It can be argued that if neorealism in Italy emerged out of opposition to Fascist and escapist cinema which was away from reality then Indian neorealist cinema was also rooted in the milieu of colonial oppression and post-colonial apathy of the elected Indian government towards the contemporary issues of caste and class discrimination, patriarchal set up, social oppression, economic inequality and increasing antipathy towards democratic traditions. The centralization of the government authority and unbridled exercise of its power left a large section of society discontented. After the independence, the dreams and aspirations of the large section of society remained unfulfilled. The achievement of independence was seen to be as panacea by many but shattering of the hopes in the later years gave a blow to their aspirations.

Neorealism’s methodology of making films became evident in Asia and Africa. In Japan, Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* (1950) probing quality left one spellbound -the film handles an extremely complex theme, truth itself. Similarly, Roberto Rossellini talks about ‘going to the root of things’.\(^1\) He suggests that the truth is out there and the filmmaker has to pick it out and recreate it on the screen. This thought points to the significant idea of a correspondence between facts and their process of origin, and the quest for that which lies below the facts. Neorealism had a profound effect on world cinema in the history of the 20\(^{th}\) Century.\(^2\) Initially; Indian realist cinema had an imprint of Italian neo realistic cinema but slowly it developed into an independent genre.\(^3\) Indian conditions were replete with poverty, unemployment, caste oppression, class distinctions, maltreatment of women, superstition, dowry system and forms of social and economic injustice. Indian films adapted some of the neorealist conventions indigenizing them in their own portrayals.
Cinema of 1950s and 1960s was a socially all-embracing bourgeois narrative based on agricultural or industrial experiments. The representative of change was supposed to be a bourgeois as can be viewed even in a current film *Swades* (2004) which also highlights the idea of a bourgeois modernization. Moreover, the commercial cinema of 1950s and 1960s promoted patriarchy as basically Indian. In a way, pre- globalization cinema defined the mainstream and colonized the marginal. In commercial cinema, protagonist was a ‘hero’ first, and then an actor, he was an upper caste Hindu who was affluent. If he was portrayed as a poor then it was a consequence of an unfavourable circumstance to be rectified later when he will become rich in the end. The actual poor like *Dalits* or *Adivasis* were never the protagonists of the films. In commercial cinema, the depiction of Muslim figures can be seen in terms of stereotypes and clichés. They are, usually, depicted as self-sacrificing and loyal to the protagonist who is usually a high caste Hindu. In Muslim socials, *mushaira, sherwani*, usage of Urdu dominated the ambience and the narrative.

**National Identity**

The discussion on nation and its cultural politics emerged in the 19th century when nationalism evolved out of what Partha Chatterjee has called the ‘point of departure’ of the colonized from the conformity with the colonizer’s civilizational ideas, the latter loaded with the ‘rhetoric of enlightenment universalism’ but doubtful in practice. In post colonial writings of Indian history, the urge to classify ‘home’ as the realm of culture and identity - and to safeguard and detach it from the ‘world’ which was controlled by the colonizer - has been acknowledged as the introductory act of cultural nationalism. In a majority of representations ‘west’ did not require to be a geographical presence it was effectual and dominant enough as a vague cultural signifier.

Sumita Chakravarty referred to Indian commercial cinema as the ‘mistress’ to a ‘master narrative’, ‘Indian national identity.’ Ravi Vasudevan and Sumita Chakravarty have deliberated on the forging of national identity in
popular Indian cinema. The linkages between the culture promoted by Hindi films and Hindu nationalism have also been shown. It also diminishes the position of women which appears as male narcissistic.\textsuperscript{9} Jyotika Virdi focused on ‘nation’ in her book’s title and its contents \textit{The Cinematic ImagiNation}. There is a tendency to homogenize the nation and its portrayal. The depiction of upper caste patriarchal dominant Hindu world view with focus on economic mobility is seen in large number of films. In contemporary times, the combination of new media, transnational corporations and consumerism makes the situation critical for large sections of disadvantaged communities in developing countries.\textsuperscript{10}

Indian cinema is neither politically naive nor does it express an obvious secularism; its ‘social’ cinema is ‘predicated upon the politics of inequality and escapism.’ On themes of gender, rationalism and modernization, Indian cinema is backward-looking.\textsuperscript{11} The oversimplification of class, gender and cultural distinctions within the traditional comic trope in commercial Indian cinema find a brilliantly appropriate turn of phrase in ‘epic melodrama’, the term Ashish Rajadhyaksha applies to show the prevailing narrative form in commercial cinema in which concepts like tradition, nationness, womanhood, and generous patriarchy have played an important part.\textsuperscript{12} West or westernization has been used as a signifier for a set of cultural values or functions. City, in contrast to village, stood for corruption, decadence, and dishonesty.

Tomas Guieterrez Alea writes that cinema developed into a genuine ‘show business’ industry and started to produce on a large scale, a type of merchandize able to gratify the tastes and to promote the desire of a society subjugated by a bourgeoisie which extended its influence into each place of the earth. From the commencement cinema grew along two corresponding paths; ‘true’ documentation of certain facets of reality, and on the other hand, the creation of magic fascination. Cinema has constantly moved between these two poles; documentation and fiction.\textsuperscript{13} The type of realism that Alea had in mind was obviously that of the Italian ‘neo-realists’ (Alea along with the
great novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez studied in 1952-55 in the Rome Experimental Film Centre) or the earlier works of Eisenstein. His characterization of cinema in bourgeoisie society as a product is, definitely, part of the theoretical tradition he belonged to. Moreover, the nature of cinema in the contemporary times is reflective of the way it was perceived by theoreticians like Alea.

The story of the nation state essayed by commercial Hindi cinema is an outcome of the Indian bourgeois attempt to connect the ‘universal material values of western enlightenment’ with the often repeated spiritual and ethical values of Indian tradition. This Indianization of the modern nation state is eventually achieved by resolving disturbing contradictions like class, gender and religious, ethnic and caste discrimination in support of caste Hindu patriarchy. For the benefit of the Indian ruling class, Hindi cinema has cautiously built a remarkable historical account of the Indian nation by either excluding or marginalizing numerous social groups and issues in its depiction of Indian society.

Third Cinema and Nation

The focus of third cinema is on recovering and reinventing indigenous aesthetic and narrative traditions in opposition to the homogenizing impulses of Hollywood in its control over markets and normative standards. One of the hallmarks of third cinema theory has been its resolutely unchauvinist approach to the ‘national’. In its references to wider international aesthetic practices third cinema asserts but also problematizes the boundaries between nation and other. In the course, it also explores the ways in which the oppressed domestic others of the nation whether of class, sub- or counter-nationality, ethnic faction or gender, can find a voice. An important lacuna in this project has been any continued understanding of the domestic commercial cinema in the ‘third world’. This is significant as in countries like India the commercial film has, effectively marginalized Hollywood’s influence in the internal market. The Indian popular cinema stylistically incorporated
facets of the world ‘standard’ but it constitutes something like a ‘nation space’ in opposition to the prevailing guidelines of Hollywood.\textsuperscript{17}

The difficulty of Indian popular cinema lies not only at the boundary between the local and the global in the creation of a politics of cultural disparity, but must also be seen in terms of the domestic hierarchies that are concerned in the creation of a national culture. The construction of a national market is a vital feature of these multi-layered associations of ‘domination and subordination.’ Bombay gained in dominance in 1950s sidelining Pune and Calcutta and became the main center of national film production. This pre-eminence was reduced by the appearance of vital film industries in Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, making films in Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam respectively. In the Tamil and Telugu cases the films also have a strong connection with the politics of provincial and ethnic identity. The internal hegemony achieved by the commercial cinema has had ambivalent implications for the social and political creation of its viewer. All the cinemas of India were concerned with creating a certain abstraction of national identity; Pan Indian as well as provincial constructions of national identity. This process of abstraction oppresses other identities, either through stereotyping or through absence. The Bombay films have a unique place here, as it places other national / ethnic/ religious identities in stereotypical ways under an overarching north Indian, majoritarian Hindu identity. The stereotypes of the ‘Southerner’ (or Madrasi a term which frivolously derides the whole southern region) the Bengali, the Gujarati, the Parsee, the Muslim, the Sikh and the Christian inhabit the subsidiary positions in this space. Bombay emerged as the main centre for the creation of ‘national fictions’ at the time when the new state came into life, so its creation of the national narrative carries an exacting vigour.\textsuperscript{18}

**PWA and IPTA**

The theatre movement, Indian Peoples’ Theatre Association (IPTA), emerged out of the efforts of the writers and intellectuals associated with progressive
writers’ movement. In mid 1930’s, S. Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand, two founder members of Progressive Writers’ Association of India (PWA), called the first meeting of Association in November 1935 in London.\textsuperscript{19} Earlier, in June 1935, in Paris was held the conference of world writers. This resulted in establishment of international association of writers for the Defence of Culture against Fascism. The PWA was part, then of an international movement which focused on local popular culture with clear social and political objectives. The PWA programme stated clearly that the writer was first a socially and politically responsible member of the society. It asked him to take cognizance of the Indian situation in particular, to take part in the effort for political and economic emancipation, to take culture to the ‘masses’ and lastly to develop regional languages and literatures. In 1936, the PWA of India opened branches in, Aligarh, Delhi, Lahore and Allahabad and an all India meeting of writers was organised in Lucknow in the same year. The origin of IPTA in Bombay in 1943 was a consequence of such developments. The draft resolution of the All India People’s Theatre Conference, drawn up in May 1943, was geared towards anti - Fascism and anti - Imperialism.

The First Bulletin of the Association entitled \textit{Historical Background} published in July 1943 stated that this theatre movement’s agenda was social communication and commitment. There was more cooperation with trade unions and \textit{Kisan Sabhas} (peasant associations). The importance of traditional folk forms was realized so that direct communication with the masses could be achieved and new political and social messages are transmitted effectively. Various branches of IPTA sprang up all over India.\textsuperscript{20}

In 1943, IPTA’s Central Cultural Squad was created and dancers, musicians, singers and people associated with theatre joined it. IPTA produced a varied body of theater and performances. Apart from employing folk forms, IPTA used urban theatre of which the most popular play was \textit{Nabanna} (New Harvest) by Bijon Bhattacharya. The plays deal with the devastating Bengal famine of 1942-43, a man - made catastrophe produced by the colonial rule that used the food- grains of those years to feed the troops.
fighting in Europe and Japan. The self-interest of the colonialists was to such an extent that because of their policy millions starved to death. In a way, this play was a colonial critique as well as a portrayal of suffering peasantry under the so called ‘benevolent’ and ‘civilized’ state.

**Initial Influences**

The three influences on cinema in India were the neorealism of post-Second World War Italy, the conventional narrative techniques of Hollywood and the idealistic power of Soviet cinema, mainly of 1920s. Indian cinema evolved its own style in terms of use of songs, dance and music. Fredric Jameson argued, “the star system is fundamentally, structurally, irreconcilable with neorealism.” Many, Indian filmmakers tried to deglamourise the stars and attempted to present them as average characters devoid of their stardom. Moreover, India saw a powerful reflection of its own social problems that it was influenced by it. Realism in Indian cinema was driven more by logic of social responsibility than by an aspiration for social justice. It implies that filmmakers were more interested in depicting the problems rather than providing radical solutions. They wished to maintain the status-quo in society by maintaining the existing situation and hierarchies. Cinema was expected to depict the ‘real’ India, support its much hyped ‘timeless’ traditions and ways of life and at the same time portray the blueprint for a modern, democratic and secular national life.

In post independence India, the social and national consciousness was affected by the dilemma caused by the desire to cling to established norms and value system while the country was trying to make the challenging transition from feudalism to industrialism, colonialism to democracy and economic stagnation to material growth. During this time, poverty came to be known by its social scientific name of ‘economic backwardness’ which could be overcome by industrialization, science and technology. The belief in this idea by Nehru and other political leaders led to establishment of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), dam construction activity and other related
progressive projects. The notion of *Panchsheel* or the five principles of mutual respect, equality, nonaggression, non intervention and peaceful coexistence was created in this ‘optimistic and mediatory’ mode.

**Conflict of the Classes**

Before independence, the Indian capitalists defined their interests pretty narrowly and vacillated in showing opposition to colonial state and also in supporting nationalism. These capitalists, as the phase of proletarian turbulence in the 1930s exhibited, opposed cinema critical of their class. On the matter of class, the colonial government, Indian capitalists and the key political parties expediently united against the workers. The incident related to *Mazdoor/Mill* scripted by Munshi Premchand shows how radical films were censored by vested interests. *Mazdoor* exhibited the existence and struggle of the Indian working class. It was released in the backdrop of intensifying radical sentiment and was quickly proscribed by the government on the suggestion of the Bombay capitalists. At the same time, the films made for subaltern cause were less in number. Referring to the contradictions inherent in Indian nationalism, Tanika Sarkar observes that in the Gramscian notion of conflicting consciousness, sporadic subaltern experiences of resistances and solidarities upset, without overturning, the prevailing ideology of class hegemony.

*Udayer Pathey* (1944 *Humrahi* in Hindi) portrayed the conflict between the workers and capitalists in an effective manner. The film revolves around a writer, who is also intensely involved with the condition of factory workers. He not only provides them support in every possible way but also organizes them against exploitation of industrialists. In the end, industrialist’s daughter defies all class barriers by opting for him than become party to the exploitation of the working class. Later such stereotyping where leader of workers protest movement becomes the love interest of his boss’s daughter, whom he eventually marries, could be seen in many films. A new romantic-realist aesthetic was evident within a melodramatic form which was concerned with the workers’ movement. But such portrayals also showed the need for conforming rather than providing radical solutions.
Satyajit Ray, remarked that *Udayer Pathey* did away with the cobwebs of tradition and initiated a realism completely suited to cinema. The cast and crew of *Udayer Pathey* were also unknown. Bimal Roy got a rationed saw stock to shoot the film. Most of the negative belonged to the remnant stock of more renowned directors. Therefore, some of the contemporaries of Bimal Roy derisively referred to the film as a ‘cut-piece’ production. Despite these constraints the film exhibited a rare freshness that was new to the Indian cinema, a sensitive story of human relationships breaking down class barriers. The most valid social statement of the film was protagonist’s challenge to the elite with dignity and self respect. The director could have insulted the elite by shouting of anti-capitalist slogans but he chose a dignified way of depicting class divisions in the society. The protagonist provided logical answers to the capitalist without compromising his situation.

*Humrahi* (1945) was the Hindi remake of *Udayer Pathey* and was one of the most progressive films with “an intellectual approach and solution to the eternal problems of the haves versus have-nots, capitalist versus labour, materialism versus idealism.” Another highlight of the film was Tagore’s song *Jana Gana Mana*, which later became the national anthem of India. The film was strikingly honest and realistic - shot with unglamorous non-professional actors and on actual locations it exhibited freshness in the style and treatment of the theme. The protagonist displays a stance of confrontation against caste, class and creed. He is committed to his words, thoughts and ideals to the cause of working classes and displays an aspiration to bring out a change in the unjust social order. But such portrayals emphasize on change of heart of the industrialist - capitalist on whose benevolence and paternalism the working classes exist. Dealing with the labour-capital struggle, it was the first - to evolve the concept of film as a social document and to reject studio-made reality to explore its heart in the open streets. It looked way ahead – a progressive and a realistic film made much before neorealism became a trend. The success of *Udayer Pathey* set the trend for the films with greater realism. In a way, Indian cinema began its own journey of neorealist portrayals without even being aware of such films in Italy.
Bimal Roy had uncanny knack of capturing images - the atmosphere, mood of the artist, and the tone of the situation were presented through his sense of framing and the lighting shots conceived by him were striking, yet they never overwhelmed the content, nor did they drew attention to themselves. Bimal Roy contributed to cinema and realism in introducing another type of realism which was not the reality of atmosphere or behaviour or psychology but the reality of the conflict of classes i.e. clash of the exploiter and the exploited and of the capitalist and the worker.\textsuperscript{41}

*Neecha Nagar* (1946) was more than a realist film and had a socialistic purpose.\textsuperscript{42} It narrated a tale in which an allegorical contrast between the high / rich / haves and low/poor/ have-nots was drawn through two locations the upper town ruled and supervised by a wealthy landowner and the lower shanties headed by a fiery young man. Class struggle is depicted like a fable in the film. The narrative of antagonism and conflict between the wealthy and the impoverished is resolutely separated into ‘easy-to-understand signs and symbols’ so as to convey its meaning in easily comprehensible terms to the audience. The positioning of the rich at the mountains above and of the poor in the plains below is itself highly symbolic. The sewage sent downward from above manifests the squalor of poverty which the rich inflict on the poor. And very sensibly, the rich man is called “Sarkar” and he keeps changing his part between being the chief of the state and the chief of the class he represents.\textsuperscript{43} This flexibility in his representation is also symbolic in the sense that wealthy / haves / rich govern the rules of the society on the basis of their wealth and impoverished / have-nots / poor are left to fend for themselves in most apathetic circumstances.

The photography of the film is grayish in texture. The cast of the film included non-professionals and their portrayal of the various characters displayed a kind of authenticity which was an essential component of this film. The song which is sung during their protest march; *Hum rukenge phir nahi, shum jhukenge phir nahi* (We will not stop again, we will not bow again) shows the resolve and commitment of the people. The spirit of resistance of
people is further exemplified by some thought provoking lyrics which assume greater significance if viewed in the background of India's struggle for independence: “Utho ki hamen waqt ke gardish ne pukara, Jagi hui rahen nai manzil ko jayengi, Har dil ko naye josh se aabad karengi, Khamosh nigahen nahi, khamosh rahengi, Azad hain, azad hai, azad rahengi, Marana bhi hamara hai to jina bhi hamara”, (Rise to the need of the hour. The newly awakened path will lead to new destination which will fill every heart with renewed energy. Silent eyes will not remain silent. We are free, we are free, and we shall remain free. If our life is in our hands, then so is our death).

In the conflict between the rich and the poor, the poor display qualities of steadfastness, persistence, self-control, tolerance, self-sacrifice and renunciation which in a way run parallel to the Gandhian ideals of the freedom struggle. Aruna Vasudev writes that for those who cared to look for it, the references to the Gandhi, British government and the Indian elite-symbolized by the daughter, Maya, were obvious. K.A. Abbas considered Neecha Nagar as more than a realist film – it had the theme of the lower depths and had a socialistic purpose. Moreover, this conflict is because of inequality and inequality is terrible for economy, democracy and society. Moreover, economic inequality leads to instability whereas an equal society is more efficient and productive.

Colonial Oppression

Dharti Ke Lal (Children of the Earth, 1946) was total socialist realism- had non-professional cast and depicted the theme of uprooted humankind in the Bengal famine. It was a cooperative venture of the members of Indian Peoples’ Theatre Association (IPTA) featuring non professional actors and narrated a simple story of peasants and their hardships encountered during the famous Bengal famine of 1943. K.A. Abbas, portrays the rapacity and selfishness of the Indian hoarders and black marketers coupled with apathetic attitude of the British for whom the famine did not exist. A few villagers living in an impoverished condition migrate to Calcutta to satisfy their ever-growing
starvation. But they are shamelessly exploited by the inhabitants of the city who take undue advantage of their homelessness, joblessness and above all hunger. Women resort to prostitution to save themselves and their children. The undernourished bodies of the children on the streets of the city are suggestive of the poverty, starvation and indifference of the people towards them. Finally, they decide to go back to the village again to do farming. They resort to collectivization of farms, cooperating with each other and reaping a good harvest. The film draws the relation between the drain of wealth, recurrent famines and the colonial impact on the agrarian scene.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{Dharti Ke Lal}, undoubtedly exhibits certain neorealist traits. But it does not mean that this influence was the impact of Italian neorealist films rather the colonial oppression and selfishness generated this kind of cinema which was rooted in contemporary conditions. The use of non-professional cast, gray photography of the film, location shooting, contemporariness of the situation and the moral approach towards the treatment of the subject made it really remarkable. Satyajit Ray commented that its courage, freshness and sincerity could not be rejected and when social commitment seems abomination to most filmmakers, it appears even more a milestone than it did when it first appeared.\textsuperscript{49} Even the poster of the film declares “the story that had to be told in all its simple grandeur and stark realism.”\textsuperscript{50}

K. A. Abbas writes that Balraj Sahni was not a recluse intellectual and artiste, his knowledge of the masses, which shone through his characterization, emerge out of his involvement in struggles of the populace for freedom and social justice in processions, in public assemblies, in trade union activities, while facing the cruel \textit{lathis} and bullets – spouting gun of the police.\textsuperscript{51} K.A. Abbas writes that Balraj Sahni ate only one meal per day for months to achieve a starved appearance to his half-naked body.\textsuperscript{52} Such an authentic portrayal of an impoverished peasant not only satisfied his hunger as an artist but also won him critical acclaim from various quarters.

IPTA played a vital role in launching a kind of people’s cinema in \textit{Dharti Ke Lal}.\textsuperscript{53} IPTA is the only instance of “a cultural \textit{avant garde} in contemporary
Indian history. The film was released in Bombay at a time when IPTA’s prestige was at its zenith. When the film was released, all the shows for a whole week were booked in advance. The communal riots broke out in the city at the time when the first matinee show was in progress. When it ended the audience was full of praise but they were distressed when they heard that the communal violence has started only a mile away from the ‘Capital Cinema’ where the film was released. After that nobody was interested in talking about it. The people exhibited anxiety and tension to reach home before the curfew hour. It was a race between the riots and *Dharti Ke Lal*.\(^{55}\)

The film lost the race commercially but artistically it earned a lot of critical acclaim. The story of the film was based on two plays which had been successfully staged by IPTA – Bijoy Bhattacharya’s Bengali plays, *Nabanna* and *Jabanbandhi* – and Krishan Chander’s Hindi story, *Annadata*, which were integrated and adapted to narrate the circumstances and events of the famous Bengal famine of 1943 which caused the loss of 3.5 million lives.\(^{56}\)

The colonial apathy, disdain and abdication of responsibility in context of its citizens is evident in one of the most poignant scenes of the film when female character in the film succumbs to prostitution to save the life of her only child who was in a critical stage for the want of food and milk. The situation, further worsens when his husband himself is ready to become a pimp for his wife. These scenes of abject poverty and starvation lend an authentic aura to the film as the famous Bengal famine which claimed innumerable lives might not have escaped such moments where women were ready to sell their bodies and men were ready to feed on them. The very selection of the subject-matter and the theme, which was not away from the immediate past, provided a contemporary look to the film. The shootings were basically on outdoor locations which lent an air of authenticity to the film. Above all, the social and moral commitment of the director to the story in which he tries to de-dramatize the situations also reflected K.A. Abbas’s approach.

*Chinnamul* (*The Uprooted*, 1951) showed the colonial apathy in terms of partition of India and consequent violence. It reflected the filmmakers’
personal concern with immediate social realities and was a milestone in the development of socially conscious cinema in India. The film was shot in the years 1948-49 but because of some censor troubles it was finally released in 1951. The displacement partition caused; the violence it led to; and the starvation and impoverishment it generated marked the subject-matter of the film. The theme was not only contemporary but also reflective of the agony and hopelessness of millions of Indians who had been uprooted from their motherland. It was, in fact, the first film on the partition of India and, undoubtedly, a neorealist attempt to put things in perspective. The cast of the film was non professional and some of them were even real refugees who had migrated from other areas after the partition. The film was mostly shot outdoors capturing documentary shots with hidden cameras and impromptu shooting as the situation offered.

There is absolutely no violence in the film in the overt sense of the term and the only instance when the forewarned violence almost appears on the screen is during villages’ attempted dislodging from the large house they had occupied. But the covert violence of uprooting, displacement, starvation, poverty, hunger and lack of identity is evident throughout the film.

The theme struck a chord at the heart of the uprooted. Sunipa Basu comments that after partition the view of refugees from East Bengal, impoverished strangers coming to Calcutta, touched a chord in Ghosh. His formative years had been spent in Dacca, in East Bengal and he could empathize with these people. He saw the resistance in terms of exploiters and the exploited. He realized disapproval must be registered, and could think of no superior medium than the one in which he worked. He was also closely associated with IPTA and his assessment of political situation brought him this awareness that partition was ethically indefensible and politically immoral.

Regarding the constraints, the finance was scarce; the actors had never acted in films and some of the refugee actors had never seen cinema; as a lot of outdoor work was required the studio gave them only obsolete
machinery; trouble in getting authorization to shoot in certain areas; and un-
official pre-censorship gave a jolt to the shooting as the home department
examined the script, found it extremely communal and wanted to stop the
shooting. The shooting was resumed, secretly. After the film was completed,
the censors wielded their scissors happily.\textsuperscript{61} Despite these obstacles, the film
really turned out to be an authentic portrayal of tribulations of violence and
migration coupled with misery, dejection, hopelessness and impotency to alter
the callous world around oneself. It was a courageous effort to make such a
realistic film to register a protest against the prevailing situation. The
spontaneity of the film was also because it was mostly a single-take film as
they could not afford to do retake. The documentary quality of the film was
further attested by the fact that a number of shots were taken of the ‘real’
streets, ‘real’ refugee camps and Sealdah station with a camera hidden in a
van. Ritwik Kumar Ghatak also acted in the film. In spite of the hurdles raised
by the Censor Board, B.N. Sircar, the Chairman of the Board, took a strong
stand in favour of the film and salvaged many of the priceless documentary
shots for posterity.

\textit{Chhinnmool} found its patrons in the form of Russian film masters
Vsevolod Pudovkin and N. Cherkassov who had come to purchase Indian
films for exhibition in the Soviet Union. Pudovkin’s positive response when he
said, “Here I see your people, here I see your country… Artistically it is the
best among the pictures I have seen in India” a great source of consolation as
well as success to Nemai Ghosh.\textsuperscript{62} Sovexport purchased the film for showing
it in U.S.S.R., first Indian film to be so honoured. It was simultaneously
released in 181 theatres in USSR.\textsuperscript{63}

Sunipa Basu writes that the film definitely shares some of the concerns
of the neorealists.\textsuperscript{64} Though Ghosh had not seen any neorealist film, he had
read about and seen photographs of neorealist films like \textit{Bicycle Thieves} and
\textit{Rome Open City}.\textsuperscript{65} This sparked off his own creativity and he experimented
while shooting the film. He adopted some ideas from the neorealists which
appealed to his imagination, like hidden camera, faces left with their rich
natural skin tones instead of being smothered in thick pink make-up, comment through eyes of children, keeping faith in ‘reality’ or ‘truth.’ But we can argue that it was not the question of how many Indians had seen an Italian neorealist film but how many Indians could see an Indian neorealist film when Indian filmmakers attempted to make it. The sense of loss of their birthplace and the consequent suffering in the city when they became refugees is vividly portrayed in the film. Mrinal Sen, commented that Chhinnamool was undoubtedly timely for more than one reason - viewing this film, one would see a certain conviction and a certain faith in a newer kind of cinema which was unknown to movie makers of Calcutta and to metropolitan spectators. Though it failed commercially yet one could read on the faces of a minority audience the undergoing of a new experience. Indeed, Mrinal Sen’s observation further attests the courageous attempt to break-free from the cinema of conventions and traditions and create a document against the colonial and post colonial state’s antipathy towards the masses.

Chhinnamool, seeks to explain the ‘social structures, political institutions and economic relations’ that enable the subjection of the people. An important scene of the film is when the old lady refuses to vacate her house and migrate to Calcutta. The old lady was a real refugee who would not listen to any instruction for acting and would claim “I know the pain of leaving home.” Her portrayal of the character was not only impressive but authentic. The music at that point is very haunting, creating a mood of separation and melancholy. Some of the images in the film serve the documentary quality of Chhinnamool – train filled with human beings like locusts in a field, people stranded on railway platforms with their tired and pessimistic faces, impoverished naked children walking and lying with their skeletal frame of body and faces of people expressing more horror than shock – contributing to the new experience of de-glamorization. There is a use of symbolism in the film. The bird’s nest and lamp are not commonplace images; they are metaphors commonly used in the folk idiom of those about whom the film was made. They are indicative of displacement of masses and their dimming
hope in the face of collaboration of colonial and Indian interests which led to
the brutal division of their country of origin. When villagers come to Calcutta in
a train, the scene ends at a point where the train changes tracks, in a way,
indicating the change in the direction of their lives. Another instance of
symbolism is when the lands of migrants are measured and sold to both
Hindu and Muslim moneylenders – symbolizing division of India.

During partition violence between different communities, Gyanendra
Pandey has highlighted role of rumors in generalization of incidents and
heightening of tension between both communities. How rumors were then
politicized and how both these communities used these rumors as a
justification to serve their own interests.71 Not many films are made on the
theme of partition as the policies of the state always restrained the filmmakers
from venturing in to controversial areas and partition was no exception.72 In
Punjab, the experiences were more violent in nature. During partition
violence, ‘rape abduction and killing’ became the chief constituents of partition
of India.73 The explosive situation as also realized by Jawaharlal Nehru was
“murder stalks the streets and the most amazing cruelties are indulged in by
both the individual and the mob.”74 The vulnerability of women during the
times of violence and bloodshed has been studied in detail in recent times.
How the bodies of women became prized possessions of their captors and
how the conflict of communities was played over the bodies of women.75 In
her book Mool Suta Ukhde (Torn from the Roots), Kamlaben Patel, who was a
social worker associated with retrieval of women abducted during partition,
has mentioned that around seventy-five thousand women were abducted and
raped during the carnage of partition.76 According to Penderal Moon, by
March 1948, four and half million Hindus and six million Muslims had become
refugees.77

Hum Log (We the People, 1951) dealt with the problems of a lower
middle class family. The present social order situation acts as a deterrent to
the fulfillment of aspirations. The film is a critique of forces of power and
wealth and how they oppress the common masses. It is argued that the
placement of the social messages in the entertainment framework makes these films a mixture of ‘speakable’ and ‘unspeakable’ elements. The ‘speakables’ are the higher values of life, concern for humanity, removal of inequalities, social justice and the necessity for changing society. The ‘unspeakables’ are the sensuous delights of audio visual fare, the near-erotica created by camera positions, movements and suggestive dances and songs. The portrayal of social issues in such films lack the depth and truthfulness. B.D. Garga has called *Hum Log, Awara, Footpath* and *Paigham* as the genre of pseudo-realist social films. But the question is whether there can be only one filmic idiom for representation or portrayal? What will happen to the issue of adapting to one’s own filmic vision? Is sensuous and erotic depiction not a part of reality or beyond reality?

**Vision of a Utopian society**

The vision of a Utopian society (desirable society and citizenry) with strong focus on what ‘should be’ and not ‘what is’ was the focus of realism in Indian cinema. Richard Dyer argues, “Entertainment offers... Alternative, hopes, wishes these are the stuff of Utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and may be realized.” This created stereotypes of poor but happy farmer, the hard working and honest labourer, generous and kind doctor and idealistic school teacher. These characters are uncorrupted by the social environment of an economy supporting capital accumulation, the struggle for higher salaries, illegal profits and other such activities. This utopian sensibility was also central to the project of nation building in the aftermath of partition and independence. But there was absence of such utopian ideas in some films which exhibited pessimism anxiety, despair, resignation and fear. *Hum Log, Footpath* (1953), *Shri 420* (1955), *Jagte Raho* (1956), *Pyaasa* (1957) were some of these films. But we should keep in mind that even these films despite exhibiting above mentioned negative qualities radiated some kind of hope and optimism. The project of nation building forced them to come out of its pessimism and despair. By extension, self sufficient, traditional family on the celluloid secluded in its enclosed circular account is a ‘metaphor for the nation as family.’
Cinema depict a nation’s collective desire for the uncomplicated and soothing pleasures of family bonds (more so when the nation, the large family, is endangered by violent activities for autonomy on ethnic and religious grounds) by the supposed danger to such familial bonding by the lures of unchecked individualism as a consequence of unchecked westernization. But strangely, all these films delight in unbridled consumerism.\textsuperscript{84} In \textit{Awara’s}, song, \textit{Mera Joota Hai Japanai…} Raj Kapoor’s Hindustani heart and soul encapsulated the very spirit of the Utopian society that the films of 1950s intended to produce. \textit{Mother India} also aimed for the Utopian society. She is a personification of the values and codes of behaviour derived from myths, cult worship, social customs and traditions, the foundation of traditional Indian society.\textsuperscript{85} Situating her in these distinct social structures permit her to achieve a symbolic position of authority with which to guide the transition to a new mechanized India. She came to epitomize a national identity for the newly sovereign India.\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Naya Daur, Paigham, Jagriti, Purab aur Paschim} etc. were some other films which harped on utopian vision of society.

\textbf{Urban and Rural}

The cinema promoting ‘a rural nationalism’ either does not refer to the minorities and \textit{Dalits} or allots them prearranged roles. \textit{Upkaar}’s hero belonged to a ‘middle’ peasant family perpetuating rural ‘Indian’ values with obvious patriarchal proportions. The demeaning urban society is represented by a few urban - bred westernized characters. Lastly, the hero triumphs over evil at a moment when Pakistan was defeated by India in 1965 war. The danger to family because of western values and to the nation as a result of foreign agency shows the conflation and concurrent crisis of family and national values. \textit{Purab aur Paschim} eulogizes the spiritual achievements of the ‘Hindu’ Indian nation and juxtaposes it against western materialism. The conversion of a westernized Indian origin girl is the basis of the film. Her conversion is victory of Indian values and tradition. The female sexuality transforms in to a site for the contest of civilizations. The danger posed to Indian patriarchy by the urbanization and westernization of women is
surmounted by revitalizing the patriarchal family. The final outcome is seen in terms of girl finally marrying the protagonist with Hindu customs.

City is the central point in Awara, Boot Polish and Shri 420. Boot Polish has been viewed as an allegorical depiction of the recently independent “infant” Indian nation. The city or an urban centre was seen as a source of employment and wealth and Mumbai and Kolkata saw huge migrations in search of employment opportunities and improved living environment. The scarcities of village life were replaced by ordeal of existence in wretched urban slums. City transformed in to an emblem of decline in moral values and corrosion of social structure.

The questioning of the social order in Awara does not lead to any radical solution rather this social conflict is resolved through conforming to the traditionally accepted strategy of family reconciliation. Awara raises the question of class distinctions and exploitation but they are finally submerged in the happy family reunion and maintenance of status quo. If Raj is seen not as a poor criminal but as the son of Justice Raghunath then the social gap between Raj and Rita becomes illusory. Another important feature of some films was the emphasis on education and its possible role in social mobility. Awara typifies this and how the protagonist’s abandon of schooling leads him into criminal activities. Boot Polish ends on the note of nation building when two destitute child protagonists are adopted by a well to do family and enrolled in the Navbharat (New India) school. Do Bigha Zamin and Pather Panchali also emphasize the education of children.

Awara sought to establish the individual’s democratic right to an identity of his own, independent of class and privilege and protested against the glorification of heredity. The two worlds of Raj and Rita are separated not just by a moral chasm but by a real social one as well. A poster of Awara claims “Criminals are not born, they are made” emphasizing the heredity and environment debate on which the film is based. But in the end, protagonist’s elite ancestry points towards the need for maintenance of status quo in the
Raj Kapoor and *Awara* became so much a part of Russian folklore that a song ‘*Awara Hum*’ even entered the famous novelist Solzhenitsyn’s ‘Cancer Ward’ and can be found there in fulsomely Russified accents.

*Jagte Raho* (1954) was a satire on the society – depicting the corruption, hypocrisy, selfishness and unscrupulous callousness- with a certain amount of vehemence. The apartments and its residents symbolize the modern society, a structure of hypocrisy, with a suitable title which asks the sleeping society to keep awake. Thus, the contradictions of society – to what it really is and what it pretends to be – form the subject-matter of the film. The city in *Shree 420* acts as a representation of urban deceit and the state as a space of ambivalence, pessimism and decay is very noticeable.

Yet there is attraction for urban centres and metropolitans in films. The adoration for elite city lifestyle with fad for its fashions, signs of modernity like cars, clubs, pubs etc. shows that the post independence cinema was fascinated with the industrialization - urbanization model and other indicators of modernity. These characteristics were part of an incipient stage in which the seeds of globalization were sown by the state dominated by the urban bourgeoisie. This metropolitan aspiration to be associated with symbols of modernity also favoured the capitalist forces.

Kishore Valicha argues that Raj Kapoor used a stylistic that was a kind of neorealism within the constraints of commercial filmmaking. We can certainly see certain shades of neorealist elements in *Jagte Raho* when we see a deglamorised representation of images which are purposeful and meaningful in nature. Though the film has its own share of melodramatic moments but its sincerity in attacking a hypocritical society in an unconventional manner cannot be questioned. The film also questions the degraded position to which women are reduced by men. The patriarchal authority exhibited by the drunkard who is shamefully demanding and cruel towards his wife. His unrelenting attitude is exemplified by his repeated persuasion and posturing to reduce his wife as a mere puppet. Another instance of such an attitude is reflected by the gambler who is trying to steal
his wife’s bangles but questions her about her relation to the villager who had accidentally taken refuge in his house. The counterfeit currency was being printed in the basement of a hospital titled Daridra Narayan Sevashram. The name of the hospital when seen against the kind of nefarious activities in which the patrons and officials of the hospital are involved, is indicative of the ironical position such institutions are reduced to by the so called moral guardians of the society. The use of the child as a ‘moral eye’ opening towards the world was also suggestive of neorealist practice. The child not only sees the world in terms of black and white, right and wrong but he also opens villagers’ eye when he asks him to abandon his fear as he has not done anything wrong. In another poster of Boot Polish Raj Kapoor declares that in Awara he attempted to prove that vagabonds are not born, but are shaped in the slums of our modern cities, in the midst of grim poverty and wicked environment. Boot Polish graphically portrays the issue of impoverished children, their struggle for existence and their fight against organized begging.  

Jagte Raho shows the distance between the haves and the have-nots and the indignities experienced by the poor. The irony in the film can be seen in the form of innocent protagonist, who is mistaken as a thief while the residents of the apartment building, supposed moral upholders of law and order and quality of unlawful activities.  

Jagte Raho has been referred to as a ‘mock-realist’ film. But the fantasy-like ending of Jagte Raho in which everything is settled peacefully is an example of magic realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The protagonist in Awara and Shree 420 is a rebel against society. He is a victim of circumstances - resorts to criminal activities due to poverty and rejection of society. This element of protest and rejection is followed in Jagte Raho as well which was written and directed by IPTA’s stalwart Shombhu Mitra. Awara was bought and exhibited by Soviet authorities since it contained a strong anti-capitalist sentiment. Yet the antagonists are not capitalists or feudal elements but the ‘system’ in Raj Kapoor’s films.
Boot Polish (1954) has a cast which is mainly non-professional and even the professional elements too are so very well integrated with the entire structure of the film that they, at no point, threaten the simplicity and realist elements in the film. Boot Polish regrettably offers no answer to the tribulations of destitute children who are oppressed by mercenary, ruthless individuals and trained to beg for alms instead of being trained to earn a living. Apart from this, the film explores the poverty and hunger of the masses which was not only widely seen in those times but also quite common in today's India. In one of the scenes when child protagonist says: mujhe roz- roz bhukh lagti hai (I feel hungry every day), a character in the film replies: yeh hamare desh ki sabse badi kami hai (This is the biggest deficiency of our country) as if the natural process of hunger and its satisfaction is a sin or a crime! Boot Polish gives a direct social message need for a social change bringing some sort of equalitarianism to the poor and impoverished. At the same time, the total abdication by the state in fulfilling its responsibility of providing education and food to citizens is also shifted to people who have adopted the children. Raj Kapoor's cinema is a cinema of security, even if, momentarily, bringing joy and comfort to the audience. He realizes this sense of security by harmonizing tradition and modernity, social protest and maintenance of status quo, and realism and fantasy. Raj Kapoor views songs as a welcome prospect rather than a burdensome interference. He seems to have perceived the potential of the film song as a variety of modern folk music, the lyrics as a type of the poor man's poetry. Today sociologists have started to understand the importance of film songs in the popular culture of modern India.

Bimal Roy made a number of socially noteworthy films, with Do Bigha Zamin/ Two Acres of Land (1953) as the most significant of them all. It was based on the theme of a peasant being driven out of his land due to his indebtedness and how forces of industrialization deprive him of his ancestral land forever. Do Bigha Zamin's peasant's struggle against the avarice of the village moneylender and to redeem himself are well documented. It is a
sensitive study of an impoverished peasant family driven by poverty to the city, his dismal struggle against the forces of modernity and his passion to earn sufficient money to retrieve his mortgaged land from the clutches of a moneylender by pulling rickshaw on the streets of Calcutta. Though he is unable to save his land but the film ends on a hopeful note when they are shown moving towards a rising sun. In a way, film conforms to the project of nation building initiated by the post colonial government. Moreover, the commercial interests of producers and financiers did not let Bimal Roy to end the film on a pessimistic note. The changes made in Bimal Roy’s story to make happy ending in mid 1950s is similar to the situation in mid 1930s when Premchand’s story of Mill/Mazdoor was adapted according to the financiers of the film. Though the ruling class changed from white to brown sahibs but the identity of interests had not changed in colonial and post-colonial times. Film producers and financiers guided the film’s scripts as investment and recovery of money were guiding factors. Premchand felt dissatisfied with his small stint in the film industry when he got involved in the making of the film titled Mill/Mazdoor. Film was banned in most parts of India as it dealt with the issue of labour-capital conflict. The President of the Bombay Mill Owners Association himself sat on the Censor Board to ensure that the film was proscribed in Western India. When Premchand was writing for this film, he was also writing the novel Godan where he reflects on this theme. The theme was specifically unsafe in those times following the two great General Strikes of 1928-29. Premchand’s short-lived association with cinema industry, his subsequent disappointment with film industry and the hypocrisy of Ajanta Cinetone Company about ‘socially relevant’ narratives was reflective of the dealings of the business of cinema. Where ‘profit motive’ and commercial interest guided the production, the power of capital in determining investment was crucial.

The film was based on a story called Rickshawala written by Salil Chowdhry. Do Bigha Zamin was undoubtedly a serious cinema or the socially conscious cinema, a kind of breakaway from, and a questioning of
conventions and traditions of earlier cinema.\textsuperscript{117} In many ways, Bimal Roy’s \textit{Do Bigha Zamin}, showed the initial impact of neorealist cinema in its simplicity of technique and in its authentic depiction of the tribulations of the poor of the countryside. In spite of the occurrence of the customary share of songs, an attempted rape and a number of sentimental situations as well as a miraculous recuperation, it managed to encourage a more intelligent understanding from the viewers.\textsuperscript{118} The film was not only appreciated in India but also received rare reviews from international film critics. It indicates Bimal Roy’s concern for the severe rural dilemma which has existed in India for many years. The impact of De Sica is present approximately all over – the location shooting in Calcutta, the happy little boot-black boy who befriends the peasant’s son and the companionship of the slum-dwellers frequently reverberate \textit{Bicycle Thieves} and \textit{Shoeshine}. The tough existence of the \textit{rickshaw coolies} is depicted with brutal realism and the father-son bond handled with a simple purity and warmth.\textsuperscript{119} The father-son relationship in the film is also reminiscent of the same relationship shared by the father-son duo of \textit{Bicycle Thieves}.

International film critics also referred it as a neorealist film and praised it in glowing terms.

Hailed as one of the first Indian neorealist films, \textit{Two Acres of Land} succeeds in presenting an unromanticized view of certain aspect of Indian life... makes a genuinely compassionate statement on behalf of the poor and dispossessed.\textsuperscript{120}

It was claimed as a stirring, humane and touching film, in the same class as De Sica’s \textit{Bicycle Thieves} which it powerfully resembled in subject and handling. The understanding of depravity and empathy for individuals who have to squander their lives in its shadow, it was an excellent contribution to the films of ordinary people.\textsuperscript{121} In it realism blends logically with sentiment, and the natural influence of De Sica’s \textit{Shoeshine} and \textit{Bicycle Thieves} is noticeable.\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Two Acres of Land} pleads for the ignored and oppressed of all times.\textsuperscript{123} It was contended that the vital aspect is its denunciation of the
appalling poverty to which so many millions of Asians are condemned and the indictment is all the more effectual because it is made implicitly within the terms of a intensely stirring human document. The theme of universality of was acknowledged and was described as the misfortune of a gentle poor man attempting to sustain the self-esteem and significance of his life against intense poverty and an economic arrangement which favours the prosperous against the underprivileged, the dominant against the feeble and the well-fed against the famished. Undoubtedly, the honesty of Do Bigha Zamin lies in its theme- in its justification of the struggles of the exploited against injustice and tyranny of the exploiters.

It won critical acclaim from the Western nations, the USSR and China and received an award in Karlovy Vary for “Social Progress” at Cannes Film Festival in Venice. It was considered remarkable because it was the first of its type from India, a new country in the political sense, and at this initial stage of independence an Indian filmmaker had made a savagely gloomy film. It’s true that film was pessimistic in its portrayal but the reality of Indian situation imparted it such a character.

Regarding the contribution of Bimal Roy to cinematography Shyam Benegal, a noted filmmaker observes:

Bimal Roy’s work stands out as a pioneer... in ... source of light photography that is, taking great care to reveal where the light source is to light up a set or place – whether it is night or day. Which suddenly brings in a new element on celluloid – it suddenly connects one to reality. You can tell what time this situation takes place... The time of day and night was important to him- which gave you a seminal view. You are going seminally into an area and link the narrative to reality.

Do Bigha Zamin was criticized by some Indian film critics who were unable to digest such an unglamorous and realistic film. It was called as a poorly directed film that could have become a classic of the screen if only Bimal Roy had used his imagination a bit more and not forgotten the importance which the emotional sequences badly required. But the critics
seem to overlook the fact that the film was attempting to break free from the over-dramatization of the emotional situations. In a way, it was trying not to exploit the emotional response but to present the story without getting much subjective about it. But some Indian critics were full of applause for *Do Bigha Zamin* and called it a type of film to be shown to the world as one of our best films. Bimal Roy has presented the perennially appealing idea, portrayed in a well-knit script on the celluloid, investing the story with radiant human touches which gives life to the characters and creates in *Do Bigha Zamin* a document of life. The authenticity of the real locations was also embellished by the fact that a number of scenes were shot in public places like the scene of Nirupa Roy coming out of Howrah station, Calcutta and the scene where protagonist and his son walk on the streets of Calcutta. These scenes not only exhibit camaraderie between a father and a son who are in distress but also points out the problems of daily existence and life.

Balraj Sahni closely observed peasants and rickshaw pullers so as to learn their mannerisms. He went to the colony of milkmen in Bombay to study and understand their way of working and the kind of talk they indulged in. He also travelled in third class compartments to watch how the peasants entered into a compartment of a train and went out of it. He also visited office of the rickshaw-puller’s union in Calcutta and with their help, learnt the technique of rickshaw pulling. Despite all these efforts, Balraj felt that he would not be able to do justice to the role. But when he narrated the story of his film to a rickshaw-puller, he identified with that story and said that he had come to the city to get his own land released from the clutches of a moneylender but even after fifteen years he has been unable to do so. This motivated him to portray that character. This nexus of moneylenders, zamindars and state was responsible for his plight.

One of the most famous scenes of the film was the race between the protagonist carrying a fat passenger on rickshaw and the horse-driven carriage. That fat man, with a sadistic sense of humour, promises the protagonist that he will give him ten rupees if he wins the race. He complies
and breaks his back to win the race for the sum of ten rupees which will ultimately go in the savings for releasing the land from the clutches of the moneylender. K.A. Abbas recollects that Bimal Roy wanted to employ a professional rickshaw-puller to “double” for the artist in the long shots, but Balraj did not agree to it. He did it realistically almost killing himself in the race, but achieved a sequence that was unforgettable as a victory of realistic performance. It was a presentation of the social reality of the life of the subjugated and the deprived humankind.¹³²

*Newspaper Boy* (1955, Malayalam) was a distinct precursor to *Pather Panchali*.¹³³ It was acclaimed as a neorealist experiment. The director and production unit had no previous film-making experience.¹³⁴ It was made by a group of committed students headed by P. Ramdas and succeeded in portraying the grim poverty of the characters with sensitivity and simplicity.¹³⁵ In a way, it was also a critique of the state which is unable to provide food and security to its citizens.

Challenges

Usually, post-colonial Indian cinema depicts a bourgeois colonialism with its caste, religion, class, and regional prejudice.¹³⁶ In other words, in post-independence cinema, the processes of dislocation and reconstruction can be narrated through frames of class, caste, and region and socio-religious community. Moreover, it portrays how the characters’ movement in to the area of criminality and peripheral marginal status dramatizes the ‘social flux’. This is evident in films like *Chinnamul*, *Aware*, *Do Bigha Zamin*, *Devdas*, *Pyaasa*, *Pather Panchali*, *Megha Dhaka Tara*, *Subarnarekha*, *Komal Gandhar* etc.¹³⁷ The social films of the 1950s focused on theme of economic deprivation and déclassé situations. The emphasis on issue of employment, of need whether for food, clothing, shelter, education and medicine is seen in a number of films. The narrative divests characters of social markings or informs us about them when they have lost their meaning. By portraying characters in this
manner, the film emphasizes the ‘symbolic leveling imperatives’ of an ‘embryonic democratic society’.¹³⁸

Some of the social processes activated after independence need to be recalled here. Self-contained agricultural communities were increasingly drawn in to the periphery, if not the vortex, of the industrialization and urbanization process. With the establishment of large new townships, often displacing agricultural populations and many rural professions losing relevance, migrant labour came together from many regions, religions, languages, customs and habits for centuries isolated from each other. The enlargement of existing towns and the growth of industry had the same effect. The workplace tended to become more secular and modern, if insecure.¹³⁹

The problem of modernity and tradition, religion and science, old and new, east and west – expressions of the same basic conflict – have been predictably central to the Indian cinema.¹⁴⁰ Modernization was one of the big challenges which India was facing after independence. India had to overcome its feudal set up and join the path of modern economic development. Nehru preferred a socialist path of modernization. Princes and zamindars were to be dispossessed. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel successfully integrated the princely states into the Union despite some desperate efforts on their part to maintain their independence and sovereignty. The Indian National Congress was broadly against the feudal elements yet it was far from being a revolutionary or a radical body. It was reformist in nature and its speed of reform was to be piecemeal and gradual and its manner of reforming India consensual in nature.¹⁴¹

The increase in the size of the electorate was a challenge for Nehru as last elections held earlier in 1946 under the Government of India act, 1935 had 40 million as the electorate which increased to five times, that is, 200 million in the elections of 1951-52, because of the introduction of universal adult suffrage. Moreover, it was a transformative experience for the downtrodden to gain some political rights for themselves. But in hindsight one
can say that it benefited Congress as it was the party which led India during the freedom struggle.\textsuperscript{142}

Another issue was secularism. The introduction of the secular in to a society can’t be a fractional experience, revolving around religion. It is a constituent of bigger transformation involving chiefly the introduction of democracy, but also of new technologies, and appearance of a new social group, the middle class, which breaks away from earlier social identities.\textsuperscript{143} Due to the lack of the application of human rights and social justice, a modernized state can turn into simply a new oppressive state: and where it appropriates the kind of nationalism which creates ghettos, it becomes a Fascist state.\textsuperscript{144}

The industrialization process while it disrupts traditional life generates demands for justice and the emancipation of the individual. The presence of the tradition will provide the strength to tackle the hazards that the new might bring with it. The concern should be with the individual - his dignity, humiliation degradation and his final reclamation of prestige within the dynamics of social transformation emerging out of an interaction between both the forces of tradition and of modernity. These forces are connected to each other and symbolize trauma, suffering and also hope.\textsuperscript{145}

In this period of socio-economic upheaval, the question of economic development was the primary after independence. The launching of First Five Year Plan in 1951 aimed at resolving the immediate crisis situation following the end of the Second Word War.\textsuperscript{146} The Second Five Year Plan based on Nehru-Mahalnobis model aimed at rapid development of heavy capital industries in India, chiefly in the public sector.\textsuperscript{147} At the same time, labour intensive small and cottage industries for the production of consumer goods was also promoted.\textsuperscript{148} The thrust on capital goods would help in solving the actual problem of unemployment. Mahalnobis argued that “Unemployment is chronic because of (the unavailability of) capital goods\textsuperscript{149} and it occurs “only when means of production become idle”.\textsuperscript{150} The state claimed that it would
create more employment opportunities and would alleviate poverty. But bureaucratic and political corruption and inefficiency coupled with oppression of caste/class-based social relationships of domination and subordination, communalism\textsuperscript{151} and violation of fundamental rights of weaker sections served the interests of dominant sections of society and the desired goal could not be achieved.

The films concerned with social and economic injustice, poverty, social discrimination against women, centering on caste distinctions and conflicts, are preoccupied with contemporaneous discord between tradition and modernity.\textsuperscript{152} It also reflects the filmmakers’ desire to express problems and probe issues that assist in defining the historical context in which he finds himself and in relation to which one can take a socially relevant stand.\textsuperscript{153} In the post-colonial Indian context, policy makers had to select between the different patterns of socio-economic development defined in binaries of capitalism/socialism, industrial/agricultural or artisanal, urban/rural and individual interests/community values. The adopted path of development was a combination of a Soviet type central planning and a complex bureaucratic licensing regime. There was an emphasis on industrialization - urbanization and emphasis on higher education forces and institutions that were closely aligned to the interests of urban bourgeois. While the forces connected with the Communist Party of India attempted to encourage realism in the arts to initiate social change.\textsuperscript{154}

Another important feature of some films was the emphasis on education and its possible role in social mobility. \textit{Awara} typifies this and how the hero’s abandon of schooling leads him into criminal activities. \textit{Boot Polish} ends on a positive note when two destitute child protagonists are adopted by a well to do family and enrolled in the \textit{Navbharat} (New India) school. \textit{Do Bigha Zamin} and \textit{Pather Panchali} also emphasize the education of children.\textsuperscript{155} The use of degrees like B.A., B.Sc. on film posters demonstrate that cinema in its initial years required the legitimacy that only education could come forth with.\textsuperscript{156} The portrayal of reality was expected to reflect the contradictions in
the society. Some filmmakers like K.A. Abbas, Bimal Roy, Mehboob Khan, Chetan Anand etc. made films which reflected their belief in transformatory potential of cinema.

State patronage to Arts

After independence, state took up on the responsibility of organizing cultural activity. The last All India conference of IPTA was held in Delhi in 1957-58. The establishment of Sangeet Natak Academy in Delhi in 1953 as the national academy for the performing arts was to give patronage and conserve tradition. This made for radically different dimensions in cultural movement. Firstly, artists and performers received the direct patronage of the state, exercised by the cultural officialdom established solely for the reason in the capital of the new nation. Secondly, the regional was subsumed or appropriated resolutely within the nation. Folk forms were viewed as ‘rural derivations and deviations of the all encompassing sanskritic tradition’ from which they had emerged and into which they could, under the new regime, flow again. It was in this context as against the former IPTA aims and attitude that ‘folk’ performance was now to be studied and preserved.

The idea of establishment of a national drama institute gathered moment when a steering committee of forty members came together for a seminar in March 1958. It was V. Raghvan’s paper on ‘Sanskrit Drama and Performance’ which elicited the most debate, for Sanskrit drama had become a subject of state concern, not only as the source of all past forms but also as providing direction for all further advancement. Generally, the concern with finding an indigenous theatrical idiom exhibited little concern for reaching out to the ‘masses.” The attention now was much more on combining the artistic forms of the people into mainstream national culture. In 1959, National School of Drama (NSD) was established in Delhi, an attempt at centralization of theatre.

Informally, the impulses generated by IPTA were pursued by writers and playwrights functioning in diverse regional cultures. Lok Natak, folk theatre, had certainly become a component of the theatre vocabulary and
could encourage a play such as Dharamvir Bharti’s Andha Yug (1954); the ‘masses’ could also inhabit the stage, as in Habib Tanvir’s Agra Bazar (produced first in 1954 and published in 1979) and later in Tanvir’s production of Sanskrit plays such as Mitti Ki Gari, a Hindi adaptation of Shudraka’s Mricchakatikam (The Little Claycart, 1958).¹⁵⁹

The theatre of a few decades after independence was propelled by a faith, not yet completely crushed, in the idea of India, while probing for a culture which could be defined as Indian. The decades of 1960s and 1970s brought a new political consciousness in many areas as it became progressively clearer that the fruits of independence were limited to a tiny urban and rural class. Unemployment, food shortages and high inflation led to countrywide instability. Government’s failure to implement land reforms resulted in armed agrarian resistance in numerous parts of the nation. Even people traditionally considered as quietist, such as, teachers, doctors, engineers and civil servants also dissented. The enemy was not so simple to identify on the national level as it had been in the glory days of IPTA, and it was difficult to forge unity, yet there was an increase in theatre movement during this period.¹⁶⁰

The theatre- makers of the late 1960s and 1970s had seen their experiments with folk forms as entrenched in the concerns of the urban middle-class and thus embedded in a modern sensibility. Now the medium was being exploited to such an extent that folk theatre was being increasingly exhausted as a basis of strength for the urban stage. The state organized ‘festivals’ celebrated Indian culture, of which a major chunk was covered by folk performers, sponsored by the Indian government in 1980s.¹⁶¹ During the era of globalization or contemporary era cultural forms are commoditized and are used for consumption so as to make maximum gains out of them financially. G.P. Deshpande, famous playwright and critic, argued for recognizing plurality of the linguist and theatrical idioms as every form was exclusively significant.¹⁶² Any type of homogenization and categorization into stringently defined restricted genres would damage its unique characteristics.
Similar idea can be applied to the consumption patterns in today's world where Mac-donandization and coca-colonization is a grave threat to reduce cultures into homogenized wholes.

Debate on National Cinema

A Film Enquiry Committee was set up in 1949 under the chairmanship of S.K. Patil. The committee was critical of the way the film industry operated. Its organization, financing, selection and handling of themes, availability of trained personal its conduct and the supply of goods and services. The committee recommended that a certain proportion of the entertainment tax be kept aside to establish a Film Finance Corporation to give cheap finance to filmmaker and an institution be created to train actors and technicians.

In the 1950s, country's media debated the creation of a national cinema and the role of the government in its growth and development. The government imposed censorship and heavy taxation on the expanding industry. Some of the policies of the government led to the boycott of All India Radio by film music producers.

The industry felt resentment at government's policies. In 1960s the government established Film Finance Corporation (which merged with the Motion Picture Export Association in 1980 to form the National Film Development Corporation, for financing and exporting films). In 1961, Film Institute in Pune and National Film Archives of India (NFAI) were also set up. Later television was added and it became Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). They became academic and training grounds for budding filmmakers. In 1973, the Directorate of Film Festivals was set up to organize an annual International Film Festival.

These developments gave a boost to young filmmakers who wanted to present a new film language. The availability of finance by the government and training of young recruits at Film institute became important for changes in cinema of 1970s and 1980s. The setting up of Film Enquiry Committee in
1949 led to establishment of three major film institutions - Film Institute, Film Finance Corporation and Film Archives. The committee also recommended formation of the National Film Awards to honour remarkable work in cinema. The awards were institute in 1953 and first presentation made in 1954. In 1952, the Central Board of Film Censors was set up in Bombay with regional offices in Madras and Calcutta.

**State Objectives and Film Censorship**

Nehru was critical of British policy of discrediting India and carrying on imperialist propaganda in foreign films which were exhibited in India. Nehru was in favour of state censorship of films and felt that to what extent it should be done should be discussed and argued and then to arrive at some conclusion. Though Nehru was not biased against cinema yet he did not feel that Indian cinema was very good. The other political leaders too did not show any positive attitude towards cinema. Some post independence films like *Bhuli Nai* (1948) and *Forty Two* (1949) of Heman Gupta based India’s struggle for independence were banned and not considered suitable on the ground of being violent it appeared as if the censors believed that the British were still ruling India.

Nehru laid a lot of emphasis on planning. Thrust to agriculture and also industrialization was given. He also argued for machine making industry to achieve self sufficiency and decrease foreign reliance. Nehru talked about increasing production and productivity through mechanization. He also said that wealth thus generated should be equitably distributed in society and should not be concentrated in a few hands. The caste system, communalism, regionalism and linguistic barriers created barriers among people and it was necessary to get rid of them in order to unify as a nation. He said that religions and provincial unity of India should be maintained and divisive politics should be kept at bay to unify India. The second five year plan recognized the significance of industrial development or India’s long term growth. He was ready to seek help from foreign nation but he desired to
generate resources internally and stressed the importance of the ‘cooperative movement and reliance on self-help’.  

But such ideals remained wistful thinking. The profound disparities of income and profit obstinately persisted. Planning contributed to the beliefs of social equality but not to its real accomplishment. The poor remained as vulnerable as ever. The maintenance of a huge planning and development initiatives needed funds. The premature move from agriculture to industrial development in the Second Five Year plan left a legacy of a feeble and dependent agrarian structure to hinder overall growth. Moreover, one-sixth of the finance for the Second Five Year plan was provided by a group of western nations and the remaining of required resources was raised through domestic borrowing.

The notion of ‘Nehruvian consensus’ was propagated which has three main characteristics. The first was the supreme requirement to fight India’s poverty and free it of its economic backwardness and dependence on other highly developed industrial countries by creating a self-sufficient economy based on import-substitution and speedy industrialization. The second was the establishment of India as a modern society faithful to the principles of freedom, equality and democracy within a secular framework. The third was a foreign policy based on non-alignment, as between the rival East-West power blocs of the Cold war world, further sustained by resistance to imperialism and the avoidance of any military and political alliances or economic relations that might diminish India once more to a quasi-colonial situation. The critics felt that this ‘Nehruvian consensus’ was not shared by the ordinary people, outside government circles and younger generation of politicians who polished their skills in a different social milieu and who were much closer to the ‘vernacular’ politics of caste, community and region within their provincial turfs.

Mahalanobis model’s priority to development of large-scale heavy industry and inadequate attention to the financing of agriculture brought no encouraging results. Moreover, two successive monsoon failures in 1965 and
1966 brought northern India on the brink of mass famine in 1966-67. The result was resorting to Green Revolution. Though it increased food production and food productivity but it also caused regional imbalances, lopsided development, widening of rich-poor divide and other catastrophic ecological consequences in form of salinity of soil, desertification, and ill-effects of fertilizers on human health.

There was no progress in the position of the film medium which remained equally vulnerable to bureaucratic spite and susceptible to governmental pressures in the new epoch. The latest rhetoric about freedom, modernism and progress shown by the national leaders with free-will were not relevant to film censorship machinery which persisted to suffer under the gloom of its colonial legacy. The Indian Cinematograph Act 1952 (which continued the pre-censorship of films in independent India) was a calculated risk in view of the incorporation of the Right to Freedom of Expression in the Constitution [Article 19(1) (a)]. It was taken care of by amending the constitution by ‘First Amendment’ which stipulated that censorship laws could be framed by the Executive in the guise of reasonable restrictions on the press(and other media of expression) in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, security of State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency, morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence. The Central Board of Film Censors was created. The centralization of film censorship was against the spirit of federalism enshrined in constitution of India. The masters of independent India wished to maintain a tight control over the medium.

The constitutional authority of film censorship was not discussed at length by the judiciary until 1970. During the well-known Tale of Four Cities litigation, K.A.Abbas, the filmmaker, raised four crucial issues for courts to think: (i) that pre-censorship goes against the right to freedom of speech and expression (ii) that even if it were a legal restraint on the freedom, it must be used on very clear-cut principles without any scope for arbitrary act, (iii) that there must be logical time limit fixed for the verdict of the censoring powers.
and (iv) that the petition should lie with a court or an autonomous tribunal and not the government. The (iii) and (iv) issues were accepted making film censorship a time-bound and justiciable subject. With reference to (i) and (ii) the constitutional legitimacy of film censorship was upheld on grounds of reasonableness and full justification. Judiciary commented that the test of reasonableness, wherever prescribed should be applied to each individual statute impugned, and no abstract standard or general pattern of reasonableness can be laid down as applicable to all cases. The Supreme Court stated emphatically that censorship in India has full justification in the area of exhibition of cinema films. One should not generalise about other kinds of speech and expression here, for each such fundamental right has a different content and significance. The judgment ends with the statement that censorship imposed on the creation and exhibition is in the interest of society. 183

Thus, we can say that the Italian neorealism influenced Indian cinema in the beginning but later Indian cinema developed its own genre. Neorealism’s techniques and concerns were rooted in Indian reality which had poverty, inequality, unemployment, caste and class conflict, regional and religious divide, patriarchal oppression and overarching authority of the state, colonial as well as post-colonial, which were felt by Indian filmmakers. They borrowed from its stylistics and also tried to adapt and modify to suit their own styles. It also provided a progressive look to their films. The contribution of PWA and IPTA in the various stages was substantial. It led to a purposeful cinema contributing to the socio-economic, political and cultural concerns of the society. The works of Bimal Roy, Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Guru Dutt, Mrinal sen, Raj Kapoor etc. tried to build up on the legacy of V. Shantaram, K.A. Abbas, Chetan Anand etc. and also gave a meaningful direction to Indian cinema.
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12. Ashish Rajyadhyaksha has dealt with this idea in a lucid manner.


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20. Sudhi Pradhan ed; *Marxist…* Pp. 132-134 Bengal, Punjab, Delhi, Bombay, Mysore, Uttar Pradesh, Mangalore, Malabar, Central Provinces and Berar, Andhra, Hyderabad and Madras were represented on the All India Committee and there were organizing Provincial Committees in Bengal, Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra, Mysore, Malabar and Madras.


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