

# CREATIVE PROCESS OF THE INDIAN FILM

By

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Of late the Indian film has come to be widely criticised for its poverty of outlook, and anyone who sees Indian films regularly is sure to find a certain amount of repetitiveness in their themes, stories, dialogues, location and even music. One does very often feel that the situations are the same, the same methods are being constantly adopted to bring about the catastrophe; and the ending is more or less always melodramatic. The too frequent use of songs and dances, the introduction of the comic interlude at the most inappropriate moment and the stereotyped method of character interpretation—these lead a discriminating visitor to the movies in India to think if the directors and actors of these films work with any positive creative purpose, and if they have the necessary artistic and theoretical background to make them competent to know and understand the job they are doing.

There had been, in fact, too much of stray criticism of those who make the films in India. Leaving aside these generalised and sometimes, meaningless statements, one does feel that to bring about a renaissance of the film in India it is necessary to have a more constructive approach to it, going into the very fundamentals of the creative process if necessary. And since so many factors contribute to the making of a film, it would mean that we enquire into the operation of all these factors taken jointly and severally, with the ultimate burden of artistic creation remaining on the director.

In this connection it would be very interesting to quote what Margaret Kennedy has said about 'the mechanised muse': "A picture must be a group production, just as operas, symphonies and plays are group productions. But no group production can ever be classed as a great work of art unless it has the stamp of one predominating, creative mind. The single signature, in screen art is at present the signature of the director."

But since the signature will not appear unless there is the paper, the pen, and the hand, the film also will not be ready until the various units voluntarily combine and all the product of their artistic

labour subsumed under the single totality of the director's signature.

Such being the case, the defects of the Indian film, though primarily the defects of the directorial signature, can perhaps be examined a bit more closely to discover how much of these come from the various units which make up a film. The producer, the director, the actor, the editor, the photographer, the maker of the sets, the designer of the costumes, the lyricist, and everybody else has his responsibilities which he cannot shirk in a conjunctive production. Not that these in India do deliberately shirk their job; many of their mistakes can be traced either to their ignorance or lack of understanding or insufficient directorial supervision or even the low wages they get. The chief of these perhaps is artistic *unawareness*—I will not call it ignorance—and it is time that we probed into this to find out exactly where the unawareness lay.

Today we know that some of our actors and actresses have received high education which implies that they have the necessary training in methodology that would make them read and understand books on film aesthetics and be aware of their creative process. We have also now, among our technical men, several persons who are highly qualified in the academic sense and are capable of knowing what they are doing. But in spite of this, when we remember the generality of films that they are making, of course, barring a few exceptions, we are sometimes led to conclude that they do all their acting and technical work on the spur of the moment without any definite critical thought, quite often spoiling the possibilities of a rather good film material.

This would surely lead a sensible person to think about the matter seriously and he is likely to ask the following questions: Do our directors and actors possess any clear idea of what they are doing? Do they, for instance, care to acquaint themselves, say with the various interpretations that are given by distinguished critics to some of the characters from the novels and plays they film? Do the actors know the difference between character-acting and type-acting?

Do the directors know that a melodramatic ending damages even a good screen-play? Are our photographers aware of the fact that too persistent a desire to employ unusual angles or false effects often spoil an excellent visual impression? Do the design and costume makers know the full implications of what they are doing? Are the music directors aware of the aesthetic implications of introducing too many songs in a serious drama?

A dozen more of such questions can easily be asked: questions whose answers would spotlight the defects of many of our films. And it is essential to answer those questions if we are out to cure many of the evils of our present day films. But this would demand that we know the makers of our movies more intimately than before, for time has come to take stock of the entire film situation of this country.

There are practically two methods of securing this information. One is to go and meet these persons and ask them searching questions about their approach to their work; the other is to read what some of these artists write about themselves.

Let us take up the second question first. In between the flood of fanfare material that has invaded most of our film journals it is sometimes possible to discover statements made by directors and photographers, musicians and screen-play writers, actors and distributors. Many of these statements are of course full of platitudinous and generalised statements but some of the statements which I am quoting below would throw a flood light on the real state of affairs in Indian film.

About the nature of film as a whole Actor-producer Jairaj says: "One fact common with all the people I have met is that picture-goers do not relish films that possess a marked pseudo-intellectual touch without any degree of entertainment. Further, they also dislike films produced to 'show off' the genius of the director or of any one aspect of the technique of production at the story. They also resent the superiority complex and paternal attitudes."

Character actor Murad says: "As long as the myopic vision of a film maker is concentrated solely on boy-meet-girl type of themes, there is no chance for the growth of character-acting in India. Character lead is a thing unknown in our films, which invariably have the same stereotyped heroines and heroes."

Director Hemchandra is sorry that most of the Indian films are "fairy tales with nothing to do with our world. What we want is down-to-earth stories that have something to do with human beings."

Ashok Kumar wrote sometime back: "Another plane on which the evolution of the Indian film artiste

has taken place is that of the inter-action between his personality and the requirements of the screen script. The front-rank artiste formerly used to influence the content of the script. He was not bothered about its importance. The screen-play was always secondary. The result was a lack of cohesion between the role he portrayed and the character suggested by the story. Only when the camera technique became more competent and the placement of shots easier, was the personal dominance of the star kept in check. The more refined directorial conception of the film made it necessary for the star to become a part of the screen play. His dialogues were not shouted as previously but began to be spoken in the manner suitable to the characterization."

Bombay's producer-director Amiya Chakravarty says: "It is not possible for anyone to know what the people like and do not like. Only the fundamental emotions are common to all human beings, the rest vary with the experience of each individuals. . . . . After twenty years in motion pictures and doing all the jobs connected with picture-making, I feel that the primary ingredient of any picture should be novelty. The same story must not be repeated with different costumes and music and lyrics must also be different in each film . . . . . (The Producer) should, as I invariably do, go and sit in the lower classes in the cinemas and observe the reaction of the people to his picture. There are no formulas for box-office success except hard work."

Director J. K. Nanda writes: "A film can be called the visual literature of a country and as such to become a powerful medium for the enrichment and education of the people". . . . . Love is a natural emotion in every human heart but each nation's culture shows divergent conceptions of love. In our country, the sublime aspect of love is given greater emphasis as contrasting to the flaunting of sex in the West. If films show sex more prominently, their justification must lie in the culture of these countries and not in the taste. The trend to ape the Western attitude towards sex in our films makes them appear outright artificial and unconvincing because they have the barest semblance to reality."

The above quotations throw a wealth of light on the fact that many of the important persons in the film world are aware of what they are doing, at least of what they cannot do. The following from Director Hemchandra bearing directly on his job would clarify the point further:

"In the craze to make films colourful the movie-makers have gone to the undesirable extent of making them outlandish and heterogenous. Many are crude imitations of foreign pictures or a series of song and dance numbers with an incoherent plot woven round them. Such an abracadabra of meaningless mixtures is naturally rejected by the audience."

The statement at least confirms the fact that some of those who make films for us are in the know of what type of film is being produced in this country. Whether the audience rejects this type of film or not is a different question which cannot be easily answered since once a while even the most outlandish variety of film proves to be box-office hit. The reason for this would perhaps emerge out of the other statements we are going to study next, some which indirectly give the pointer to the truth.

Well-known story and dialogue writer of Hindi films Azam Bazidpuri says: "Film stories are deteriorating..... because story-writing for film is being treated as a commercial enterprise rather than as an art..... The films based on indiscriminate writings are, as a natural consequence found to be lacking in appeal. . . . The technique of penmanship and the purpose of a film story are different. The author of a novel is comparatively more (sic!) fierce in expressing his feelings. He may at times disregard the people, may even revolt against their pet likings. But a film-story writer is under bounden duty to be guided by the choice of the public."

The above statement betrays the source of the success and failure of films in India: it throws interesting light on the manner in which the box-office-director-cycle moves. The subsequent part of Bazidpuri's statement completely exposes the technique of some of our directors. Writes he: "I deride the tendency of some directors who create a story built on particular "shots" borrowed from foreign pictures that have caught their imagination. A story cannot be made on the basis of some shots and if that is done it will remain a mere jumble of good shots without story. The finest "shot" of any picture is good only because it has arisen out of the regular flow of the story. Thus the love of the film director for "shots" has, at times, resulted in a purposeless theme."

When we read such a statement in conjunction with paragraphs 119-202 of the Film Enquiry Report we are convinced of the fact that there is in fact a real dearth of story material in this country with a few incompetent, but influential 'authors' taking advantage of the situation. But it remains a fact nevertheless that careful editing can to some extent nullify the defects of a story, and it is therefore necessary to note what the editors have to say about their task.

Samsuddin Kadri, an editor of long-standing attached to the Mahboob Productions at Bombay writes: "The work of film editors in India will be, very much simplified if copies of the script are handed to them in advance..... To create the proper effect in the logical sequence is one of the main duties of the editor. In *Aan* when Nimmi overhears Dilipkumar telling Nadira that he loves her, her eyes well up with tears which roll down her cheeks. To create the effect of an angered Nimmi, he retained

the portion where tears dropped from her eyes and quickly shifted the scene to Nimmi rushing towards Dilipkumar and Nadira and declaring her love for Dilip. If the tears were allowed to flow copiously the audience might have got the impression that Nimmi's anger was spent as a result of crying. Then the effect of her rushing to quarrel with Nadira would have been ineffective.....

"In another sequence in *Aan* Dilipkumar and Premnath fight with daggers. Premnath is struck with a dagger in the chest and he bends. It was understood at the time of editing that Premnath's fall was to be cut out when he bent his chest forward but due to an oversight Premnath was shown falling down. The audience gathered the impression that he was killed, and when he appeared in another scene, they found it difficult to understand how a "dead" man would come to life again."

The importance of editing can well be realised from the above extract and when we thereafter read G. C. Mayekar writing that "editing is not given a second thought in our films," we know what we miss thereby. The very fact that several of films hang loosely is due to inefficient editing. Says Mayekar: "Movie makers in India have not realised its importance. The over-burdened producer specially has failed to realise how much editing can affect the chances of a picture. There are a few editors who have sense of timing and not a single one of them has any theoretical knowledge."

How useful the theoretical knowledge can be is all the more apparent when we come to deal with the use of music and dance of our films. How difficult the use of music in film is will be apparent to anybody who reads Hans Eisler's "*Composing for the Films*" and the opinions of the lyricists, the composers, the music directors and the playback singers would be revealing indeed. Mohammad Rafi writes: "Knowledge of classical music is a great asset to the playback singers. Classical music imparts the basic training through its traditional methods of rendering songs, and is therefore very helpful in modulating the voice of the singers. . . . A singer's voice is however not static. . . . and my voice itself has undergone regular changes during the last so many years."

Mukesh writes: "The tendency now-a-days is to make a singer render all types of songs be they sad or comic."

Lyric and dialogue writer Saraswatikumar Deepak holds that the lyrics to be effective must be linked inextricably to situations in a picture. He writes: "In our films songs are usually inserted without much regard for the needs of a situation. It is due to this flaw that songs instead of flowing spontaneously from the theme, appear to be artificially woven patches. Lyric writers should have complete knowl-

edge of the story and a thorough grasp of particular situations. Then alone can they depict the correct attitude. . . . My conviction being that a lyric draws its momentum from the situation, I cannot reconcile myself to the idea that one kind of film lyric could be universally effective."

The famous music director Hemant Kumar sees the problem from another angle when he writes: "Directors would suffer if they did not explain to music directors the situations of the pieces. . . Usually only a vague idea was given to them. . . Certain important lip or body movements were necessary at the time of rendering songs and therefore it would be advantageous if the director called the music director on the sets. It would also be useful to show the 'rushes' of sequences to music directors."

C. Ramchandra lays a greater emphasis on the relationship of the audience with the story of a film and its musical score when he says that "the task of a music director has grown as the audiences were becoming increasingly interested in good stories. In a musical picture they would want good songs and in a social, good themes. For musicals music directors should be allowed to give good stories. This is not generally done in this country."

Music director Sudhir Phadke examines the problem from the point of view of the playback singer when he says that "sufficient consideration is not given to the selection of playback artistes. The actor's 'singing voice' should watch his speaking voice, and in this, age is a very important factor. It is absurd to present a young girl in a full mature voice."

Along with the problem of the playback music comes that of 'Gap music' and it is worth noting Madhubala Jhaveri's views. She says: "Gap music depends upon the words, their meaning and their picturization. We have no choice of gap for music. That is for the director and the music director to think of but gap music gives relief to the singer. Once I had to sing a song without any break and I found it most strenuous."

The question of the wording of the songs, their tuning, the relative merits and demerits of adopting the Western music and the place of folk-music in our films has all been more or less discussed by most of those who matter in the film world. Here it would be possible to reproduce only a few extracts from their statements. Composer Majrooh Sultanpuri writes: "...I came to know that film songs written with simplicity and directness, offered them identification, analysis, rhythm of life, produced a sense of catharsis, and above all, gave them a very big thing—the feeling that they were not alone.

"One thing is certain. It is essential for the film

poet to be well versed in the literary form of poetry before he ventures into film poetry inasmuch as one has to be a good artist before becoming a caricaturist.

"Faulty language will mar the worth of compositions, however good may be their musical contents. Besides, such lack of knowledge will not be conducive to the education of the masses. A good literary poet can also be a good film lyricist."

Regarding the use of folk music in films, Jamal Sen writes. "This under-estimation of indigenous growth may be due to an inferiority complex for the spring of Indian music is perennial and however deep we may draw from it, it cannot belie the hopes of a thirsty seeker. . . . Our country's folk music too affords ample scope for film work."

Allied with the problem of music is the problem of dance and it is surprising that it has not been possible for me to discover an important statement on this subject by one who directs dance in Indian films. Dance director Prem Sharma is perhaps the solitary figure who maintains that "it is criminal on the part of film makers to introduce cheap and vulgar... dances which have a demoralising effect, specially on the younger generation."

Among the artistes Vyjayantimala says: "I thoroughly disapprove of the Western influence which is encroaching on . . . dancing in Indian pictures. When I am called upon to do modern dances as in *Anjam* there's no way out; but I would much rather do Manipuri, Kathak, Kathakali or folk dances. . . . It is easier to dance for the camera as the number is taken shot-by-shot."

The two statements in their own way only confirm what the Film Enquiry Committee Report states that "dance for the sake of having a dance denotes a lack of quality and taste. . . . we find dances more the handmaid of vulgar music than the expression of any artistic feeling. . . . Quality is sacrificed to the need of giving the quantity; film dances hardly reflect Indian dancing, whether of the popular folk variety or that of the well-known schools (paragraph 511)."

The other constituents which make up a film are perhaps more technical than artistic though even in the execution of these techniques there is the scope for artistic efficiency. Photography is of course, the key point in all film making and one has to admit that of late the photography in Indian film has considerably improved. The excellent photography of *Barsaat*, the magnificent camera work of *Do Bigha Zamin* or *Pathik* or even the remarkable location shots of *Yatrik* would do credit to any country but then these are films out of the ordinary, most of which even now display occasionally the ignorance even of the fundamentals. An excellent camera man like Faredoon Irani is

highly critical of his own work and while analysing it said: "If I complete two or three pictures in colour I will naturally become proficient in colour photography... Lighting is very important in colour work... When I handled the camera for *Aan* I experienced various hazards... I had to be careful with everything as I had learnt that in the 'blowing up' process the colouring is a co-operative venture."

Photographer Sudin Mazumdar of *Chota Bhai* fame had slightly different approach to his task. He feels that technical excellence is dependent on equipments, on proper consideration given to the making of the sets, on the selection of the proper shots, on a suitable location of the out-door work and finally on the absence of disturbance from the outsiders who often dabble in photography.

V. Avdhut says: "I believe photography must be natural, especially the lighting effects. It must be soothing to the eye. The camera must aid in telling the story, and therefore, must be adjusted to different moods. Angle and effect are good for pictorial imageries but cinema must tell nothing more or less than the story."

Cameraman Ramchandra believes that in a film "the camera plays the most important part in presenting the story and the characters... Different themes are differently photographed. A comedy is always picturised in high key, that is bright photography, while a dramatic or suspenseful theme is presented in low key—shadowy-photography... Each 'shot' fulfils a particular need and purpose and if any one 'shot' is misplaced the general effect will be marred."

"Undue liberty to the cameraman is also dangerous because his love for artistic photography sometimes makes him blind to the demands of the story."

But in a full length film photographic effects depend considerably on the sets, the costumes and the make up, and in these directions as well there is much scope for improvement in our films. Art Director S. N. Kulkarni feels that movie architecture will play a vital role in improving the aesthetic sense of the people. He, however, admitted that at times some art directors did over-reach the boundaries of their imagination and built highly fantastic sets. Explaining some of the handicaps experienced during the construction of certain types of sets, he said: "When a set is erected on a platform, the curtain walls shake slightly. Due to the movement of artists ill fitted planks joining the platforms transfer their vibrations from the floor to the walls whose vibrations can easily be perceived by keen sighted audiences."

"Producers and directors show preference for curtain settings because they are cheap and can be made quickly. The latter view is taken to meet the dates of stars... or when a picture is to

be finished for quick delivery... There are times when a director is unable to explain his requirement and he suggests that he wants a set similar in design to one seen in some foreign film.

"Art directors in India suffer from considerable handicaps. There is surprising lack of material for period architecture."

No wonder in this; since the star salary takes away the major part of a film investment and we can understand the make-up man Dada Paranjpe's difficulties when he writes that "today few directors show any enthusiasm for realistic make-up. Few artists also show appreciation of this art. Most of them are averse to grease and paint and exhibit repulsion to the spirit-gum utilised for applying make-up... This attitude is undesirable for I feel that a story demands a character and not the identity of an artiste."

"Yet another undesirable trend is the neglect of make-up for the hero and heroines in our films... The public becomes tired of looking at the same faces in our films..."

"Despite the important contribution made by the make-up man, his job is not appreciated and rarely is legitimate credit given to him... I fail to understand why make-up men are indifferently treated."

The stereotyped glamorous make-up of the female stars can perhaps be ascribed to the source Mr. Paranjpe has stated, and when an art-director like Sayyad confesses that "directors jealously guard their stories and never relate them even to those who are closely associated with its production" we can almost understand why so many of our films are just slap-stick productions.

The prospect which the statements quoted above creates is depressing indeed and I am perhaps open to the charge that my selection of views is not representative enough. It is true that I have not quoted the opinions of those who are the most efficient in their vocations and this has been deliberately avoided because we in India have just a few experts while most of our films even now continue to be made by mediocres. Even then the reactions of the various persons contributing to the making of a film are hopeful in the sense that most of them at least show a certain degree of creative awareness which is the first stage to the improvement of our films. The reactions of the actors whose personal equation to the film is rather high reveal the same attitude. In an interview given to me at Calcutta Jahar Ganguly told me that while depicting important characters from well-known novels, he made efforts to acquaint himself with the various interpretations critics give them while Ahin Choudhury told me that he read through the books carefully, and I should add, that

he is very well equipped with theoretical knowledge. Negatively speaking Kamini Kaushal who is a B.A. Honours with English literature said sometime back that "in pictures made now-a-days, the characters of the players is rarely developed to its logical content. The heroine acting a village or country girl seems to go through the same kind of routine. This is extremely painful for an artiste who is forced to ramble through meaninglessly. Situations should be explained and the action, gesture and expression should be left to the originality of the artiste."

Such probes into the creative process of the various artistes who contribute to the making of films in India are sure in the long run to bring about a renaissance in Indian films, though just now, one should say, the critical edge of the self awareness is not sharp enough to produce swift results. There should be much greater appreciation of what is called "the cinematic workshop" and what we further require today is, besides a documented history of the Indian film, a band of professional critics who would examine films "not merely as a piece of ephemeral entertainment but as a stage in the development of the

technicians<sup>Author</sup> who created it and for its place in the tradition of film making of which it is but a single expression."

The creative artiste, whether he be a director or an actor, will deeply search his soul and would try to analyse his work. We in India as yet do not have anything like Paul Claudel's Diary of his making of *The Beauty and the Beast* or of Sir Laurence Olivier's account of his *Hamlet* or of T. S. Eliot's story of his *Murder in the Cathedral*. Neither do we have anything like Eisenstein's brilliant analysis of the form or Grierson's review of the documentary. Is there anything like the statements made by Mrs. Jameson or Mrs. Terry with reference to the drama?

Without anything like these, it is certain that the Indian film will not attain the unified totality of its Western compeers and the cinematic production and acting in India would remain haphazard and of a mediocre quality. Until the very nature of the creative process is analysed and reckoned with we cannot have a series of excellent films though there may be isolated specimens of excellent production.

## IN MEMORIUM



**Shri SHANTI BARDHAN**

It was a privilege to have known Shantida, for that is what he was to most of us. In his death the country has lost not only a dancer but a choreographer whom it is difficult to replace.

As a tutor he was superb, he was gentle yet firm. In his hands the most ordinary material was transformed into something most beautiful. He was a creator.

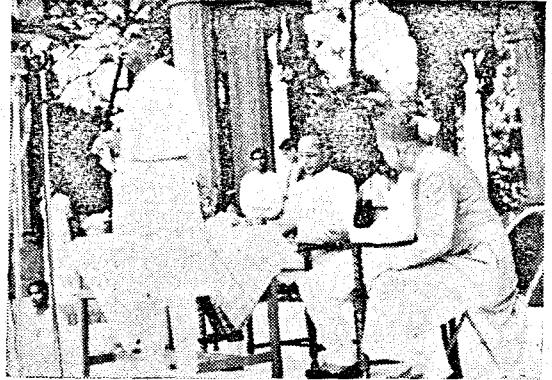
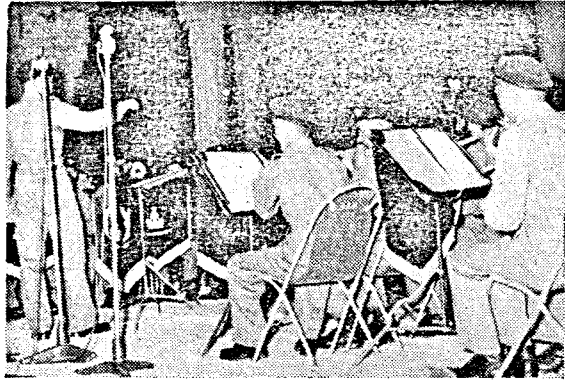
Himself a born dancer, rhythm was his life. His drum dance will ever remain in the minds of those who had occasion to see it as a most vigorous and rhythmic dance.

The news of his death came as a rude shock and that he should have been snatched away in the prime of life, when in spite of illness he was busy with his creative activities is all the more tragic.

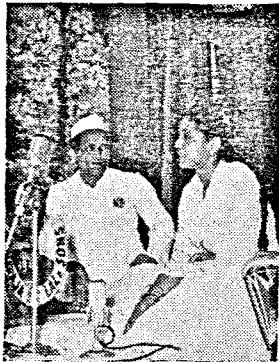
Though Shantida is no more he lives in our midst in his work.

### **Ustad THAMBOU SINGH**

The foremost exponent of Hindustani music in Manipur, Ustad Thambou Singh passed away on 12th September. A pleasing personality, his untiring zeal had kept the traditions of Hindustani music alive in Manipur which otherwise had very little contact with the rest of India till recently. He used to take part in music conferences in Assam and Bengal until his failing health kept him confined to Imphal. Only last year when he was in hospital he was kind enough to give a recording to the Akadami. Little known outside of Manipur he has trained a host of students in Hindustani music in his own country, where he was widely loved and admired.



Above: Inauguration of the All India Music Festival Chairman of the Akadami greeting the Festival. Seated are Dr. Keskar who inaugurated the festival. To his left are Dr. Katju and Pandit Haksar, Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the Bharatiya Kala Kendra. On the left the members of the Military School of Music from Panchmarhi



Top: (from L to R) Folk Singer from Maharashtra and Bai Rasoolanbai of Banaras Centre: (from L to R) Singer from Orissa and Shri Gopal Misra of Banaras. Bottom: (L to R) Jahangir Khan and Imrat Husein Khan



Below: Smt. Radharani Devi Kirtan Singer from Bengal

