

Communications & Culture

Shyam Benegal delivers

The Subhas Ghosal Foundation Lecture 2005

When Titoo Ahluwalia asked me to deliver this year's Subhas Ghosal lecture the first thought that came in my mind was – why this undeserved privilege? I have hardly any views that could be termed insightful to people in the advertising profession. I gave up advertising almost three and a half decades ago and, so in some ways, belong to the Jurassic period of the business. Secondly, a film-maker puts together things, works towards a synthesis which eventually results in a film. Much of this work is done intuitively and often instinctively. Delivering a talk or a lecture requires the power of analysis, an analytical mind and a different kind of talent which I am not sure I have. There is really no reason why I am here. But since I am here, I intend to make the best of it by shooting my mouth off on subjects that I hope I know something about.

I had no professional connection with Subhas Ghosal so I do not have any anecdotes relating to him. I knew that he had a formidable professional reputation in advertising. The only time I came in contact with him professionally was when he offered me a position in JWT which he was then heading. I had to refuse mainly because my ambition was really to be a film-maker. However, I knew Mrs Gopa Ghosal as an acquaintance since the middle 1960s. It was Gopa who introduced me to Satyajit Ray. And it was Satyajit Ray who was my referee when I applied for a Homi Bhabha Fellowship. Thanks to him, I got the fellowship which in turn helped me to give up advertising painlessly and become a full time film-maker. Thank you, Gopa.

Why did I want to be a film-maker – an ambition I carried within me all those years since childhood? There were the obvious attractions; a high public profile, a larger glamour quotient, the ability to be in the news without necessarily making any. There were other reasons too – a whole complex of them; a compelling

need to give expression to my imagination for which I had neither competence nor ability in any of the nine traditional muses.

The tenth muse of the Cinema had *Technology* which made up for the lack of skills needed to practice the other arts. Cinema also seemed like the ideal medium through which to reflect on the human condition. At the time, I brashly and somewhat arrogantly felt that most films made in the country were quite awful with little or no merit, and that they generally insulted one's intelligence and sorely tested one's patience.

Earlier while still in college, I had heard a speech made by our then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. For reasons I cannot fathom, he spoke on the subject of communications. During the speech, he mentioned that all communications had hidden messages. These, he said, functioned on a subliminal level. The burden of his argument was that communicators should be aware of these messages to be able to manage these communications efficiently.

He referred to these hidden persuaders as an important component for change. What he was talking about was not quite subliminal messages as understood in advertising as much as semiology -- the use of signs, signals and symbols that often work on different levels of consciousness and have great motivating power in catalyzing change in society. Political parties have often used these semiotic devices but not always for the right reasons. Nehru often used these devices himself in his speeches using similes and metaphors creating new emotionally potent symbolic meanings. His famous speech at the inauguration of the Bhakra Nangal project referred to the new Dams and Steel Plants as the 'Temples of Modern India'. In advertising you have numerous such examples: motorcycles are no longer motorised two-wheelers; they are expressions of testosterone-driven masculinity. Wrist-watches and pens are not utilitarian objects for which they are normally bought; they are fashion accessories and jewellery. Designer

clothes are no longer simply clothes to wear; they are lifestyle symbols denoting privilege and class.

Needless to say, the speech made a deep impression on me and I convinced myself that although Cinema was and is considered simply a vehicle of entertainment, it could not only have artistic worth but shape content in ways that would make Cinema a catalyst in social change.

I belong to the generation that grew up in the first two decades of independent India and, like a large number of my contemporaries, I believed – a little naively perhaps – that while Cinema was primarily meant to entertain people it had an immense persuasive power. I felt quite seriously at the time that film-makers had some kind of a role to play in helping to change our traditional hierarchically-constructed feudal society to a modern egalitarian and democratic one. Films seemed an ideal vehicle to use in this process. Generically speaking, films from certain film industries represent and define entertainment more than others. For instance, for one half of the world films from Hollywood stand for entertainment. For the other half, popular Hindi Cinema defines film entertainment. Films that attempt to engage their audiences outside of this definition are not seen as being entertaining at all. You may have noticed that film-makers are at pains to stress that whatever kind of films they make, their films are ‘out-and-out entertainers’ and ‘very commercial’ so that the film industry and the public in general will not consider it offbeat or an art film – a genre that in the popular imagination is considered as not entertaining.

It would be interesting to see how and why this happened. What is it in the content or form of popular Hindi Cinema that makes the majority of the cinema-going audiences of our country consider only this cinema as entertaining even while a sizeable number criticize these films as being fanciful and lacking in any credibility?

In my view, popular Hindi cinema works towards getting an enthusiastic and predictable response from an audience. It would not be perceived as entertaining if it challenged audience beliefs or allowed itself to be challenged. In order to succeed, it has to meet with the requirements of an essentially passive audience. It cannot afford to be disturbing nor can it hope to shake fondly held views, attitudes, beliefs or even superstitions.

The stress on mass entertainment which is the hallmark of popular cinema creates a culture very much its own. Popular Hindi Cinema projects a standardized urban view of Indian Society – a view endorsed by the film industry as being socially integrating, offering a homogenous view of India and its culture.

It generally trivializes social and political processes by reducing these equations; or rather, by reducing everything to good and bad. Its greatest success lies in making the audience a willing participant in its own manipulation, much in the nature of populist politics.

Since films have to succeed at the box office, film-makers are compelled to find common denominators that would appeal to the largest number of people cutting across social and cultural diversities. Most films, therefore, are bound to be bottom-line ventures and when any one of them succeeds it is certain to have scores of clones in its wake. Common denominators are more easily found in sensory areas of human experience. Small wonder then that most films seek to create new sensations. This is perhaps a somewhat one-sided and partisan view of mine simply because I do not make films of the kind I have described; even more importantly, that I may be lacking the capability to make such films.

So before I go any further, let me try and look at our popular cinema as objectively as I can by examining what *entertainment* means in Indian tradition.

In all our traditional arts, particularly the performing arts, entertainment is quantified as a combination of the essences of nine basic emotions. Complete entertainment is possible only when the nine emotions of love, hate, joy, sorrow, pity, disgust, fear, anger and compassion are blended in different ways around a predominant emotion. The main emotion could be love or joy but without being complemented by the others, neither are they defined nor experienced. *Popular Indian cinema, like other traditional arts is an heir to this tradition.* The plots and storylines are used as pegs to hang various emotional ingredients that make up for entertainment.

Ashis Nandy, the eminent social thinker suggests that “the Indian film is essentially a spectacle and not necessarily an artistic endeavour”. Let me quote him at some length, as he articulates it better than I can.

“In a spectacle, black is black and white is white – emotionally, motivationally and morally; all shades of grey are scrupulously avoided... since they detract from the logic and charm of the spectacle. Thus, in the popular Indian film, when somebody has a change of heart, the change is dramatic and total. Such a person is not allowed to linger in a normative limbo and the clues to such a change must be clear and well defined. If the storyline chooses to depict the hero as an apparent mixture of good and evil he must eventually be shown as essentially good, whose badness is thereby reduced to the status of a temporary aberration. It does not allow for residuals in a character; it has to be split between good and the evil. A spectacle has to be an overstatement.

It bases its appeal not on the linear development

of the storyline but on the social configuration which the film presents of many known elements or themes derived from other movies or traditional tales. The viewer is actually expected to know these elements by heart and to experience in the films a feeling of 'déjà vu'. Indeed the issue of plagiarism in such films has been wrongly posed.

The film-makers operate within a consensual system which rejects the idea that the elements of a story are personal property or individual creation. A popular Indian film aims at presenting a not-so-unique combination of themes that have been witnessed hundreds of times before. The successful film is different from the unsuccessful film in that it presents a more popular or efficient combination of themes arrived at by design or sheer luck."

Most of the stories told in these films are usually known and ahistorical without requiring any specific context. The linear unfolding of the story is not particularly important since it is predictable. The suggestion of the narrative's unpredictability is so designed that the viewer can easily see through it. The viewers know from the very beginning that the villain will, however good his behaviour, bear his true self sometime or the other and that he will ultimately be humiliated, jailed or killed. The hero, too, even if he has mortgaged his soul in the first few reels, is bound to recover his ethical moorings later in the film. Since all heroes and villains are typecast with well-known actors and stars and their roles tailor-made for them, there is a conformity to the viewer's expectation.

As Nandy says, "The popular Indian film is not concerned with the inner lives of the characters on the screen; it is concerned with the inner life of the viewer. It

actually reverses a major tenet of modern fiction and film; the characters do not develop through situations; rather, the situations develop through the character. The story is told through a series of incidents which are woven through means such as coincidences, accidents, and through songs and dances. Judged by the logic of the structure, such films are anti-psychological. This follows directly from their nature as spectacles. Spectacles have to be anti-psychological in their context; they can only be psychological in their impact.”

Audiences in India are most comfortable and totally accustomed to this cinematic form. The psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar says:

“Hindi cinema represents a collective fantasy – a group daydream, containing unconscious material and the hidden wishes of a vast number of people. The daydream they develop is not idiosyncratic. They must appeal to those concerns of the audience which are shared; if they do not, the film’s appeal is bound to be disastrously limited. Like other high fantasy products, Hindi films emphasize the central features of fantasy; fulfillment of wishes, the humbling of competitors and the destruction of enemies. The stereotyped twists and turns of a film plot ensure the repetition of the very message that makes a fairy tale so deeply satisfying. Hindi films may be unreal in a rational sense, but they certainly are not untrue.

The depiction of the external world may be flawed; their relevance to the external life of the viewer remote, yet the Hindi film demonstrates a confident and sure-footed grasp of the topography of the changing circumstances of desire. Desire and fantasy

are inexorably linked. Fantasy is the mise-en-scene of desire – it is the world of imagination fuelled by desire. The relationship between collective fantasy of Hindi films and Indian culture is complex. Though itself a cultural product, Hindi film has shaped culture in an unprecedented way.”

What more can one say of Indian cinema that has developed over the years. A few years ago, the eminent film critic, Chidananda Dasgupta, wrote, “The Indian cinema never succeeded in emerging into the area of national resurgence in the way painting, dance, drama or music did... (the language of the cinema) was held back by the very fact that it is a modern, industrial, technological medium imported from the West. Not being a traditional medium, there was no ready base for an understanding of it as a new language. The absorption of the cinema into Indian culture was made difficult by the absence of an industrial-technological culture. Grafted on to an agricultural country, it failed to develop a valid artistic form, a cultural contact point with tradition or with reality. It subsisted on an imitation of the West, mainly Hollywood, without producing the fusion of art and box-office that Hollywood often represented... the cinema lived in partly enforced isolation in British India, enclosed comfortably within its own standards. The absence of film culture was as marked as the physical spread of commercial formula-bound cinema.”

Earlier, speaking of Indian cinema in 1929, Rabindranath Tagore commented, “Form in Art changes according to the means it uses. I believe that the new art that could be expected to develop out of the motion picture has not yet made its appearance. In politics we are looking for Independence, in Art we must do the same. *Every Art seeks to find its own independent manner of expression within the world it creates*; otherwise its self-expression is undermined for lack of confidence in itself... no creative genius has yet arrived to deliver it from its bondage. This act of rescue will not be easy, because in poetry, painting and

music the means are not expensive, whereas in the cinema, one needs not only creativity, but financial capital as well.”

A creative genius did arrive in the mid 1950s in the form of Satyajit Ray but I will come to that a little later. While agreeing with several assumptions made by both Dasgupta and Tagore, one cannot deny the incredible hold that Indian cinema has not only on the Indian population but on the entire region of South Asia. Indian cinema developed in a largely agrarian society in somewhat enforced isolation from the industrial-technological society of its origin. It was taken to enthusiastically by its early practitioners who were part of a newly-emerging urban middle-class in the commercial cities of Bombay and Calcutta.

It was the urban middle-classes, who owed their origin to the colonial policies of British India, that determined the agenda for Indian cinema in its infancy. Although the urban middle-classes have grown exponentially in the last one hundred years and their cultural characteristics have become far more complex, they have continued to remain the predominant influence in the shaping of Indian cinema.

Initially, early Indian films were imitative and mimetic of the form it was taking in the West, but soon enough film-makers started to look at the existent theatrical entertainment forms that were most successful in urban India at that time. Since several early film entrepreneurs were already successful theatre producers, it was natural for them to film theatrical productions taking advantage of the added capabilities of the cinema.

The urban theatrical form of the time – the Parsi Urdu theatre derived its name from the fact that some of the most successful producers were Parsis. Parsi Urdu Theatre was an amalgam of folk and classical theatrical forms of India and the nineteenth century theatrical techniques of the West. The subject matter could vary from stories taken from the Indian mythological epics, Arabic or Persian

classics, to adaptations of English plays going back to the Elizabethan times. Parsi Urdu adaptations from Shakespeare were great favourites. These productions are operatic in style with high tragedy, fervid melodrama and low comedy punctuated with songs and dances making use of popular Indian musical and dance traditions.

The Parsi Urdu theatre itself was sourced from *Nautanki*, a popular form of theatre in rural and urban areas of North India. Equivalents of this form existed in different language regions of the country. Having appropriated this form, Indian cinema did not have to look any further. This is probably what prompted Mr. Chidananda Dasgupta to remark as I quoted earlier, '(to remain) enclosed comfortably within its own standards' and Rabindranath Tagore to bemoan the fact that 'the new art that could be expected to develop out of the motion picture has not yet made its appearance'.

The narrative structure of Indian cinema is unique in the sense that it is very different from the cinema of the rest of the world. It is punctuated with songs and dances. These are often used to express the interiority of characters and sometimes to further the narrative. Most times, however, they are used simply as music and dance interludes or as periods of rest in the narration before the next dramatic event takes place. Recently a new term, describes this interlude – an item number.

The music director's major effort in a film is to compose attractive melodies often set to very fine lyrics of a high literary quality. Some of the best poetry in Urdu and Hindi found its way into films songs, particularly during the period of 1950s and 1960s. The most popular form of music in India continues to be the film song. In the last couple of decades, with the introduction of inexpensive audio-cassettes, and compact discs the market for popular music has grown enormously.

Today, it is not unusual for films to be designed around a set of songs rather than the other way around. The best example one can take is that of the music company, T-Series, that puts together films built around already composed and recorded songs. There is an increasing trend to use the narrative of a film simply as a string to hang song and dance numbers, much like a music-hall revue.

With the new audio-visual technology available, they can often resemble extended music videos peppered with action and dialogue.

As I mentioned earlier, the form of popular Indian film did not emerge from the aesthetic and narrative capabilities of the cinema as much as it did from the existent urban and folk theatrical forms rooted largely in agrarian traditions. The cinematic form of popular Indian cinema is therefore difficult to explain in post-renaissance Western aesthetic terms or even in the context of international cinema.

During the colonial period, Indian films often dealt with subjects that showed Indian tradition as being threatened by the corrupting influence of western culture. 'Colonialism' and 'Westernization' were projected as being synonymous and therefore inimical to Indian social traditions. Villains tended to wear western clothes; westernized women were seen as vamps; what is more, they smoked cigarettes. In the hero vs villain situation, it was always the villain who was westernized, depraved and perverse. Indian tradition was seen as being unquestionably sacred, and the sole repository of social values. It did not take long to equate 'Westernization' with 'Modernity' and to equate 'Patriotism' with 'Tradition'.

Unlike the 1857 revolt against colonial rule, the 20th century anti-colonial movement was ideologically nationalist. The movement gained strength by imaging a vastly diverse and disparate country such as ours as a homogenous nation. The point I wish to make is this: Nationalism is not a traditional idea; it is a

modern idea that emerged in the western world after centuries of strife and a couple of revolutions. It was one among the many big ideas of what one might call the Modernity or the Enlightenment Project. The Modernity Project threw up a whole slew of concepts and ideas such as Universal Human Rights: liberty as everyone's birthright; equality and fraternity; the concept of a secular state separated from religion; the ideas of democracy, development and progress driven by a boundless faith in human reason.

Immense progress made in natural sciences from the eighteenth century onwards gave the impression that science would reveal all the secrets of the Universe. Human reason and rationality were relied upon not only for the unstoppable progress in science, technology, politics and social sciences but in setting out to identify the eternal and universal truths and codes of individual and social morality which are traditionally seen as belonging to the domain of religion. All the big ideas and ideologies such as Capitalism, Marxism, Socialism and Nationalism were part of the Modernity Project. Nationalism in the context of the anti-colonial movement was to give the image and shape to the Indian Nation – 'Unity in diversity' was Nehru's definition unlike the single-language, single-ethnicity, single-religion states that emerged as nations in Europe.

The rapidly-growing urban middle-class was most influenced by nationalist ideals as it was with many ideas that originated in the West. Equally it was concerned with preserving Indian traditions.

You only have to look at some of the films made by studios such as Prabhat and New Theatres in the 1930s and 40s that took up the subject of social reform. Films like *Duniya Na Mane* and *Aadmi* suggest that reform is compatible with Indian tradition *despite the fact that the most social inequities in Indian society are the result of their sanction by that very tradition*. Traditional Indian Society is caste-ridden and hierarchical. And it is neither singular nor homogenous. It is diverse, pluralistic and in many ways bewildering. To consider that social reform

on egalitarian lines is possible within such a tradition is a contradiction in terms. This contradiction is not easy to resolve – in life as in Cinema.

To remove the stigma of untouchability, Gandhiji called Dalits, 'Harijans': children of God. With the best of intentions, it could only have been a cruel joke for people who had no human rights at all. Similarly, the term 'Daridranarayan' which Gandhiji coined for the poorest of poor. Both these terms are considered extremely condescending and rejected by the Dalits themselves. The subjects of popular Indian films until quite recently skirted all these inconveniences when dealing with Indian tradition.

Tradition in popular Indian cinema is not the reality but the ideal. As an ideal, it has been sanitized, concerning itself not with the harsh realities of caste, untouchability, gender discrimination and the varieties of feudal economic oppression that exist in traditional society but rather to evoke nostalgic sentiment and a sense of belonging to the certainties of tradition. In fact, this is the secret of its greatest appeal to the South Asian diaspora which has helped Indian film industry grow exponentially in recent years.

For instance, the idea of the inviolability of the family. Sacrificing oneself for the family is considered the highest virtue. In what is an entrenched patriarchal society, a wife's devotion to her husband regardless of his behavior, a son's duty towards his parents, a daughter-in-law's duty towards her mother-in-law are seen as eternal values to be emulated. The rights of the family have primacy over the rights of an individual. This is a far cry from the liberal, rational and universal language of rights and the humanistic view that came in the wake of the Modernity Project. (*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, Baghban* etc.)

Viewed in the context of the nationalist movement, and later the adoption of democracy with a democratic constitution in independent India, traditional values

were bound to find themselves in direct confrontation with the changes that had begun to take place in the political and social scene.

One of the strategies adopted by popular Cinema to circumvent this uneasy confrontation was to attribute the systematic evils in tradition to individual villainy and to resolve the problem by punishing the villains. For many years popular Hindi films were peopled by characters who had no surnames that would give away their caste and region. This lack of differentiation except when it came to religion was designed to create a larger homogenous Indian identity that could be identified by people in different parts of India. Suppressing traditional identities was seen as helping to create a national identity and considered nationalistic and patriotic – a strange perversion of the Modernity Project.

Most film narratives, were broadly speaking, either rural or urban morality tales in which good overcame evil at the end with all the turns and twists in the tale. Traditional morality was sacrosanct even if only lip service was paid to it.

Ashis Nandy has an interesting observation to make about the duality of the rational self (which is modern) as against the secret self (which is traditional) in contemporary Indian literature and films. He suggests that the secret self represents the deep-seated traditional attitudes that appear as sub-texts in contemporary works. I would like to think that this duality, often if not always paradoxical, exists in all of popular cinema. I am personally of the opinion that without this sub-text, no film has any chance of popular success in India.

The first radical departure from the conventions of traditional Indian Cinema took place with the films of Satyajit Ray from the middle 1950s. Ray brought to the cinema a genuinely modern sensibility and, to loosely paraphrase Tagore, “*an independent manner of expression within the world he created*”. Here was a filmmaker who not only understood the language and vocabulary of the cinema but

brought to Cinema a genuine aesthetic that was at once modern yet drawn from the Indian tradition.

His exploration of Indian reality was from a point of view that was liberal, humanistic and socially enlightened; in short – modern. His impact on cinema was monumental enough for us to look at Indian cinema in terms of “Before Ray” and “After Ray”. For me, certainly, he became a huge inspirational figure. Here was a film-maker whose sensibility appeared to be similar to one’s own.

Satyajit Ray’s films were not necessarily entertaining in the same way as mainstream Indian cinema, but were deeply engaging. They entertained because they were stimulating and engaged one’s attention. For me this was very important. As a film-maker, I wanted to engage the viewer on several levels – sensory, emotional and cerebral. To do that, you need to wake up your audience; activate them, challenge them rather than make them passive recipients. This I knew was not always easy and certainly not without risk, because most audiences are accustomed to treating Cinema as an opiate or simply as ‘time pass’.

My criticism of popular Indian Cinema before I became a film-maker was that it neither created a credible reality nor did it reflect any of the complexity of Indian culture or society. When I started making fiction films in the early 1970s, I was in many ways reacting to the rigidity of the conventional form of popular cinema. I found it difficult to accept the fact that the *form* of popular Indian Cinema determined the *content* of the film.

The first casualty of this reversal was credibility. It did not allow for personal expression and appeared to be unconnected with real life and therefore incapable of providing any kind of valid experience or artistic insight. By its very nature, mainstream popular cinema was for the status quo and therefore

traditionalist. Its determinant was popular taste which to me seemed like a sop to populism.

I felt that if Cinema had to have any artistic merit or offer any kind of insightful experience, it would automatically go against the mainstream or traditional cinema. This was not an easy choice to make thirty-five years ago, as it is not today, since it does not make for a wildly successful career.

I am tending to stray. With Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen in the 1950s, and several of my contemporaries and myself in the 1970s, and some of my younger contemporaries in the 1980s, (I believe) a modern sensibility came into the Indian cinema. Unfortunately, some critics and the Media generally tended to bunch all these films (of diverse sensibilities) together under the ludicrous label of 'Parallel Cinema'. Most of the films of the so-called parallel cinema, for reasons I will not go into here, unfortunately, were more heard of than actually seen.

Over the years, the graduates of the Film and Television Institute both in Pune and Kolkatta have played a significant role in infusing a modern sensibility into Indian cinema – more in the regional language cinemas than in the mainstream Hindi cinema. The role that Hindi cinema plays in India is hegemonistic. Today, it controls Indian cinematic discourse, just as Hollywood controls the cinematic discourse in the West. In many ways, “those who control Discourse control reality”. “Discourse,” to quote someone whose name I forget, “is not merely a reflection of Reality but is constitutive of it.”

Even after 58 years of independent India, a modern sensibility does not help to make for popular success in the cinema. My own view is that ideas from the Modernity Project are essentially alienating in a society that finds itself difficult to come out of its traditional mould. Let me give you a small example. In spite of modern education, demands for dowry among the urban educated middle-

classes has only grown over the years. It only goes to show that education does not necessarily confer enlightenment. Is modernity then a failed project, as claimed by some of the present-day philosophers, or is there still a future for it?

The last decade and a half has seen a dramatic increase in the mass media of the country. The proliferation of television channels of India now rivals the United States. In the field of Information Technology we have few peers. The last 15 years have also seen steps being taken towards economic liberalization by the successive Governments of the country gradually leading to market-driven economy.

All this has made for changes so rapid that our background and history has simply not prepared us for. To quote the eminent British Historian, Eric Hobsbawn, "When people face what nothing in the past prepared them for, they go for words to name the unknown, even as they can neither define nor understand it... the keyword was *after* generally used in its Latinate form *post* as a prefix to any of the numerous terms which had for some generations been used to mark out the mental territory of 20th Century life... the world became post-industrial, post-Marxist...etc." In short, post-Modern.

What has happened in our post-Modern times is that mass media has become all-pervading and culturally dominant in a way that it never was in the past. Reality, in many ways, is constructed for us by the media today, whether it is the world of Television soap operas, commercials, cinema, popular film songs, newspapers that offer infotainment and advertising which has become so all-pervading that you see more advertising than architecture in most Indian cities and towns.

What we see and hear in the media constitutes a major source of our knowledge of the world. There are no longer clear distinctions any more between the

cultural, social and economic spaces. They have all become intertwined. Culture is a big business. Film stars are now brands.

As someone said, “Early Capitalism made slaves of the labouring classes exploiting them for profit while Late Capitalism has made individuals simply units of consumption – in other words, *consumption slaves*.” There is a suggestion here that individuals cannot perceive their own needs – the classic distinction between use value and exchange value has disappeared.

Some fundamental values have started to change in our post-Modern times. ‘Greed is good’ is the new motivational slogan for development. Whoever makes money is a valuable member of society; those who fail cannot possibly be members of the same society. The poor simply fall off the map. Post-Modernism denies the validity of the social goals that were part of the Modernity Project. They are seen as unachievable utopias and abandoned. All this has started to get reflected in our cinema. Since success is all-important, the moral distinction between notoriety and fame has disappeared. *Bunty aur Babli* and *Sarkar* are excellent examples of post-Modern Hindi Cinema. The lifestyle signals emphasize conspicuous consumption rather pointedly. For instance, *Sarkar*’s family travel in Lexus sedans and SUVs. Similarly, *Bunty* and *Babli*’s idea of the good life is five-star comfort with liberal doses of night life and cabarets.

Yet another aspect of post-Modern Hindi Cinema is the total disappearance of rural India in any of the films being made today.

The most successful films today are largely peopled by well-to-do designer-clad urban Indians who appear to be living comfortable lives transnationally – these are globalized Indians who appear to be modern but are actually deeply steeped in tradition. There are no paradoxes in post-Modern India. Traditional Indian cinema which was a product of *laissez-faire* anyway, has simply leapfrogged into

post-Modernism without having to deal with the uncomfortable problems of modernity.