

## STUDY WEEK ON MAKING MEANING IN INDIAN CINEMA

26-29 October 1995

In the framework drawn up for participants of the study week there was to be a focus on the ways cinema could be understood historically. Relatedly, it was hoped that by analysing the modes of address and narration employed in cinema insight would be provided into the audio-visual experiences involved in the formation of modern Indian society. While questions of cinematic address, form and narrative method were of central concern in this framework, analysis of reception was also invited: the particular way various publics, audiences and state institutions responded to the cinema in popular and film society periodicals, government reports and enquiry proceedings, public lobbies and petitions. Reflections on the historical distinctions that had emerged within the cinema, between popular, art and avant-garde practices, as well as through different language versions of films, were also highlighted for analysis. It was hoped that the study week would be able to discuss the political functions of cinema against these backdrops, an evolving account of the complex formal, institutional and social location of film in India.

It is perhaps an index of the general direction of film studies in India today that, of the twelve papers presented, only two were concerned with what might be called the field of art and avant-garde practice, Madan Gopal Singh's 'The Homeless Image' and Sanjoy Mukhopadhyaya's 'Reframing *Meghe Dhaka Tara*'. Using *Sant Tukaram* (Fatehlal and Damle, 1936) and the work of Kumar Shahani and Mani Kaul, Madan wrote about the way the cinema, or an ideal version of it, had taken over and transposed the metaphor of homelessness associated with the history of Sufism and the *bhakti* poets into an exploration of contemporary experience. Mukhopadhyaya's was a contribution to reception studies, highlighting how writers outside film criticism, specifically

the modernist poet Bishnu De and the social scientist Boudhayan Chattopadhyaya, were able to escape the straitjacket of realist expectations in their response to Ghatak's film.

Ravi Vasudevan, Venkatesh Chakravarty and M.S.S. Pandian all concentrated on public discourses generated about the cinema, and by it. Vasudevan highlighted the problems of categorizing various types of antagonistic response to the cinema available in government archives alongside those expressing cinephilia, a love for cinema. Using Phalke, he suggested that the cinema itself generated an image of the public through its particular modes of address and representation, and that this had implications for the historical negotiation of modernity by Indian society. Pandian looked into the categories, especially of realism and classicism, used by Tamil elites in their critique of popular film. Chakravarty attacked the hierarchical discourses deriving from art and avant-garde film practice, arguing that the history of Tamil cinema revealed the potential for generating an alternate film culture within the popular. He screened *Enn Uir Thozhan* (Bhartiraja, 1989) to back his case. Ashish Rajadhyaksha's paper 'An agenda for film studies in India' overlapped with these concerns, in that he highlighted the problem of spectatorship and cinema publics, and the discourses generated by the industry in representing its narrative activity, specifically around the importance of the Hollywood model in identifying/distinguishing the nature of Indian film.

Hollywood was also the sub-text of Moinak Biswas's presentation on *Harana Sur* (Ajay Kar, 1956) a key film in the cycle of successes pairing Uttam Kumar and Suchetra Sen. Biswas demonstrated the applicability of melodrama criticism evolved for Hollywood cinema in relation to this popular Bengali work,

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I, N.K. Maini, son of Hem Raj Maini, declare that I am the printer and publisher of newspaper entitled Summerhill-IIAS Review and that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd/-  
N.K. Maini

## OBITUARY

### S.C. DUBE (1922-1996)

Professor S.C. Dube was Director of the Institute from 1972 to 1977. He continued, with great vigour, the path-finding work of its first Director, Professor Niharranjan Ray. His tenure as Director was marked by an openness and an easy informality which has set an ideal for life at the Institute. Professor Dube's wide-ranging interests, his impeccable articulation of difficult intellectual issues and his sensitive handling of inter-personal relationships have become part of the Institute's legend. He kept up his interest in the Institute after he ceased to be its Director, and we had the honour of publishing his book on *Ethnicity* as recently as 1994.

especially around how questions of 'excess' in *mise-en-scene* (literally, how figures, objects, colours are 'placed-in-scene') is used to articulate fraught or forbidden feelings. Another highly intricate paper on the restructuring of narrative form, by Madhava Prasad focused on *Roja* (Maniratnam, 1992) and *Damini* (Raj Kumar Santoshi, 1993). Using notions of 'formal' and 'real' subsumption emerging from Marx's understanding of the shifting terms of labour's subordination to capital, and carried on in enquiries into ideology by Etienne Balibar, Prasad suggested that recent socio-economic transformations provided the context for a change in the way film narratives organised story information, and invited an alteration in the relations amongst spectator, character and state.

Something of the more flexible terms of a cultural studies

approach was perhaps represented in the papers by Tejaswini Niranjana on *Kadhalan* (Shankar, 1995), Ranjani Majumdar on the changing significance of the male body in contemporary Bombay cinema, Ajanta Sircar on 'Genre system of 1980s Bombay cinema' and T. Muraleedharan on the way in which the notion of diaspora had complicated the question of reading.

The participants, who had come from considerable distances, (Madras, Trichur, Hyderabad, Calcutta and Bombay) expressed great pleasure in the opportunity given for interaction. Something of the sense of an emerging community of scholarship, hitherto dispersed and difficult to communicate with, was put together over these four days, thanks to the Indian Institute of Advanced Study which hosted what in many ways seems an important moment in the development of film studies.