

## **Concluding Comments**

In submitting the final research report of the "The History and Practice of Cinematography in India" we are deeply conscious of the enormity of the exercise that we undertook when we embarked on this project in 1996.

While it may have taken us all of almost five years to come to the moment when we feel that we can submit something that has the words 'final' on it, we also recognize the ephemeral nature of this moment. The history of cinema in India has not as yet had a curtain call, and in some senses, one might be forgiven for thinking that the game, insofar as the practice of cinematography is concerned, is only just beginning.

This is not because cinematography in India does not have an impressive body of work to call it's own. If anything, this research is able to demonstrate the vitality of the work of the cameramen who worked in the studios of Bombay, Kolhapur, Calcutta, Trivandrum and Madras for the last many decades. But it is only now that there is beginning to be the first sparks of professional self-awareness. There is only now a foundational public consciousness about the fact that the craft of the cinematographer is something that needs to be looked at seriously, in and of itself, and not merely as an adjunct to the 'stars' of the firmament of cinema in India.

We feel that our research project can claim a modest share in the provocations that have led to this awareness. It was, after all as a result of the activities undertaken during this project that a fertile climate could be created for

the formation of the "Cinematographers Combine" in 1998 in Mumbai, a forum that for the first time in India, seeks to bring cinematographers and their work squarely into the public domain, outside the realm of narrow professional specialization.

It also contributed, in some ways tangentially, to some of us engaging very seriously with the question of creating public resources for knowledge and creativity in media practices. This engagement has matured into the Sarai: The New Media Initiative ([www.sarai.net](http://www.sarai.net)) at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, in Delhi, which will be the first and originating home of the entire digital corpus of the raw materials of the research findings of the project. This includes around fifty hours of tape-recorded interviews (and the transcripts of the same).

We can say that the nature of the project itself dictated this extended timeframe. It was not only the matter of accommodating our busy working lives around a phenomenally time consuming enterprise that involved repeated long distance travel by four people on several occasions, it was not only the long hours and days spent in archives and libraries, the many rounds of tape recordings with veteran and working cinematographers that has contributed to this delay, but also the time that it took for our enquiries to mature that led to this lengthening, that at some points threatened to go on infinitely.

The project was conceived as a result of long conversations between a Delhi based collective of filmmakers (Raqs Media Collective - Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta) and a Mumbai based cinematographer, C.K. Muralidharan, during the course of a film shoot in Goa in

1994. These conversations took the form of a series of notes emerging out of the joint watching of films and discussions with other colleagues, both practitioners and theorists. It has from its very inception had an inherently collaborative nature, and while Shuddhabrata Sengupta administered and co-ordinated the grant, the intellectual and creative work on the project was shared by him with Jeebesh Bagchi and Monica Naruala and with C.K. Muralidharan. We have therefore decided that all four will together hold the moral right to be identified as the authors of the final research report.

When we wrote our proposal, we had outlined a series of questions on the nature of the cinematographer's craft as it had evolved in India. What we had little awareness of was the labyrinthine nature of the investigations that a pursuit of these questions entailed.

A startling paucity of archival materials, many years of studied neglect of the practitioners themselves, and the scale of the enterprise of trying to come to grips with the aesthetic, technological and social history of the largest cinema culture on our part have made for greater humility on our part.

Despite excruciating delays and many false starts, we feel that we are now in a position to have redeemed the promise of our original proposal. We had planned to do 20 in-depth interviews. We have done more than that number.

And the scope of our enquiries broadened considerably as we developed the work of research. In some ways this was as a result of the very useful

criticisms that were made by the anonymous evaluator who looked at the original proposal. His/her comments amounted to two substantive criticisms

1. That the research project did not deviate from the established canon of what has been considered 'good' or 'artistic' cinema in India. The history and practice of cinematography in popular or mainstream cinema was seriously under-represented in the proposal.

2. That the research proposal did not have more than a token representation of south Indian and other non-Hindi film cultures in India.

We took both these criticisms very seriously and the resultant widening of our horizons are evident in terms of the cinematographers we chose to interview. The research project as it stands now has been enriched by a substantial engagement with popular cinema and a detailed exploration of south Indian (especially Tamil and Malayalam) and Bengali cinemas.

The final list of interviews is as follows:

Jal Mistry, V.K.Murthy, Jaywant Pathare, 'Kodak' Krishnan, Ramananda Sengupta, Dinen Gupta, Soumendu Roy, A.Vincent, Ravi Varma, Ramachandra Babu, Venu, Sunny Joseph, PC Sriram, RM Rao, KK Mahajan, Ashok Mehta, Rajan Kothari, Anil Mehta, Navroze Contractor, RV Ramani and Ranjan Palit whose interview was re-shaped by him into an essay on documentary cinematography (first published in 'Double Take: Looking at the Documentary", ed. Raqs Media Collective, published by PSBT/FUR, New Delhi 2000)

(The transcripts of interviews of Subrata Mitra are ready and have been collated. We are not attaching them in this lot of materials due to his special request that we defer making them public until such time that he is able to go over the transcripts personally to ensure that there are no errors of emphasis or fact.)

We will dispatch his interview transcript as soon as he gives us the approval to do so. Please refer to the copy of the e-mail to us in relation to this matter that has been appended within the report.

A large body of secondary materials comprising of articles, stills, and other documents have also been collated.

These two sets of materials, the interviews and the secondary materials (an appendix) have been collected in five volumes, which comprise the final research report of the project. The interviews themselves are arranged in four parts. Each part forms a volume in itself.

The discerning reader will note that the list of interviews includes not only the cinematographers who translated the imaginations of filmmakers like Ray, Ghatak and Guru Dutt into celluloid, but also takes into account cinematographic contributions to films directed by a host of commercial and mainstream filmmakers from Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. It also includes genres such as the documentary film and advertising cinematography.

Naturally this is not a complete or exhaustive list, and nor does it claim to be so. It is merely a well-endowed foundation for what we hope will be an

ongoing process of research and enquiry. We ourselves hope to continue with the process of doing a few more interviews (with cinematographers that we have had to leave out at present, and with some whose work we were unfamiliar with until recently) and hope that others will also participate in this task. The questionnaire that we have developed is a document that can be used by any scholar/researcher to initiate a series of serious enquiries and interviews.

We also hope that the corpus of materials that this collection now embodies will attract a great deal of interpretative and theoretical interest from film theorists and scholars as well as practitioners. In a sense, the 'real' questions about the history and practice of cinematography have only just been prised open.

We ourselves want to now start dealing with these questions in the form of an extended essay, and to commission a few other such essays as a prelude to preparing a manuscript that collates all the materials for publication, in a variety of print and electronic forms. Now that we have a definitive sense of the vast body of material that has been generated in the course of the project, we realize that such publication(s) will be very valuable additions to the study of cinema and media cultures and practices in India.

Immediately, we see possibilities in the following areas of theoretical enquiry arising out of this body of work:

- formulations about the social history of the cinema industry read through the personal narratives and biographical details in the interviews with the cinematographers

- formulations about the relationship between technology, cinematographic optics and chemistry, industrial regulations, conventions & practices and aesthetics

- formulations about the industrialization of light and new forms of scopic pleasure

All the primary research materials that have accrued to this project, in the form of interviews, transcripts, archival documents and stills will be placed in the public domain in order to facilitate the maximum extent of access. The primary holdings will be kept in the public access digital archive of the Sarai Initiative in Delhi on an electronic interface. All the interview transcripts will also be available as PDF files on the Sarai website. We hope that this gesture on our part opens out the interpretative space of cinema studies in India and is able to act as a catalyst for much greater interest in primary research.

In addition to this, electronic copies of the five volumes of primary research materials may be sent to the libraries of a select body of institutions for the benefit of cinema practitioners and students, research scholars, film enthusiasts. These institutions could include the following:

1. National Film Archive of India, Pune
2. Film & Television Institute of India, Pune
3. Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute of India, Kolkata
4. Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi
5. Adyar Film Institute, Chennai
5. Federation of Film Societies of India, Delhi
6. Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata

7. Centre for Studies in Culture and Society, Bangalore
8. National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai
9. Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Delhi
10. Nandan Film Centre, Kolkata

Additional copies will be made available to other public initiatives, film societies, associations and other bodies on request at cost price. The materials will be free to use for non-commercial purposes against acknowledgement of the authorship of the materials. Raqs Media Collective and C.K. Muralidharan will retain the moral right to be identified as the authors of the work.

Preliminary presentations of this body of work have already been made in summary form at the 'Border Crossings' panel on Indian Cinema History at the Annual Conference of the Association of Asian Studies in Chicago, March 2001. Other presentations are planned in the near future, including a colloquium with Dr. Ravi Vasudevan, eminent film historian, on the implications of this body of research for film theory and film history.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge all those who have helped us, inspired us and encouraged us to work on this project. They include, not in any specific order of importance, the interviewees themselves, our filmmaker and cinematographer colleagues, Sanjay Kak, Ranjan Palit, R.V.Ramani, Sudheer Palsane, Paresh Kamdar, Hansa Thapliyal, Sameer Mahajan, Chinmaya Khatri and Satyajit Pande who encouraged us throughout this long process. Ajeet Bhandare, Mrityunjay Chatterjee, Shayamshree Dasgupta, Monica Bhasin, Kalpesh and Mahesh Kumar for their assistance in transcription. Gauri Patwardhan for additional archival research. Moinak Biswas and Ranu for their

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In conclusion we would like to thank Anmol Vellani, Hartman De Souza and George Jose at the IFA for their belief in our work and Mr. Jayachandran, also at the IFA for his steadfast patience.

This research project is dedicated to Dilip Gupta, Jal Mistry and 'Kodak' Krishnan, three very special gentlemen whose conversations about light have deepened our insight considerably, and who passed away while this project was in progress.

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