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CINE-POLITICS : ON THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CINEMA IN SOUTH INDIA

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There are hardly any parallels elsewhere in the world for the way in which relations between the institutions of cinema and politics have evolved in post-independence India. In two of the four south Indian states, film stars have launched their own political parties and achieved spectacular electoral victories. Even after their demise, the parties they founded have retained a mass base and are in a position of strength vis-a-vis the national parties and other local rivals. In a third state, Karnataka, a star with an equally formidable following, appeared for some time to be on the threshold of a political career but decided against it. And even in Kerala, Prem Nazir had briefly toyed with the possibility of a political career. In the Hindi cinema, with its much wider and more diffuse audience base, we have the case of Amitabh Bachchan, who won an election against no less a political personage than the socialist H. N. Bahuguna. A number of other lesser actors have had minor political careers in many parts of the country.

There are two aspects to this relationship between cinema and politics in India. Since both these are well illustrated by the recent history of Tamil Nadu, where the whole phenomenon finds its most complex expression, let us approach them through this instance. The first aspect is illustrated by the DMK film and refers primarily to the use of cinema as a vehicle of party propaganda. Such "didactic" content might include both scenes and dialogue that illustrate the philosophy of the Dravidian movement as well as references to the party's symbols, including its flag, leaders, etc. In these films, of which *Parasakthi* is considered the most emblematic (see Pandian, 1991), the message is conveyed through scenes which enact the particular lesson. Thus in *Parasakthi,* the scene of the attempted rape by a priest inside a temple which leads to the famous oration by the victim's brother, Gunasekaran, about the goddess : "It will not speak, it is a stone." These scenes are made all the more powerful by the dialogue, which constantly rises to a high level of persuasive rhetoric, penned by some of the masters of Tamil prose, in this instance M. Karunanidhi. As Pandian has argued, *Parasakthi,* released in 1952, already shows the signs of the ideological compromise that a social movement re-constructing itself as a political party is forced to enter into. The lesson in "atheism," for one thing, is not as sharp as it first appears. And on the question of women's chastity, the film takes a retrogressive stand (Pandian 769). Nevertheless, one thing that distinguishes these DMK films from a later genre is the emphasis on the communication of a "message". Of the combination of signifiers that constitutes a film, it is the dialogue that dominates, as it critiques, satirises, accuses, condemns and exhorts. K. Sivathamby, who pointed out this division referred to them as the two *phases* of the DMK film. In the first of these, he remarked, which depended

on social criticism from the writer's point of view the emphasis was more on the arguments adduced by than on the character of one personality, though, even in those films, the character was identified with the cause propounded (Sivathamby, 41).

Let us follow Sivathamby's description of the second phase as well :

In the second phase of the DMK oriented films when MGR was the chief personality, the entire argument was woven round the protagonist himself. The whole concept was personalised in that it was shown as emanating from the personality of the actor. Here the emphasis was equally placed on the actor as it was on the story. Here too it is the dramatic narrative that is important but, the world of conflict exists only as a world centred round the hero and his personal emancipation symbolizes the emancipation from the social evil depicted. If we accept this position, and see it in the background that the particular actor chooses to act only in particular roles then it becomes easy for the identification of the actor with the character. Such was the case with MGR. A comparison that can be usefully applied here is that of the image of NT Rama Rao of the Telugu films who by choosing to act only in particular roles (in the roles of gods in mythological themes) has been considered a 'divine' personality by the vast majority of Telugu film fans.

In the case of MGR there is an additional force of the social circumstance. He played the characters of heroes who are socially relevant to the vast majority of the Tamil filmgoers. In such a situation he emerged as the symbol of the fulfilment of their own wishes (41-42).

We shall take up later the debatable proposition that NTR's popularity was built entirely on the basis of his mythological roles. What Sivathamby's remarks bring into sharp focus is the transformation that occurs in the DMK film, whereby the figure of MGR becomes the dominant signifier in the films, and the message becomes valid only because it emanates from this privileged source. According to Sivathamby, the first phase, beginning in 1948 (the DMK was launched in the following year), gives way to the second in or around 1957 (when the party changed its policy and entered electoral politics). Thus he suggests that the rise of MGR as an autonomous signifier that transcends the party programme coincides with the politics of compromise that led DMK into the arena of parliamentary politics. *Nadodi Mannan* (1958) secured MGR in his new role and the party acknowledged this by organising a massive public reception at which he was taken out in procession on a chariot, against a backdrop of the rising sun and garlanded by elephants (Pandian 1992). (Many years later, asked what he would do were he to become a minister, MGR told the interviewer Jayalalitha that he had already answered the question in *Nadodi Mannan* (Bommai, August 1977 : p. 15 ; the interview dates back to 1969 but is referred to here). The transition in question has also brought the cinematic image into focus, subordinating the symbolic dimension, where the voice transmits a message, to the imaginary. The imaginary relation between spectator and image, whose evolution belongs to the history of cinema, has overtaken the historic but brief period of dominance of word over image.

The history of the political use of cinema has been, as it were, shortcircuited by the history of the evolving relationship of historical audiences to the cinematic image. It

would be less than accurate to describe this as a case of one man's clever manipulation of the party's programme to serve his own ends. Even though that seems to be very much part of the story of Tamil Nadu politics, it is simplistic to say that MGR "used" the DMK film as a vehicle to launch himself before turning the tables on his benefactors. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the DMK was shortchanged in the phase of its relationship of dependence with MGR, in the days when Annadurai is reported to have said,"just his face would draw 30,000 (persons), the person himself would bring in 50,000" (cited in Sivathamby 39). Everything thus points to a radical break rather than a mere shift in emphasis at the transition point identified by Sivathamby. The DMK film before *Nadodi Mannan*, with its emphasis on narrative, could not have produced what MGR was to soon become. I am sceptical therefore of the suggestion that the elevation of MGR to superstar status was the result of conscious planning by the party, even if it is true that the party was quite happy to exploit this popularity for garnering votes.

In other words, we must distance ourselves from an approach to the study of the Tamil Nadu instance where the emphasis is laid wholly and entirely on the intentions and strategies of the leading players and, in the process, the logic of cinema's own evolving social presence is rendered neutral and transparent. There is another spectre that haunts this scenario, which leads to the downfall of some and the rise of others, which has to be reckoned with. That this is so is indicated by Sivathamby's comparison of MGR's case with that of NT Rama Rao of the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh. There, no party was in the picture, nevertheless NTR emerged similarly into a position of power. His films were not known for the kind of propaganda content that MGR's films included. Fans' associations nevertheless emerged to consolidate the position of this star. And in the other neighbouring state of Karnataka, Rajkumar had similar success, although he desisted from translating it into parliamentary power. If we take these three instances into consideration and pose the question of why and how three states gave rise to such formidable star-politicians, we are forced to acknowledge that there is a problematic here that had only a tenuous link with the history of DMK's more message-oriented brand of cine-politics. This party's programme-based approach to the exploitation of cinema as a "medium" of political communication is a far cry from the logic of these stars' social position, which is not always based on the messages they convey.

There is thus a need to reconstitute the object "cinema and politics" or cine-politics as I call it here, to take into account factors that are ignored by the "political communication" model or any model that relies on the idea that cinema is used as a transparent medium to transmit messages and thereby win the hearts of spectators. Neither the specificity of the cinematic institution nor the complexity of political processes in a peripheral modern nation-state is given its due in such models.

In existing accounts of cinema's "influence" over the masses, especially as it takes a political turn, we mostly encounter discussions of cinema's role *in* politics—how cinema is employed as a propaganda tool for political ends or how stars exploit their charisma to succeed in politics. While the former invites positive or negative valuation depending on one's agreement or disagreement with the content of the propaganda, the latter is seen as an instance of the many unhealthy influences that contaminate the electoral process and spoil the chances of democracy functioning as it ideally should. In this sense, star charisma is treated rather like caste or community based appeals in an election, which the dominant

democracy model criticises as inimical to its furtherance, as an infusion of unreason into a system that would otherwise function rationally, on the basis of programmes and manifestoes.

Thus most people who are interested in this phenomenon recognize the political dimension of cinema only insofar as it manifests itself in the field identified aforehand as the field of politics. It is only when MGR or NTR launches a party and contests elections that we see the object "cinema and politics" coming into view. Thus the critic Chidananda Das Gupta, who had earlier confined himself to discussions of art cinema, wrote an entire book on the popular cinema, "the urge for [which] came with N. T. Rama Rao's meteoric rise to power in 1983 in Andhra Pradesh" (Dasgupta ix). Cinema thus figures here as a prior instance, where the accumulation of charisma takes place before it is deployed in politics. When attention is turned to cinema itself, the adulation that stars enjoy has tended to be seen as a variant of devotional activity of the religious kind, a view buttressed by the instances reported in the press of worship of stars, construction of temples in their names, etc. In this way star charisma joins superstition and other pre-rational phenomena which are used to "rig" the electoral process. The "gullibility" of the masses is often taken to be an obvious fact in such analyses, the people are regarded as incapable of distinguishing reality from fantasy, and are believed to believe that MGR can actually fight with tigers and lions, and a host of other such absurdities.

I do not wish to oppose to this an alternative approach based on the familiar insight of critical theory that "everything is political". Nor is it our purpose here to rescue the masses from the accusations of gullibility and restore them to an exalted position of instinctual and unerring wisdom. It is not unusual for a first-time visitor to the cinema to experience the action on screen as real, and in the period that we are discussing, new audiences were being drawn into the cinematic institution every day. But, as we shall see, stars in this region made no attempt to carry the illusion of valour or glamour over into their public lives. Acting styles, music, costumes and other elements also frequently reminded the audience of the theatre, and audiences in the 1950s for instance were hardly likely to imagine that MGR could "actually" be a king of some wonderful land today and a farmer by the time of next Friday's new release. Something more was involved, an illusion too, to be sure, but not the illusion that the image was real. An ideological novelty, anchoring the experience of cinema and leading to a unique socio-political event, that we call cine-politics. Remaining within the confines of the model of politics narrowly defined as a system of representation, the attempt here is to raise some questions about the division between cinema and politics assumed by the dominant approach and to propose some elements, a set of factors that may contribute to a re-construction of cine-politics as an object of study. It is around the notion of *representation* that one such line of questioning opens up.

The term representation is commonly used in two broad senses, which can be summed up as political and aesthetic. In the political sense, the word refers to what is commonly identified as an "indirect" form of democracy where representatives chosen or elected by the polity take decisions on their behalf (Manin, 1997). Leaders who represent any group even outside the framework of democratic institutions could also be included within this category. Aesthetic or, to use a term that is more prevalent nowadays, cultural representation refers to the realm of discourse, of texts and images, those products of culture in which we re-present our world. Such re-presentations never afford direct and transparent access to reality as they are themselves subject to a variety of constraints, including the codes and conventions that make representation possible. By the same token, representations are also not neutral, each combination of codes, conventions, historical and ideological determinations carries its own ideological biases and emphases. When we discuss cultural products like films, novels, television, art, we locate them within this field of aesthetic representation. As culture acquires a wider currency and displaces the term "aesthetic", the field of cultural representation too expands to include texts other than those that are defined as aesthetic.

Through all this, however, we retain a clear distinction between the aesthetic and political realms. While the critique of cultural representation often takes the form of an investigation of the "politics" of representation, here the term politics is used in a broad sense to mean those effects of persuasion or ideological interpellation through which a class or a dominant ideology creates and maintains its own hegemony. Even as we expose the political underside of what appears to be innocuous entertainment, we do not lose sight of the fact that culture is an autonomous field of textual production with its own history, institutions, rules and conventions. Thus as film critics, we know that even if films are used to conduct political propaganda, they are still autonomous texts which tell stories, employing a set of established conventions, techniques of storytelling etc.

Cinema, however, has from the beginning posed a problem to our assumption of the unicity or aesthetic autonomy of the cultural text. Stars, or the star system that seems to arise in any thriving film industry, always exceed the narrative framework of the film-as-story and acquire an autonomous existence as supplementary representations that are only partially anchored in the films that feature the particular star. Star personae are themselves representations but they are not constituted only through the roles played by the star. And once a star persona is established, the roles themselves begin to exceed the requirements of "characterisation". The star as representation begins to communicate through other channels than the films, and even in the films, a star retains a channel of communication which runs parallel to the diegetic content of the narrative.

There is now a vast literature on the question of stars and the different ways in which star-fan relations unfold.[1] To a large extent the insights provided by these texts apply to star systems across the world, including India. However, the particular phenomenon that we are concerned with here appears to be more than just an extreme version of the standard star-adulation and needs to be treated as something qualitatively different. One feature that is distinctive in the south Indian case is the fact that adulation is based on the ascription to the star of the status of a representative. The star is taken to represent the *linguistic community* for whom his films are made. If it were only a question of the political *messages*, if the "rebel" image in itself were the source of adulation, there would be no difference between the Hindi star Amitabh Bachchan and say, NTR, many of whose later films were remakes of Bachchan's hits. Or, given the much wider fan following of Bachchan, it would seem reasonable to expect him to be politically more successful than NTR, which we know to have not been the case. The difference hinges on an extra dimension—NTR is taken to represent the Telugu "nation" in a way that Bachchan cannot be—within modern India, a "Hindi" nation cannot exist, since its identity is fully merged into the Indian national identity.

Studies of the star system usually place great emphasis on individual fan's relations with the star, which can take several forms, such as imitation or identification. There are also cases of "mass hysteria", as in the case of Rajesh Khanna's brief period of stardom (or Rudolf Valentino in the West, in an earlier period), or a music star like Elvis. Even in such instances, however, the explanation usually turns around fans' individual subjectivity and desire—the star represents an ideal, an object of desire, of imaginary identification. Fans express themselves through this relation, give vent to their repressed desires. The drudgery of everyday existence, the compulsion to conform, are relieved by the fantasy unleashed by acts of identification.

Stars like Rajkumar, MGR, NTR however, rarely appeared as rebels against the system in their formative years. (When NTR does so in some later films he is a rebel in the name of the system.). They played characters who worked to restore a better, improved version of the existing order. There is thus little evidence here of a dynamic of counter-identification, of the sort we find in the case of the early Amitabh Bachchan, where the liminal figures that he played seemed to hold particular appeal to a subaltern, lumpenised population. In those films, it was as a leader of the oppressed *in a hostile environment* that Bachchan gathered a massive following. In the films of these southern stars, however, we rarely find such narratives of counter-identification.

Another unusual feature that we find here is that this generation of stars never tried to reproduce in real life the image they had on screen. All of them appeared in public in traditional clothes, sometimes with their bald pates fully exposed, even when, on screen, they were playing glamorous college students with painted faces and wigs with bushy sideburns. At the height of their careers, while the films showed them as youthful, fashionable lovers, they celebrated their children's marriages in grand style and allowed pictures of the weddings to be published in popular film magazines. Their public image, in other words, was that of elderly, respectable members of traditional high society. When Bombay or Hollywood film stars give special glimpses into their private lives to the magazines, they retain the glamour so that there is no radical disjuncture between the on-screen and off-screen images. Our stars, however, show a clear demarcation between screen roles and real life. The difference between these two zones of their existence is stark, startlingly so for someone who expects certain familiar forms of behaviour from stars in real life.

The main reason for this is historical—MGR, NTR, Rajkumar, A. Nageswara Rao, Sivaji Ganesan etc., belong to a generation which grew up and began to enter the industry at a time when it was still substantially derivative, in many respects, of the popular theatre. This was the early era of the sound film when all of a sudden the advances in silent cinema were temporarily annulled by the necessity of having characters that spoke. In such a situation, a film-maker does not make the same films as earlier with sound added, rather he looks for a play that talks. Thus early sound cinema in the south was predominantly derived from the stage. The actors too had to come from there, initially. Thus our heroes were in the same mould as the "bhagavathars"—Honnappa, Thiagaraja etc., who preceded them, actors trained in the touring theatre companies (sometimes called boys' companies), who came into the industry after a stage career. Our heroes had very brief stage careers, before they were picked up by film-makers. Rajkumar recalls, in his autobiography how he got rid of his "bhagavathar crop" after entering films.[2] Unlike the early bhagavathar-screen actors, whose work in the movies remained substantially similar to their stage work, our stars witnessed the transition from a stage-derived to a more autonomous narrative cinema. They thus formed the bridge between the bhagavathar era, when there was as yet no star persona for actors, to the present era, when star persona reigns supreme. While their careers were almost entirely in the cinema, these middle generation of stars remained bhagavathars at heart. Playing a romantic hero at 50 may not seem all that odd for actors who come from a professional theatre tradition where men played women's roles (as Nageswara Rao did, before he was discovered by a film-maker) and a role was defined as a *vesha*.

The rise of these stars who are, historically, the first generation of male stars in the industry, acquires added significance when seen against the background of a cinema that was, before their arrival, organised around the female star as the primary attraction. This goes back a long way. In 1931, in an article in *Filmland* entitled "Choice of 'Heroes' from a Lady's Standpoint" the writer observes : "Producers think that if the female artistes are not good, people will curse them and so they do not care so much about male actors. They are in the wrong. Heroes should be as befitting as heroines" (Bandyopadhyay, 63). A four-year survey of the industry published in *Moving Picture Monthly*, 1935 confirms this observation in dramatic fashion. The section on "Players" starts thus : "Among the players Gohar and Sulochana still hold the supreme places, with Madhuri coming for a close second…" This is followed by a second paragraph : "India seems to be lacking in heroes…" (Bandyopadhyay, 26). Here there is no doubt as to who comes first in the category "players". While the lack of "heroes" is regretted, there is no suggestion that there is anything wrong with the primacy given to heroines. The idea that in cinema actresses must come first seems to have acquired the status of an obvious and natural truth. Let us also note that these anxieties are beginning to be expressed in the thirties, when the talkies were beginning to replace the silents.

Although the above remarks were not made in reference to south Indian films, there is evidence to suggest that a similar emphasis on the centrality of female stars was prevalent here as well. Indeed, it is enough to look at some of the early films of our trinity to see how both in terms of narrative movement and glamour, it is the female characters who matter most. *Sodari* (d : T. V. Singh Thakur, 1955) Rajkumar's second film, made in 1955, is a good example. The title refers to the heroine, sister of the king of Jayanagara (Pandari Bai) who marries the king of a neighbouring kingdom (Rajkumar). Her brother promises to adopt her son and make him king after him. The queen of Jayanagar, instigated by a maid, tries to scuttle this plan so that her own son can be king. The king goes to war in the neighbouring kingdom, drought ravages the land and the king (Rajkumar) gives away all his wealth to save the people. He leaves the palace, so that his wife can return to her brother's. After this Rajkumar more or less disappears from the narrative and returns in brief scenes as he wanders aimlessly, until the climax. After many trials, Pandari Bai reaches her brother's palace where in his absence his queen inflicts a series of cruelties on her until the king's return. He inquires after his sister and the rest of the action is taken up with his trying to set things right. Rajkumar returns at the end, but by then his wife has died, along with their son.

As the husband of the heroine, Rajkumar plays a role that is, within the logic of the narrative, central in a purely symbolic fashion. After Pandari Bai, the heroine, he is the most important character, more so than the heroine's brother. He is the more handsome, aristocratic figure. From the point of view of narrative *movement*, however, he is a marginal figure. He makes nothing happen. The entire gamut of plots and counter-plots, actions and reactions, through which the narrative moves forward is initiated by the king of Jayanagara, his wife, her maid and others, including the heroine herself, who is the pathetic centre of the narrative. In a revealing farewell scene that follows the wedding, Rajkumar stands at the edge of the frame with a look that suggests that he has no connection with the goings on. This indicates the somewhat secondary status of the male "lead" in that kind of cinema as well as the unimportance of the hero to the plot. A similar bias towards the heroine can be seen in other films as well, for e.g., *Rayara Sose* (K. Ramamurthy/ K. S. Murthy, 1957) ; *Mohini* (Lanka Sathyam, 1948) ; *Manthirikumari* (Ellis Dungan, 1950) ; *Shavukaru* (L. V. Prasad 1950) to mention only those starring our heroes. These are from the late forties and the fifties, when the trend towards male star-centred narratives had already begun. The entries for the period 1920-1940 in the *Encyclopaedia* (1994) indicate the extent to which female stars, and therefore female characters, dominated the scene before the transformation brought about by the entry of our southern trinity.

Why and how does this dominant tendency get reversed in the course of about 15 years? Given the non-availability of an adequate number of early silent and sound films, it is difficult to come to any reliable conclusions about this phenomenon. It is not even certain that a transformation such as this can be really understood through an examination of the films alone. In any case, this is undoubtedly one of the most momentous transformations in the history of Indian cinema and it is strange that no attempt has been made to explain it or even to acknowledge its occurrence. It is one of those phenomena that would appear to have been rendered invisible by virtue of having been too common, too familiar. At this distance and with the limited resources available to us, we can only approach the problem in an indirect fashion, hoping at best to eke out some speculative propositions that might guide future research.

If the advent of the talkies is one of the historical transitions that seems to have a bearing on this question, the other is the birth of the new nation itself. In matters of cultural change such as this, where each instance of the social has its own temporality, it would be disastrous to assume direct cause-effect relations between texts and historical developments. For the same reason, neither the date of advent of the talkies nor the exact moment of independence is here implied but the period in which these events take place, including the years leading up to independence, which is already a time of preparation for a new day. Periodisation is further complicated by the fact that in the case of the sound film, different language cinemas in India have their own temporalities, so that it takes some of them much longer to make certain transitions in terms of genrs, than it does others.

What then are we to make of the fact that as narrative films evolve, the dominant genre that has come to be known as the "social" acquires an androcentric structure? Does it indicate the lifting of a constraint that prevented such a structure from prevailing earlier? Or does it signify the imposition of a fresh constraint, a new order, made possible or necessary by the withdrawal of the colonial power? In the mythologicals, which were the

first, spontaneous choice for talkie producers, speech was not a problem. What was to be spoken, who was to speak, what mannerisms of speech were to be employed—all these problems were solved by the existence of a ready resource—the stage mythologicals, with their established modes of stentorian dialogue delivery, bursts of singing, etc. But in the "social", speech brings with it the problem of authority, the necessity of a narrative centre from which moral authority flows. In a film like *Schoolmaster* (Panthulu, 1958), an elderly patriarch serves as this centre and thereby makes possible the imagining of a world, whose coherence and integrity are troubled by an invading modernity. The important thing here is how a new world which can *represent* the society of modern India is imagined, using the joint family as model and, as D. R. Nagaraj has argued, an ambivalent attitude towards romantic love as both an important element of this construct and a threat to its integrity (Nagaraj, 1996). If romantic love is a "formal requirement" of the popular cinema as Nagaraj puts it, it appears to have become so only slowly. Romantic love acquires importance in a process of re-formation insofar as it allows the centrality of patriarchal authority to be maintained without foregoing the visual pleasures of glamour, colour, sensuality, etc. The androcentric structure can be effectively operated through the narratives of romantic love.

This long-drawn process of a restructuring of the dominant narrative form which installs a new patriarchal order as the moral-legal framework within which narratives unfold is the background against which we must plot the rise to importance of male stars, whose image henceforth includes not only glamour and beauty but also the authority of a patriarchal figure. Nothing illustrates this more vividly than the *paternal* relation that these heroes often have with the heroines. At the height of their career as star-representatives of the linguistic community, these stars cannot indulge in romance without maintaining, as a supplementary feature of their subjectivity, a paternal function which extends to all characters in the film, including the heroine. The mandatory sub-plots of sister-love in the south Indian cinema, with their emotional excesses, are also part of the technology that assists in the elevation of the male star to a paternal status. The sister in these films is a *cause* that the hero takes up and through which he elevates himself from a state of immanence in the diegesis, rising above it as a transcendental signifier. Sister-love is an ingenious solution for the problem of narrative authority that the popular cinema faces. (It is by no means a "reflection" of south Indian cultural values, as a reflectionist reading is likely to assume. There is no evidence to show that south Indian brothers love their sisters more than their north Indian counterparts. Indeed, if the practice of "rakhi" is any indication, brother-sister relations seem to take a stronger, more institutionalised form in the north. And yet this particular sub-theme, while prevalent in the Hindi cinema, rarely achieved the kind of obligatory and excessive status that it acquired in the southern industry.) It enables the hero to take the place of the elderly patriarchal authority, like the schoolmaster of Panthulu's film, while he pursues his own romance and other goals. In the presence of a "schoolmaster", the characters indulging in romantic love look innocent, carefree, and in need of protection. In his absence, the male member of the romantic couple becomes a protector, acquiring the attributes of the schoolmaster/parent. Thus it is not surprising to see Rajkumar, in *Bidugade* (Y. R. Swamy, 1973), admonishing the heroine in song for neglecting her studies. The father/schoolmaster, a figure of traditional authority, is thus replaced by the brother, a figure who, while respectful of traditional

authority, has the skills to get on in the modern world. There is no better, more effcient way for a star to emerge out of diegetic immanence to a position of transcendence than through the sub-plot of sister-love.

While all this may contribute to an understanding of the transition from female-centred to male-centred narratives and the increasing importance of male stars in the star-system as a whole, we have still not approached the more specific question of how, among the many stars who acquired popularity through a combination of the above strategies and circumstances, one in each of the three states rose to represent the nation or linguistic community. Now that we are getting closer to the question of representation, I would like to return once again to the discussion of this term, which signals, at this stage, the arrival of the political question that distinguishes this top layer of the star system from the rest. In a brief discussion of the term and its use by Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire,* Gayatri Spivak introduces a problematic that, albeit indirectly, has relevance to the question we are considering. The discussion, which takes the form of a polemic against Deleuze and Foucault, concerns the two senses of the term that we have noted above : 'representation as "speaking for," as in politics, and representation as "re-presentation," as in art or philosophy." In Marx's German, these two terms translate as *vertreten* and *darstellen* respectively. Spivak cautions against ignoring the distinction between the two senses, even while we recognize that their meanings sometimes overlap :

> The event of representation as *Vertretung* (in the constellation of rhetoric-as-persuasion) behaves like a *Darstellung* (rhetoric-as-trope), taking its place in the gap between the formation of a (descriptive) class and the nonformation of a (transformative) class : "In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life...*they form a class.* In so far as...the identity of their interests fails to produce a feeling of community...*they do not form a class.*" (Spivak, 277).

The quote within the quote is from the *Eighteenth Brumaire,* where, in Spivak's reading, the distinctions between *vertreten* and *darstellen* come into play in a complex argument about a political situation where a "model of social indirection" prevails in the absence of transparent modes of representation based on a calculation of interests alone. Thus representation takes the form of *substitution,* a process through which Louis Bonaparte comes to be recognized by the French peasants as their leader. Here, as Spivak remarks above, political representation "behaves like" aesthetic representation or *Darstellung.* The *name* of Napoleon substitutes for a capacity to "make their class interest valid in their proper [own] name" (278). To summarise, the argument here is that sometimes, political representation is not effected through acts of election or delegation, but through *substitution,* i.e., through the unexpected arrival of a figure who seems to be already endowed with the legitimacy to represent us. In such instances, the figure of representation as substitution has the added dimension of *darstellen* or aesthetic representation. The two orders of representation, in other words, collapse into one.

In the political order of post-independence India, we have a situation that might give rise to a similar deadlock of representation, although the entities involved are not classes, so much as linguistic communities emerging into a shadowy nationhood within a federal polity. The linguistic re-organisation of states which came to a culmination in 1956, led to the dissolution of the Madras Presidency and the constitution of new states, incorporating territories from the erstwhile Madras Presidency, Bombay Presidency, and the princely states. The territorial map of south India was thus re-drawn according to the dominant languages. For long a demand expressed by Congress leaders, linguistic reorganization was nevertheless resisted by the Nehru government. The demand from the regions, especially from Andhra, however, could not be ignored[3]. The main reason for resisting linguistic re-organization was, of course, because from the Centre's point of view, the states were purely administrative units. National identity had to be one and indivisible—Indian. Linguistic reorganization automatically implied that there were different nationalities within the federation of states. While in the north, to a large extent, a considerable linguistic homogeneity existed to reduce the possibility of the state = nationality equation, in the south and the east, language communities, if not alreadydefined as nationalities, had the potential to move in that direction. Thus for a Central government preoccupied with the deepening and expansion of national unity and identity, regional demands for the territorial affirmation of linguistic identities would naturally appear as divisive. Separatist voices arising from the south would only have confirmed the Central machinery in this fear.

The anxiety was not unfounded, whatever we may say about the assumption that such sub-nationalism was undesirable. Linguistic reorganization did create the conditions for the development of a national identity in these states. Wherever such an identity already existed, it also made possible a deepening of national identity and the inclusion of greater numbers of people within its ideology. A movement that was largely confined to the educated classes, and elaborated in literary texts, now found itself appealing for the affiliation of the poor and the unlettered as well. There is no logical reason why cinema should become entangled in such a situation. But if there is already a strong film industry in existence, and the re-drawing of boundaries creates new boundaries within the market, the cinema, a talking cinema what is more, would necessarily reflect this change in some fashion. *Ranadhira Kanteerava* (N. C. Rajan, 1959), one of the most popular films of the post-reorganization era in Karnataka, begins with a call to a constituency that cinema had never directly addressed before : "*Geleya kannadigare swagathavu nimage...*" (Welcome, fellow Kannadigas..."). Based on the story of a legendary king of the Mysore dynasty, who is reputed to have restored the kingdom to its former glory, the film stars Rajkumar in the lead role. Scenes of confrontation with challengers from other kingdoms in the region emphasize the Kannadiga versus Tamil/Malayali dimension. Here the direct address to the spectators as Kannadigas and the thematic reinforcement of the appeal serve to define a new market.

The entire process of the dissolution of the presidency and the gradual re-centering of cultural production away from Madras, in the state capitals or within the new state boundaries is of great relevance to the story we are trying to tell. This process has many dimensions, of which only those which concern cinema will engage us here. While initially films in south Indian languages were made in many production centres all over India, Madras soon became the primary site of production. In the socials produced here, the narrative authority rested in a particular zamindar-type that must have been based on local models, and elaborate plots full of familial intrigues often required a *sutradhara* type of figure to intermittently announce the next step in the story. In such complicated plots, the

hero had the sort of symbolic centrality noted above, with the attendant romantic scenes, songs etc., but there would also be many scenes that were unconnected with the main plot. L. V. Prasad's Telugu films (e.g. *Appu Chesi Papu Kudu*) are typical of this genre, which we can call, for convenience, the studio genre. The comedy track, for instance, was often totally unconnected to the main plot and sometimes for long periods, the comic and the hero never met. These films, in other words, showed a world, of which the romance of the lead pair was the central, but not the only preoccupation. Since it is through these "socials" that the heroes acquire their final star-identity, it is useful to look at how this narrative structure changes.

One such important change is the process by which the comedian's existence within the film becomes more and more strongly linked to the hero's. From a parallel "hero" of an independent comedy track, we see the comedian becoming a side-kick, a friend who is nevertheless shown as a subordinate, and in the moment of the star's apotheosis, as in a film like *Nammaadu*, the comedian has become indistinguishable from a fan. In Kannada, this identity of the comedian as fan is prefigured very early, in *Nandadeepa* (M. R. Vital, 1963), where Vadiraj plays Rajkumar's "follower". (In Hindi films, the relationship remains at the level of friendship, although in an occasional film, like *Jhuk Gaya Asman*, the favourite southern analogy for the star-fan/hero-comedian relation, that of Ram-Hanuman, is invoked). This process of narrative streamlining, whereby the hero's position soon determines all the action, coincides with the rise of these stars to representative status. At the same time, while female stars and lesser male stars take up roles in more than one language, representative status imposes on the top male star a language restriction. He cannot or will not act in a language other than the one he is identified with. Further, the re-centering process leads to a situation where the fact that they reside in Madras becomes for the stars from Karnataka and Andhra, a contradiction that they are forced to resolve or find explanations for. They build studios, acquire an interest in distribution and/or exhibition and in other ways entrench themselves as key players in the developing regional industry. The entire industry's fortunes begin to depend upon the star value of the top hero and one or two of his rivals. New stars pay their obeisance to the "elders" or are forced by fans to do so (as in the case of Vishnuvardhan—once Rajkumar fans are reported to have made him get out of his car and march in a procession in honour of their star). Fan clubs regulate the sizes of the cutouts and "stars" that are erected outside the cinema halls, so that a rival cannot have bigger cutouts without incurring their wrath. Thus a whole series of major and minor phenomena go to construct for the top star the supreme position within the local pantheon.

In all the three industries, there also emerges a division of labour among stars that hints at the different forms of representativeness that are involved in the public's relation to cinema. Thus each of these top stars has a counterpart or set of counterparts, who by contrast to the former, have a more middle class image : Nageswara Rao in Telugu, Sivaji Ganesan and Gemini Ganesan in Tamil, Kalyan Kumar in Kannada. These stars' images tend to be invested with a sense of *cultural authenticity*, whereas, as the case of MGR makes clear, cultural authenticity is not the primary factor in the representative status achieved by the top star. A star like Rajkumar, working in an industry with a limited market, soon corners a part of even the middle class segment and NTR tried to rival ANR in cultural

representativeness. But the popular acclaim and the supreme position that they enjoyed derives from a series of factors, where cultural representativeness plays a limited part.

In terms of iconography, the choice of top star was clearly decided in favour of a face that was associated with adventure and stunt films, where the body acquires primacy over acting ability[4]. Physical attributes that, thanks to various conventions prevailing in the visual culture at large, are associated with princes or other exceptional beings, parts which these stars often played , are prized over ethnic familiarity. In the films that the subalterns favoured, identification had a symbolic dimension, where one identifies with the Other precisely for the qualities that make him different from us, superior to us.

Thus, considered in the light of recent history, against a backdrop of the rise of spectral nationalisms for which no legitimate grounds of political expression were available within a federal polity that was in competition with the regions in its attempt to establish a non-linguistic pan-Indian national identity, cinema in the southern region confronts us with a unique case of a cultural form serving as a shadow structure of political representation, a political "supplement" in the Derridean sense. The entry of these stars into everyday electoral politics may then be read as marking the end of cine-politics, rather than its beginning, the conclusion of a phase in which among certain nationalities, political representation had to have this double structure, a supplementary, virtual one subsisting underneath the parliamentary system. It may have been to use Nicholas Dirks' phrase, a "hollow crown" but only when viewed from above.

Such a reading brings to light an array of theoretical problems which have a bearing on our understanding of political processes, as well as our spontaneous assumption of the separation of the cultural and political instances of a society. Cinema in India rarely lends itself to the sort of neat textual analyses that are prevalent in film studies, where text and context are assumed to be separate, to be then brought together through certain strategies of reading. Textual identity itself is one of the central problems that film theory in India has to take up as a challenge. And on the other side, our certainties as regards what constitutes politics and what does not also come up for a thorough re-examination. The division of faculties through which such spontaneous practices have emerged has to be suspended in order to make possible an investigation of the actually prevailing divisions, demarcations and distinctions.

Cine-politics is not about the infusion of star charisma into electoral politics, nor about the use of cinema to disseminate party slogans. It is a distinct form of political engagement that emerged in some of the linguistically defined states of southern India at a certain historical juncture where Indian nationalism's ideological suturing could not take care of certain gaps in the symbolic chain. A set of contingent factors led to a situation where cinema, a form of entertainment that was then learning to speak, came to be chosen as the site of a strong political investment, where audiences responded with enthusiasm to an offer of leadership emanating from the screen and, through the fan associations that emerged later, established a concrete set of everyday practices that re-affirmed the position of the star as leader.

It is important not to miss the historically contingent nature of this development, which becomes possible thanks to a conjunction of events that arise from different sites : the end of colonial rule, the rise of the talkies, the linguistic re-organisation of states, the dissolution of the presidencies, to name the most important. Cinema in south India had to be at a certain stage of evolution for it to play the role that it came to play. Its novelty as an apparatus for the screening of diverse images must also be taken into consideration. Above all, the tendency to find in this phenomenon of "star-worship", some ancient Hindu trait's self-expression has to be avoided, because it reduces to nothing, all other factors other than the cultural in the old sense.

Cinema offered certain distinctly novel possibilities, which Indian filmmakers exploited to bring about such a social scenario. To get at this, we must pose the question of the cultural significance of the *screen* as a site of discovery of images. As I have suggested elsewhere (Prasad, 1997), Phalke's story about how he was inspired to take up film production is indicative of the primacy that the screen, as the site of projection of images has had in the Indian imagining of a cinematic culture. The possibility of seeing *Indian* images on the screen was what Phalke cited as the motivating factor behind the launch of his *swadeshi* film production enterprise. The screen here has the status of one of those neutral spaces that modernity produces, whose very existence compels all nations to re-locate themselves in them. Like History itself, within whose domain every nation seeks to install itself, the screen too is, beyond the fact of its western provenance, a space that can be rendered neutral, and hospitable to diverse imagery. The underlying metaphor here is that of parliament, an assemblage of the world's diversity, providing an opportunity for all to represent themselves in its spaces. "The tradition thus shows itself...seeking beholders, native and foreign," as Geeta Kapur has put it, describing the burst of creativity in the early phase of nationalism (Kapur, p 80).

This sense of "our images, their spaces", with its attendant connotation of acts of self-alienation that transport us into modernity, has been a discernible feature of the experience of popular cinema in India. When a fan sees a star on screen, there is thus a sense of seeing "one of us" making it in "their world" which gives an additional charge to the pleasure of film-viewing. This is a theme we are familiar with at the level of film narratives—stories in which the lead actor, coming from a poor family, makes it big and enters the world of the elite, outdoing them at their own games. But here we must try to imagine a similar experience working at the level of the apparatus itself, in the relations that are unconsciously adopted by viewers with the screen as such. Not the character in the film, but the star's own ability to shine in the spaces and costumes of an exotic world, endears him to us. The screen is the first of a series of things and spaces alien, which "our man" must encounter and emerge triumphant.

It is thus as "our representative" in the spaces of Indian nationalism as well that the hero must function, serving as a linking figure through whom the otherwise unfamiliar thematics of a pan-Indian identity take on a more friendly appearance. While they are figures of linguistic nationalism, leaders in shadowy structures of representation, these stars are not invested with any separatist longings, rather they have tended to function as figures of conciliation between the local and the pan-Indian nationalisms. In our films,

we often see a scared looking group of subaltern petitioners who hesitate before the imposing grandeur of a zamindar's mansion, a courthouse, a factory owner's bungalow, or a police station and are grateful for an intruder who fearlessly walks in and speaks for them, unfazed by the grandeur and glitter. This is how the star appears to the fan, as a representative not only in an alien world but also *on an alien screen*.

Notes :

1. For a representative selection of writings on the star system, see Gledhill (1991). See Srinivas (1997) for a full-length treatment of a single star, Chiranjeevi.

2. The bhagavathar crop can be seen in many early south Indian films—the hair is cut just above the shoulder and often curls inwards at the ends. The Kannada writer Poornachandra Tejaswi recalls in his memoires about his father, how as a child he (Tejaswi) used to get his hair cut short, in the modern style. This was so novel in the Mysore of those days that his friends used to call him "taki bola" (talkie baldie). This does not necessarily mean that everybody in those days sported a "bhagavathar" crop, only that the very short haircut was still rare.

3. For this and other details concerning the language question in India, see King (1997). King argues that Nehru's foot-dragging on the language question was, in the Indian context, a sign of greater wisdom that is acknowledged. See also D. R. Nagaraj ("Kannada Rashtreeyatheya Swaroopa") for a discussion of the history of Kannada nationalism.

4. To retun to the question of hair here, Ashish Rajadhyaksha suggests (private conversation) that the first rank of heroes is distinguished from the second by the fact that the former cannot afford to appear on screen without a moustache. While in real life, they have appeared clean shaven, this observation may be true about screen appearances.

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AN 'OTHER' ROAD TO AN 'OTHER' RAY

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I want to begin with a prefatory note. This paper is very much work-in-progress. It marks only the beginning of a substantially longer-term project of research into the fantasy films of Satyajit Ray, i. e., the Goopy-Bagha trilogy of *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne/The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha* (1969), *Hirok Rajar Deshe/In the Kingdom of Diamonds* (1980) and *Goopy Bagha Phire Elo./The Return of Goopy and Bagha* (1991). I feel the need to underline this at the outset not as an excuse for shoddy intellectualism, rather to indicate that in a very real sense I hope the project will grow and change in the coming months. And obviously, to also indicate that the paper does not present a 'finished' reading of the Goopy-Bagha films, for whatever 'finished' readings are worth. Instead it merely lays out what, at this stage, have emerged as framing questions of my research. For me moreover this is a task of some considerable importance because I believe that in a significant sense the 'answers' one finds are already 'determined' by the questions that are asked.

And, as I have tried to indicate through the title of my paper, I hope that my project will not merely add to the huge already-existing body of Ray-Criticism but be both, one more and one *different*—an 'other'. My aim therefore is to see Ray not only through *Pather Panchali /Song of the Little Road* as the great neo-realist 'auteur' which he undoubtedly was, but also as Ray emerges from the *fantasy* world that he created for children, a world of magic and adventure to which also Satyajit Ray was deeply committed.

Among other things, then, this is also a paper on 'fantasy', on 'fantasy' in the many and loaded resonances that the concept evokes—on 'fantasy' as it refers to the world of the imagination, especially in the incarnation it was given by nineteenth-century German philosophy ; of 'phantasy' with a 'ph' as used in psychoanalytic theory to refer to the desires and the activity of the unconscious mind as it erupts through dreams/jokes and a whole range of other phenomena ; of 'fantasy' as hallucination ; of fantasy as *false*-belief and finally, also of 'fantasy' as utopian aspiration.

As is obvious, the defining 'other' against which all the different senses of the term 'fantasy' operate is a certain notion of the 'real'/the 'rational'. Given the Enlightenment belief in rationality and the vast conceptual shift signified by the transition from a God-centred to a human-centred universe, 'fantasy' then was categorically the 'other' of the Enlightenment consciousness ; an outmoded reference to a world of god and goddesses, spirits and fairies, ignorance and superstition, that the Enlightenment sought to banish through its supreme confidence in the human mind and its capacity for rational thought. And yet, as a startling example of psychoanalytic notion of 'the return of the repressed', in the same stroke as Enlightenment rationality sought to dismiss the world of ghosts and spirits as mere figments of human imagination, the 'marvellous' and the belief in the supernatural returned with a vengeance to haunt the popular-cultures of post-Enlightenment Western Europe. And, as a very exciting body of cultural theory is now documenting,