

Genesis of the Indian Popular Cinema

THE FIFTIES

The City: Paradise and Inferno

The factors which contributed towards making the fifties the Golden Age of Indian popular cinema are many. However one aspect which demands attention, says *Jahal Masud*, is the influence of the post-Independence burgeoning urban culture and the complexities of the 'city' on the film industry both at the economic and ideological levels. For the 'geniuses' of the decade - Satyajit Ray, Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt—the 'city of the fifties' offered a rich tapestry....



"Teeming city, city full of dreams" — Baudelaire

"Utteral City, ...so many, I had not thought death had undone so many" — T.S. Eliot

"Maik ko peh narak na chahate/mush ko phasl, mush ko pret, mush ko chahate bahaar" (No, not this hell for me! I want flowers, love and spring)— from *Awaara*

"Yeh mehalon, yeh takhton, yeh taaron ki duniya/Yeh insanon ke dustman, samanton ki duniya/Yeh duniya agar mil bhi nae to kya hai" (This world of palaces, thrones and crowns This society is the enemy of man. What use is the conquest of such a kingdom)— from *Pyaasa*

The dream! *Awaara*!

The fifties are known—and rightly known—as the Golden Age of popular Hindi cinema. They were its high noon. The forties were a prelude, the sixties and later decades a falling away. To do full justice to the structure of the industry in those years, the form and content of the films, the directors, the stars and the artistes who created that achievement, would require many volumes and many authors. In this article, I shall discuss one aspect of the cinema which is largely ignored. Hindi cinema of the fifties was the creation of the post-Independence burgeoning urban culture. To this day the types and attitudes created in the fifties resonate through the films. This process cannot be discussed here in its entirety. What will be taken up is a tentative study of the complex of processes known as the 'city' as reflected in the cinema.

The 'city' as a concept reaching down to our age existed in ancient Greece and earlier. But as the embodiment of a specific culture in its modern form it took shape materially, and in the mind of the artist, in the 19th century. There are many artists whose theme has been the city. For me the really great conceptualisers are Baudelaire, Proust, Fitzgerald, Eliot and Bellow. A flavour of their vision is conveyed in the quotations above. In a popular form their mood is reflected in the song quotations from *Awaara* and *Pyaasa*. These song-sequences (which are seminal in the history of our cinema) will be discussed later. Here it is enough to refer to the 'dual aspect' of the city in the *Awaara* quotation—nightmare and dream—and to the rejection of the unreality of the city in the *Pyaasa* quotation.

What is the kind of the city that developed in the post-Independence period? This question can be answered in two parts: The development of the city in so far as it affected the 'base'—the economy of the cinema industry, and the development of the city as a complex culture which affected the ideology of the cinema artists-creators.

As far as the 'base' is concerned, the vast convergence of uprooted masses on the cities had begun during the War in the forties. Here we are concerned particularly with the city of Bombay, the capital of the Hindi film industry. As a centre of political power, as a custodian of

cultural values, and as the generator of new ideas, Bombay had already played a great role. The leading commercial families of Bombay had transformed themselves into a native industrial bourgeoisie. The affluent class was cosmopolitan, the working class too became increasingly 'mixed'. There was also a highly volatile class of the literate and the unemployed who could find no niche for themselves. As a result, there arose in the cities a "quality of social restlessness" (Ravinder Kumar; *Essays in Social History of Modern India*).

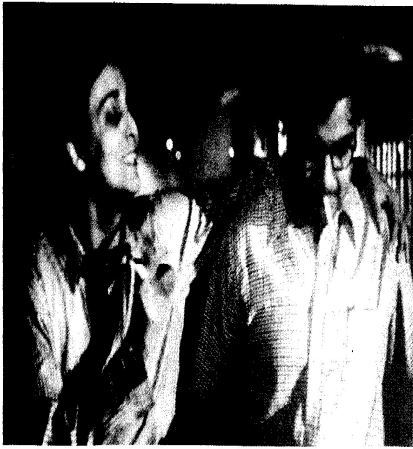
On the cinema scene descended a large number of directors, actors, producers and distributors from the North as a result of the Partition. The scarcity conditions of the War generated black money which found

its way into the film industry. Lack of fresh theatre construction caused by scarcity conditions delivered the 'creators' into the hands of distributors and exhibitors. When distributor/exhibitor became King, the formula film—the film which would get the quickest returns from a volatile and rootless audience—became the sovereign popular art form.

It's the fashion today to abuse the formula film. It was a product of material circumstances. But even a formula film could succeed only if it made innovations. The dream factory had to show a measure of originality because it really was not an assembly line. It's the tension between the need for a quick return formula and the need for innovation that produced the Golden Age. Ideology crept in between the interstices



...and the nightmare ('Do Bigha Zamin').



Transcending urban bleakness: 'Apar Sansar'

of the complex web created by the tension (this primarily refers to the geniuses of the Golden Age—Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt). It is this fact that is responsible for the abnormal and dissonant elements which fissure the fabric of realism in *Azadana* and *Pyasa*.

For artists like Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt, the 'city' of the fifties offered a rich tapestry. There was no significant break with the impoverishment of the past; westernisation which was synonymous with modernisation permeated only the upper and middle classes; there was anonymity, impersonality and segmentation of roles; there was high social mobility and heightened individualism; there was a balance between the bazaar and capitalistic system of production; there were squatter settlements which survived as creative and functional economies under conditions of abject poverty—pawn-broking, bribery, petty thefts, prostitution, black market and a host of illicit activities connected the legitimate/formal and illegitimate/informal sectors. (M.A. Qadeer: *Urban Development in the Third World*).

In short, the city was a kaleidoscope (Mrinal Sen actually used this title for one of his recent films) which showed development favouring the rich and the poor becoming powerless because they were bound to the rich myriad ways.

Bombay and Calcutta have great similarities, vast differences. In Calcutta the dominant social class in the city in the 19th century was the East India Company bureaucracy, and their descendants today—the government and private sector

senior employees—are still important. Then there was (in the 19th century) the native world of territorial magnates (*Rajās*), landed gentry (*Zamindars*) and the professionals. Then again, there were the upcountry Marwaris who picked up the business ignored by the British. These trends or their successors are very much there today—made more complex by the decline of the Calcutta industry and the peculiar process of the interaction between the affluent and the unorganised.

All these facets are there in the films of Satyajit Ray, who created the cinematic city and to whom at least Guru Dutt owes a debt. Ghatak and Mrinal Sen too are important in this context but for reasons of space I shall restrict myself to Ray.

Ray came to Calcutta (cinematically) via the village (*Pathar Panchali*) and the smaller traditional city, Varanasi (*Aparajito*). Therefore, Ray's treatment of the city is deeper and more nuanced than that of his Bombay counterpart. Chidananda Das Gupta rightly said of Calcutta in *Aparajito* in his Ray book: "Banaras comes to life but Calcutta does not." But the city touches are not to be missed. During the first entry into Calcutta, Apu finds Afghans and Chinese laughing and talking among themselves—"his first impressions of a city of strange people and strange languages." The exoticism of the City (which would include 'Anglo Indians' and 'Goans') became a stereotype in Bombay. A second stereotype would be the 'park'—an oasis in the inferno where one could dream, read, or chase a girl round the bushes. A scene shows Apu reading in the lawns of Victoria

Memorial Park. *Pyasa* begins with the poet stretched full length under a tree.

Apar Sansar involves both celebration and rejection of the city. The celebration comes in the early sequences when Apu (in Pulu's company) bursts forth into a song in the railway yard (Tagore's *Basudhara*)—"Let me burst open the heart's narrow cage/Break down the hard stone walls/The dark and cheerless prison of my mind." There's talk of Goethe, Dickens, Keats, Lawrence, Dostoevsky. And, Apu, in a burst of youthful exuberance, makes a significant statement: "A village boy... poor, but sensitive... Father's a priest. He dies... The boy comes to the city. He will not be a priest. He will study. He's ambitious. Through his education, his hardships, we see him shedding his old superstitions, his orthodoxy, he must use his intellect. He cannot accept anything blindly. But he has imagination, he's sensitive. Little things move him, give him joy. He may have in him the seeds of greatness, but... he does nothing great. He remains poor, in want. But in spite of that he never turns away from life... He wants to live." (*Apu Trilogy*—English version by Shampa Banerjee).

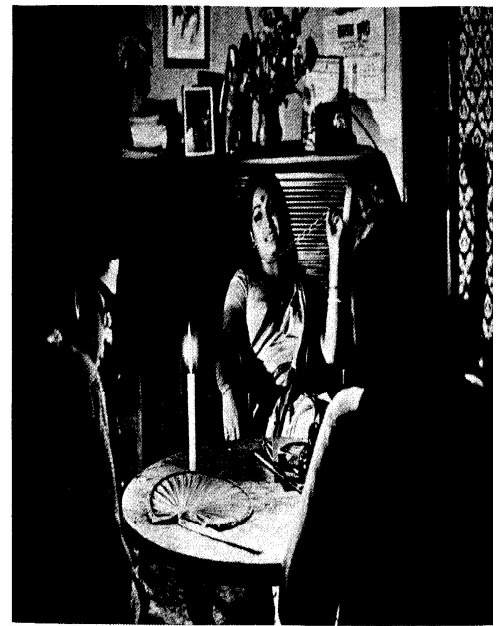
Apu is outlining the plot of his novel. Unwittingly, he is outlining the plot of his future, the essential plots of Bombay 'city' films.

That sequence has a central importance in the *Apu trilogy*. When I think of that sequence I ask myself: How can these two young men be so ebullient, so euphoric amidst the bleakness of that railway yard, symbolic of the ultimate blight of an urban industrial culture? It's the city—or rather the finest products of the city—Tagore, Dostoevsky *et al.*—who have made Apu and Pulu transcend urban bleakness. 'Transcend'—not in a spiritual or escapist sense—but of achievement of a certain 'overarching eye' which can look at the city and one's self in relation to it without self-pity or romanticism. This is the greatest gift of city life.

Ray does not idealise the city. Apu's room on the terrace overlooks the railway yard, the pigs, the slum, and the coal bins. Aparna sobs when she first looks out of the window, recoils at the cockroaches. She gets 'used' to the City, but she dies before she is 'used up'. When Apu contemplates suicide, what deflects

him is the pig's death on the tracks (compare it with the sequence of the death on the tracks in *Pyasa*). That scene is open to many interpretations. To me it covers the

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The legitimate/formal and the illegitimate/informal complement each other in 'Jana Aranya'

casually indifferent inhumanity of the city.

Apu deserts the city. In a final rejection of 'city ambitions', he throws away the novel. At the end, there's a chance that he may return to Calcutta because his son is there.

Ray hasn't really explored the city in *Apar Sansar*. He seems to be reflecting about it, not fully prepared to work out the inner logic of urban dehumanisation.

Modern Calcutta furnished the background to *Mahanagar*, *Nayak* and a kind of backdrop to *Aranyer Din Ratri*. But it's another 'trilogy'—*Seemabaddha*, *Pratidwandi* and *Jana Aranya*, that's about the 'city as city'—meaning that it reflects about the city, its compulsions and its victims. Chidananda Das Gupta has some very important things to say about *Jana Aranya*: "For the first time Calcutta comes to life. Its grime and dirt are established with the very first shot... *Jana Aranya* epitomises... the failure of earlier values celebrated... Pauline Kael shrewdly compared Ashim in *Aranyer Din Ratri* to a corrupted Apu; indeed all urban heroes in Ray's contemporary films are—Siddhartha in *Pratidwandi*, Shyamalendu in *Seemabaddha*, Somnath in *Jana Aranya* in their different ways... No film of Ray has an equal sense of the complexity and depth of evil as

Jana Aranya."

I admit the force of Gupta's reasoning but would like to take the argument further. Ray has always had a wary attitude to city and urban success—the message on this point in *Mahanagar* and *Nayak* is clear. But in the new trilogy Ray comes to grips with the 'internal dynamics' (Dr. M.A. Qadeer) of the city. To call it 'evil' is perfectly justified. But one must also appreciate the art which weaves the links, the specific culture, the socio-economic drives in a pattern of such ruthless inevitability, that no 'choice'—in the day-to-day living, not in a philosophical sense—is left. And without choice, moral judgement will have to evolve a much more complex concept than 'evil'.

In *Pratidwandi* there is a direct ideological defeat for the hero. He is beaten by the drive of urban culture. In *Seemabaddha* it is the dependent urbanism—dependent on the finance and lifestyle of developed countries—that beats him. In *Jana Aranya* it's the sheer pressure of the crowd, the struggle for survival that gets the young man down.

Jana Aranya is the most sophisticated examination yet of the 'essence' of an Indian city. It shows as no other film has done, why, in our cities, poverty, inequality and public ineffectiveness persist despite remarka-

ble industrial development. *Jana Aranya* also shows how the sectors complement each other, how the supply of girls to a managing director is an essential link between the organised/formal and unorganised/informal sectors in an Indian city. That's why the most vital figure in *Jana Aranya* is neither the bewildered and compliant Somnath or his moral tradition-bound father, but Mr. Natabar Mitter, the PRO-pimp. For the same reason I cannot regard Somnath as a 'corrupted Apu'. The world of Apu is aeons away from the world of Somnath. Apu could be a relatively free agent. Somnath is condemned to be a child of the city of his time—a dupe and a tool. The cities of both Apu and Somnath bear a common name but as Baudelaire says: "The form of a city, alas, changes more quickly than a mortal's heart."

What really sets apart Somnath from Apu is sadness about what was and lack of hope for what is to come.

The first notable 'city' in Hindi popular cinema is also Calcutta of Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin*. Very different from the Calcutta of Ray or the 'cities' of Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt. This is Calcutta seen through the eyes of an uprooted non-Bengali peasant come to Calcutta to earn money and save his land from the capitalist landlord.

This is the Calcutta of harsh pavements, slums, overworked rickshawallas. Bimal Roy's film is one of the few attempts in a cinema to view the city from the point of view of the casual labourer and the city proletariat. Ray, Sen, Ghatak, Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt films have one common feature despite great differences. Their vision is middle-middle or lower middle class. Bimal Roy's movie is the odd film out. Neo-realism is married to the public's need for song and melodrama. The peasant's life despite miseries is romanticised as never before or since. "Haryala savan dhol bajata aya" (Verdant monsoon come beating its drum) is perhaps the loveliest peasant song on our screen.

Calcutta is bleak. It's bleak in a soul crushing, animal fashion. Perhaps it is Balraj Sahni's craggy integrity, perhaps it's the sombre camera craft but the world evoked is one of profound hopelessness and powerlessness. In Satyajit Ray's most pessimistic film, in Raj Kapoor's *tamashas*, in Guru Dutt's chronicles of despair, there's a sense of an important, if hopeless battle being fought. In Bimal Roy's film the scale of battle itself is reduced—a rickshaw's race to death to save two meagre *bighas*. There's an absence of transcendence, a deliberate achievement of the most naked kind of secularism that's the hallmark of the genuinely leftist ideological film. The value of the city in human terms is examined and rejected because it is irrelevant to the peasant.

And yet *Do Bigha Zamin* created some stereotypes which persist to this day. There's the streetwise but ... Jagdeep in the film.



Do Bigha Zamin romanticised the life of the uprooted in the slums...

uncynical city urchin played brilliantly by Jagdeep. You can be a citizen and yet remain human.

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There's the warmth, the togetherness of the slums caught unforgettably in the "Ajab teri duniya" (What a strange world this of yours, oh Lord!) song. This song is a cry of the peasants uprooted from their land



in a huge metropolis. They have created a home for themselves and it is from this vantage point of their artificial home that they judge the ruthless world around.

The Bombay of Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt (though the latter shot many scenes in Calcutta) is a far cry from the Calcutta of Ray and Bimal Roy. First, there is the economic and social difference. There is an air of decline about Calcutta, of things falling apart. In Bombay there is a thrust, there's a drive, there's a vigour which suffuses even the chawls. This is a felt, actual difference and not a creation of cinema. But it is exploited by the artists in different ways. While Ray maintains a distance, takes his time to chart the changing Calcutta over three decades, Kapoor and Dutt, so to say, jazz up the pace of change, reduce the character of Bombay to certain stereotypes, and give an indulgent play to their fantasies and (in the case of Dutt) to despair. The City becomes an over-obvious metaphor. And yet the idiosyncratic elements and the social comment in Kapoor-Dutt films deserve analysis because they set the pattern for the form and content of popular cinema till the eighties.

The structure and elements of the Kapoor-Dutt cities will be set down before a brief examination of four films—*Awaara*, *Shree 420*, *Pyaasa* and *Kaagaz Ke Phool*.

The Structure of the city:

1. There's an upper/upper middle class consisting of judges (*Awaara*), successful publishers (*Pyaasa*), anglicised rentiers (*Kaagaz Ke Phool*) and nouveau riches in league with decadents (*Shree 420*). There's an 'adversary culture' critique of this class.



Not easily attainable...

2. There's a middle/lower middle class hero who is the adversary (more intense in Dutt). He may be a lost son (*Awaara*), a rootless, good-hearted and moral vagabond (*Shree 420*) or an artist (*Pyaasa* and *Kaagaz Ke Phool*).

3. Then there are the genuine outsiders—the apaches—dacoit-killers (*Awaara*), the prostitutes (*Pyaasa*) and the slum crowd (in all four films).

Women of the city

This topic deserves an entire chapter to itself. Here I shall concentrate on two broad 'types' of women observed in Kapoor-Dutt films.

The first type is the cool, sophisticated, aloof, not easily 'attainable' type, represented by Nargis in *Awaara*, Nadira in *Shree 420*, Mala Sinha in *Pyaasa* and Veena in *Kaagaz Ke Phool*.

It will be said that there are vast differences in the personalities of these women. Nargis is warm-hearted, she falls for a tramp, Nadira is a small-time racketeer. Mala Sinha is a sold-out socialite. Veena is the contemptuous, high aristocratic type.

These are personality differences. I am thinking of the way these women must have appeared to the 'heroes' of the four films—shiftless tramps, failed poets, unsteady filmmakers. All these four women are used to money, they have the style which only long acquaintance with money or being born into a good family can bring. Baudelaire caught the essence of this quality in his line: "The softness that fascinates, the pleasure that kills." Hitchcock was frank in his work about his fascination for such women. Kapoor and Dutt are not (though Kapoor



...and the attainable women of 'Kaagaz Ke Phool'

made some amends later in *Mera Naam Joker*). These women are seen as faithless or hard. Even Nargis in *Awaara* is savaged by Raj Kapoor

"Awaara accepted the city—its slums and its palaces. Shree 420 and Pyaasa fled the city. The artist of Kaagaz Ke Phool consummated his love-hate affair with the city in death."

(see below). But there's an undercurrent of admiration for such women because of their elegance—see the 'dream' sequences in *Awaara*

For Raj Kapoor, the city was a 'tamsha'. Be it in the slums...



and *Pyaasa* and more important watch the ethereal way Nargis and Mala Sinha are conjured up ("Ghar aaya mera pardesi" and "Hum apki aankhon Mein" sequences).

"This is love which makes the lover burn in its flame," as Walter Benjamin says in another context, "but no phoenix arises from it."

It is interesting to contrast this image with the way the 'other' women—the marginal women are handled. Waheeda in *Pyaasa* is a street walker. She becomes a 'fall-back' woman for Guru Dutt—in fact, in one of the most revealing shots in our cinema, Dutt slides down in her embrace in total defeat. The prostitute by a strange reversal takes on the role of the 'Indian wife'—a taken-for-granted source of recuperation towards health. In effect this is the role Waheeda plays in *Kaagaz Ke Phool* too. But it must be pointed out that *Kaagaz Ke Phool*... is



... or in the urban society (Sri 420).

suffused with the lacerating passion of hopeless love—a tragedy which is not fully worked out. Nargis in *Shree 420* is a do-gooding school mistress, voice of conscience—an image which is not weakened by those Hollywoodish shots of romance in the rain. She is a figure of salvation, of escape from the city rather than 'object of desire' in the city.

In a sense, in choosing the 'marginal' women, the men are settling for the second best. To quote Baudelaire again, "Who gives to prostitutes his love/Is happy, satisfied and free/My hands are broken utterly/For having grasped the clouds above." A very resigned 'city' conclusion.

"The song in Hindi films of the fifties was epiphony — a sudden illumination — which substituted for visual devices. Kapoor made use of it to create the archetypal modern urban hero."

The Poetry of the city:

Sahir, Hasrat, Shailendra and a host of others created the poetry of the city—"A chorus of voices rising from the abyss of history." It is this which gave the cinematic city of the fifties its most distinctive mark. This poetry assimilated the simplicities of rural speech, the intensity of bhakti, the devotion of the qawwali, the banality of the Bombay patois,

undeniable power. When Kapoor puts his vision into Madame Simki's fantasy—Kapoor struggles up a vast staircase to an ethereal Nargis only to be dragged down by masked devils. Here he expresses both his detestation for urban lower depths and his infatuation with affluence. "There's money in her voice," says Gatsby fascinated by Daisy (*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald). It is the culture which money has bought that fascinates *Awaara's* hero. In a significant scene Kapoor savages Nargis for being what she is, implicitly for being a social success—and Nargis clasps his knees in surrender. Which is no doubt a scene where Kapoor is seen as hating himself for being in love with a woman of the 'upper class' but a conclusion of the sequence shows that 'love' wins over 'hate'. No, success is not a bitch goddess in *Awaara*.

But she becomes one in *Shree 420* made four years later (1955). Whereas the world of the tramp and the world of the society goddess is fused at the end in *Awaara* (with a lot of alibis, of course), in *Shree 420* both the hero and the girl forsake the city and its world of power. Of course, this could be an accident. The same story and screenplay writers were involved in both films—K.A. Abbas and V.P. Sathe. Is it merely a neat reversal of the formula? That possibility is there since Kapoor is neither a classicist like Ray nor a romantic like Guru Dutt. Whatever the reason *Shree 420* looks at the city from the opposite view point to *Awaara*. The hero here—unlike the streetwise hero of *Awaara*—is an ingenue who discovers the city—the warmth of its slums and the pseudo warmth of the nouveau riche. He is successful in both worlds—a brilliant pointer to the link between the urban 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' sectors. Of course, the point is muffled. In *Awaara* 'society' is blamed for slum crime; in *Shree 420* the slums are pure as driven snow and the crime is in 'society'. But my point is different. The two films in their distorted way reflect urban actuality—the mutual co-existence of two apparently opposed orders, and their strong linking which is established by the ease with which the hero passes from one order to another. Despite the inequality, the hero shows exceptional social mobility.

The End of the Affair:

Awaara accepted the city—its slums and its palaces. *Shree 420* and *Pyasa* fled the city. The artist of *Kaagaz Ke Phool* consummated his love-hate affair with the city in death.

The individual geniuses of Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt in their creations of the city deserves elaboration. For Raj Kapoor the city is a *tamasha*, a roller coaster ride, fair game for a vagabond or a tramp (too obviously Chaplinesque). A critic called his work a "canny compromise between art and commercial experiences." "I do not think Kapoor made such a calculated decision. Of course, everyone is in this business to make money. But our business is to judge the vision from the work. And the Kapoor vision was—and remained—a surface vision. This is no denigration. Perhaps this approach extracted a truth about the city not open to more tortured souls—that its glitter its show its seductiveness has

The heroes of both *Awaara* and *Shree 420* have certain common features: they are rootless, without any traditional faith, they are dandies, they are actual or potential criminals. They have the gift of tongues. Kapoor can sing "Ramayya dostanayya" in the chawl to establish bonds which are both slum and rural. He can also sing the song of the rising new urban class "Mud mud ke na dekh" (Do not turn back, do not look back)—cavorting away with Nadira from the tradition-bound school-mistress upholder of old values, Nargis.

The song in Hindi films of the fifties was epiphony—a sudden illumination—which substituted for visual devices. Kapoor made use of it to create the archetypal modern urban hero.

For Guru Dutt the city was not a *tamasha*; it was an 'adversary' using the word in Trilling's sense of an overall cultural confrontation. The paradox was that Dutt's hero as artist in *Pyasa* and *Kaagaz Ke Phool* is a product of the city—the fame he craves can only be bestowed by its patrons and its crowds. It is the working out of this tension between the instinct to fight the adversary and the craving for fame that make *Pyasa* and *Kaagaz Ke Phool* unforgettable. Even love is subsumed by this tension.

Guru Dutt is the great romantic of the city just as Ray is its great classicist. Dutt is searching for the "discovery and discrimination of inward reality for a new wholeness, a new totality." In both his films art becomes a substitute for philosophy and religion. It's through art that the poet challenges the chaining of women into brothelhood "Jimhen Naaz Hai Hind Par/Woh Kahan Hai" (Where are those who are proud of India). It's through art that he challenges "thrones, crowns, palaces". The whole scene in *Pyasa* where the living poet's funeral oration is being delivered, signifies the burial of dissent by acceptance of its 'text' when the dissenter is dead. In fact the scene is shot as if in the vault of a tomb. Dutt's entry, illuminated as if he were a risen Christ, constitutes a challenge to 'acceptance'.

Pyasa's last scene has worried many. Why did not the poet 'fight'? I think *Pyasa* and *Kaagaz Ke Phool* have to be read together, 'fight' against the city as constituted today can only lead to co-optation. As in

the case of the hero of *Jana Aranya* the city proves a trap. Ray being a classicist arrives at the conclusion in a different fashion. The classicist is without illusions, without day-dreams, without hope, without bitterness and with an abundant resignation.

Guru Dutt being a romantic, saves himself and his art by 'flight' in *Pyasa*—for the very 'success' of his art would spell its doom. In *Kaagaz Ke Phool* he does the same thing by 'retreat'. He retreats into

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the 'inner city' of unreality—cinema itself. Gradually both the film director and his actress begin to live in the studio—their romance is lighted by beams from studio lights. Even love comes to the director via a close up of Waheeda seen by chance during a showing of rushes. Rejected by the

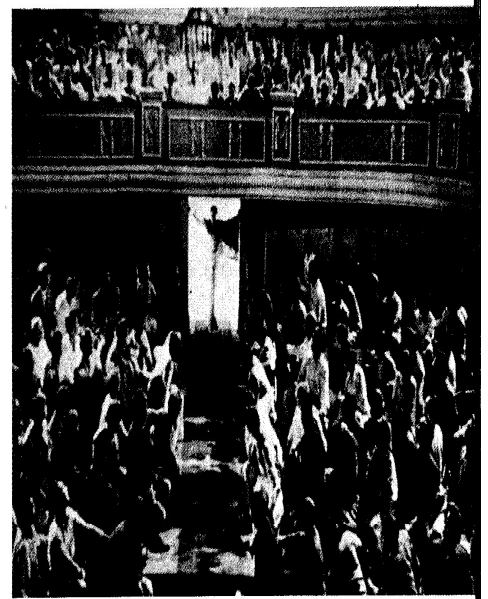
city, art flees to the mausoleum. Even death becomes the acting out of a fantasy.

About Guru Dutt's suicide or death, both in *Kaagaz Ke Phool* as in life, I think the words of critic Leon Daudet written in 1930 after he had looked at Paris from an elevation are relevant. "A man needs work, that is correct, but he has other needs too. Among his other needs there is suicide, something that is inherent in him and the society which forms him, and it is stronger than his drive for self-preservation."

The death of Guru Dutt, seen in the proper perspective, was both noble and inevitable. The city proved too much for him.

The fifties were the last period in Indian cinema when excellence and popularity did not contradict each other, when the distinction between 'art' and 'commercial' cinema made no sense. After that the spiritual energy that made for artistic excellence was absorbed by the modernist, highbrow movement of new cinema while popular cinema degenerated into a banal reiteration of 'wholesome' bourgeois themes (less wholesome today, but still bourgeois).

The clock cannot be turned back. But today when both new and old cinema are under pressure, one can look at the fifties classics with a fresh eye—for illumination, if not for imitation.



For Guru Dutt the city was an adversary. (*Pyasa*)