Chapter 2

Historical prospective of Hindi Parallel cinema

Parallel cinema started before the name came to it. It became a new wave cinema, drawn from the European new wave then an art cinema and some bigger person said that it is parallel cinema that means it runs parallel to the mainstream cinema (Chidananda Das Gupta 1983). “Parallel cinema the term was coined by ‘who exactly’ but by this journalist who were trying to give some identity to this kind of cinema, so it went through different terms, it started as new cinema, art cinema then it became middle level cinema then it became parallel cinema, and parallel cinema seems to be a term that made sense” says Govind Nihalani (Interview: 2013).

In The History of Hindi Cinema by Sanjiv Srivastava, (2006), he talks about “The Indian New Wave” as a specific movement in Indian cinema, which is known for its serious content, realism and naturalism. And with a keen eye on the social-political climate of the times, it has started when the movement for independence was in the process. There was a conflict between the new ways of thinking and the old ways of thinking of the era, because post independence, there was a motive bringing social changes everywhere and that made a huge impact on the parallel cinema movement.

“In the search for a difference, Ritwik Ghatak, Bengal’s and India’s outstanding film maker after Ray, was sometimes enthroned as the alternative Guru. His films are about the struggles of the middle class and are laden with nostalgia for undivided Bengal, particularly East Bengal which became Pakistan at Independence (and later Bangladesh)” (Gupta : 44). In Omar Ahmed’s “Indian Parallel Cinema- Introduction” (2007: Web), the unexpected commercial success of a film like Bhuvan Shome (1969) which performed tremendously well for a low
budget art film, Blaze sensed that the emergence of a middle class audience versed in the language of European cinema could potentially evolve into a lucrative niche market. And the hunger for the art film was qualified in the success of *Ankur* (1974), cementing the development of a parallel cinema with which both Benegal and Shabana Azmi would become synonymous icons. However, the conditions for a new realist cinema spearheaded by Benegal were in no way a sudden phenomenon.

“I make films where I relate to the world or to the people. I look at the world differently that’s why in my films I am always concern about gender, for me the woman has to be equal, in my world women are kept dependent; they are equal in every way; sometimes women are much stronger than the man but the man wants to look at her as a victim as that will make her weak but I don’t look at the world like that. In my opinion women and man should be made equal and equality necessarily doesn’t mean competitive but it can be complimentary,” says Shyam Benegal (Interview: 2013).

The core argument for an alternative mode of cinematic address had originally been touted by the IPTA, a leftist theatre organization that found many of its members actively involved in using film as an ideological instrument. However, the state’s subservience to Hollywood imports and a reluctance to heed the advice outlined in a 1951 report by the *S.K Patil Film Inquiry Committee* delayed the inevitable emergence of an indigenous parallel cinema.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1994) say the 1951 report highlighted “the shift from the studio system to independent entrepreneurship” whilst also recommending “major state investment in film production, the setting up of a film finance corporation, a film institute and archives.” And the monopolisation of the distribution and exhibition network by the major film making hub in Bombay would have had an influence on why exactly the report was ignored as the
recommendation for state investment would have raised concerns amongst many of the major producers who were not willing to share a market in which certain films would have favorable support from the government. State sponsored cinema even today tends to provoke a strong reaction amongst some directors who argue that such a situation in which the political values of the state and those of the filmmaker co-exist is problematic in that the two will inevitably come to a consensus, thus diluting and compromising the ideological purity of the film’s initial aims.

This might be true of countries in which the ruling government does make use of the ideological state apparatus like cinema as a means of circulating dominant values but the films that have been financed either partially or fully by the NFDC arguably share a leftist perspective that runs contrary to much of the conservative rhetoric espoused by consecutive Indian governments.

“One of the reasons that is identified for the decline of parallel cinema is that television uses the same actors, technique, same theme, similar treatment realistic dialogue delivery for instance. You get all that at home and this was a different kind of cinema, you need to go out of your home to see it. Then home video came, the economy became such that the making of the film became expensive. The media support that we use to take earlier vanished. The mainstream guys took all the media guys, they used to feed them well, buy them drinks, sometimes they took them to locations. If they shoot in Kashmir, they will take them there to cover the shoot. It’s part of their business and one of the biggest thing that happened was because of the films that deserved the accolade that’s been created, they got from the audience for their such good shots. Many people attempted this kind of film and many of the stories came from good literature from regional cinema as well but the filmmakers who made these films are not taking any names. Unfortunately, fell short over the control of the craft,” says Govind Nihalani (Interview: 2013).
The film finance corporation (FFC) was established by Nehru with a remit that centered on supporting good quality films through financial assistance in the form of low interest loans. Admittedly, at first the FFC initially aligned themselves with established directors in the film industry, backing in particular Satyajit Ray. “The Film Finance Corporation’s policy of funding the off-beat film maker, announced with a flourish by the granting of the first unsecured loan for Mrinal Sen’s Hindi film Bhuvan Shome (1969), became the main impulse behind this fresh effort to discover the essence of a new cinema for India” (Gupta 22).

Another equally significant factor often overlooked when contextualising parallel cinema is the decision taken by the government in 1971 to reject the renewal of a “5 year contract for the import of Hollywood films.” (Prasad 1998: Web) The dislodging of Hollywood’s domination was useful in opening up a new area of indigenous cinema as it meant Indian filmmakers no longer had to face the indignity of subservience. Even in the light of today’s American hegemony, India is one of the few nations in which the domestic box office each year is made up of home grown films.

“There was a reaction against the existing mainstream cinema. Mainstream cinema wants a bigger star cast, we don’t want, we will go to the streets and pick up our actors and other things. So if they want big starts we don’t want big stars; they want fantasy, we don’t want fantasy; mainstream wants big sets we don’t want them; we will shoot at the real locations; mainstream wants six songs in a picture we don’t need songs; and most importantly, mainstream wants a happy ending, we don’t need a happy ending. We want open ends, questions, enquiry, criticism. We don’t need happy endings. Life is not happy ending, that kind of reaction happened,” says Govind Nihalani (Interview: 2013).

It was in the nineties, according to Omar Ahmed, that Indian cinema started to change yet
again, with both the family film and image of the romantic hero revived in the films of new stars like Shahrukh Khan and Salman Khan. Today, the *NFDC* continues to support Indian art films and still finances a number of films year after year. However, the growth of independent production companies, the rise in cinema screens and the dominance of television have obscured the role of the *NFDC*. Even the leading light of parallel cinema, Shyam Benegal turned to *UTV Motion Pictures*, a newly established international production company, for the production and distribution of his 2008 comedy film *Welcome to Sajjanpur*. No equivalent art-film movement as that of parallel cinema exists today but the new wave of film makers including Ram Gopal Varma, Vishal Bhardwaj and Anurag Kashyap certainly acknowledge the realist aesthetic of auteurs like Benegal, Nihalani and Shahani on their own work.

What we observe now is the synthesis of parallel cinema and the mainstream cinema. It certainly has some good results - what is behind the parallel cinema is the kind of sensibility and the kind of intellectual formation of ideas that supported that cinema. It’s the way of engaging with the reality, with one’s life, a way of perceiving the reality by raising questions. It was not everything about identifying problems and offering solutions. “One thing that happened because of these films was that people started saying, now we are telling them the problem, what’s the solution. We don’t have the solution that’s why the problem is so complex and it exists, then some filmmakers claim we don’t know the solution, our job is to highlight the problem, you find the answer. This is my point of view that should be clearly stated,” says Govind Nihalani (Interview: 2013).

From the multiple perspectives that are highlighted above, one could present the following points to be the predominant reasons for the dynamic Emergence of the “Hindi Parallel Cinema.” They are as under:
• A movement of a renewal of an aesthetics and vitality of themes in Indian cinema in the pre- and post independence India.

• To make the Indian cinema known to the outside world.

• The need to fill the aesthetic vacuum in the films of 1960’s and 70’s.

• Aspiration to refuse to follow the mainstream cinema and to work outside the commercial structure.

• The attempt in the 70’s was not completely new and such attempts have been made by the likes of Guru Dutt, Satyajit Raj, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Bimal Roy, and other directors who were also ignored by the Hindi film industry for a long time, who later became the main inspiration of the new Indian cinema directors.

To Keval J. Kumar, ‘What is termed the ‘New Wave’ in the history of Indian cinema is not the ‘nouvelle vogue’ of French cinema with which Bresson, Godard and other experimental filmmakers were associated in the fifties and sixties. In the Indian context, the terms are rather loosely used to describe the deliberately realist and non-commercial style of film making that sometimes experiments with form and content. Other terms used to talk about this cinema are ‘alternative’, ‘parallel, and even ‘another’ cinema’.

(Mass Communication in India: 133)

In An introduction to parallel cinema by Omar Ahmed, Prof. Media and Film Studies, he shares his opinion that most academics and scholars are in agreement that 1969 is probably an accurate starting point in terms of pinpointing the beginnings of parallel cinema with Mrinal Sen’s FDC financed Bhuvan Shome. However, the end of the movement is far more problematic to isolate as the NFDC (National Film Development Corporation) continues to support
indigenous and emerging filmmakers in terms of financial support. Though key film makers of the parallel cinema movement including Mrinal Sen are no longer active, exceptions exist in the form of Shyam Benegal.

In an article entitled “The Demise of Parallel Cinema,” by Rishabh Shrivastava published in the *Viewspaper: The voice of the Youth (2008)*, he talks about how after India’s Independence, the Indian cinema’s main theme became post colonial issues like poverty, illiteracy and unjustified social systems. Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, V Shantaram and Sohrab Modi were the few directors who made socially relevant movies. In his article he also spoke about how after the emergency that was imposed during that time created more frustration in the lives of the people.

- Suppression of civil liberties and subsequently, a Constitutional breakdown which led to the emergence kind of addresses the growing frustrations of the Indians by completely deviating itself from the ‘feel good’ mainstream movies. Thus the parallel cinema came into existence.

- The birth of parallel cinema is also attributed to the various film schools that produced many educated filmmakers, who felt responsible for the cause of this new genre of cinema.

- The trend was witnessed in all parts of the country with names like Shyam Benegal, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Budhyadeb Das Gupta, Basu Chatterjee and many others. The movies like *Interview, Ankur, Aakrosh* captured the mood of an ordinary Indian. This new wave had created a great impact in the society but with the changing times, parallel cinema has lost out to commercial films. He feels that the demise of parallel cinema is one of the many bad things that happened to India. Few of the best directors like MS Sathyu, Govind Nihalani, Saeed Mirza, Shyam Benegal are on the wane.
He also pointed out some factors which are responsible for the death of the “New Wave”.

- The situation is rather bleak for the lover of serious and meaningful cinema. The filmmakers who make serious films have failed to make the cut with TRP-driven television channels.
- Ironically, the stakes have seldom been higher for major players in the Hindi film world and the losses steeper for lovers of serious cinema. But then, the population of this section is scanty.
- The films nowadays cater to multiplex audience and they are bound to make a film which sells, no matter even if it is rubbish.
- Even Mahesh Bhatt says that contrary to the assumption that people want good cinema, they don’t. Even if they get it for free, they don’t watch it. Even Doordarshan, where profit is not the main motive, does not want art house cinema. It is a battle for the eyeballs, a battle for bums on the seat. It is pure and simple economics, no art.
- The tastes of audiences have changed and a filmmaker who wants to draw attention to some serious subject finds no takers. This has resulted in the loss of space in a rural/semi-urban Indian in the cinema.

In an interview with the actress, Shabana Azmi by Ritusmita Biswas (2008) TWF, Bollywood Trade News Network, Azmi states that “the myth 'Parallel cinema is dead' is not true at all. On the contrary, new breeds of directors are trying their hands at a new genre of realistic cinema that hitherto was not being attempted. My favourites are Kaizad Gustad, Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair and of course, Sudhir Mishra. They speak a language through their films that the average urban guy can relate to. They are also targeting an international audience. In fact, the
Brand India now needs such filmmakers who will free the international audience from the stereotypes with which they associate India, i.e. poverty, fanaticism, etc. We notice a welcome change in the ‘blurring of the line’ between commercial films and the traditional parallel cinema. The commercial movie has finally broken away from the typical stories of family drama or boy-meets-girl kind of romance. This is a welcome change from the perspective of mainstream films. In the future, I envision Indian cinema to be more realistic, yet, sustaining the entertainment value associated with the commercial movie”. With such a global take on “the presence” of parallel cinema in India and its growing demand in the world market, actress Shabana Azmi leads us “on” on a new frame of mind to look at Indian parallel cinema “of” the time.

The distinctive role and contribution of technicality and advanced processes of processing a film is another major change that took place in the late 20th century. It was a break away from the usual ways in which scenes were usually launched forth before the audiences. Enhanced music and visuals adopted by the filmmakers represented cinema in a new and active light. The upsurge of newer technical facilities supplemented hugely to the ways in which parallel cinema and the serious issues and social realities they portrayed before and for the masses created a great effect. So it is a fundamental point to discuss here a bit about the importance and the contributions of new changes in particular, in the technical aspects that also led to the growth of the Indian Parallel Cinema. Johnny Wingstedt studied the narrative music, visuals and meaning in film using Halliday’s (1978) metafunctions of communication as a starting point. And two short film scenes from the movie Jaws and The Secret of My Success were examined with a focus on the intermodal relationships of music and image. The examples illustrate how musical and visual expressions combine to form multimodal statements where the whole is certainly different than the sum of the parts. The article gives a closer look at some of
the functions of narrative media music, music used for narrative purposes in film, television and computer games, etc. and critically discussed how meaning is achieved in the interplay of music and image in those two short movie-scenes.

Narrative media music is becoming one of the largest sources of musical experience in our daily lives. Even if this kind of music tends to be transparent and is often processed by the audience on an unreflected level, it seems to actively contribute to how we make meaning from a multimodality based story. Gorbman (1987) describes it:

\textit{(the music) guides the spectator’s vision both literally and figuratively’}. In other words-
what (we think) we see is to a large degree determined by what we hear. It of course also works the other way around. Just as the music will affect how we see things, the visuals will also determine how we hear the music. Murch (in china, 1994) describes a phenomenon he calls conceptual resonance between image and sound, where the sound makes us see the image differently, and then this new image makes us hear the sound differently, which in turn makes us see something else in the image and so on.

Further Wingstedt categorized six classes of musical narrative functions such as they appear in film and other multimedia. They are the following:

- The emotive functions which refer to music’s ability to communicate emotive qualities.

- The informative function which refers to the situations where music expresses or explains a phenomena by communication information on a cognitive level.

- The descriptive function is related to the informative function in certain aspects, but differs in that the music is actively (or programmatically) describing something rather than more passively representing certain values. It is usually a matter of describing the physical world, such as physical setting, appearance or movement.
• The Guiding function includes musical functions that so to speak, turn directly to the audience, aiming to ‘direct’ the eye, thought and mind. This could include indicative or imperative functions. The latter function is prominent in computer games or advertising, where the purpose is to bring the audience to perform specific actions.

• The temporal function foregrounds the time dimension of music. Especially important is the music’s ability to provide continuity (immediate, longer or overall) as well as how music can contribute and define structure and form.

• The rhetorical function refers to how music, sometimes steps forward to comment the narrative events or situation. This is often achieved by having the musical expression contrast the visuals or by referring to the well known musical material.

The findings reveal that when an image, dialogue, sound effects and music combine into multimodal texts, a chemical reaction seems to take place. The resulting whole is, if maybe not greater, certainly different than the sum of the parts. The communicational act takes place on several levels and through many simultaneous channels or modes, but our experience is perceived as being one. Since such experiences often are interpreted as being of primarily visual nature the effect is, as stated initially, that what (we think) we see is to a large extent determined by what we hear.