Parallel Cinema in India: The Embracing of an Arthouse Movement by the Mainstream

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Abstract:

There is a widespread misconception in the western world that Bollywood films constitute the entirety of Indian cinema. While there are several booming film industries within India, this thesis is focused on an art house movement sometimes referred to as “Parallel Cinema,” that has been present alongside Bollywood since the 1950s. The aim of the research is to showcase how a movement that initially defied the conventions of its popular counterpart slowly became accepted by the popular film industry. The paper delves into the origins of this cinematic movement, international recognition of the movement, its differences from Bollywood films, its relationship with popular cinema and the government, and its presence in Indian film today. The thesis argues for the confluence of popular cinema and art cinema over time, using music as a focal point to analyze four films that aptly encapsulate the changes in the art form over the decades.

Introduction

Every art industry has a mainstream that garners the most public attention and is privy to the most commercial success. This usually occurs at the expense of other artistic movements within the same field. However, it isn't uncommon to see the mainstream evolve over time and encompass the qualities of the alternative streams surrounding it. In Indian cinema, since the fifties there has emerged an independently thriving alternative to the Bollywood mainstream, called parallel cinema, although the term is often reluctantly used since it defines the phenomenon not in terms of "what it is, but what it strives not to be" (Krishen, 26). The two have existed alongside one another but stood for different, often contradictory, things. In particular, the two industries depict starkly different images of the social dimensions of the nation. These differences have created a tense relationship between the two. Over time, both the art forms have undergone significant evolutions, the most unexpected of which is the convergence of the two movements in recent times. A key signifier of this confluence is from their respective use of music.

Roots of Parallel Cinema

Like most arts movements, there isn't a single film that triggered an entire movement by itself. The earliest known film that embodies the characteristics of the parallel cinema can be traced back to a silent film in 1925 titled *Savkari Pash* by Baburao Painter (Allemand, 14). It was, in fact, the films of directors such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak from the fifties that collectively sparked an "alternative movement" (Allemand, 14). The filmmaker that is widely regarded as the progenitor of a cinema in "radical opposition to the conventions and taste of the commercial cinema" is Satyajit Ray (Krishen, 26). Krishen states that "in depicting rural Bengal or Calcutta's streets with felicity and 'truth', Ray was an embarrassment to the image that

of India that the government was trying to project abroad" (pg. 26). The statement touches on arguably the most integral artistic aspect of parallel cinema, *realism*. The social realism of the films was intended to emphasize on popular social and economic issues of the time. Interestingly, Ray was recognized as a great filmmaker abroad and that deeply impacted the government's view on him. He was considered "a jewel that the government was proud to display in its showcase of cultural exhibits" (Krishen, 26).

Ray's films have been inextricably linked to French and Italian movies such as *The River* by Jean Renoir or *The Bicycle Thieves* by Vittorio de Sica. Ray even assisted Jean Renoir on his film *The River* and it had quite an impact on his early work (Allemand, 15). The films that fall within the definition of parallel cinema often play the role of "unveiling the truth" to audiences, showing audiences imbalances in power structures, turning films into "discursive intervention" (Virdi, 151). The central tenet of realism is the backbone of every other aspect of these films, including their musical scores. These films generally favored a more passive musical direction. As opposed to Bollywood, the music in these films were relatively understated and deviated from the tradition of song and dance routines, an integral part of Bollywood movies. Musically, these films from the early period of the movement drew a stark contrast with the mainstream by focusing solely on Hindustani (Indian) Classical music. There is a trend of directors from this movement working alongside maestros in the Hindustani classical field. Ray famously worked alongside world renowned sitarist Ravi Shankar during his famed Apu trilogy but during the latter half of his illustrious career, he scored the music for the films himself. Besides Ravi Shankar, Ray has also worked with other notable Hindustani classical musicians such as the legendary sitar player Vilayat Khan and the widely influential sarod player Ali Akbar Khan. Ritwik Ghatak's seminal film *Subarnarekha* (1965), a film about the refugees coping with the

aftermath of the partition of India in 1947, featured Ustad Bahadur Khan, a distinguished sarod player, as the music director. The films appeared to have a commitment to Hindustani classical music in its purest form. The music in these films are distinctly sparse and minimalist in nature which eventually became a characteristic feature of parallel cinema. Since parallel cinema films strived to be considered high art, it stands to reason that the public perception of Hindustani classical music as being high culture or high art may be one of the primary reasons as to why it is used in these films.

Relationship to the Government and Bollywood

The Indian government set up the Film Institute of India at Pune and the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) in 1960, ostensibly to provide support to a minority cinema, but by the end of the sixties there were few grounds to believe that these initiatives had made any lasting difference to the cause of an alternate cinema. Launched by the investment made by the FFC, the movement burgeoned in a wave of offbeat, artistic cinema. At the same time, however, it was not as if the films shared a singular political or aesthetic ideology or position, marked as they were by an immense variety of concerns and styles. Yet, there were common responses and larger approaches that were evident in the work that was financed by the FFC and a few others during this period, which can nevertheless be seen as constituting an aesthetic and cultural movement. These were a rejection of the values, forms, performance modes and the style of commercial cinema that privileged entertainment values, spectacular display and melodrama (Bhaskar, 71).

During the late-sixties the FFC became closely associated with difficult, experimental cinema that reaped very little financial reward. Not surprisingly, the FFC was accused of "wasting public funds" (Krishen, 31). In 1975, a government committee rebuked the FFC for not having considered the financial viability of its films. The Corporation was instructed henceforth

to treat all money advanced as loans, strictly repayable, and was asked to refrain from supporting films which were not good commercial prospects. The entire Board of the FFC resigned in protest, bringing to a dramatic end one phase of the parallel cinema movement (Krisen, 32). Soon after, the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) of India, a governmental agency tasked with promoting high quality Indian cinema, was formed. Over the years, NFDC has provided a wide range of services essential to the growth of Indian cinema especially Indian parallel cinema in the late-seventies and eighties.

Interestingly, in the mid-seventies, director Shyam Benegal (discussed further below) was one noteworthy filmmaker who found a means of operating without governmental support. He is widely credited with expanding the new wave of cinema to a more mainstream or traditional audience. Instead, his first two films, *Ankur* (1975) and *Nishant* (1977), were financed by Blaze Advertising (Bhaskar, 82). As a testament to Benegal's ingenuity, he also used co-operative funding in which almost half a million villagers donated two rupees each for the film *Manthan* (1976), and when it released, they all flocked to the theatres in droves to watch "their" film, thereby ensuring it was commercially a hit (Bhaskar, 83). Today, the NFDC continues to support Indian art films and still finances a number of films each year. However, growth of independent production companies, the rise in cinema screens and the dominance of television have obscured the role of the NFDC. Even the leading light of parallel cinema during this era, Shyam Benegal, turned to UTV Motion Pictures, a newly established international production company, for the production and distribution of his 2008 comedy film *Welcome to Sajjanpur* (Ahmed, 132).

It is safe to assume that the relationship between the so called "alternative" movement and the mainstream industry was strained. As was stated earlier, the films' emphasis on realism led to significant challenges to the government's desired perception of India in the West. These

discomforts were even present in the eighties, when the actress Nargis "denounced Ray on the floor of the parliament for projecting a negative aspect of India" (Krishen, 26). This isn't surprising given that one of the foundational aspects of such films is contrarian in nature, essentially defying the conventions set by Bollywood. By relying on different funding sources, and rejecting the mainstream star system, genres and formulaic ingredients, there was ample reason for the two industries to be in conflict with one another. One of the consequences of this ambivalent attitude towards 'realistic' films was that without the Western plaudits and acclaim, an Indian filmmaker was unlikely to win government recognition or support. For example, the films of Ritwik Ghatak, whose gloomy, brooding portraits of village life in East Bengal went unnoticed in the fifties and sixties (Krishen, 27). It's only when parallel cinema auteurs in the seventies, especially Shyam Benegal, infused elements of mainstream cinema in their films to great success, even financially, the two industries began to occasionally overlap.

Trends in Parallel Cinema

In the fifties, sixties, and to some extent even the seventies, the "creative" cinema, as opposed to the commercial one, was defined in Satyajit Ray's terms. It was a cinema of "social conscience" (Gupta, 37). When Satyajit Ray released *Pather Panchali* in 1955, his first directorial effort, the revolt against commercial cinema "could not have been more complete." The film was shot on location with several non-professional actors, without a trace of a "sexual love-interest," it used Indian classical music on the soundtrack, it was "intensely personal", it was completely regional, it portrayed poor people with the utmost compassion, and the filmmaking was entirely left to the director. Each one of the aforementioned qualities broke the "rules of the film establishment" at the time (Gupta, 32). Ray's anti-establishment style of filmmaking inspired many other prominent filmmakers in the movement, such as Ritwik Ghatak

and Mrinal Sen, but the movement had a very specific audience, primarily an international one, at the time. Due to its focus on art over entertainment, as well as its use of regional languages, films within the movement distanced general film audiences in India.

After failing to convert the traditional film audience during the fifties and sixties, it appeared that the only way to "break through" was either by "dressing the new films up in the conventions of song and dance" or by "making concessions to traditional taste in terms of plot and treatment" (Krishen, 28). These were the foundations of the trends in parallel cinema in the seventies, it can be argued that these were the early stages of compromise or confluence of mainstream and the alternative. Shyam Benegal was the first parallel cinema filmmaker to break through to a popular, more traditional audience. This audience was urban, educated, and perhaps primarily Westernized, but it was large enough to leave him free to work outside the constraints of government sponsorship or low-budget loans. In other words, he was the first parallel cinema director to aim at an all-India audience, and believed firmly in the "gradualist strategy", that the road to good cinema lies in taking the audience along, in mixing "good taste with popular ingredients" (Krishen, 35). He has functioned like a broker between the "cast iron traditions of popular cinema and the more somber aspects of the minority film" (Krishen, 35).

Benegal's own distinctive touch added value to both of these aesthetics. His films, such as *Ankur* (1975), *Nishant (1977), Manthan* (1976), critiqued decadent feudalism, gender and caste exploitation, the violation and humiliation of women, the corruption of power and the inability of the state to counter this oppression. His films share stylistic similarities with Ray with its "realist-narrative mold, its avoidance of song and dance routines, glamor and overblown instrumental music" (Gupta, 37). However, these films notably used the most commonly spoken language in India: Hindi. Benegal's emphasis on "confrontations" and "apparent simplicity of his

resolutions" were considered the key reasons as to why he garnered a mass audience (Gupta, 38). His blend of commercial and parallel cinema has widely been referred as "middle cinema" by critics. His films are the first real example of confluence between the two types of cinemas. The critical and economic success of Benegal's early films were major indications that this type of cinema was economically viable if it reached the right audiences. While these films existed in film societies across the breadth of the country, Blaze Advertising, who funded the film as opposed to the commonly used FFC funds, allowed for a more widespread consumption among the general populace (Bhaskar, 83).

By around 1982, however, the provincial parallel cinema faced its first major challenge. As mentioned earlier, the cost of film production had moved beyond the means of state government sponsorship, but the regional audiences had also shifted their attention to a more commercialized regional language cinema. Then, by the mid-eighties, a new element was introduced into the numbers game, in terms of both audience figures and financial returns. Television became excessively popular. The Sunday evening feature-film slot opened its doors to the parallel cinema, and a new concept - the Television Premiere - was initiated. It now became possible for an unreleased film to premiere on television to an audience estimated at upwards of 30 million (Krishen, 39). It is important to realize that this decline doesn't mean that films of the movement were never produced. As previously stated, the FFC's abandonment of parallel cinema films in favor of more commercial films gave rise to another governmental entity that was meant to bolster or support high quality Indian Cinema, the National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC). The NFDC was involved in co-financing Richard Attenborough's biopic *Gandhi* (1982) and throughout the early eighties, it experienced its arguably most instrumental and productive decade, distributing a catalogue of quality Indian films that have

come to be regarded as the high point of parallel cinema. This period of prominence includes award winning films such as *Aakrosh* (Cry of the Wounded, Govind Nihalani, 1980), *Anantram* (Monologue, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, 1987), *Ardh Satya* (Half Truth, Govind Nihalani, 1983), *Bhavni Bhavai*(A Folk Take, Ketan Mehta, 1980), Chakra (Ravindra Dharmaraj, 1980), *Ghare-Baire* (The Home and the Word, Satyajit Ray, 1984), *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (Who Pays the Piper, Kundan Shah, 1983), *Khandhar* (Mrinal Sen, 1983), *Salaam Bombay* (Mira Nair, 1988), *Sati* (Aparna Sen, 1989) and *Tarang* (Wages and Profit, Kumar Shahani, 1984).

It was in the nineties that Indian cinema started to change yet again with both the family film and image of the romantic hero revived in the films of new stars like Shahrukh Khan and Salman Khan. Subsequently, parallel cinema filmmakers struggled to find financial support during the decade and the movement faced a major decline that resulted in a permanent change in trajectory. It is widely acknowledged that there is no equivalent art-film movement as that of parallel cinema today but the new wave of film makers, such as Ram Gopal Varma, Vishal Bhardwaj and Anurag Kashyap, certainly acknowledge some of the core components of the movement, particularly the realist aesthetic of auteurs like Benegal (Ahmed, 132). All of whom, play a crucial role in the resurgence, and reshaping, of the new-age parallel cinema that came about after the release of the gangster-epic *Satya* in 1998, a film that will be further analyzed below. The critical and commercial success of *Satya* acted as a launchpad for integral figures, particularly Anurag Kashyap and Vishal Bhardwaj, who attempted to bridge the gap between art films and the mainstream in the new millennium. There began a series of films that shared the same "edgy" characteristics and noir inclinations of *Satya*, helmed by one of its luminaries, Anurag Kashyap. It would be presumptuous to claim that *Satya* invented a new wave, but it can

be a notable turning point in terms of "signaling a shift in audience tastes" (Ahmed, 214). Even today, films that attempt to analyze socio-political ideas such as the risks of success, the changing landscape of Mumbai, violence, betrayal, family and the police, in a realist fashion are in high demand in the mainstream industry. It remains the latest stage of the confluence between films that conform to the principles of parallel and mainstream cinema. In an everchanging industry, there still remain a few notable examples that stand out as parallel cinema films, in the purest sense, but these films are seldom produced and still not considered box-office attractions.

Film Analysis

There are many films that showcase the gradual progression of parallel cinema and its eventual convergence with the mainstream. The analysis includes a brief background and cinematic relevance of each of the films, followed by a synopsis of the story, and finally a scene analysis that shines a light on the role of music in each of the films as a broad indicator of the film's place within the cinematic spectrum. The following four films not only play a significant role in asserting their place in movie history but strictly encompass the qualities that showcase the stage of the movement during that period.

1. *Pather Panchali* by Satyajit Ray (1955) – *Pather Panchali* is the film considered to have pioneered the parallel cinema movement. It became the template for filmmakers aspiring to make films within the movement. It is a canonical work in world cinema and is arguably the most written about film, along with the other two films in Satyajit Ray's trilogy *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* (1959), in Indian cinema. The film is based on based on Bibhutibhushan Banerji's 1929 novel about the voyage of self-discovery of a young boy who grows up in a poor Brahmin family in the village of Nishchindpur, Bengal, in the middle years of the twentieth century and eventually migrates with them to Benares after the death of his sister (Allen, 87).

Ray retains much of the incidents and encounters from everyday life as they are experienced by the protagonists and the "particular sense of rhythm and repetition" (Allen, 87) that the novel bestows upon the experience of rural life. Ray uses a variety of camera techniques and filming techniques, including the use of natural lighting and non-professional actors, to create a realist style for the film.

Ray had a well-known disdain for mainstream cinema. His antipathy towards it fueled many of the defining traits of parallel cinema that echo today. Perhaps his most glaring artistic choice that separates this film from mainstream films of the time is the role of music in the film. It was commonplace, at the time, to see films that feature song and dance routines and a boisterous musical score, that plays an active role in the film. Bollywood movies frequently used "large orchestras" that contained a "mixture of Indian and non-Indian instruments", as well as a "plethora of international sources" for reducing melodic complexity (Beaster-Jones, 53).

Ray, instead, found a way to work alongside the world-renowned sitarist Ravi Shankar for the film. In contrast with the grand instrumentation used in Bollywood, Ray and Shankar decided to be less instrumentally diverse, consisting entirely of small groupings of Indian instruments playing Indian ragas. The music for *Pather Panchali* was also used in a more reserved fashion, that is, it played a passive role in the film when compared to its mainstream counterpart. The soundtrack was rife with moments of virtuosity on the sitar, bright melodic moments on the bansuri flute and the tar shehnai (a bowed instrument), among others, but these tunes were used sparingly and in a narratively purposeful manner. The absence of singing in the soundtrack, a result of eschewing song and dance sequences, was particularly noticed since playback singers had begun to garner a substantial amount of fame, in the fifties, for performing in mainstream films.

Scene Analysis: Several scenes from the film wholly capture the tenets of the parallel cinema movement. The approach of the film's music is one area that is often overlooked and requires closer inspection. One scene that embodies Ray's stylistic and musical approach occurs towards the middle portion of the film (1:19:10), when the elderly aunt, Indir Thukrin, of the family is found lying dead in the middle of the forest by the two kids, Apu and Durga (Kanopy Streaming, 2016). The moment of discovery is preceded by Apu and Durga having fun by themselves in the forest. As Durga first stumbles upon her aunt's corpse there is the light jingling of the bells, a leitmotif for the aunt's character. At this point, Durga is unsure of her Aunt's state of consciousness. Only once Durga calls out her name several times and gently nudges her to see if she would wake up from her slumber, it dawns on her that her aunt is, in fact, dead. Interestingly, this moment of realization isn't underlined with any music at all. Unlike the average Bollywood film, this major moment in the film is met with musical restraint. In Bollywood films from that period, such scenes were emboldened by the musical accompaniment. Their music served to heighten the emotional nature of such scenes. In Ray's film, the strategic use of music, or lack thereof, brings into focus a particular moment or scene despite adhering to a different set of rules.

That is not to say that Ray and Shankar never emphasize moments of heightened emotion. Towards the end of the film, the father, Harihar, returns from the city with gifts only to find that his daughter, Durga, has deceased. While Harihar is showing the various gifts that he bought for his family to his wife, Sarbajaya, she proceeds to break down in tears at the request to hold a new sari, an Indian item of clothing, that he bought for Durga. This poignant scene, at 1:56:30, was met with a lingering melody played on a tar shehnai, a string instrument that was commonly used in Bollywood films to evoke a deep sense of sadness (Kanopy Streaming, 2016).

It is true that the hard-hitting scene was elevated to great emotional heights with the introduction of the tar shehnai but this artistic choice isn't entirely dissimilar from its popular counterpart. As a matter of fact, it is distinctly similar to it due to the instrumentation and placement in the film. Ray, however, still manages to add his own artistic touch to the scene. The tar shehnai completely replaces all the diegetic sounds in the scene. For those few seconds, the music hijacks the audio of the scene thereby conveying the emotional climax in its own unique way. Essentially, this proves that while there are slight similarities between this film and popular cinema at the time, it is the overall musical restraint shown by Ray and Shankar that makes for an interesting point of difference. The absence of song and dance routines aside, there is still a distinct, more minimal sonic approach that, in retrospect, helped frame the movement's sonic appeal in the years that followed.

2. Nishant by Shyam Benegal (1975) – Shyam Benegal's trilogy of films, *Ankur* (1974), *Nishant* and *Manthan* (1976), were deemed the dawn of a new cinema, one that was considered distinct from mainstream cinema. This movement was dubbed middle-cinema since it was ostensibly catered to middle-class audiences but also because it accepted some popular cinema conventions. In other words, these were art films that struck a balance between popular cinema and art cinema. Benegal himself describes "middle cinema" as a term that implies "some kind of compromise between the mainstream that came out of the film industry and those that seemed like independent films of personal expression" (Ahmed, 133). *Nishant* is considered to be an art film but it still conforms to some of the tropes in popular cinema. It fits in the category of parallel cinema in so far as its refusal of song and dance sequences, emphasis on social issues, relatively sparse musical presence, realistic depiction of the poor, strong female characters, and the casting of stage actors as opposed to wildly famous film stars. Despite its visual contrast

from popular cinema, in terms of social realism, there is certainly an aural similarity to it. There are several instances when the music is used in a manner that mirrors Bollywood. The conventional music is a product of the conventional, melodramatic acting that is featured in the film, which often work in tandem with one another. Simply put, the film's similarities with popular cinema come into focus when considering the melodrama in the screenplay and acting choices, conventional musical instrumentation, and traditional usage of music in the film.

Nishant is the story about Anna, a powerful landowner, exerting his merciless authority over local peasants with the help of his two miscreant brothers, Anjaiya and Prasad, who excessively drink, gamble, steal and abuse labor and women because "they are considered, de facto, above the rule of law" (Virdi, 152). Anna's bashful younger brother, Vishwam, is regularly berated by Anjaiyya and Prasad for lacking their machismo. When the two brothers notice Vishwam's attraction toward the schoolmaster's wife, Sushila, they kidnap and abduct her, rape her and turn her into a kept woman. Vishwam stays faithful to his wife, Rukhmani, and doesn't partake in these notorious activities but is still conflicted in his fascination for Sushila. The schoolmaster pleads for help to the local police, the court, the press to no avail because the villagers are terrified to testify against Anna's family. A chance encounter between Sushila and her husband at the temple spurs the schoolmaster to appeal to the temple priest as a last resort. The priest convinces the local community to speak out against their oppressors. The schoolmaster's spontaneous attack on Anna during a religious procession turns into a full-fledged rebellion. The frenzied peasants slaughter Anjaiyya and Prasad but, in the process, kill the innocent Rukmani and track down and kill Vishwam and Sushila after they escape together.

Scene Analysis: There are a few scenes in the film that reveal the sonic approach of the film. The music, like the rest of the film, finds a way to blend the more conventional musical

settings with Benegal's art film sensibilities. The scene nearing the very end of the film, when Sushila and Vishwam are running away from the furor of the villagers, leads to the two of them finding a place to rest in an elevated area. Sushila becomes exhausted and accepts her fate as the mob of villagers begin to draw nearer. At this point (2:18:34), a female playback singer starts singing a powerfully somber tune, devoid of any instrumental backing (Hindi Movies Hub, 2016). The moment is profoundly tragic given the innocent victims of the commotion that was incensed to overthrow the system. As the singer begins to sing the lone song of the film, "Piya Baaj Pyala Piya Jayee Naa", the film shows a montage of the ramifications caused by the upheaval. It is worth noting that the tune isn't necessarily a song but a ghazal, which is a poetic expression of the pain of loss and the beauty of love. These poetic expressions have infinite renditions and are frequently performed by Sufis.

For *Nishant*, Preeti Sagar, a prominent playback singer in the seventies who often worked with Benegal, sang this rendition. The film clearly abstains from song and dance numbers, but its use of a playback singer aligns with Bollywood's formula. Bollywood often use playback singers, who are celebrities in their own right, to perform on several tracks in films. These tracks are later used to promote the movie, to compel an audience, and for artistic purposes as well. The musical cue in the scene was fairly conventional but is notably a callback to an earlier scene when Sushila sang that very ghazal to her son as she feeds him, a moment that occurs right before the two brothers, Anjaiyya and Prasad, kidnap her. In a sense, the musical callback could be an allusion to an impending doom or her final affectionate thoughts toward her son. These extrapolations perfectly embody the middle-ground of Benegal's art cinema. While there are creative choices that fall within the framework of Bollywood, there is also an artistic purpose and execution that mimic the qualities of parallel cinema.

3. *Satya* by Ram Gopal Verma (1998) – *Satya* was the turning point for both parallel and mainstream cinemas in India. The film was the brainchild of director Ram Gopal Verma and writers Anurag Kashyap and Saurabh Shukhla, and it met with critical acclaim. *Satya* is a "realist genre piece" that examines the "doomed nature of the Mumbai underworld" while offering one of the "grimmest depictions of the gangster as anti-hero" (Ahmed, 203). Significantly, the film's existence followed a drought of parallel cinema. In the nineties, parallel cinema films were rarely made, and the decline was largely believed to have been the final straw of the movement. The widespread popularity of the film spawned others which represented the unglamorous side of Mumbai and its underworld, which prompted critics to coin the term "Mumbai noir," a genre unto itself.

The multitude of films that fall under this category can be considered as modern-day representations of parallel cinema. Such films make it a point to adhere to some of the core concepts of the movement, such as the tactile depiction of poverty and its realist approach, but insert a few commercially viable elements in the mix, such as the several musical numbers, a more active and traditionally expressive musical score, and a proclivity for melodrama. In other words, it marked the beginning of the confluence of the two film movements, parallel and mainstream cinema. Musically, the film resembles the average popular Bollywood film from the nineties. It even commits the cardinal sin and features six original songs, five of which were fully choreographed song and dance sequences in the film. The musical restraint shown in films within the parallel cinema movement is a crucial part of what makes it a thoroughly different and refreshing experience. From this perspective, *Satya* is a film that has compromised a defining trait of parallel cinema and has taken a cue from Bollywood films with its dense musical production and vast instrumentation. The soundtrack was composed by Vishal Bhardwaj, who

also gradually becomes a central figure in the resurgence of parallel cinema in the years that follow. The non-diegetic underscoring isn't deployed in a remarkably unique fashion either. Rather, it is surprisingly similar to Bollywood films in the nineties. Although *Satya* has its own distinct score and soundtrack, it's utilization and characteristics aren't markedly different from the extensive scoring in Bollywood films, including musical underscoring during most dialogue sequences.

A remarkable feature of the film, is the way Ram Gopal Varma plays with "space and bodies to craft an urban jungle where the idea of the 'spectacular global city' is completely erased" (Mazumdar, 238). Gang wars, extortion and encounter killings are staged in the film against a backdrop of "urban detritus" (Mazumdar, 238). The gangsters thrive within this urban decay and dereliction. According to the film's screenwriter Anurag Kashyap, who later becomes a central figure in the growth of the Mumbai noir movement and thereby the resurgence of the newfound parallel cinema, inhibiting the experience of Bombay's disorder was more important than offering a moral position or charting the causal reasons for the events unfolding on-screen. As a result, Bombay's disorder and internal crises dominate the narrative.

Satya tells the story of the title character, an immigrant to Bombay who, after a series of random events and a chance encounter with the gangster Bhiku, is slowly pulled in to the underworld. The film then begins to revolve around their friendship and Satya's entry into the underworld of Bombay. Satya's descent into the underworld, one with rampant gang wars and political corruption, is juxtaposed with an engaging love story with Vidya, an aspiring playback singer. Satya decides to conceal his affiliation with the underworld as their romance blossoms. As the gang wars heat up, and the local police force begins to tear down his operations, she becomes unwittingly entangled in his mess. The tragic story comes to a halt as Satya and his

fellow gang members are mostly killed in the midst of gang wars, political assassinations or a police crackdown. By the end of the film, Satya is shot and killed by a police officer as he tries to convince Vidya to flee the country with him.

Scene Analysis: One scene that brings the film score to the foreground occurs in the final stages of the film, at 2:30:30, when Satya slowly approaches the politician, who had sabotaged and killed his best friend and gang leader Biku, in a crowded festival with the intention of stabbing him to death without being detected (B4U Movies, 2016). The music is heavily mired with synthesizers and builds tension in a conventional manner by playing a menacing melody that is ascending in intensity. The moment Satya begins to stab the politician several times, the music strongly resembles that of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, specifically the iconic shower scene (1:00). The short, screeching and dissonant melodic line that is threateningly repetitious helps elevate the sense of danger in the scene. The music, similar to contemporaneous Bollywood films, is boldly used to bolster the scene's emotions, almost as if the dread from the visuals is transcribed into an aural arrangement. It would be apt to describe the music in the scene, like many other scenes in the movie, to have an overwhelming effect on the senses. The sheer loudness and dense production of the score diminishes the sounds of the surrounding chaos and commotion at the festival. Musically speaking, this scene is the antithesis of parallel cinema films and its attempt to champion subtlety. It speaks to the compromise of values between the conventions of popular and parallel cinema.

What is arguably more blasphemous in the compromise of the virtues of parallel cinema is the use of multiple musical numbers therefore disregarding a foundational quality of parallel cinema. One notable song and dance sequence occurs at 32:35, when the song *Goli Maar Bheje Mein* begins playing (B4U Movies, 2016). It is undeniably a song and dance sequence that fits

into the context of Bollywood but there are certain creative liberties taken by Ram Gopal Verma that still make it somewhat different. In the nineties, Bollywood musical numbers were decidedly more glamorous and appealing. It depicted a style and choreography that almost always placed the central characters of the film on a pedestal. *Goli Maar Bheje Mein*, on the other hand, is particularly unglamorous in its depiction. Not only are the characters excessively drunk, the characters are relatively underdressed and look astonishingly shabby. In contrast with Bollywood musical numbers at the time, the choreography and the acting in the sequence is intended to repulse. The characters themselves are generally presented as unkempt, scruffy individuals. The sequence propels this unglamorous style to new heights. The inclusion of song and dance sequences could be interpreted as conforming to the Bollywood norms but the way in which these song and dance sequences are executed tell another story. This sequence is essentially functioning in a manner that contradicts the fundamental ingredients of a Bollywood musical number yet it somehow managed to create a stir among audiences across the country. Since this film became a watershed moment in the trajectory of parallel cinema, primarily because of the unexpected financial and critical success of the film, such creative choices became the new standard of filmmaking in the new-age parallel cinema, most of which still stand today.

4. *Dhobi Ghat* by Kiran Rao (2011) – *Dhobi Ghat* is a rare modern-day example of a film that adheres to the conventions of the classical roots of parallel cinema. This film stands out as one of the few films that befits the parallel cinema tag in recent times. More impressively, it was a moderate box-office success. The film thrives in its exploration of Mumbai and its realist depiction of the class or socio-economic differences prevalent in urban society. The film's fixation with Mumbai might perhaps be a byproduct of the growing audience of the Mumbai noir genre, popularized by the movie *Satya* in 1998. The sparse instrumentation in the film score, as

well as its minimalistic approach, and a female-led cast only further add to the merits of the movie as a product of parallel cinema. However, the one overt difference is the casting of the high-profile actor, Aamir Khan, in the film. In an interview with Times of India, the director Kiran Rao revealed that she had no intention of adding any recognizable film star to the cast. She was looking to only cast theatre actors or non-actors in the film (Bhawnani, 2017). It wouldn't be presumptuous to suggest that the financial success of the film may well be attributed to his star power. The film's minimalistic score can be attributed to Rao's decision to involve the internationally celebrated film composer Gustavo Santaolalla. His style appeared to be guided by the sequences of the film and primarily intended to reflect the mood or the ambience of the scenes. By including Santaolalla, a figure far outside of the Indian industry, it seems as if Rao searched for a particular voice for her film despite running on a low budget.

The film is framed against the backdrop of contemporary Mumbai, India's financial centre and multicultural urban center. The movie follows three primary characters: Arun, a famous but introverted and angst-ridden artist; Shai, a young non-resident Indian investment banker, indulging her "avocation of photography in Mumbai" (Devasundaram, 180-181); and Munna, a *dhobiwallah* or washerman who is a migrant to Mumbai from the economically backward state of Bihar and harbors aspirations of becoming a Bollywood star. Shai and Arun bump into each other for the first time at Arun's art gallery opening. One thing leads to another, and the two spend the night with each other. The next morning, Arun makes his intentions clear by implicitly stating that he isn't looking for a romantic engagement or a lasting relationship with anyone, much to Shai's disappointment. Shai subsequently meets Munna, the local *dhobi* or washerman, when he comes around to pick up laundry. The conversations that ensue between the two of them "penetrate the socio-economic and class divide" (Devasundaram, 181) owing to its

informal nature. After Munna finds out that Shai has an interest in photography, they come to an arrangement whereby Shai will take headshots to help further his ambitions of becoming a film star in exchange for letting Shai take photos of him as he works in the *dhobi ghat*, the place where he washes the clothes. Meanwhile, Arun moves into a new flat and discovers a box secreted away in an old armoire by the previous occupant. It contained three video tapes among other personal belongings of seemingly little value. Arun eventually views the tapes and discovers that they contain the video diaries of a young muslim woman named Yasmin as she visits Mumbai for the first time. The video diaries show her slow descent into depression as she recounts her "alienation in Mumbai and her loveless marriage to a philandering husband" (Devasundaram, 181). Yasmin's video diaries culminate to a farewell message that acts as a suicide note, a revelation that haunts Arun enough to shift his place of residence once again. Shai remains unable to stop obsessing over Arun. After having found out that she shares the same washerman as Arun in Munna, she attempts to use Munna as a possible intermediary. One night when Shai undertakes a nightly photoshoot in Arun's neighborhood, she inadvertently interrupts Munna in the act of performing his nightly clandestine operation of exterminating rats infesting the area (Devasundaram, 181), an encounter that prompts Munna to flee in embarrassment. Under these circumstances, Munna realizes that his love for Shai is unrequited and the insurmountable socio-economic barriers render his feelings futile. After being initially reluctant to provide Arun's new address to Shai, he makes the grand gesture of chasing her car on foot to hand her the new address on a piece of paper. As the film nears the end, we are shown a resolute shot of Munna as he walks away, Shia slowly breaking down in tears as she crumples the sheet of paper with Arun's address, and various shots of the city of Mumbai.

Scene Analysis: True to the parallel cinema tradition, many of the scenes embody the musical restraint that is synonymous with movement. The music in the film is deftly used, almost entirely, in montage sequences. At around the eleven-minute mark, the montage that showcases Arun and Shia's romantic evening together and is subtly accompanied by a slow, melancholic melodic line played on what sounds like a *sarod*, a prominent string instrument in the sphere of Indian classical music (Rao, 2010). There also seems to be light chordal accompaniment on the guitar. The music is distinguished by its minimal instrumentation. Similarly, at the end of the film when there are various shots of the city of Mumbai, the music played over the scenes is once more a combination of the western classical guitar and the sarod.

There is a fundamental lack of a powerful, instrumentally diverse musical score throughout the film. The director, Kiran Rao, clearly espouses the parallel cinema virtue of musical reticence. Unlike its Bollywood contemporaries, there is almost a strategic and careful use of musical insertion so as to avoid being an overwhelming presence. The film also has a few instances when Hindustani classical music is played diegetically as Arun listened to it in his apartment. This particular type of music helps symbolize his refined taste. Since it can be argued that the sophistication that is attached to Hindustani classical music is a part of why it is regularly featured in the parallel cinema filmography, the usage of Hindustani classical music in the film could further be construed as a homage to the movement's well-known musical style.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of confluence isn't unique to Bollywood and parallel cinema. It will always remain a possibility so long as art movements exist alongside one another and undergo constant evolution. What is truly fascinating are the nuances of each stage of the aforementioned confluence of styles. As a result, some of the facets often get overlooked or ignored. The

exploration of the sonic side in the development of parallel cinema over the decades is one such example. Initially, the movement's sound was inextricably tied to its Hindustani classical stylings, not unlike the belief that jazz and American film noir were entwined during the 1940's and 1950's (Butler, 3). In its most recent iteration, the score of the films share a striking resemblance with popular cinema to the astonishing degree of sometimes even including musical numbers in the films. That is not to say that films that fit within the definition of parallel cinema today do not differ from one another to varying degrees.

Another important insight into the history of the parallel cinema movement are the circumstances that brought about the changes. The circumstances range from the ever-changing perceptions as to what is considered marketable to the traditional audience to the dearth of funds allocated by government bodies, such as the NFDC. What remains to be seen is the future of the movement. It appears as if the genre of Mumbai noir, arguably the latest stage of the confluence between parallel and popular cinema, is here to stay given that it is sometimes considered to be commercially viable. Bollywood has embraced some of the qualities of parallel cinema films and occasionally release these hybrid films to their audiences worldwide. While it can be argued that the merging of the two art movements is akin to a watered-down version of what the forefathers of parallel cinema intended, a byproduct of this merger that can't be overstated is the reception to a much wider audience. Many of these films make it a point to sincerely explore the various socio-political issues that run rampant in India; something that is often avoided by the mainstream industry. By actively engaging in socially relevant themes, the subject matters that would otherwise have been ignored enter the public's conscience and add to the discourse. If nothing else, it has opened the floodgates to a rich history of cinema that has long been neglected and underappreciated by the domestic populace.

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