INDIAN PARALLEL CINEMA

Mostly defined through its ideological opposition to Popular Indian Cinema, Indian Parallel Cinema, in general terms, is understood as India’s art or alternative cinema. More specifically, it refers to the ‘New Cinema Movement’ (roughly from 1969 to 1985), which might be seen as a historical moment when the impact of this art cinema was both nationally and internationally at its height. Major figures include Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, M.S. Sathyu, Shyam Benegal, Kumar Shahani, Mani Kaul, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G.Aravindan, Govind Nihalani, Saeed Akhtar Mirza, Girish Kasaravalli and Ketan Mehta.

The origins of both the Parallel and New Cinema are usually traced back to three events: the emergence of film clubs in the 1940s, the activities of the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) and the arrival of Satyajit Ray with *Pather Panchali* in 1955, a major Bengali filmmaker who was exposed to international cinema, especially Italian neo-realism, at the first edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in 1952. Influential critic Chidananda Das Gupta points out that “[i]n hardly any country in the world has the government acted as midwife to the birth of talented film makers as it has in India” (Das Gupta 42). Indeed, there has probably been no other *nouvelle vague* for which the institutional environment and support played such a crucial role in its conditions and rise. Most importantly, this includes the establishment of two key institutions in 1960: first, the Film Finance Corporation (in 1975 renamed and restructured as the National Film Development Corporation, NFDC) providing loans to filmmakers, later acting as financier and producer; second, the Film Training Institute of India (later renamed Film and Television Institute of India, FTII) nurturing filmmakers such as Shahani, Mirza and Mehta.

Parallel Cinema came into its own in the late 1960s with three films which might be regarded as founding texts of the New Cinema: *Bhuvan Shome* by Mrinal Sen, *Uski Roti* by Mani Kaul and *Sara Akash* by Basu Chatterjee (all released in 1969). Their artistic and commercial success spawned a large number of followers nationwide, with Bombay and the South Indian states of Kerala and Karnataka emerging as major centres of Indian art cinema in addition to Bengal.

In his major study *Ideology of the Hindi Film. A Historical Construction*, film scholar M. Madhava Prasad has argued that competition with the low-budget, but commercially successful parallel films and the subsequent ‘Middle-of-the-road-Cinema’ by filmmakers such as Chatterjee became a major catalyst for the mainstream film industry’s transformation in the 1970s. However, this success and impact was short-lived. According to Das Gupta, the government failed to sustain the movement because of their neglect of the distribution/exhibition side, not providing suitable art-houses for the films in the long run. While parallel films continued and continue to be made (often with involvement of the NFDC), a decline can be observed since the mid-1980s, when it became increasingly difficult for filmmakers to find proper funding, with state television channel Doordarshan becoming only a temporary solution.

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