

Interim Narrative

What proceeds is an attempt at outlining some of our findings and concerns in the course of our research in progress on Cinematography.

EXCERPT 1: '*Tarang*' Dir - Kumar Shahani Cinematography: KK Mahajan

A man and a woman sit talking in a shack. The dark blue sky of twilight in a city is visible through the window. A train rushes past; its carriages aglow. As the woman speaks, we can sense the room begin to turn on its own axis, as if it had been caught in the spin of the conversation, or as if we, oblivious to the man and the woman had begun to walk slowly around them. The shadows in the room glide as it turns, the rhythm of the conversation finds and echo in this subtle circumnavigation. As if the room were the earth, the world itself, rotating as it must, and the train a rushing meteor. And we, outside this magic circle, witness this through the eye of the person who caught this moment in time. And then held it up to us to see in a mirror with a memory – called the cinema.

That person, who fishes for images in the light with his lens, is the cinematographer, and to his activity, often forgotten, sometimes glamorized, and rarely understood, we have paid some attention in the course of our research in the past eighteen months.

The clip that you have just seen is from '*Tarang*' shot by K.K. Mahajan. Mr. Mahajan came to cinematography by default, as he says himself, "I wanted to be a sports teacher, but ended up a cameraman". But his work, straddling the mainstream, the middle cinema, as well as the art cinema in India, embodies the

challenges that the cinematographer has faced in India – the largest producer of films in the world. A paucity of resources, little or no understanding of the potential of cinematography on the part of those who put money into film making, scarce recognition, and the suffocating absence of a critical reflection on camerawork. Despite these odds, cameramen have persisted in being engaged to the creation of a world of images, almost out of nothing, on film. Our research project on the 'History and Practice of Cinematography in India' aims to uncover this legacy of a *sadhana* of the image, and to present the testimonies of those who have practiced it.

In the next half an hour or so we would like to offer you an overview of some of the many fruitful encounters with cameramen we have had, and also share a few as yet tentative formulations and ideas that have emerged in the course of our work. We wish that we had more images than words to communicate with you, but we must make do with the paucity of visual evidence, that has at times haunted our research, and at the same time made it much more challenging than we had expected it to have been.

The presentation will consist of two related parts. First we will sketch out to you some of the broader questions and ideas that we have been working with, and give you an idea of how we have gone about our work. And subsequently, we would like to make more specific observations about the evolution of cinematography, through a more detailed engagement with the work of certain key cameramen whom we have interviewed.

SECTION I

Let us take a look here at a clip from a film shot by Dilip Gupta, and directed by Bimal Roy. "*Madhumati*" (1958). Both Dilip Gupta and Bimal Roy are

key figures in any history of cinematography. Bimal Roy began his career as a cameraman in New Theatres, Calcutta in the 30's, before becoming a successful film director and producer in Bombay cinema, and we will have occasion to refer to his early work as cameraman a little later. Dilip Gupta, whom we interviewed last year, embodies cinema history as he is one of the few surviving witnesses who made the transition as a cameraman from the early silent cinema to the talkies.

Description of the *Madhumati* sequence: Observe how the cameraman plays with our expectations of visibility. He shrouds almost the entire scene in darkness, and he moves through this darkness with only a patch of light from a lantern as his guide. This decision is clearly taken to underscore a narrative point about characters being concealed and then revealing themselves, of suspense, surprise and discovery. It underscores the building up of atmosphere, and the proportion of volumes of light and darkness act like the relation between sound and silence in a piece of music. He doesn't keep the camera still, but moves it through the space, and so he makes us move with it. Throughout this moment in the film, and at all moments in any film, one can trace a series of decisions being taken. Decisions about camera placement, about the lensing, about how the set can best be utilised as a canvas for the camera, about how much light to let into the lens, (in other words the aperture setting of the lens) and about how much light on the set will give us the impression of the correct amount of darkness and still register as an image on the film in the camera. Decisions are taken about which kind of film stock will be used, and how to use its properties most expressively. Decisions are taken about how it will be graded in the lab. Finally there are decisions about what to do with the actors, whether to take the risk of letting them play with shadows, or to constantly keep the light on them as per convention.

You can see that the cinematographer breaks up his decisions about light along three parameters. He has to consider the origin of the light, i.e. to simulate a **source** or sources, to justify the illumination in the scene. In this case, the cameraman has taken (in the context of his time) the bold step of determining that the only source of light in the scene is the lamp carried by the actor. Dilip Gupta told us how he rigged up the actor for the shot by passing the wire for the lantern-lamp through the sleeve in his kurta.

Then he has to consider the **brightness** of the image in itself, in other words, how does he create grades of darkness and light, do the masses of darkness represent shades, or are they solid blacks? This gives him the basic palette of shades, which he can distribute, in varying proportions in the frame. And since he is dealing with a moving image, how do these shades of darkness or relative illumination interact as the image moves, or as a character moves within the frame.

Finally, he has to determine what **quality** of light he wants to work with, whether it should be soft, with barely defined shadows, diffused, filtered or should it be strong and harsh, with sharp shadows.

However, in order to examine the work of the cameraman we also have to understand how much in terms of the resources is left open to the cinematographer. Is there always tension on the sets, because the producer thinks that he is using up too much shooting time, or asking for too many lights? The material considerations of filmmaking and the relationships of work are as important as the creative choices that the cinematographer takes as an artist. In fact the creative choices are meaningless in terms of analysis if they are not seen

against the economics of production and the relationships between the people on the crew. As KK Mahajan said to us “You can’t afford to have lights. So what to do? There should be some alternative to do it and you take the alternative and do it.” The acceptance of this challenge of material scarcity made it possible for KK to shoot *Bhuvan Shome* entirely without lights. And when Mrinal Sen wanted a close up inside a room, they finally ended up removing the roof to let in light and then relaying the tiles when the shoot got over.

Every film contains within itself a story of the play of various elements – aesthetic, directorial and economic, and parallel to this, a negotiation between the cameraman and these various elements, to create the scene.

Let us call these two processes – **convergence and negotiation**.

The things that converge to make the image within the frame are : light, money, time, the production system, skills, experience, creative inputs of the cameraman, the art director, the scenarist and the director, and the labours of myriad other technicians. All these can be traced out speculatively. Looking at early cinema we can try and build up a set of possibilities that may have contributed to the look of a particular sequence, or the lighting design of a particular film. We are aided in this by the film stills, publicity material and production stills that are available, and stray comments in film journals of that time. For example: Talking about “*Watan*” (Dir.-Mehboob, Cam.- Faredoon Irani) in FilmIndia of February 1938, the only film journal of its time, the reviewer says about the camerawork, “In places too beautiful for words...the picture is practically the cameraman’s show. His personality and excellence are stamped on it from the first foot to the last one.” Thus we can, in the near total absence of the films themselves, attempt only partial reconstruction of what a

cinematographic practice might have been. Here the task of retrospective analysis is paramount.

When we do get a chance to speak to a cinematographer it becomes possible to locate a series of relationships between the convergences within the frame that are visible and the cameraman's negotiations with the elements that made that set of convergences come about.

Let me give you a few specific instances of how our interpretations had to be corrected by our interviewee's testimonies.

We were curious as to why from the 1940's onwards depth of field photography, pioneered by Gregg Tolland in Hollywood especially in the case of '*Citizen Kane*' found little or no place in cinema practice in India. (*Depth of field photography is that in which objects both at the foreground and the distant background remain in sharp focus as a result of the stopping down of the lens aperture, which allows a narrow and sharp beam of light to act on the film plane*)

This lack of depth of field photography in the forties and fifties cinema has on occasion been identified with a search for a representational aesthetic derived from folk theatre and indigenous pictorial conventions. We asked many veteran cinematographers about this relation between the absence of depth of field and a non-cinematic pictorial context.

Jaywant Pathare, an important commercial film cameraman of the sixties and seventies who shot thirty-six films with Hrishikesh Mukherjee including *Anuradha* and *Anand*, spoke of the attempt by the unit on one of the early Raj Kapoor films to achieve depth of field. The cameraman had just seen '*Citizen*

Kane and they wanted to shoot an entire scene involving Lalita Pawar and Raj Kapoor on an aperture setting of 8 f stop, so as to achieve high depth of field. This meant the usage of a great number of huge lights. The sheer amount of electricity consumed by the lights translated into a hefty bill for the producers. Also, the acute discomfort of the stars in having to work in the heat generated by the lights (in a non air conditioned studio) meant that the ambitious plan of shooting at 8 f stop had to be shelved halfway.

Perhaps a certain innate feeling for pictorial conventions that did not employ linear perspective had something to do with this – about this we can at best speculate. But we know for certain that wattage, electricity bills, and work conditions had a great deal to do with it as well. The producer's anxiety about mounting costs and sweating stars played an equal role in the avoidance of one cinematographic aesthetic and the cultivation of another!

Similarly, in the early colour films, especially in large song and dance numbers, one can detect differences in the face hues of the stars and the back up dancers. We had wondered whether this was due to a deliberate attempt at creating a sort of formal separation between stars and extras in the grading of the prints in the laboratory. The late Mr. Krishnan, who headed Kodak India's film department for decades, and was known affectionately as 'Kodak Krishnan' by generations of cinematographers, gave us the real explanation for this seemingly odd practice.

"...This used to happen because not enough money was spent on make up, the stars had good make up kits, and the extras cheap stuff. Because of the overlaps and dips in the spectral sensitivity curve of the films, certain colours could not reproduce. In the lab you could colour correct the faces either for the

expensive make up, or for the cheap stuff, which would register differently in terms of colour. Invariably, in the printing, the cameraman would grade the print for the star's skin tone, so whenever he/she appears with the extras, the other faces took on an unusual, even picturesque magenta hue. This feature occurred accidentally to begin with, and because no one wanted to spend money on details, as a result it was the cameraman's work that suffered, but no one really cared, least of all those who made money from films. "

To give another example. You must all be familiar with the *Mera Bharat Mahaan* ads that featured running sportspeople. You would have noticed that all the sports stars are running in slow motion. We asked Mr. R. M. Rao, the cameraman for the ad, about the aesthetic brief that gave rise to the decision to use slow motion. Mr. Rao replied "... there was no brief that led to slow motion. Actually, one of the sportsmen, whom we were shooting on the beach in Madras gave us very little time to shoot with him as he was getting late for an appointment with his milkman, and he would keep rushing the takes. When we saw the rushes, we discovered that he was running much too hurriedly, as if he was running without any purpose. So from then on, we decided to shoot everybody in slow motion. There is no other reason why you see slow motion in that ad."

The usage of slow motion here is a result of a negotiation between time constraints and the production apparatus. Its consistent use makes it seem as if it were a preconceived stylistic decision.

But this is possible for us to say only because we have in this case the facility of checking the elements that converged to make the image, with those

who were actively involved. For much of the early period of cinematography in India, we can only rely on speculation for our arguments and conclusions.

We would like you to imagine three moments from the cinema of the nineteen thirties. And we say imagine, because, unfortunately their secrets and their images are locked away in fragile archival prints that cannot be reproduced. Here we can only talk about convergence and not negotiation.

1. *Mukti*, 1937 New Theatres Production. Dir: Pramathesh Baruah.

Cam : Bimal Roy.

The opening sequence consists of a series of track shots in which the viewer is propelled by the camera through a series of doors, each of which opens as the camera approaches. The camera's movement places the viewer squarely in the centre of a space that it then opens out. It sets the framework for creating an atmosphere in which concerns with individual freedom or '*mukti*' can be played out in the course of the unfolding of the film's narrative.

2. *Amrit Manthan*, 1932 Prabhat Studios Production. Dir: V. Shantaram

Cam: K. Dhaibar

The opening sequence begins with a low angle circular track movement in a dungeon with flickering lights and deep shadows. This is cut with a close up of a single menacing eye. You have to imagine a very heavy camera, a very complex lighting pattern that can accommodate the range of perspectives from the extreme close up to the large moving wide angle, and the repeated takes to ensure that the trolleys and the operators work in perfect unison. Yet the drama that the sequence encapsulates within it so effortlessly would have been impossible to bring alive in any other way.

3. *Duniya na mane*, 1937 Dir : V.Shantaram Cam: V. Avadoot

The first song sequence in the film, sung by the lead actress and a group of children inside a small room, is picturised through a series of circular tracking movements, POV shots, top angle camera movements – all of which dynamise and open out the small space as well as the audience's experience of the moment between the young woman and the group of children. "It does not give us a figure described in a unique moment, but the continuity of the movement describes the figure." (Deleuze, *The Movement-Image*)

These shots, remarkable even in today's context, clearly underscore the imaginative and creative vitality of cinematographic expressiveness in the cinema of the nineteen thirties. But to talk for a moment of the context in which they were taken- slow film stock requiring the usage of large arc lamps, large Mitchell cameras that become enormously heavy when blimped to keep them quiet, and because of parallax problems it was not possible to see parts of the shot during execution, exposure reading primarily by the eye etc.

All we have from this epoch are a few dull and fading prints in the archives. These prints cannot be handled, or copied, because there is no money to restore them, reproduce them on an accessible format like video, or make prints. Thus for all practical purposes these films are invisible. And as for the silent cinema – virtually the entire corpus of film has disintegrated. Similarly, the large majority of early documentary cinematography produced by the Films Division has degenerated. The most modern of all the arts also recedes into history and then into myth, into cans full of footage that slowly turn into jelly and into fine powder, in a sense at the fastest pace. And an archaeology of the cinematic image in India, which is what we have set about to attempt, is from the

very beginning something like a walk through a lost and forgotten landscape, with a map full of holes and marked by fading signs.

It is this reality that prompts a master like Subrata Mitra who shot the first ten films of Satyajit Ray, to say, "...I am considered to be a good cameraman. But, if someone from this generation (ours) does not agree, he would be quite right. Because you will not find a print of any of my films that would prove that I am even a mediocre cameraman. It is relevant to mention here that I have seen prints of my films without any middle tones at all, which gives an impression that these films were shot not with photographic film, but with sound negative."

When we went to the Film Centre laboratory in Bombay, one of our primary objectives was to talk to the person who had helped Mr. Mitra grade his first colour film *Kanchenjunga*. Now, we knew that Mitra was a meticulous craftsman in the laboratory, and it was quite exciting to think that we could talk to the grader. In the lab we were told that this gentleman had died. And with him had passed the eyewitness account of the grading process. The entire negative of *Kanchenjunga* is now completely destroyed. And the positive print that exists is so discoloured that no sense of the original work can be retrieved from it. And Mr. Mitra says when asked about the film and his use of colour, "what is left of *Kanchenjunga* for me to talk about? What you see is only a counterfeit coin".

SECTION 2

Let us now look at how the cinematographer approaches his creative process.

Frame:

A frame is the determination of a closed system which includes everything that is present in the image – the landscape or the geography of

the space, the objects or props, the characters. In the creative process of making this frame, the cameraman enters from different points. His method of lighting reflects the closed system that he is creating. Dilip Gupta for example would always begin by lighting the characters. The rest of the scene would follow. So did Jaywant Pathare. People like Mahajan and Subrata Mitra light for the entire frame. The objects, actors and geographical space are given equal weight. On the other hand Jal Mistry in *Naseeb* for example lit up the whole set. That is, he lit up the actors and the props. The frame followed. [EXCERPT: *Naseeb*]

All this however is not done only out of the individual cameraman's choice. The directors' demands, or lack of them, are critical. While Subrata Mitra created new lights to tackle Ray's demands for more camera movement on *Charulata*, KK Mahajan who besides his art cinema work has shot 21 films with Basu Chatterjee, 4 films with the Sippys, with Raj Tilak, with Subhash Ghai and countless others, says that the problem in working with commercial directors is that they make no demands. They say – Night scene or Day, Interior scene or Exterior and care for little else that follows.

In advertising on the other hand, the challenges and scope for originality have decreased. RM Rao, responsible for most of the ads that we have seen when younger, especially the famous Liril ad, points out "Earlier we had time and scope to try out things. Now, ever since the easy access to the VHS tape, we are given international ads to copy or recreate. While the work is now more polished and glossy, it is also a lot less original."

What we turn your attention to now is a delineation of different cinematographic approaches that are discerned by us.

EXCERPT– Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam : Cam.- VK Murthy : **Creation of Icons – of beauty and desire.**

In this sequence, the whole energy is directed in the revelation of the face. This is the first time that Meena Kumari's face is being revealed in the film, and the glory of the first look that the character in the film undergoes is the emotion that the cameraman seeks to create in every member of the audience. How does he do this: The centrality of the Close Up. The face which is invested in is the female face. It is the **Idealized face** where all the marks of life are removed. There is a use of heavy diffusion – using materials like nets, stockings, filters, ground glass, vaseline. There is an amazing ingenuity in finding ways of reducing wrinkles and other “blemishes”. In fact, Jal Mistry's innovations in this field were popularly known in the industry as Jal ki *jaali*. Long lenses were used for taking the close up as they would flatten the background and put everything else into soft focus so that the face could stand out. Jal Mistry always used a 150 mm lens to shoot the close up of the heroines, where most scenes are being shot at around 28mm-50mm. Strong back and top lighting are used to create a halo.

The eye is very central in the creation of this Close Up. The enigma of the eyes lies in the fact that not only do they see, they are also able to see themselves seeing. It is by focussing on the eye of the icon that we know that they acknowledge our gaze. Apocryphal stories abound all over world cinematography as to how cameramen developed special techniques to highlight the eyes of the heroines. For instance, Jal Mistry was the first man in India to use special pencil lights mounted on the camera to illuminate the eyes and make them shine.

Certain angles were used depending on the shape of the actress's face. Mistry thought Nargis had a papaya face that required foreshortening. Vyjantimala;s CU was shot often from a toppish angle to lengthen what was

considered a broad face. This way of thinking about the face is still the consideration of most mainstream camera practice – In *Rangeela*, for example, shot by WB Rao, Urmila Matondkar will always have a glorious backlight no matter what the location – whether beach in the day or the friend's *jhuggi* at night.

The clipping that we will see now is from the work of Subrata Mitra. Subrata Mitra shot his first feature film at the age of twenty-one, without ever having touched a film camera before. That film was 'Pather Panchali'. Mitra is regarded as a master by cinematographers in India and the world, and his work is acknowledged as an inspiration by cameramen of the stature of Nestor Almendros, K.K. Mahajan, Ashok Mehta as well as younger people like Anup Jotwani, Sunny Joseph and many others working today.

EXCERPT: Charulata: Cam: Subrata Mitra: **Evocation of a sense of the real through feeling**

If cameramen like Murthy and Jal Mistry specialized in the creation of icons, then Subrata Mitra made a breakthrough in the evocation of reality. But it would be incorrect to call this mere realism, because he observed nature closely to recreate in his work not a slavish reproduction but an evocation of feeling. As Mr. Mitra often told us "It is not enough just to see sunlight in a film, one must be able to feel it as well." *Pather Panchali* shook audiences because of this quality. In the film you can sense the transition in feeling from sunny days to grey cloudy skies, as the mood of the film itself darkens. This was imperceptible, but nevertheless palpable.

In the clip we have just shown you it would be worthwhile to notice how it manages to evoke the feeling of afternoon ennui in a Calcutta mansion. Here what is remarkable is how the camerawork actually shies away from drawing

attention to itself. But to create this shadowless, diffused feeling of an afternoon interior, and use long tracking shots at the same time was impossible given the kind of lights available to him in 1964 Calcutta studios. Subrata Mitra had already experimented with bounced lighting from *Aparajito* onwards. (after *Pather Panchali*) But to use the same principles of soft lighting, and reconcile them to the director's demand for extensive camera movements required a new kind of lighting set up. Subrata Mitra's solution was to design what he called the "dabbas" – wooden boxes measuring three feet by two feet, containing thirty household electric bulbs set in banks. The box would be covered with layers of butter paper. In this way he constructed a large source of soft light which could be easily set up on a normal light stand. The quality of light that this was able to generate was so convincing, that his mother who had been born and brought up in the kind of milieu that the film is set in, thought they had shot *Charulata* in a house and not a set. As Subratada however points out, this impression would not have been possible but for the great feeling for detail in Bansi Chandragupta's art direction.

Bansi Chandragupta's name comes up again and again when we talk to cameramen. The slum in *Chakra*, the house in *Swami*, the fantastic palace in *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* and even the urban space of *Calcutta 71*, as well as the bedsit in *36 Chowringhee Lane* are designed by him. In each of these cases the cinematographers said that Chandragupta's work acted as a catalyst for their own imagination and creativity. We tried to locate Chandragupta's notes and drawings, because we wanted to draw on them to reconstruct the planning and execution of several key sequences in cinema history. We were told by K.K. Mahajan that he had personally deposited the entire collection after Chandragupta's death at the Film Institute so that it could be of use and value to students of cinema. Repeated enquiries at the FTII at Pune, have yielded no

results. And we are forced to conclude that this invaluable resource is now lost. It is unfortunate that institutions entrusted with the care and conservation of such precious materials can also be so callous and indifferent to the fate of their holdings.

EXCERPT : '36 Chowringhee Lane' Cam – Ashok Mehta

Before the setting up of the FTII all cameraman had to work for a number of years as assistants before they could shoot their own films. Ashok Mehta's journey into the profession is unusual in that he rose from the very bottom rung of the studio hierarchy. He began as a canteen boy in a film studio, then worked as a light boy, camera attendant, then as an assistant and finally got to shoot his own films. He brought a fresh eye and an immense flexibility in his approach to lighting. It comes as a surprise to anyone to hear that his work ranges from *Mandi*, *Utsav*, *Trikaal*, *Ram Lakhan*, *Saudagar*, *Khalnayak*, and *Gupt* to *Bandit Queen*. In his work it is possible to see an innovative fusion of many kinds of cinematographic influences. In future interactions with him we plan to uncover these traces.

One of the most enlightening encounters that we have had in the course of our research has been with Mr. K. K. Mahajan. KK's work is foremost in claiming for the camera an unprecedented **expressive freedom and vitality**. One of the early graduates of the FTII, he was exposed to the work of the French New Wave and was greatly inspired by the risks being taken by the young cameramen in films like '*Breathless*', '*Masculin Feminin*' '*Jules et Jim*' etc. In these films the actors were often allowed to go dark, things burnt in the background, handheld camera was used.

His first film was with Mrinal Sen in 1968 '*Bhuvan Shome*'. Not long before this Mrinal Sen after seeing the French New Wave had commented that he would like to make a film which would physically look youthful and at the same time make a serious socio-economic point. Achieving this youthfulness demanded tremendous cinematographic application and exploration. KK joined Mrinal Sen for *Bhuvan Shome* and they made 12 films together.

KK's work – whether it is the sharp intensities of the Calcutta Trilogy for Mrinal Sen, or the stretching of the possibilities of the ORWO stock in *Uski Roti* to recreate the Punjab of Amrita Shergil paintings, or shooting *Mayadarpan* with the director explicitly demanding desaturated colours and no blue – all this shows an incredibly experimental approach where risks are always being taken to achieve new results. This is the kind of approach that you see also realised in a film like '*Amma Ariyan*' directed by John Abraham and shot by Venu.

SECTION 3

An important concern of the project is an analysis of how technological development has interfaced with cinematographic practice. Without boring you with a barrage of technological details, we would nevertheless leave you with a few ideas. Perhaps the relation between aesthetic evolution and technical improvements is more complex than a simple line of unidirectional and reciprocal progress – with technical improvements, automatically leading to leaps in aesthetics. In fact, if you take the coming of sound into the movies, one can with some justification say that the phenomenal growth of cinematographic language that took place in the silent era was short-circuited by the coming of sound. The movies retreated into studios and into an iconography of theatrical frontality, as the talking element in the talkies became paramount.

Barely had cinematography recovered and found its place in the sun again, that the arrival of colour forced it back into the studios again. Colour film had far less latitude initially than black and white stock, and a much higher degree of lighting intensity was required to achieve an acceptable exposure density. The fluidity, expressive range and panache of the black and white cinema of the forties, fifties and sixties, gave way to a flattened colour aesthetic that dominated cinematography in India for much of the decades that followed. However, smaller, portable technologies like the combination of the Arriflex 35 mm camera and the Nagra tape recorder liberated cinematography again, and much of the freedom of movement as well as hand held shooting that we see in the early new wave films is attributable at least in part to this. Today, the possibilities of digital technologies and computer aided image making have taken away great deal from the cinematographer's control over his craft, even as they have added a great deal of gloss. The substance of cinematography itself stands threatened as big budget productions come to rely increasingly on an aesthetic dominated by the need to dish out special effects.

We believe that what is represented and the means of representation have a direct relationship. And any study of the cinematographic apparatus makes this quite transparent. If you come into a crowded neighbourhood with all the paraphernalia that goes with an expensive 35mm Panavision camera, the likelihood is that the presence of the equipment and the cameraman will significantly alter the dynamics of the space that is sought to be photographed. This in turn has definite implications on the nature of the aesthetic choices that are subsequently made. Take for instance the film *Bombay* by Mani Ratnam, shot by Rajeev Menon. Here, what is particularly interesting is the way in which the need for a glamorous image, influences the design and execution of interior

shots. A single room unit in a Bombay tenement becomes a backlit haven, where the camera tracks and dollies effortlessly over gleaming antique furniture.

It is as if the scale of the technological apparatus at the disposal of the cameraman dictated the style and substance of the shots themselves. The same phenomenon when observed from the opposite end would suggest, that perhaps there are certain subjects which require the obverse of sophisticated technology and gigantic budgets. Subrata Mitra, looking back on *Pather Panchali* remarked; “Perhaps a film like *Pather Panchali* could not have been made if I had Panavision cameras and Cooke Verotal lenses”. In other words, what Subratada is suggesting here is that as a young cameraman, out to do his first feature film, and never having touched a movie camera before: the very simplicity of the means at his disposal enabled him to take a lot of risks, and adopt an approach in which he was constantly pushing himself to work with the image in a way that may well have not been possible if he had to face intimidatingly sophisticated equipment. Thus the very obverse of technological sophistication, and meager resources were the greatest creative assets that he had.

In the course of our research we have realized that it is not possible to treat the cinematographers as mere witnesses to events in cinema history. The quality of time and the interaction with them in the course of the research must rise above the instrumentality of the interview. We need to evolve our relationship with them on the basis of a trust that builds up over prolonged conversations and the sharing of their excitement. This form of interaction precludes an easy catch-all compendium of all that there is to know about cinematography as a possible outcome of these encounters. Instead we have to think in terms of initiating a series of monographs that take up different persons, epochs and issues. We would not like this effort to be limited by our own work, but rather see our

research as a beginning to which, over time others will join in. We have a great deal more to do, for instance, we have to work much more on the cinemas of southern India, but experience so far suggests that our journeys and encounters in the forthcoming period of the research will be just as rewarding for us.

In conclusion we would like to leave you with an excerpt from *Egaro Mile* a documentary film photographed by Ranjan Palit, a cinematographer with whom we have shared many privileged moments of work, conversation and discovery. To us this shot brings together a perspective and an attitude that we feel is emblematic of the reverie and the simplicity that makes for possibilities in cinematography and of our experience of cinema.