorical mode. This is true for *Tukaram*. (3) Consequently, as compared to the phenomenologically rich but overdetermined and unitary 'realism' that Bazin for example seeks, we can place *Tukaram* quite candidly in the genre of the Indian 'mythological' and see in it a different constructional principle. The miracles for example are so embedded in the story as to be seen not only as motivating points of the narrative but even one might say as ideal prototypes of human action. (4) The question of realism is thus always kept a little at abeyance though never quite eschewed since the pedagogical part of the life of a saint requires constant reference to reality. (5) What is interesting is that the *social* is

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Tukaram performing kirtan

introduced, rather as in the realism of Bresson and even Rossellini, by opening out the subjective into the historical through acts of *transgression*. Here these are acts of transgression of a saint as they may be, in a political text, of a rebel or a revolutionary.

Can metaphysics be converted into action? And can action have meaning beyond itself? These are the questions that have haunted film makers who do not stop at naturalism.²³ Kumar Shahani poses this question with reference to the saints of Prabhat going on to say that if the answer is in the negative neither these saint films nor post-Rossellini cinema would have been possible. In *Sant Tukaram* it is this unselfconscious simplicity that *fused thought and action* which makes for this particular form of didactic narration. (Shahani adds that such simplicity can rarely be repeated, even by the authors themselves, and asks if this 'aspiration' to transform the subject-matter itself into form and content is not dangerous when conducted deliberately and in imitation of the naive.) The uniqueness of *Sant Tukaram* lies in that 'the legend, the heroic saint himself, dictated the movement of the film.'²⁴

Now the actual movement of the film consists in the first instance of the song and reverie of Tuka; this releases the spring of miracles; which in turn

Tukaram with the kirtankars





Jijai taking food for her husband

mobilizes the life of the villagers, the peasants and artisans of the village of Dehu, forming the material environment within which the struggle of Tuka's poor wife and children is foregrounded.

Having already mentioned the presence of Vishnupant Pagnis as Tuka, only a word more about his style of singing need be added to show the narrative effect of the performance. Shahani points out²⁵ how Pagnis moves only his torso when he sings; the body moves in a subliminal rhythm above the hips and the viewers see him often in close-up, singing to himself as he sings to us. And we see him sometimes in mid-close-up, leading the Kirtankars and singing with them as he winds his way in and out of the village streets, weaving a community. The singing modulates the pace and structure of the moving image. (Compare the style of Tuka with his corrupt rival, the priest Salo Malo, who sings the plagiarized verses of Tuka with the body all askew, using the jerky movements of the tamasha actor. One might also compare the passionate, pragmatic, uncouth but vulnerable Jijai, wife of Tuka, in her attempted naturalism, or spontaneous 'expressionism' with the seductive stylization of the prostitute after the hybrid mannerisms of Ravi Varma's pictorial compositions, noting how styles are consciously used to set off the integral being of Tuka.)



Jijai admonishing the gods



The idols come alive



The goddess emerges with Tukaram's books of verse



Krishna pours grain from the sky



Tukaram ascends to heaven

The second feature of the movement of the film is the childlike, indeed childish set of miracles (as when the stiff idol of Vithoba comes alive smiling and dances with his little feet, arms akimbo; when the wheat stalks in the ravaged fields shoot up of themselves as Tuka sings with his eyes closed; when the boy Krishna pours grain from the sky with his own two hands to save Tuka; when the goddess emerges from the depths of the water with Tuka's bundle of verse intact; when the person of Chhatrapati Shivaji multiplies to fool the invading armies; when Tuka takes off in the chariot flown by Garuda in the shape of a great hairy bird straight to Vaikunth.) The miracles in any case make happy omens for the magical aspect of the cinema; there is a never fading thrill in technical transformation of contours, substances, bodies, and there is a special thrill in kinetic transfiguration of hitherto static iconography.

The fabulous, even where it appears ephemeral, has a narrative function nevertheless. Which brings me to the third aspect of the movement in *Tukaram*. Because the magic is inducted into the everyday life of the little community at Dehu it become a motivating impulse *towards a materially plentiful, therefore generous existence*. The first signs of this are provided by the wholly generous acts of Tuka himself as when he walks through the village like a divine somnambulist, letting the plundering army of little children take their pick of his great bundle of sugarcane until by god's grace there is but one left for each of his own two children, the poorest of the lot but made so easily happy.



Artisans of Dehu singing Tukaram's verses as they work

Then there is Tuka's gracious *effect* on his community. There is a sequence when his priestly interrogator arrives in the village riding a horse. Ruthless and haughty in his high seat, he sees to his bewilderment the entire village engrossed in its artisanal tasks by virtue of the saint's songs. There is a wonderful tracking shot parallel to the priest on the horse but taken from the near side so that you see between the camera and the priest an entire pageant of working people, working at their craft and trade and domestic chores and yet singing, giving form and rhythm to their daily life. Not only does the film here achieve (through a remarkable use of a depth-of-field and a sustained lateral movement which prolongs the penetrating view) a shift in the viewer's perception — it is the priest and his cohorts rather than the poor in their hovels who are objects of the viewers' voyeuristic interest and derision — it also achieves a shift in the viewers' comprehension of the more spectacular miracles. Here is an evidence of emancipation shown to be immanent within a community of unalienated labour. Here life, song and work combine to attain the sustained rhythm of reverie we associate only with leisure. This gift to his people is the saint's true miracle.

The actual miracles are naive to the point of being crude, just as the image and its iconography is construed cursorily, to simply signpost the event. But it is also as if the moments of fallibility suggest complementary moments of identification; just as the moments of material want and suffering recall the moments of plenty in an equal measure of human affect. As for example in the scene where Jijai and her two children succumb to greed and play unabashed with Shivaji's *nazraana* only to provoke Tuka's rebuke against the easy wealth of



Tukaram's daughter playing with the gifts sent by Shivaji



Tukaram's son dressed in royal clothes



Tukaram's generosity with the grain



The miracle of the grain



Mounds of free grain



Villagers sharing the grain

the ruler. As also the moment where the village poor loot god's boon to Tuka, the piles of grain at his door, and you see, inadvertently almost, the glistening energy of muscle and movement mounting up to a revolutionary effect — a virtual pre-figuration, through the saint's encouragement, of peasant insurgency.

Thus if the film has a Melies-like magicality (via Phalke), the miracles also initiate a sensuous gain in the daily life of the community and become the mode of social transformation in the film. Ultimately Tuka's ascent to heaven is fairly matched by Jijai's pathetic but real claim to see him back home for his daily meal. We can see the other part of cinema, the early realism of Lumiere and Pudovkin already moulded into this saint's life and dream and film.



Tukaram with heavenly attendants



Tukaram with his family

IV

Satyajit Ray's *Devi*²⁶ is a classic narrative. Somewhat as in a suspense drama where the viewer anticipates the next stage and slips into it, the sequences in the film move imperceptibly. The plot is attuned to the young Daya's destiny; her life runs swiftly into madness, she is dead at seventeen. The plot-time in other words is tuned to the brief life of the quarry which once marked runs on, giving fleeting measure of reality but in the foreclosed form of tragic denouement.

What should be noted is the way real time is absorbed by the space in which it functions; in the grand household of the feudal partriarch where, in the large dark rooms, in the resounding corridors, life moves but slowly, blocked by heavy furniture, hidden behind doors and screens. The shriek of Daya's pet parrot lifts the gloom, the clatter of the old man's wooden sandals subsides into the shadowy magnitude of the place. Ray is of course famous for creating a mood and an atmosphere (to which Bansi Chandragupta, the art director, and the cameraman, Subrata Mitra, contribute greatly). We see this in *Jalsaghar* and will see it again in *Charulata* : how the mise-en-scene and the camera movement coincide to establish a beautifully integrated *environment*.

In this sense Ray fulfils the conditions of realism quite perfectly : a seamless narrative; the use to maximum advantage of the two elements of perspectival depth, sound and shadow, to achieve a rich chiaroscuro that harbours a particular kind of psychic intentionality. He not only fulfils the conditions but reiterates the equation between narration, realism and tragedy at that level of noble rationality at which the investigations of man-in-society become scientifically viable. By embedding human destiny in an interposed map of nature and culture (heredity and environment) he also examines psychic distortion : a manifestly modern preoccupation.

Not unexpectedly, the double register of realism/modernism, strikes up the erotic note — this too is characteristic of the rationalist project. Thus the core of this film is revealed when an unintended eroticism unwinds in the heart of the old aristocrat and destroys the old order. As Kalinkiner Roy watches his beautiful, young daughter-in-law perform the ritual puja before the goddess, and as he receives her devoted attentions, we see a visible conflation of motives : the deification of a desired object. The dream that is forming in the old man is still, in terms of the plot, to be revealed; in terms of the image it is already established in the body and performance and cinematographic capture of Kalinkiner. There is an exhibition of sensuality which in Ray's fashion is shown discreetly enough but not for that reason to be missed : the crumpled brocade clothes of the aristocrat; his delirious love of the goddess; his covert, almost spying glances at Daya; and his freely surrendered limbs as he relaxes on the tiger-skin chair while she washes and caresses his feet.

The faint repugnance towards the floundering old man is set against a sympathy for the clear-eyed younger son, Daya's husband, Umaprasad. He studies in Calcutta, in a liberal environment. And though Umaprasad is not in any way heroic or even fully emancipated, his body, his direct, compassionate smile, his voice and words, have a *firm contour* (of which you get a mannerist proof in his well-articulated handwriting as he writes his name several times over with the fine bold strokes of a good pen !) The difference is not just of old age and youth but of the way the images are formed and positioned. Even the dandyism of the young man riding with a friend in a horsecab in Calcutta has a *poise* that signals the making of a selfconscious, perhaps imitative but also optimistic, middle class in nineteenth-century Bengal.

The figural contrast of the aristocrat and his son are of course entirely ideologically dictated — this is one of the few times that Ray *is* speaking in class terms and he is speaking of the feudal and the emerging bourgeois in favour of the latter. If there is sympathy towards the aristocrat suggesting also a sympathy towards the dying order (in *Jalsaghar*, of course, it is the very motif), it is only so much as is necessary to maintain the balance of realism. The terms of criticism are clear enough and they are precisely those formulated by the Brahmo Samaj movement : the rational/liberal progressivism which Ray's family inherited as Brahmos and which Ray saw modernized into a universalist aesthetic via Rabindranath Tagore (with whom his family was close and in whose university



Kalinkinkar with disbelieving son Umaprasad

at Santiniketan Ray studied art). I would in fact emphasize that in this film Ray does deal with false consciousness in its more or less precise meaning as class ideology which functions among other things most prominently through religion. And it seems a pity that critics,²⁷ harping on Ray's subtlety, should shy away from saying this, depriving Ray of even his own reticent manner of social intervention.

But to go on with the motif: while we can see the dream thoughts in Kalinkinkar's imagination there is scarce expectation of the quickness and finality of his dream where he sees little Daya as the deity and gets up in the morning crying out in ecstasy that she is goddess incarnate come to bless this house and humanity. A monstrous process of condensation in the aristocrat's psyche culminates in a flash in the dream-content: all the mixed up elements of the old brain find a 'truth' that achieves via cunning displacement, the fulfilment of his desire.

'I do not think it is necessary at this point to form a plastic conception of the psychic condition at the time of dream formation' says Freud.²⁸ But the cinema has been doing precisely this since its inception, providing us with the *plastic conception* at the time of dream formation by a virtual relay of images, their overlapping density and transposition. But also by reproducing in the cinema-hall virtually those conditions in which dream formation takes place so that you can either achieve a collapse of the conscious subject or, if the film-maker intends to encourage reflection, to use the cinematic apparatus to retrace and thereby demystify the very dream-work, of condensation and displacement, which it is otherwise the business of the psychoanalyst to deconstruct. In a modest way Ray provides the plastic conception and then a reflective understanding of the dream process in *Devi*.

The desire of Kalikinker is quite obviously cast in the mould of the Oedipus complex. But there is an inversion which makes the desire more predatory, and the complex more indigenously apt, and the dying order more mournful. In supplicating before the mother goddess who is beneficent and cruel, nurturing mother and annihilating energy (and to the Bengalis she is also in the form of Uma/Durga, their very daughter come home, so that when customarily they call their own daughters *ma*, they are at once adopting the goddess and deifying the daughter — as potential mother), there is already an awesome convergence of tenderness, fear and desire. There is greed and despair and the need for a violent catharsis. Now all these elements go into constituting the Oedipus complex which as we know Freud believed to be nearly universal. But in the Oedipal story, and its reenactment in every male child's psyche, there is a desire to murder the father in revenge for the sense of castration he produces in the boy. In *Devi*, it is the father who, coveting the daughter-in-law, wishes to castrate the son. The conflation of the figure of daughter and mother already present in the language and sentiment in Bengal helps him butt together two desires; to possess the mother and dispossess the son of his beloved.

If this is the story of a feudal patriarch using the mother cult to appropriate his own progeny's bride, then Ray's reason for taking it up seems to be not moral disgust as much as a protest against all *empowering, all authorizing procedures*, even when these are gained from myth and religion or precisely when these are thus gained. There seems to have been a distrust also of excessive eroticism and of libidinous display as in the cults of the mother goddess, a distrust surely gained from his mentor Tagore. And one might add that like Tagore there is also a didactic intent, to make a critique alike of bogus deification as of the artist-author/activist who will disgorge the phantoms of his imagination to gain a catharsis, calamitous to others in that it starts up the kind of romanticism that invites cultist mystifications, secret loyalties and indiscreet valorization of the self, of the folk, of a community, of the nation. The critique Tagore introduced against Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya in *Ghare Baire*, for example, was to be used by Ray against Ghatak in the coming years, through the 1960s.

One of the ways he protests against this empowering process is to exaggerate the actual effect of feudal power. The zamindar's declaration of Daya as goddess incarnate induces almost the entire populace around Chandipur to bring their grief at his door; asking for blessings from the goddess but also paying obeisance to his glory. Garlands of pilgrims wind across the countryside and press up to the household shrine. Then one incident is isolated; a miracle is performed amidst cheap suspense (rather, through the editing pattern of inter-cut shots commonly used to build up suspense in films) and a dying child is restored to his dazed father by Daya's blessing. But then the displacement in this vainglorious drama takes place with the aid of this same man. As Daya is being destroyed by her daily role, the pauper returns and sings one of Ramprasad Sen's famous songs to the goddess Kali and in this moment two things happen. Seeing the man's serene and melancholy face in close-up as he sings, you realize that it is now *he* who is blessing the girl. He recognizes her suffering. The dignity of the

poor is restored as also popular mystical sensibility in verse and song that cuts beyond ritual and speaks directly of pain. Indeed, as a benediction the song also becomes an expression of our pity for the trapped girl virtually dying before our eyes.

Finally we should see what Ray does with the young Daya. To her he attaches the two elements of fear and pity that signify the effects of classical tragedy and he does this from the first, *imagistically*, by showing how *little she is*. It is sentimental but as effective a marker as any used in tragic convention (Ophelia, after all is composed of sentiment alone). How little she is derives from the young small body of the actress, and in the way she is held and cherished and also spoken of by the husband whose entire agony about her absurd transformation is expressed in the one sentence to his mentor in Calcutta : she is only seventeen.

But it is equally in the way she is taken by the camera as a diminutive figure. In fact her littleness seems to become an insistent motif especially after she has been deified : seated in the shrine you see her from near enough but you also see her as the camera saw the clay icon at the start, tilted, about to fall back. You see the signs of a trance showing on her weary face (a trance evoked as much by the claustrophobia of priests, chanting, incense and beseeching pilgrims as by her own half-doubt about her status) but when she actually swoons and falls



Dayamoyee with her pet parrot

sideways, like a doll, the camera has withdrawn and you see her in long-shot, bereft, broken. When the husband returns they exchange this intelligent compact look of *adult* understanding, but he is able to do nothing against the father and when you see her next the camera is moving above the pressing crowds following the husband's gaze as he watches her from the privacy of an upstairs window while she is being made into a public spectacle. Again, how small she looks wearing her sari down over her face as she hurries into the night with her tall husband agreeing to escape with him to Calcutta; then as she stops among the giant weeds by the river bank, whispering I'm afraid, I'm afraid, I'm afraid — and returns to her awesome state at home. Finally when he comes again she has just gone mad, her face and clothes are in disarray, and she runs out into the fields. Silhouetted against a very warm bright light, she runs with her body stiffened exactly like a wooden puppet hopping awkwardly into the mass of sunflowers. There is hardly the feeling of pity anymore; she is a denounced witch and even at her best no more than a tragic sign. Being a child she has gained no knowledge from her circumstance and the tragedy is as it were purposeless.

What is important is that Ray, as part of his protest against the empowering procedures of myth and religion, never makes her face and figure take on an *iconic aspect*. The paramount point of view is that of her husband with which the director identifies and in that point of view there is tenderness, compassion and rather than the condescension that may go with it (remember Nora in Ibsen's *Doll's House*), there is a peculiarly relieving sense of friendship. She is his young companion who will soon face the world with him in the big city. In refusing to give her an iconic aspect Ray overcomes her own developing doubt: for her husband, the director and the viewer she is always human, therefore of course the more tragic, until the very end when she is for a moment dehumanized to become as I said purely symbolic, a tragic sign. And this last moment is significant in that it makes the film a testimony against a dead order where the icon is as it were the last of the debris and you see it as such, as a throwaway doll.

* * *

Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee situates his story around 1860 or so, Tagore's *Ghare Baire* is placed four decades hence (where rationality in the figure of Nikhil is so far developed), and of course Ray, in his turn, decides to make this film long after Tagore's day—in the Nehru era. Indeed for Nehru, who had released the film to foreign audiences, it would be in the nature of a proclamation declaring the old order dead. But then how should we position the young husband, the preferred protagonist, who fails so miserably but nevertheless becomes emblematic of a not yet realized consciousness? In 1860 — or in 1960?

The discussion on *Devi* can be contextualized if we take up the question arising from the point made just above: *is the film an intended anachronism?*

Chidananda Das Gupta observes²⁹ how Ray's work traces the social evolution of the middle class in modern India, suggesting that in some of his films

even his post-Tagore characters are observed from a Tagorean moral viewpoint, implying in the course of the argument that Ray is ill at ease when this literary mediation no longer suffices; that the period after *Charulata* (1964) shows spiritual exhaustion which he overcomes but only after he has replaced the passionate identification he felt with his immediate past, with a contemporary project. But what is this project? And doesn't the past continue to feature poignantly in it so that indeed Ray's oeuvre can be said to be fairly homogenous, or cyclical, always putting the past and present in a subtly overlapping arrangement, repeatedly reflecting what he regards as perennial values until the 'truth' surfaces? Isn't the project finally to redeem the autobiography of his class and his culture—the progressive conscience of a modern Indian artist?

This takes us too far afield. Here we can only ask how usefully Ray establishes the anachronism of a 'period' film within contemporary reality. The question easily splits into two parts, the ideological and the aesthetic. It is possible to argue that some of the social issues he represents in the first phase of his films (*Pather Panchali* to *Charulata* including *Devi*) are not only located in the middle-late nineteenth century but that they are most keenly felt and examined in that phase of Indian history and not quite since. One of this is of course the question of religious reform, especially the 'modernization' of Hindu religion, or indeed its replacement, as propagated by a section of the Brahmos, with a variety of alternatives including atheism. It may be argued that as nationalism advanced the question of reform was left behind or even overtaken by its opposite force, revivalism; that however progressive Nehru's own position might have been in this matter the Congress Party, and even for that matter the Communists, let the problem of religion (as that of caste, community, etc.) subside before other declaredly more vital goals. In which case Ray's insertion of a period piece (where the collusion between feudal ideology, religious superstition and senile delusion are presented) may be an intended, and at any rate a telling use of an anachronism. It can serve the function of causing disjunction, of forcing upon us a double-take on our contemporary situation.

What about his aesthetic, does it also function retroactively? Let us take the question of the narrative. If with the end of foreign rule the Indian middle class, among them artists, feel the need to face up to ghosts in the cupboard (with a scepticism which even at times queries the gains of political freedom), it is not surprising that this need should be conditioned by a bourgeois literary preoccupation: of introspecting over subjectivity, society and the limits of liberalism in a fictional narrative of the interrogative mode.

In their act of *introspection* modern Indian artists' choice of genre, style, form, does come from the nineteenth century (e.g., Ibsen and Chekhov) with its extension via existential morality into the twentieth century (with Sartre, Camus and Solzhenitsyn). Nor is it surprising that an Indian film-maker should 'go back' to this narrative form so late as in 1960. One, because we know that art does not in this sense follow a determinist path and that there is no absolute successivity and progress in forms. Two, because each medium has its own history and



A villager who comes to Daya
as Kall to cure his sick child

cinema, still young, solves its own problems along a different time-scale and along different routes than literature and the other arts.

Bazin is at much pains to prove³⁰ how it needed the transition from silent films to the talkies and from primitive to a sophisticated technology of lensing, lighting and outdoor shooting before cinema could lay claim to a phenomenological rendering of reality qua reality, where even the aesthetic factor may surrender itself. Only thus, according to Bazin, is the image you see on the screen not reality artificially 'framed' but reality imperceptibly 'masked', and the plot simply set in the theatre of life, the *mise-en-scene* coinciding with nature itself. Cinematic realism has its own ontology, as it has a technological and formal logic.

In India the development of cinematic realism by Satyajit Ray has to do with a long process of gestation, which includes precisely the contribution of Renoir and Bazin. But not before Ray himself made his Apu trilogy, supplementing it with four more ideologically oriented films (*Jalsaghar*, *Devi*, *Mahanagar* and *Charulata*), could he have developed his version of realism that is concretely in place—in Bengal, in India. Ray in fact is the very artist who extends, through the use of modern technology and cinematic means, the psyche and the creative grasp of the middle-class Indian artist to this particular position with regard to the real: a commitment to veracity, intellectual equanimity and reflection.

Having acknowledged this we must attend to the criticism applicable to Ray, a criticism that he remains a liberal after all, even leaning towards conservatism in response to a deteriorating social situation. And this is attributable as much to his indigenous, historical-cultural lineage, as to the larger fact that the other route which nineteenth-century rationalism took in Europe is so simply circumvented by Ray. This is the route of historical dialectics where even the notion of realism is not, as for example even Lukacs shows, an automatic correlate of humanism but requires a critical reflex gained at first by what he calls the potential consciousness of an author-subject and then, in the twentieth century, by revolutionary theory and practice. Ray's humanism/realism is itself limited in its unstated belief in empirical perception; in an evolutionary logic where heredity, tradition and environment are taken rather literally as crucial determining factors; and finally, in a notion of authenticity, albeit a lyric rather than dully moral authenticity, with its 'true to the soil' ethic of the F.R. Leavis school.

Finally even Bazin's position on realism though it takes not the route of Lukacsian Marxism but a Catholic phenomenology manages as much, or more, as Ray's over-all progressivism in that it incorporates Italian neo-realism, the cultural advance guard of the Italian communist party.

It is because of Ray's conserving classicism, situated in the very heart of his realism, that the pain from a tragedy is drawn straight and clean, like a silk thread from its cocoon; but then it is for the same reason that the fine-spun story of *Devi* is contained *within the cocoon of the domestic environment*. And though he does to a point succeed in presenting the tricky problem of mythic distortion there is a therapeutic aspect to it. Ultimately he is looking at the seamy side not of the social body as of a familial (psychic) complex which, once exposed, may be restored to health. But false consciousness as we know is different from the problem of bad faith; nor is a well-told story adequate to the demands of a complex narrative. False consciousness cannot be simply exposed, it is so structurally embedded that it needs an equally dense narrative pattern which requires of us that we see it cut down sectionally so as to face up to its unexpected profile and the jagged emotion.

While Ray certainly cleanses us and enriches us, giving us whatever nobility we may yet find in the surviving culture — indeed here he is a master, and not only among Indians — he leaves us meagrely equipped to handle conceptually, and through art, the new complexities of the superstructural phenomena, especially myth.

* * *

Renewed investigations into the narrative form with tools developed by anthropologists and linguists — among them literary and film theorists — bring the debates on realism up to date. But if anything realism is again problematized and must be tackled as such. It is a problematic for reasons that are obviously political but also aesthetic and formal. Just as it is not sufficient to try to comprehend twentieth-century revolutions in terms of a psycho-social apparatus of nineteenth-century bourgeois consciousness, it is not possible to extend the genre of realism to cover all historical situations. This is something that Sergei Eisenstein and Brecht irrefutably demonstrated in their work, in their theories and polemic; this is something that Ritwik Ghatak understood very well. But the issue must continue to be debated, especially in the third world, where realism as a genre has proved to be so hospitable, spawning all manner of realisms that replicate and reify the 'given'. Perhaps it is here that the debate will yield new ground, and subside.

But the ideological implications of genres and forms and the alternatives worked out in artistic practice are brought up here merely to signpost the problem. While speaking of the nationalist phase and the crucial transition from colonial to post-colonial status, the polarity I set up with the two examples, *Sant Tukaram* and *Devi* reasonably represents the range of discourse that dominates the cultural realm and artistic practice of this period. A radical thrust is present in the Indian art tradition of this century but it remains marginal and should be examined as such : *a tendency with a revolutionary future*.

1. See Richard Kearney, 'Dialogues with Paul Ricoeur', in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, pp. 15-46.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.
3. There is a vast literature on the subject of the *popular* in art history. And there is a continuing debate on the subject in India at least since the 1930s: at Santiniketan; around the Prabhat films in Pune; among the Progressive Writers' Association and of course in the Indian (IPTA) movement. The debate continues today most specially in contemporary Indian art (See K.G. Subramanyan, *Moving Focus*, Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi, 1978; *The Living Tradition*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1987); and in contemporary Indian theatre. The overwhelming phenomenon of popular Indian cinema raises somewhat different questions due to the commercial component and it encourages also a populist sociology; but there is also a more sharply focused debate on the progressive and formally significant aspects of the popular in cinema (see Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'Neo-Traditionalism—Film as Popular Art in India', *Framework*, 32/33, London, 1986, pp. 20-67.)
4. The film *Sant Tukaram* was made in 1936 in Marathi by the Prabhat Film Company in Pune. It was directed by the inspired two-man team of Vishnu Govind Damle and Sheikh Yasin Fattelal. Damle came from an enlightened middle-class family of rural Maharashtra; Fattelal came from a working-class family from the culturally active city of Kolhapur. Both of them started drawing and painting early; both served as 'art directors' in drama companies in Bombay, theatrical culture being a popular business in Maharashtra. Each in his own turn served as an all-purpose apprentice to the artist brothers Anantrao and Baburao Painter in their pioneering efforts in the field of film, settling down to a career in cinema from 1917 when Baburao painter set up the Maharashtra Film Company in Kolhapur. In 1929 they split with this company and formed along with a few others, which included the soon famous V. Shantaram, the Prabhat Film Company. Shifting to Pune in 1933, they set up the exemplary Prabhat Studios producing some of the most significant films of the 1930s and 40s.

Of these I am here interested in naming those that concerned the myths and legends from the Indian literary tradition. In Kolhapur Damle/Fattelal had already made a silent mythological, *Karna*; in 1935 Shantaram made a film on Sant Eknath called *Dharamatma*; Damle/Fattelal made *Sant Tukaram* in 1936, *Gopal Krishna* in 1938; *Sant Dnyaneshwar* in 1940; *Sant Sakhu* (with Raja Nene) in 1941; and in 1944 they produced *Ram Shastri*.

Damle died in 1945 and though Prabhat continued up to 1953, with Fattelal making several other films in the mythological genre, not to speak of Shantaram who traversed several genres to span five decades of Indian film-making, the naive set of films we have referred to constitute, with *Tukaram* at the apex, a unique moment in Indian cinema.

Sant Tukaram ran for a continuous year in Bombay; in the countryside people walked for miles to see open-air screenings. For the first time an Indian film won an international award; it was rated one of three best films at the prestigious Venice Film Festival in 1937.

Tukaram was played by Vishnupant Pagnis, a former bhajan singer; Jijai, his wife, was played by Gauri, a working-class woman at Prabhat, and the producers kept her lower-caste accent intact. The verses, some of them from the original *abhangas* of *Tukaram*, others especially composed for the film (by Shantaram Athavale, set to music by Keshavrao Bhole) were in a sense a modest contribution to the medieval bhakti tradition—both the player and his songs becoming a part of the popular consciousness of the time in the most sympathetic sense of contemporary cultural overlay.

5. Other classified genres being the historical, the western, the musical suspense and horror films and film noir. There is the category of neo-realist films followed by the more ambiguously defined 'new wave' or art films accompanied at the margins by avant-garde experimentation and independent cooperative ventures, outside the industry. The developments since the new

wave often recall the theories and methods of earlier masters, foremost being Sergei Eisenstein.

6. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India : 1885-1947*, Macmillan India, Madras, 1985, p. 83.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 328.
8. K.A. Abbas in *The Bombay Chronicle*, 25 May 1940, quoted by Bapu Watwe, V. Damle & S. Fatehalal: *A Monograph*, NFAI, Pune, 1985, p. 35.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-40.
10. Kearney, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
11. For an original and detailed analysis of Phalke's contribution to Indian cinema see Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke Era', *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, July-December 1987.
12. This varies of course between different pictorial traditions such as Indian, western, Chinese, etc., but also between phases of the same tradition as for example the difference between Rublevov's Christ; Giotto's St. Francis; Leonardo's St. Anne and the Virgin; Rembrandt's self-portraits, and so on.
13. Andre Bazin, 'Le Journal d'un curé de campagne and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson' in *What is Cinema ?*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1974, pp. 125-143.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
15. Taking C.W. Peirces' division of the linguistic sign into its three aspects — the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic — film theoreticians have shown how especially appropriate this definitional procedure is to cinematic language and effect. See Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Secker & Warburg, BFI, London, 1982.
16. See A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'Akimcanna : Self-naughting', in Roger Lipsey (ed.), *Select Papers*, Vol. II, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978, pp. 88-106.
17. To recall again what Bazin says, the 'caste in Dreyer's *Joan of Arc* and Bresson's *The Diary of a Country Priest* is not being asked to 'act out a text, not even to live it out, just to speak it. ...' (italics mine), Bazin, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
18. See Anuradha Kapur, 'Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods : The Ramlila at Ramnagar' in Sudhir Chandra (ed.), *Social Transformation and Creative Imagination*, (Ed.) Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 335-354.
19. 'We possess the wealth of words/With weapons of words we will fight/Words are the breath of our life/We will distribute this wealth of words among the people/Tuka says, look ! the meaning of Word is God/With Word, we will extol and worship.' Translation of Tukaram's verse quoted in Jayant Lele (ed.), *Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1981, p. 119 and f.n. p. 123.
20. Translation of Tukaram's verse quoted in G.B. Sardar, *The Saint-Poets of Maharashtra : Their Impact on Society*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1969, p. 128.
21. For a fine discussion on Tukaram see G.B. Sardar, *op. cit.*
22. (i) See Sumit Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-330. (ii) Regarding the deification of Gandhi, from the point of view of historical deconstruction, see Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma : Gorakhpur District, Eastern U.P., 1921-2,' in *Subaltern Studies III : Writings on South Asian History and Society*, OUP, Delhi, 1984, pp. 1-55. (iii) I am grateful to Gyanendra Pandey for a discussion on Gandhi in the context of the present paper.
23. Kumar Shahani, 'The Saint Poets of Prabhat', in T.M. Ramachandran (ed.), *70 Years of Indian Cinema (1913-1983)*, CINEMA India-International, Bombay, 1985, p. 201.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
26. The film *Devi* was made by Satyajit Ray in 1960; it was his sixth film and though he was already well established as an international figure this film did not have any great success in Bengal and had some difficulty in obtaining an export permission owing to its critical handling of

Hindu orthodoxy until, significantly, Nehru intervened and released the film to foreign audiences.

The film is based on a story by Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee (1873-1932), a well-known short-story writer, beholden to Rabindranath Tagore for his literary achievements: the actual idea and motif of the story we are concerned with was given to Mukherjee by Tagore. The story is set in late nineteenth-century Bengal, around 1860 or so, in the grand zamindar household of Kalikinker Roy who is a devotee of Kali and after the recent death of his wife somewhat besotted by the ritual of worship. He has two sons and two daughters-in-law (and a great retinue of relatives and servants) in the home. While Tarapada, the elder son, is a weak man, dependent on his father's wealth, the younger son, Umaprasad, studying in a college in Calcutta, is already attuned to the progressive ideas of the nineteenth-century Bengali 'renaissance' and encouraged to question his father's feudal and religious superstitions by his obviously heterodox teacher and friend in the city.

Tarapada's wife Harisundari is strong and astute and impatient of the cowardice which such a hierarchical household produces; her little son Khoka is attached to his aunt, Dayamoyee, the wife of Umaprasad, who is not only very young but doll-like and beautiful and everyone's favourite. She is her husband's beloved; but she is also the obsession of the old widower, Kalikinker, whom she devotedly looks after, arousing in him as it turns out, sensual desires and religious delusion.

He dreams one night that Daya is the incarnation of the goddess he worships and forthwith deifies the girl, putting her up as the goddess incarnate in his domestic temple and exposing her to the priests and populace of Chandipur as a beneficent deity to whom they must appeal in their need and suffering.

A disbelieving Umaprasad returns home to find his Daya besieged by pilgrims from the entire countryside; he sees her perform a 'miracle' and save the life of a dying child. He protests to his father against the stupidity of such superstition and persuades Daya to run away with him to the city to escape this farce. She agrees but then revokes her decision because of fear — the fear of denying her destiny should it be truly divine.

The story then quickly moves to its tragic end. The little nephew, Khoka, falls ill and despite his mother's protestations is put into the lap of Daya who must save him. The child dies, the distraught mother accuses Daya of witchery, the father-in-law reverts to the clay deity and wails in bewilderment, and Umaprasad returns to find his wife deranged by the stress. Even as he calls out to her human self she runs to her death out across a sunlit meadow.

27. See comments on *Devī* in Chidananda Das Gupta (ed.), *Film India: Satyajit Ray*, Directorate of Film Festivals, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 44-48.
28. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, included in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, The Modern Library, Random House, New York, 1938, pp. 321-322.
29. Chidananda Das Gupta, *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray*, Vikas, 1980, pp. ix, x, 43, 48, 69.
30. Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema', in *What is Cinema?*, *op. cit.* pp. 23-40.

Daya who has gone mad rushes to her death

