

DEOOL, THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLES AND
NEW PERCEPTIONS THROUGH CINEMA

ANIL A. SONAWANE

S.N.D.T WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY,
MUMBAI, INDIA

From the perspective of the politics of 1968 and after, cinema contributed to the maintenance of capitalism; from more recent feminist perspective, it performs the same service for patriarchy. Either way, there was a need for transformation. But in order to change cinema there had first to be an understanding of it, and this is the task theorists have set themselves since the late 1960s. Not only was it necessary to demystify commonsense thinking about cinema, it was also essential to develop new more adequate theories.¹

The production, circulation and consumption of cinema happen on massive scale. Cinema as a media has a mass appeal. After merely a century of emergence of this technology, considered being an art, we have enough data to produce its history. This fact points towards the enormity of its existence in our life. Cinema in the form of fiction or documentary produces affects in various ways and undoubtedly has its impact on the society. The world of film studies however, whether of the old fashioned practical criticism or more rigorous formalist semiotic analyses, requires much more vigorous approach towards the cultural object. The study has to process the object in the context of a particular historical moment and a sense of the way in which both the study and its object of study are in an ultimately determined relationship with a

particular mode of material production. To consider the various ways in which the status of films and film theory have been studied it becomes necessary to have some idea of the historical development of this heavily technology based art.

Applying de Saussure's thought to the cinema, one could say that the large syntagmatic category of the narrative film can change, but that no single person can make it change overnight. A failure of intellection among the viewers would be the automatic sanctioning of a purely individual innovation, which the system would refuse to confirm.²

The history of cinema exhibits a compressed, intricate structure of development. Cinema as is perceived today can be divided into three major eras: silent era, sound era, and colour-sound era. Movies in the silent era were the ones, as the name suggest, without sound on film. Those made in the sound era were the ones with sound. Lastly, those in the colour and sound era were the ones with sound and colour on the film. The techniques used to produce cinema in these three eras differ from one another. By techniques here I mean: the frame, camera angels, camera movements, camera lens, light, montage and mise en scene. Theorists and film makers called these techniques of producing cinema as 'Film Language' or 'Language of Cinema'.

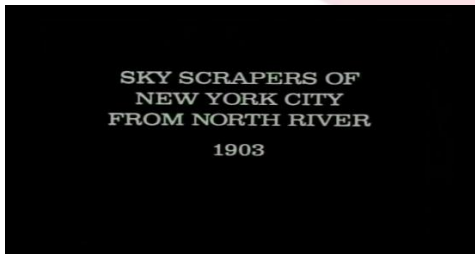
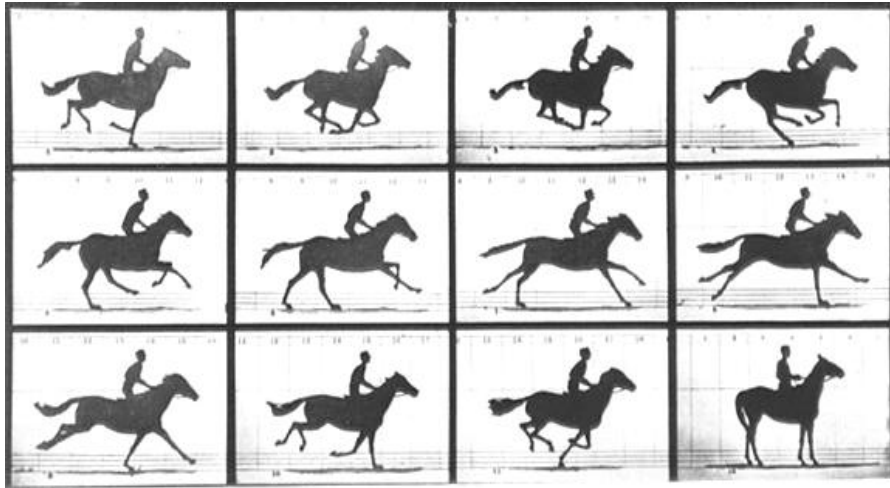
On the one side the Soviet cinema carried to its ultimate consequences the theory and practice of montage while the German school did every kind of violence to the plastics of the image by way of sets and lighting. Other cinemas count too besides the Russian and German, but whether in France or Sweden or the United States, it does not appear that the language of cinema was at a loss for ways of saying what it wanted to say.³

Let us have a brief account of the three major eras that I have discussed above. There is a long line of predecessors before cinema acquired its own form. Invention of peep shows, magic lantern, kinoscope, telegraph in 1840s, telephone in 1876, and primitive photograph in 1877 all played an important role in the invention of cinema. Out of all these 'stand still photography', 'magic lantern', and 'kinoscope' had a major helping hand in the formation of

cinema. Lumiere and Meliese were the first filmmakers. In 1895 Lumiere brothers patented the first motion picture projector in France and gave first public screening in Britain in Frbruary 1896.

In *HORSES AND OTHER ANIMALS IN MOTION: 45 CLASSIC PHOTOGRAPHIC SEQUENCES*, we get to see the project by Edward Muybridge in which he took sequence of photographs with 12 cameras that captured the moment when the animal's hooves were tucked under its belly (pic. 1). Publication of these photographs made Muybridge an international celebrity. Camera still/moving made different kind of perception possible for human beings and this quality of technology did attract lot of attention. Some of the early experiments with the moving camera were to record the cityscapes (pic.2-7) and small actions (pic. 8-11). It was for the first time that a camera would have been mounted on a ship/boat and the Skyscrapers perceived in a different way than natural perception.

In the silent era that is from 1898 to 1928 no sound on the film was recorded. Live music was played in most cinema halls along with the film screening to dissolve the large sound of projector. There would be no camera movements and the camera would be static. It lacked close-ups, depth in shot, tracking shot, parallel cutting, pan, and so on. Cameras were heavy and bulky, which made it difficult to move them from one place to other. This put limitations on the frame; characters had to walk in and out of the frame. Circles or some other shapes were used to emphasize the visual images. Titles were used on the screen instead of dialogues. Cuts were used to capture all visual images so that none of the important details were missed out and cuts were also used for visual transition.





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Movies produced after 1928 had sound on the film. Thomas Edison invented gramophone in 1870s. Lee De Forest developed the 'audion', a special electronic vacuum tube. De Forest invented practical sound on film 'phonofilm' in 1921. Hitchcock made first British dialogue film *Blackmail* in 1929. Clair made first French sound film *Sous les toits de Paris* in 1930. Vacuum tube made it possible for the first time to translate sound signals into electrical signals, and then into light signals that could be imprinted on film. The recording of sound is roughly parallel to the recording of images; the microphone is a lens through which sound is filtered; also the recorder in sound works like the camera in images; both can be recorded linearly and can be edited later. But they have a major and a significant difference between them and that is the manner in which each of them is perceived. Sound must be recorded continuously while pictures are recorded discreetly. The concept of 'persistence of vision' is missing in aural sense, that's why there is no 'still sounds' to compare with 'still pictures'. Therefore sound is restricted in time.

With the advent of sound earlier restrictions on the film were reduced to a large extent. Now there was no need to display written titles on the screen. It enabled the camera to move more efficiently, thus the use of pan, tilt-up, tilt-down, tracking shot, parallel montage, and so on. Sound made it possible to

build a long and complex structure of narrative. Frame faced two major changes: on the one hand, it was possible for frame to follow the characters. In which case, camera became subjective and followed sound. On the other hand, frame was able to do tasks at the same time; one to display visual images on screen, and two to display the sounds out of frame. Sound filled up the gaps of the narrative. Out of frame shots became possible with the sound being incorporated in the film.

Why should a glance have so much power to generate a narrative? The reason is that unlike; say, a shot of a character wiping his forehead or a shot of a vase on a table, a glance bristles with implications about space, time and causality. A glance leaps across space: its direction orients us to something nearby and hence enables us to build spatial relationship within a scene. A glance implies temporal relationships as well: an object seen is interpreted to exist in a time continuous, or simultaneous, with the act of seeing. Also, a glance may be linked directly to a character's intention or to a forthcoming act by the character or to a reaction (when the character is acted upon). A glance implies an interaction with an object. 'In fact, glances are so important to narrating a story world that the only glance that is generally avoided is a glance into the lense or the camera' ⁴

From 1935 onwards movies were made with colour along with sound on the film. Lumier brothers invented colour as early as 1905 but were unable to use it successfully on the film. Earlier films had colour because each frame was coloured by hand. The first system of colour photography appeared in 1907. Between 1900 and 1935, dozens of colour systems were introduced and some gained moderate success. It was in 1935, the Technicolour three-strip process opened up colour photography to the majority of filmmakers. The first Technicolour three-strip film was *La Cucaracha* (1935); the first Technicolour feature was *Becky Sharp*, also in the same year.

Emergence of colour changed the scenario again. Black and white movies were not close to reality in displaying real images on screen but rather a deformed form of it. In reality the world we perceive is in colour but black and white displayed it by removing the colour, hence deformed reality. This

aroused the necessity for invention of colour. When colour was used on the film, cinema came close to represent the reality.

Film Language

Earlier film theorists like Sergei Eisenstein, V.I. Pudovkin, D.W. Griffith, Andre Bazin, BelaBalaz, Jean-Luc Godard, Rudolf Arnheim, Siegfried Kracauer, and some others of that age concentrated more on the aesthetic aspect of film. These theorists were the early ones who defined some aspects or parts of film language. They considered the techniques of producing a film as the language of cinema: frame, shot, sound, colour, camera angles, camera movements, mise-en-scene, montage. Griffith discovered montage arrangement of events what follows what, which was viewed differently by different theorists.

Eisenstein viewed montage as a kind of collision or conflict, between a shot and its successor. For Eisenstein each shot has a potential energy, which becomes kinetic energy after the collision with its successor. Two shots can produce conflict in their emotional content (happy versus sad), in their use of illumination (dark versus light), in their rhythms (slow versus fast), in their objects (large versus small), in their directions of movement (right versus left), in their distances (close up versus long shot), and so on. For him, montage has its aim as the creation of ideas, of a new reality, rather than the support of narrative. He emphasized on the relationship between filmmaker and audience.

Pudovkin was mainly concerned with how the filmmaker can affect the observer. He viewed montage as a method of building, of adding one to another. He identified five separate and distinct types of montage: contrast, parallelism, symbolism, simultaneity, and leitmotif. He saw montage as the complex, pumping heart of the film, but he also felt that its purpose was to support narrative rather than alter it. He had a standpoint exactly in dialectic opposition to that of Eisenstein.

BelaBalasz was fascinated by the power of the close-up to reveal details of fact and emotion. He developed a theory, which depicted the shifts of meaning and the quiet interplay of emotions that is conveyed by close-up. He viewed film in the economic sphere of influence. He was one of the earliest film

theorists to understand and explain how our approach to film is moulded and formed by the cultural values we share.

Andre Bazin endorses cinematic method, which combines composing with the camera and staging an action in front of it known as 'mise-en-scene'. It emphasizes not the ordering but the content of images. The film's effect and meaning is inherent in the visual images themselves. This mise-en-scene tradition in silent era looked toward the incorporation of synchronous sound as a fulfillment, not as a violation. He considered shot-in-depth as an important stage in the evolution of the language of cinema.

Alexander Austruc introduced a concept of 'camera stylo', wherein the camera is used as a pen. To break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from image for its own sake, from demands of the narrative, to become flexible and subtle like written language. Austruc's camera-stylo was a doctrine of function rather than form.

Jean-Luc Godard built on Bazin's theory of the basic opposition between mise-en-scene and montage, he created a dialectical synthesis of these two theses. For Godard montage is an integral part of mise-en-scene and can be seen as different aspect of the same cinematic activity. What one seeks to foresee in space the other seeks in time.

This scenario of film language changed with the rise of structuralism and semiotics. Semiotic criticism is far more concrete and intense than any other approach. The early cinema was dominated by the fascination to see movement on the screen, due to which narrative or story-telling factor of cinema was more or less ignored. Later the filmmakers like Griffith, Eisenstein, Melies, and others consciously or unconsciously shaped filmic procedures into the narrative. Historians of the cinema generally agree in dating the beginning of the cinema in the period of 1910-15. Films like *Enoch Arden*, *Life for the Czar*, *Quo Vadis?*, *Fantomas*, *Cabiria*, *The Golem*, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, and above all *Birth of Nation* among the first films, the word film is used the way we understand it now; Narration of a certain magnitude based on procedures specifically cinematographic. The procedures were perfected in the endeavor of narrative. The pioneers of cinematographic language, Melies, Porter, Griffith, were men

of denotation. Melies, in his story telling naivete, was led to invent double exposure, dissolve, fade in, and pan shot. Somewhere around 1911 to 1915 cinema became narrative and took some attributes of a language.

Metz has outlined a view of film as a logical phenomenon that can be studied by scientific methods. He tried to analyze the film language by using Saussure's theory of sign, borrowing the terminology used by Saussure with necessary alterations. One of his important differentiation in narrative is he conceived semiotics of the cinema either as a semiotics of connotation or as a semiotics of denotation. For Metz in case of film: framing, camera movements, and light effects serve as the connoted instance, which is superimposed over the denoted meaning. In cinema denoted meaning is represented by sounds duplicated by soundtrack. Technique of shooting (a sequence or film) is the signifier of denotation, it signifies the scene represented and further these two converge to form the signifier of connotation.

Metz in his essay, *Film Language: A Semiotic of the Cinema* (1968 and 1972), states that film language is not a system, *langue* in Saussure's sense. In cinema the number of images is indefinite. The pro-filmic spectacles are themselves unlimited in number. There are variations in lighting, distance between subject and camera, quality of the raw stock (film), chemicals used for the processing of film, camera angles, focal lengths of the lens. It suffices to vary one of these elements by perceptible quantity to obtain another image. The shot is therefore not comparable to the word in a lexicon; rather it resembles a complete statement in that it is already a result of an essentially free combination, a speech arrangement. This explains that cinema has no equivalent entity to the minimal unit present in a natural language.

Metz argues why cinema is not a language system. Cinema lacks double articulation, which is the fundamental feature of all natural languages. Natural languages exhibit the power of double articulation: that is, in order to use a language one must be able to understand its sounds and meanings. Phonemes in a language when considered individually are meaningless units. But when combined in an appropriate manner form a meaningful word, which has a fixed meaning. This is not true with cinema, instead cinema has neither

meaningless units (each section of a shot is already meaningful) nor has fixed meaningful units. Each shot in cinema is unique. It changes its meaning as per the context it is placed in.

The other important differentiation in narrative, he felt, was between syntagmatic and paradigmatic categories. Both of these are theoretical constructions rather than practical facts. The syntagma of a film or a sequence shows its linear narrative structure. It is concerned with what follows what. The paradigmatic category in film is condemned to remain partial and fragmentary. It concerns with what goes with what. There is no fixed pool or sets of elements from which one or more units might be selected. Creation plays larger role in cinematographic language than it does in the handling of idioms: to speak a language is to use it, but to speak cinematic language is to invent it. ' Language selects and combines phonemes and morphemes to form sentences. Film selects and combines images and sounds to form syntagmas -i.e. units of narrative autonomy in which elements interact semantically.'⁵ The semiotics of cinema cannot work at the level of the image, since each image is unique, novel and analogous to reality, with its meaning produced not by its place within a system but by what it duplicates. There is no process of selection from a lexicon of images in cinema as there is from the verbal lexicon of a natural language. It was because of this paradigmatic poverty that Metz was led to explore the semiotics of cinema in terms of syntagmatic relations. Combination, not selection, was to be the key to its understanding. While the image might not be coded the narrative certainty was, and since cinema consisted predominantly of narrative, and indeed, since its historical development had produced a number of recognizable narrative forms and structures, it was appropriate that a semiotics of cinema should concentrate on the spatio-temporal logic of narrative. Metz's *grandesyntagmatique* was an attempt to provide an exhaustive classification of the segmentation of cinematic narratives. Arranged in a hierarchy from the autonomous shot, the smallest segment, to the sequence, the largest segment, the system of classification would permit any film's narrative syntax to be formalized.

Filmmakers constitute a group of language inventors while audience, or movie spectators, constitute a group of language users. Users of film language

use the language, invented by inventors, to understand cinema. That is why the semiotics of the cinema must frequently consider things from the point of view of spectator rather than of the filmmaker. Later on in *Language and Cinema*, he turned to a thorough exposition of the system of codes that govern cinematic meaning. He explained that the concept of codes transcends the limits of the film. Many codes that operate in film come from other areas of culture. These are non-specific codes, for example, lighting and narration from the domain of general culture. There are also those codes that cinema borrows from or shares with other media, for example, mise-en-scene shared codes from the domain of theatre. Thus we have first series of overlapping sets. The next differentiation of codes follows logically. If some codes are specific to cinema and some are not, then of those specific codes some are shared by all films and some by only a few, while others are unique to certain individual films. Any sort of system or structure might be called a code; to decode a work is to uncover the various structures that are relevant to it and appreciate their significance for the work in question. Furthermore, any system of assumptions, beliefs, ideology, or stereotypes that is relied on or alluded to in a film or other work of art can be called a code. For, to decode the work is also to see how its significance is affected by such things. Lastly, there are codes that are purely cinematic, for example, montage.

But there are certain problems with Metz's grand syntegmatique scheme. A category like autonomous shot is too broad to include diversity of cinematic forms. A scene and an ordinary sequence of events are difficult to distinguish. The most serious problem with the grand syntegmatique scheme is that it points towards arid formalism that can neither account for film's specific production of meaning nor satisfy the political demand that its mechanisms for the reproduction of ideology be exposed. Apart from semiotics there are other approaches to cinema studies. The film journals *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Cinethique* both adopted an Althusserian Marxist perspective in the aftermath of 1968 protests. They were in agreement that the ideological operation of mainstream cinema contributed to the reproduction of the capitalist system, and that its success in so doing was a function less of content than of form. The two journals were also in agreement in calling for a revolutionary cinema that

would break with the dominant ideology in respect of both form and content, and would establish a quite different relationship with its audience. But beyond this common terrain they were frequently at odds, with three areas of disagreement being of relevance to our concerns. In the introduction to the anthology of *Cahiers du Cinema* volumes 210-239 published from March 1969 to June 1972 the editor makes *Cahiers'* approach clear.

In the context of the radically charged social and intellectual movements of post-1968 France, *Cahiers du Cinema* was at work transforming both the perception of films and critical writing about cinema. *Cahiers* set about clarifying its historical and polemical coordinates by reference to Bazin and Eisenstein, and self-consciously began the process of shaping the passage from the old to the new socio-filmic order by the force of its critical intervention. Its resolutely Marxist denunciation of the function and effect of bourgeois ideology was projected as the critique and rewriting of film history/theory/criticism.⁶

Cahiers was inclined to take a more qualified view, which it supported with a sevenfold classification of films, only one category of which admittedly the commercial and art-house cinema, it condemned outright. In these category A films the dominant ideology is reproduced in pure and unadulterated form. They are films in which ideology is talking to itself, in which spectator and text are bound together in a closed circuit of illusion. The possibility of the reproducibility of photography and cinema created interesting relationship between the art and the spectator or the recipient of the art. According to Benjamin mechanical reproduction of art 'enables the original to meet the beholder half way.'⁷ The art loses its aura as mechanical reproduction separates it from tradition, cult and authenticity of the objects represented. This process gives way to the new function of art; the practice of politics.

There are other ways of film criticism and doing theory that contribute to circulate films among the academics and the viewers. Laura Mulvey's article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* deals with classically Freudian features of Lacan's theory of identification, voyeurism and fetishism. Mulvey suggests that the pleasure offered by mainstream Hollywood cinema depends on pre-

existing psychological patterns at work within the spectator.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle...⁸

Such pleasure cannot be disassociated from dominant cinema's capacity to articulate patriarchal ideology around sexual difference. By offering a kind of satisfaction to the alienated subject of patriarchy, cinema ensures its own commercial success. One of the most important pleasures offered is that of identification, where the spectator narcissistically identifies with an idealized figure on screen, typically a male hero whose actions determine the narrative, in a process that recapitulates the discovery of the image of oneself in the mirror phase; and scopophilia, or pleasure in looking, through which the spectator indulges in a more socially acceptable form of invading privacy and looking at object of desire in an unacceptable way. On the other hand, the other, typically a woman, is turned into an object of fantasy, so giving the voyeur a position of control and mastery. Cinema is more about spectacle and the process of looking at.

Let us attempt a brief analysis of *Deool* (2011), a Marathi film directed by Umesh Kulkarni. The film is set in a peaceful village in rural Maharashtra. Keshav (Girish Kulkarni), an innocently religious young man, sees/hallucinates Lord Datta in his dream while taking a nap under a tree. He makes a hue and cry in the village saying God made an appearance for him. Anna (DilipPrabhavalkar), most respected figure of Mangrul, advises him against announcing such personal matter as it's a question of faith.

However, it is too late as a journalist (KishorKadam) sensationalizes the news about Lord Dattatrey making an appearance in Mangrul. Hence, there is a demand for a Dattatrey temple. Bhau (Nana Patekar), a political activist,

doesn't approve it as he wants the funds to be used for better purposes but he seems helpless. The temple is built and the village becomes a holy place. Mangrul goes through a complete change due to commercialization but nobody complains except Anna. Soon, due to the blindness of commercial progress, the village people neglect the God.

The film begins with an archeological excavation site. A slow pan from left to right shows a mid-close up of hand doing brush work on the stones. Pictures 12 and 13 give us the establishment shot of the excavation site. This excavation site is an important space as far as the film is concerned. Anna played by Dilip Prabhavalkar refers to this site in one of his conversations with Keshav. For Anna the decision to build a temple instead of a hospital in the village is not a good decision. The commercialization of the village and its ill effects on the people and their relations with each other are visible. Anna believes that the culture of Mangrul village is going to be lost and nobody will know what kind of people and daily practices, originally, were operative in the village. Every culture has to come to an end one day and Mangarul is very close to lose its authentic daily practices.



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Keshav goes to the excavation site looking for his cow (Kardi) but does not find it. He goes to the other side of the village and meets one of the villagers. The villager says that the cow might have seen something. The film gradually keeps on taking the viewer deep into the action of looking at and spectacle. None of the dialogues refers to the active action of looking at but refers to the spectacle visible to a viewer; the spectacle being already available to be seen. In the same way Keshav hallucinates and thinks that he has seen the god Lord Datta.



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The sequence from (pic14 to 17) is an important moment of the dream sequence where Keshav thinks that Lord Datta emanated in the tree and that's why the cow came to the tree and brought him there. It's an example of the movement image that Gilles Deleuze talks about in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*. For Deleuze movement image is a combination of three images; perception image (predominantly in long shot), action image (put forth by medium shot), and affection image (dominated by close up). The dream sequence starts with the perception image where the tree, the cow and Keshav are in long shot. But what follows is the medium shot of Keshav's dream/hallucination; an illuminated and blurred image of cow and Lord Datta. This is an action image. It is a spectacle that emanates the reactions of Keshav, the affection image with his face and reactions in focus. These shots are assembled with mid shots, close ups and a trolley shot in which the camera moves from Keshav's back to his face. Till this moment all the shots contain long shots of spaces deserted of crowds. There are very few human beings seen. Keshav runs towards the village screaming the arrival of Lord Datta. The village is established in this sequence (Pic. 18). Though there is no typical establishment shot used, the director shows spaces typical of a village. The river is shown where women go to wash clothes. A public square is a place where most of the people of the village meet and chat.



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Keshav begins his search for the cow and his search leads to next events. Cinema is distinct from other arts as we get the sense of movement and duration. In cinema we not only see characters moving but camera too move and with moving camera we see sets changing. Montage too helps in changing the set. With the change in parts and sets of image we see the change in the whole that is duration. Frame, shot, and objects in the frame among which movement takes place form the parts of the whole.

The divisibility of content means that the parts belong to various sets, which constantly subdivide into sub-sets or are themselves the sub-set of a larger set, on to infinity. This is why content is defined both by the tendency to constitute closed system and by the fact that this tendency never reaches completion. ⁹

Bhau and Anna want to build a hospital in the village. This hospital never gets built as the temple for Lord Datta is built. The hospital is one more space that remains in miniature form (Pic.19) and exists only in the conversation. Hospital in this film represents the rational thought. Temple on the other hand represents the irrational. It becomes a spectacle giving rise to the new desires and creating new affects. The first half of the cinema is filled with the empty frames. These empty frames give the sense of emptiness in the village. However after the temple being built the relations of the people change. The consumption patterns also change. Most of the households in the village have their own way of earning money. The temple, with it, brings lots of opportunity to earn money. Guy Debord in his book *The Society of the Spectacle*(1967) argues that the spectacle is not a collection of images. It is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. 'The first stage of the economy's domination of social life brought about an evident

degradation of being into *having*-human fulfillment was no longer equated with what one was, but with what one possessed.' ¹⁰And the next stage of this is the shift from having to appearing. Hoardings of Bhau show this shift from being to having and from having to appearing. There is a good example, in the film, of how mechanical reproduction of art forces the art to do away with its aura and cult value. We listen to a Bhajan (Deva tulashodhukutha...) in the first part of the film. In the later part of the film, after the temple being built, the same people who used to sing the Bhajans at night start a business of copying the tunes from popular Bollywood songs and producing Bhajans based on those tunes. There is a stark change in the look of the village after the temple is built. People in the village possess more commodities. Keshav, agitated with people's consumerist approach towards Lord Datta, steals the idol of god from the temple and takes it in the mountains away from human beings. There is an epiphanic moment because of which Keshav decides to steal the idol. He meets a burglar (cameo played by Naseeruddin Shah). After drinking water from Keshav the burglar is gone and the idea of committing felony occurs to Keshav. The Burglar is hiding at the excavation site. (Pic. 20-22) This can be one more hallucination of Keshav that Lord Datta gives him a message. The last sequence of idol immersion in the river by Keshav is shown parallel to the new idol of god being brought and kept in the temple. (Pic 23-24)

Throughout the film, households are shown watching daily soaps on the television. The acts of seeing and appearances of spectacles appear frequently throughout the film.(Pic.25) The film does refer to the impact of consumerism on the remote village and its culture.



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