

# Rati Chakravyuh

A film by Ashish Avikunthak

October 22-November 1, 2014



# ASHISH AVIKUNTHAK

## **Rati Chakravyuh 2013**

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## Rati Chakravyuh Spirals of Love

by Ranjana Raghunathan, researcher and writer based in Singapore.

### **IN THE BEGINNING WAS LOVE. IN THE END IS MA.**

We are told that at midnight during a lunar eclipse twelve newlyweds and a priestess gather in a circle after a mass wedding to talk. *Rati Chakravyuh* is an unfolding of their conversation spanning the history of the universe as we orbit them. They unravel the most fundamental questions about human existence, memory and trauma in an ominous tone stripped of all emotion. In their circle, they encompass the spectrum of human experience from philosophical ponderings to banal banter. They are dressed up in their wedding fineries for their wedding night, but they seem unable to move out of the circle, hypnotized by their own words. We too are but powerless voyeurs, held in rapt attention as the camera circles them relentlessly.

A frame at the end of the conversation informs us that the thirteen people proceed to commit mass suicide. Before I ponder how or why, these lines from their earlier conversation prevent me.

*Krishna is the only God that committed suicide.  
How did he commit suicide?  
Is that important?*

The text goes on to say it is not important how or why, it is not important that they do not live in our midst.  
*They are all dead.*

### **IN THE BEGINNING IS SOUND. IN THE END IS LIGHT.**

I happened to be in Mumbai in July 2012 when Ashish Avikunthak invited me to watch the first cut of *Rati Chakravyuh*, fresh after post-production work. I sat alone in a corner of the screening room in Goregaon studios with his friends and colleagues. In my solitude, I observed Avikunthak's nervous excitement as he walked around and spoke to his friends about the film. It was a unique attempt after all, a single take film of 102 minutes through an intense conversation. I had earlier read the script as one would a book; the file was entitled *The Last Supper*. I completed my reading in three sittings, reeling in its openness, which allowed me to relate fragments my life to the text in absurd ways. How different could the film be from the script, I thought. I waited patiently for the darkness to burst into a glow, for the first utterance of sound. 105 minutes later, I remember heaving a sigh, and taking one deep breath. Avikunthak's friends

had an animated discussion about the film and when he asked me what I thought, I muttered, unconvinced by own thoughts and coming out of a daze "it is a difficult film to sit through. It is a challenge to read English subtitles of a Bengali conversation and simultaneously watch faces go in circles." I wish I had articulated myself better, but how does one speak about everything in a sentence? To write about the film is to write an epic.

#### **IN THE BEGINNING WAS I. IN THE END ARE YOU.**

After experiencing a terribly painful week in July 2014, I felt weak, defeated, hurt and vulnerable. I was on the edge all the time and the conversations that played in my head resembled the one had by the 12 newlyweds in the film. A friend's abusive husband, a marriage on tethers, a child traumatized to silence by aggression, a child raped by her teachers, state-supported destruction of books in a library in the name of censorship, death of a loved one, death of a friend, death of a person who remains as a recorded voice memory in a hard disk, incessant news about the violence in Gaza and Israel, diplomatic relations between nations... the breadth of human traumas from daily micro-aggressions to state violence in contemporary times. These stories merged to a singular point of absurdity, and when one cannot hold its pain in any longer, one writes, one screams in silence, one cries, and one makes a film called *Rati Chakravyuh*.

To write about the film is to write the human condition – life, death, love, sex, violence, religion, war, marriage, children, mythology, lust, gods, history, the quotidian and the transcendental in the mundane. The stories that I watched are stories I had read, stories we shared and exchanged with friends, colleagues, family, and other kindred individuals; stories familiar to us growing up in a certain era, stories that were universal to human struggles to love and exist. At the risk of sounding reductionist, I ask if *Rati Chakravyuh* is the narrative of everyone's life; our subconscious mind sifting through memory to randomly surface disjointed and disconnected moments, and weave a dream narrative in which there is no memory of the beginning and no sight of the end. There is only the experience of being in it.

**"To write about the film is to write the human condition– life, death, love, sex, violence, religion, war, marriage, children, mythology, lust, gods, history, the quotidian and the transcendental in the mundane."**

#### **WHY DOES KALI NOT SWALLOW TIME?**

The film creates a world that is palpably claustrophobic to me; my body felt a sense of entrapment in the dizzying spiral that Basab, the man behind the camera creates. This is the world where Gods are cars; the gods commit suicide, or feel impotent because a woman's love for the devil is greater than her love for the divine. This is the world where myths are examined and torn apart into conflicting stories – true and false at once; all that remain are words and sounds. However, the thought of the newlyweds' mass suicide returns. How does one contemplate death, except as an ungraspable abstraction? To contemplate death is to be alive, completely in the moment. Their utterances shatter our arbitrary boundaries of morality and reality, and for those 105 minutes, we can just be. The film, despite its morbid undertones, is brimming with all it means to live – the futility and the beauty of it.

#### **EVERYTHING IS ALWAYS IN THE MIDDLE.**

To write about the film is to write about Ashish Avikunthak. The film alludes to snippets in Avikunthak's biography, distilled through the circular camera in a manner that they dance like specks of dust in light – random, but drenched in his engagement with death, mother Kali, Tantra, and the pain of his life experiences. His stint in Bombay during the riots, activism against the Narmada dam, life as a Gandhian, disenchantment with activism, vulnerability to heartbreaks and his overpowering preoccupation with death are the ruptures in the film that make me view it as one made with an aching and perhaps tired soul. One that knows the ways around the labyrinth, but has no way of escaping. Is suicide the conscious choice out of the Chakravyuh?

To write about the film is to write about cinema. Avikunthak has depicted his meditation about death, suicide and redemption in his earlier works, especially in *Vakratunda Swaha*, *Kalighat Fetish* and *Katho Upanishad*. His single takes in *Et Cetera* and *Katho Upanishad* are a cinematic quest for real time (and space) and he captures death of time on film. The reverse shots in his films are a metaphor for the impossibility of redemption, but more importantly, deathlessness. In *Vakratunda Swaha*, the shattering motion of his hands create idols of Lord Ganesha from shards. In *Katho Upanishad*, the modern day Nachiketa walks backward even as he steps forward in the middle of a busy traffic road. His works are a quest to return to the very essence of cinema by engaging with temporality, and in a certain sense, they appear to be a longing to capture what it means to exist – an unravelling of time through space.



*Vakratunda Swaha* 2010



*Katho Upanishad* 2011

### **IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE SELF—UNBORN BUT ALIVE.**

Reflecting on the film, I feel like a modern day Abhimanyu entering the Chakravyuh with an intuitive understanding of its intricacies, but clueless about my exit, doomed to die fighting, just like Abhimanyu on the battle of Kurukshetra. Are we all Abhimanyus in our own ways, trapped in multi-layered defense formations? What is our battle and where is the battlefield? Why, oh why did his mother Subhadra fall asleep when Arjuna was explaining the exit strategy from the Chakravyuh? Had she stayed awake, maybe Abhimanyu, still a foetus in Subhadra's womb would have learned the wisdom that would help him decipher the exit route out of the military formation in the battle. Maybe lord Krishna ushered Arjuna away, midway through his explanation to Subhadra, because he intended us to navigate our own labyrinths to arrive at our preordained ends. Maybe ignorance is our doom, one that we must die fighting. Maybe the beginning in the womb is the end, our existence as a non-entity with latent knowledge of the universe; a recollection of its memory utters words in a circular game until silence, just like the newlyweds.

One of the protagonists in the film says, "We are all enlightened when unborn". Birth and death are then two events that have no place in memory. If they are to be considered the beginning and the end, what is in between? Love? Love that brought the newlyweds together. Love that prompts them to have an existential conversation on their wedding night. "Love that keeps us alive and is the cause of our doom." It is no wonder that Avikunthak invokes Rati, the goddess of love, while describing the Chakravyuh. Rati's power brings her consort Kama (god of love) from ashes to life, to be reborn as the son of Lord Krishna. Rati is the female seed, the pleasure of sexual activity, the union of the masculine and feminine principle, the moment of creation of the universe. In Tantra, Chinnamasta is depicted severing her own head and standing on the copulating couple of Kama and Rati (Rati on top). It seems as though the universe spins in chakras of love as Ma Kali dances on the copulating couple. In these spirals, I contemplate the oneness of existence, where my daughter is also yours. My pain is also yours. My story is also yours. There is no beginning or end because time is created the moment we exist, and we move in circles, unraveling layers of the chakravyuh, traversing deeper in search of the core, in search of love.



Production Still, *Rati Chakravyuh*



Production Still, *Rati Chakravyuh*

**"In these spirals,  
I contemplate the  
oneness of existence,  
where my daughter  
is also yours. My pain  
is also yours. My  
story is also yours."**

### **IN THE BEGINNING WAS NOTHING.**

#### **IN THE END IS INFINITY.**

After my first viewing of the film and my dazed utterances right after, it took me several days to write down a few words about the film. It has taken me two years to scribble the disjointed thoughts here. I am reminded in many ways that the duration of a film is how I live it; contemplate about it and how it comes back in innumerable ways and ineffable absurdity. One evening on July 2012, I wrote an email to him.

*The film is the experience of an inescapable maze created through the dizzying effect of the camera that moves in spirals throughout. In that dizzying spiral, words vanish, faces blur into a stream of light and eyes crave for the darkness of ignorance, of innocent illusions, of dreams where redemption is really possible. The stories are non-existent, they are the same, yet very different; but we must transcend them. How do we do that? Temporality is a painful truth to reckon with. It stretches out in a painstaking fashion, trapping every attempt to radiate out of the circle. It is our pain on that screen and we cannot look away, we cannot wish it away or magically transform it into a dreamscape. There is simply no space for any space. Space collapses into a speck, but floats endlessly unlike that moment which is out of time. The circular motion of the camera creates that spiral maze and makes us aware of the harsh truth – that we must fight a losing battle, only to inevitably lose, die and disappear. The film thwarts all our attempts to hide, to run, and all we can really do is to watch those faces blur in the spiral motions, watch those words become a hazy long stretch of intimately familiar sound, watch everything turn into myself – the emptiness that gave birth to these words.*



## *Dissenting Vision: (Re)locating Orality in Ashish Avikunthak's *Rati Chakravyuha* (2013)*

by Dr. Erin O'Donnell, Assistant Professor, Asian History,

East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania

Ashish Avikunthak has been making self-financed films in India since the mid-nineties; two of his earliest being *Etcetera* (1997) and *Kalighat Fetish* (1999), which is filmed largely at and around the Kali temple in (one of) his hometown(s) – Kolkata. Among his most recent works, his second feature film (created for a simultaneous three channel triptych viewing experience) is called *Katho Upanishad* (2011) and depicts the conversation between Nachiketa and Yama (the Hindu god of death) about the afterlife. Avikunthak is also in various stages of completing several additional feature length films, including one shot at the last *Kumbha Mela* in India. His third feature film, *Rati Chakravyuha* (2013), a tale of multiple brides and bridegrooms who extensively converse together during the course of their wedding night to (potentially) engage in mass suicide by morning – created in a singular continuous circular 102 minute shot – is the focus here. The particular conceptualization of this intense discussion is in the mode of a traditional Bengali *bashorghor*, where all through the night of the wedding ceremony, friends and family keep the newlyweds awake by means of frivolous and sexually charged banter. However, as will be addressed shortly, how the couples conduct their own *bashorghor* and what they speak about is where the director, along with his cinematic team, break novel ground in *Rati*.

Avikunthak's films have been shown worldwide in film festivals (London, Locarno, Rotterdam and Berlin), galleries and museums, including the Tate Modern (London), Centre George Pompidou (Paris), and the Pacific Film Archive (Berkeley). Ideas that course through his work rotate around ritual, transgression, transformation, morbidity, orality and time. In an interview conducted in March/April of 2013, Avikunthak importantly elucidated:

I don't think of myself as a conceptual artist, rather a filmmaker who still believes in a cinematic experience that has not been weighed under the burden of narrative. Therefore, for me, temporality plays a key-role in my cinematic practice. Cinema for me is the only representational practice that has the possibility of making time malleable.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the filmmaker's creative insistence on the primacy of temporality in his cinema provides a template, as we see in *Rati Chakravyuha*, with which to articulate, to insist upon, the local, the particular and the oral. As Niru Ratnam stated about Avikunthak's work earlier this year in March 2014:

In an artworld where an increasing number of critics are arguing that much globalized art takes the form of hollowed-out visual Esperanto, Avikunthak's works insist on an Indian epistemology while utilizing a rigorously formal visual language that is clearly aware of Western avant-garde practices such as those of Andrei Tarkovsky and Samuel Beckett.<sup>2</sup>

And in conjunction with grounding his creative practice in "an Indian epistemology" or Indian way(s) of knowing, the filmmaker actively cultivates in his work an Indian ontology or Indian form(s) of experience.

To situate the work of Avikunthak in the context of contemporary Indian cinema, beyond "the tyranny of the bazaar" (as expressed by avant-garde filmmaker Kumar Shahani), the concept and practice of *prayoga cinema* is helpful, and additionally, agreeable to Avikunthak. In an April 2014 interview via Skype (with no image, just sound!), the filmmaker related to me that *prayoga* "produces a new vocabulary to take refuge in" which "gives a very powerful space to filmmakers like him who are disenchanted with Western theoretical/hegemonic frameworks," and essentially, that *prayoga*'s "underscoring of Indian thought" serves to "give him a foothold". The term "*prayoga*" was first employed in 2005 by Amrit Gangar, Indian film theorist and historian (who also contributed to this catalogue), in the context of the Experimental Festival (Mumbai) and with the subsequent publication titled the *Cinema of Prayoga*. This understanding of and approach to Indian cinema has moved and matured through different venues ever since.<sup>3</sup> In the present 21<sup>st</sup> century moment, Gangar's idea of a cinema of *prayoga*, a word with diverse connotations, including "experiment," "representation," and "practice," serves as an opening to a fundamental reconsideration of and reflection upon not only how we think about Indian cinematographic practice, but also how we consider Indian artistic practice at large. *Prayoga* cinema/art can be defined as a practice, a theory [drawing from Indian *rasa* ("essence")/*bhava* ("being"/"becoming") and Deleuzian theoretical languages and landscapes, to name only two arenas], a categorization and a descriptive to enable a movement(s) beyond the restrictive EuroAmericanic binds of the terms parallel, experimental, underground, avant-garde, art, middle, regional, alternative, and new wave.

In a March 2013 conversation with Gangar via e-mail, he related to me: "the chemistry between Indian *rasa* theory and Deleuzian

filmosophical thoughts should bring fascinating results vis-à-vis the pre-modern, modern, post-modern and the post-post modern.” At the heart of Deleuze’s filmsophy, in his “movement-image,” motion constitutes a rational link between spaces, and time serves as the measure of movement. In his construct of the “time-image,” *time is no longer the measure of movement but the object of the image* [my emphasis], and motion can no longer be used to connect cinematic spaces into a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Avikunthak employs one shot to make the viewer acutely conscious of time itself in *Rati*; the structure of the film engenders temporality in its singular circular movement, emulating a spiral weave to suggest an infinite cosmic sense of time. In this film, time dominates representation. The text at the conclusion of the film intimates the collective suicide of the characters, proposing the agency required in the act of killing oneself, a definitive declaration of stopping time. With its one-shot structure, *Rati Chakravyuha* resonates with how film scholar Tom Gunning has described early cinema, mainly before 1906, as an experience of “exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption,” a “cinema of attractions” before the commencement of “the true *narrativization* of the cinema”.<sup>5</sup> Avikunthak has exercised the structure of the “one shot” in his earliest short films, like *Etcetera*, as well. *Rati* was shot with a Red camera, technology that has made possible a replication of the look and *feel* of celluloid, but with the added capacity of time allowed through the use of digital; a five hour long single shot film can now be produced with such equipment. Thus, Red camera technology allows Avikunthak to discretely explore an ontology of temporality, to emphasize the “real time” of an audience’s cinematic experience, where the diegetic screen time interfaces with the spectators’ viewing time.

To further contextualize Avikunthak’s oeuvre, specifically *Rati*, and perhaps even more relevant than entertaining Deleuzian ideas of movement and time in cinema, *prayoga* also employs Indian conceptions of space/spatiality (presence/absence *bhavas*, the idea of *anupalabdhi*, the non-availability that perceives the absent object; *abed akash*), and of time/temporality (*samaya*, *abed samaya*), that allows for the creation of a cinematography (here resonating with Bresson’s usage of the term as a new way of writing, a new way of feeling) for India. Classical Indian philosophical and musical (*shastriya sangeet*) categories and descriptives provide the modes (quite literally) to begin to describe the Indian cinematic experience, particularly the experience of “classical” (*shastriya*) Indian cinema, originating with experimental filmmaker Mani Kaul. To be precise, the cinema of *prayoga* considers cinematography in terms of *sangeet*, of music, of sound.



As Gangar contextualized in our 2013 conversation: “Sound as *dhwani*, or ‘suggested meaning,’ (to borrow its poetic *bhava* from Abhinavagupta, in his *Dhwanyaloka*) creates a much broader experience than just the English ‘sound’”. This is the fertile sonic field of cinematic play ideally at work in *prayoga cinema*. These rich ideas of an Indian rooted time and space, of the particularity of the moment marked with sound, the aural, and the oral critically constitute *Rati Chakravyuha*. A few ramifications of the reaffirmation of orality in/as *Rati* will now be briefly fleshed out.

In his 1988 seminal essay, “Who Needs Folklore?,” the late great Indian scholar, poet and translator, A. K. Ramanujan argues for the primacy of the oral in India, “In a largely nonliterate culture, everyone – poor, rich, high caste and low caste, professor, pundit, or ignoramus – has inside him or her a large nonliterate subcontinent.”<sup>7</sup> The fulcrum of *Rati* is the telling of the tale orally, in one shot, in one take. An ultimate aim is to efface the image, in Avikunthak’s words, in order to encourage the spectator to listen, engage, and reflect – to move beyond the facile seduction (no matter how basely satisfying) of the visual spectacle that too often comprises and dictates today’s globalized cinematic experience. In our April 2014 interview, the director put forth his perception that contemporary globalization is fundamentally about an erasure of culture and certain ideas of localized affect, where 21<sup>st</sup> century visual culture strives to construct a universal field of emotions and affect. Emerging from the particularly problematic trajectory of post-Enlightenment modernism, this universal humanism, for him, is a paradoxical trap. So in *Rati*, how does localized affect, expressly that emanating from the Indian/Bengali cultural milieu, become manifest?

Telling is the title of this filmic tale, *Rati Chakravyuha*, with its references to and resonances of both *rati* – the Hindu goddess of love and sensual pleasure/sexual love who is the consort of the Hindu god of love and desire Kamadeva – and *chakravyuha* – the virtually impenetrable labyrinth formation (shaped like a *chakra* or disc) utilized at a critical moment in the Hindu epic, *The Mahabharata*. The significance of materiality and corporeality in the earthy language of *Rati*, which begins with its very title, is fundamentally connected to an additional observation of Ramanujan:

The gods in the *puranas* and the heroes in the epics have bodies without bodily functions: they are not supposed to sweat, urinate, defecate, or pass wind. They do not blink their eyes nor do their feet touch the ground. *But in folk traditions, they have bodies, they are embodied, localised, domesticated.* [italics added]<sup>8</sup>



And pertinently, Ramanujan's further insight, "Folk renditions of the pan-Indian epics and myths not only bring the gods home, making the daily world mythic, they also contemporize them".<sup>9</sup>

Throughout *Rati*, the characters' down-to-earth, yet poetic and meditative Bengali (*bangla*) dialogue (written by Avikunthak and his screenwriting partner) circuitously flows, invoking multiple, intertwined layers of experience and meaning – from the elemental and ontological (water, earth, sky, sun, fire, rain, river, tree, birth, life, death, pain, blood, love, soul, sound, light, dark, creation, destruction, the beginning, and the end), to the religious and the mythological (Ishwar, Kali, Krishna, Radha, Ram, Sita, Hanuman, Lakshman, Ravanna, Buddha, Durga, Parvati, Shiva, yoginis, yakshis, and apsaras), to the historical, political, and locally rooted in Indian and Bengali/Kolkatan society (1947 Partition of India, Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence, Alipore Zoo, Eden Gardens, Victoria Memorial, Maruti and Ambassador cars, Enfield rifles, Indian cricket players, Bollywood/Tollywood stars, Mahatma Gandhi's 1948 assassination, Indira Gandhi's 1984 assassination, Rajiv Gandhi's 1991 assassination, and the 1993 Bombay bombings and riots). Thus, the group's oration twists and turns from the timeless to the time bound. A thrust of the film's "narrative" through the characters' discourse is to critically question the act of storytelling, the process of remembering and forgetting, and the construction of truth and falsehood. As is suggestively stated near the beginning of *Rati*, "How will we tell stories that we don't believe but live in?"

This structure of oppositional interrogation in the film bears fruitful results, specifically when addressing arenas of the taboo in Indian and Bengali society. An evocative and robust *bangla* is utilized to undermine and shatter ideas and realities of what constitutes the "sexual" and the "sensual," in both the realms of men and women, and gods and goddesses. The characters'

frequent frank utterance of words in *bangla* like "clitoris," "vagina," "penis," "anus," and descriptions of acts of "fucking," "orgasm," "masturbation," "menstruation," and "marital rape" works to forefront and "normalize" such proscribed, yet vital elements of existence and experience, often refreshingly from the position of a female subjectivity. In *Rati*, the Hindu goddess Sita loves both Ram (a Hindu god and her husband) and Ravanna (Ram's mortal enemy, who is able to abundantly sexually satisfy Sita); the Hindu god Krishna shoots his beloved consort, Radha, and then commits suicide; a Bengali husband rapes his wife; a Bengali woman experiences a clandestine orgasm on a park bench at the Victoria Memorial (a popular hangout for lovers in Kolkata); and a Bengali wife masturbates to climax. The characters' literal articulation of the sexual and the sensual, of pleasure and pain, both in liberating and corrupting terms, supersedes Indian/Bengali society's frequent incongruous quest for a sanitizing of the sexual and perverting of the sensual. In essence, *Rati*'s candid yet lyrical dialogue advocates a more honest search for Indian/Bengali ontological truth(s) and experience(s).

In conclusion, Avikunthak's *Rati Chakravyuha* strives for an economy of narrativity that is not perspectively and teleologically driven (principally in accordance with so-called Western norms). The film continually pushes conceptions of cinematic narrativity into the realm of, specifically temporal, experience(s). With the present omnipresence of the moving image, the illusionary dynamism of instantaneous imagery actually induces a state of *stasis*, and not a state of *stillness* that can engender the reflection that *Rati* seeks. This foreboding state of stasis leads to the/an ultimate commodification of experience, a continually commercialized mediation of being. Crucially, Avikunthak's artistic praxis, using the terminology of *prayoga* cinema, utilizes *mimamsa* ("investigation," "reflection") and the subsequent *samvaad* ("dialogue") necessary to productively move forward in expanding our notions of the capacity of cinema in this frantically frenetic time of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Interview in *Debordements*, March-April 2013.

<sup>2</sup>Niru Ratnam, "Ashish Avikunthak: FutureGreats 2014," *Art Review* [http://artreview.com/features/2014\\_futuregreats\\_ashish\\_avikunthak/](http://artreview.com/features/2014_futuregreats_ashish_avikunthak/), (accessed May 1, 2014).

<sup>3</sup>*Prayoga* screenings and conversations have been held from the 2006 Tate (London) exhibit, to the 2008 National Centre for the Performing Arts (Mumbai) show, to the 2011 Visva Bharati conference (Santiniketan) in honor of Mani Kaul (in many respects, looked to as the/a "father" of the *prayoga* sensibility) to Toronto and Singapore in 2013, and recently in 2014 at Johannesburg, South Africa.

<sup>4</sup>Louis Schwartz, "Deleuze, Rodowick and the Philosophy of Film," in *Film-Philosophy* (online, 2000); see also Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Hugh Tomlinson, trans., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in Thomas Elsaesser, ed., *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 59–60.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, 15.

<sup>7</sup>A. K. Ramanujan, "Who Needs Folklore? The Relevance of Oral Traditions to South Asian Studies," *Manushi* (no. 69), 3; originally a lecture given at the University of Hawaii in 1988.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 12.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, 13.

# Rati Chakravyuh Dissolving Nothingness Into Nothingness

शून्य में शून्य का विसर्जन-चक्र

by Amrit Gangar

## Finding a form, a cinematographic Mandala!

सिनेमॉटोग्राफिक मंडलः स्वरूप का निजी आत्मसात और निरंतर खोज ।

All of Ashish Avikunthak's cinematographic work seems to be held by a common thread, by an invisible *sutradhāra*, the thread-holder, and that *sutradhāra* is *kāla* or *time*, which in turn, is held by Kāli - his consistent faith in the Tāntric Sakta cult.<sup>1</sup> From his very first work *Etcetera* (1997) to *Rati Chakravyuh* (2013), Avikunthak, as i have been watching him since he started making films, is constantly in search of a formal energy (not just 'form' per se), a *swaroopa sakti*, and in that sense *Rati Chakravyuh* is not an accident, it is a consequence of his praxis, his belief system.<sup>2</sup>

About an hour-long meandering single-take in *Katho Upanishad* elongates itself to a circular 102-minute in *Rati Chakravyuh* through Avikunthak's temporal engagement.<sup>3</sup> However, what i find interesting is his increasing employment of the spoken word, the *sabda* and its sensorium.<sup>4</sup> As if the silent eloquence of *Etcetera* had to become *vāchik* (verbal) eloquence of *Rati Chakravyuh* and some of its predecessors. But it is still within a certain body, the *sarira* that its *enconsity* is retained. This *enconsity* he might call *religiosity* but it is, i think, more of an ongoing *dharma*. Once translated into a 'religion', the term *dharma* tends to lose its true edge. Worse, it becomes a static and dogmatic corpus rather than a dynamic concept-in-action.<sup>5</sup>

My usage of the word 'religion' henceforth will be in the sense of *dharma*, which could itself take a form of sound (*sabda*).<sup>6</sup> In his films, Avikunthak's *sabda* of silence (*Etcetera*) to *sabda* of *dhwani*, sound (*Kalighat Fetish*, 2000) to *sabda* of *mrityu*, death and its *rahasya* or mystery (*Katho Upanishad*) has been increasingly acquiring an abundance (*Rati Chakravyuh*); this is also an interesting part of his journey towards finding a form, as if a cinematographic Mandala, where *sabda* rings like a rhythmic chant! *Rati Chakravyuh* is a *chakra* (circle) within a Mandala of *chakra* that embeds a triangle, the *trikonā* and a central dot, a *bindu*, seed or a *beej* as it were! Broadly speaking, and as M Esther Harding in his essay, *The Reconciliation of the Opposites: The Mandala*, mentions, the Oriental thought concedes to the unconscious much greater place in the psyche than in the West; consequently 'evil', the destructive aspect of the life force, is not excluded or repressed but is recognized as the negative or dark aspect of the deities. So Kali is but the devouring aspect of the Mother Goddess, while Siva is both Creator and Destroyer.<sup>7</sup> "The goal of perfection for



the Oriental is not identification with the All-Good, as it so often is with us; rather, he seeks that enlightenment through which good and evil are recognized to be relative, a pair of opposites, from whose domination the individual can be released by acquiring a new standpoint and a new centre of consciousness."<sup>8</sup>

## Mandala, the Practice, the Significance

मंडलः अनुष्ठान, सारगमिता

Simply stated, the *mandala* would mean a 'circle' or a 'holy circle' or even a 'charmed circle'! In the sense of Yantra, it is a two- or three-dimensional geometric composition considered to represent the abode of the deity, within the broad sense of Sacred Geometry. The word appears in the *Rig Veda* and the Tibetan Buddhism has adopted it in its spiritual practice.<sup>9</sup> In his autobiography, *Memories. Dreams. Reflections.*, C.G. Jung, describes *Mandala* at length. It is a graphical representation of the centre, which Jung calls 'seat of the Self' or the archetype of wholeness.

However, in association with the film *Rati Chakravyuh*, besides Tantra, what i find fascinating is the way the Mithila tradition imagines 'Kohbar' or the nuptial room. In Mithila's folk tradition, the priest or bhagat draws a circle about his place, chanting appropriate mantras. That prevents the evil from causing any harm or hindrance to his performance. The bhagat's place is called gahbar (cave). Kohbar, the nuptial room, where the newly-wed couple perform the *garbhadhānam* rite, is also made a 'protection space'. Like the nontribal priest, the Oraon Mati makes a 'protection space'.<sup>10</sup>

Talking about geometry would be a long debate for the specialists but what i find interesting is Plato's imagination of the cosmogony, he said, 'God geometrizes continually' (as attributed to him by Plutarch). My hypothesis is that it could be interesting to contextualize or even problematize the continual circularization of *Rati Chakravyuh* within the Renaissance Perspective-cinematography debate. In his paper *Seen From Nowhere*, Mani Kaul, deals with this aspect.<sup>11</sup> By continual circularization, *Rati Chakravyuh*, defies a convergence presumed by the perspectival perception, and even the presence or the notion of conventional 'frame', which is significant.<sup>12</sup>

Again, what interests me is the sub-texts and their randomness: a sub-text of the *sabda* and the sub-text of the *circularity* or the cycle of movement-image and time-image, in their randomness. In this essay, i propose to discuss these aspects of Avikunthak's cinematographic work, particularly with reference to his film *Rati Chakravyuh*.

**"Rati Chakravyuh, the film, keeps us engaged with such crazily linked stories turning myths into realities, realities into myths or both into both, as the camera keeps encircling on faces mouthing words, without any dramatization or acted intonation, manifesting the power of sabda, and its abstraction that can give birth to million stories."**



#### **Graveyard / Space. Death / Time.**

#### **Goddess of Love / Rati: The Life-Cycle.**

रमशान (आकाश). मृत्यु (काल). रति: सर्जन-विसर्जन का चक्र।

It begins with the graveyard (space) in *Etcetera* and passes through death (time), which could be sacrificial or suicidal (*Kalighat Fetish, Vakratunda Swāhā*, 2010), through sensuality of the *sarira* (body) or Rati (*Nirākār Chhayā*, 2007). The philosophy of *Tantra* would suppose that the body is the link between the terrestrial world and the cosmos, the *body* is the theatre in which the psycho-cosmic drama is enacted.

Rati, the Goddess of Love is the female erotic energy, when Sakti sees Siva, *rati* becomes active. Rati represents kinetic energy too; the couple's union, completeness, and this has been depicted in different schools of the Indian miniature and other painting. However, Sakti of the Saktas is not the consort of Siva. In her cosmic self, Sakti-Siva are eternally conjoined. "The significance of *viparita-rati* in the copulative cosmogony is of the feminine principle constantly aspiring to unite, the feminine urge to create unity from duality, whereas the masculine principle, with each thrust, invariably separates, representing the phase of dissolution of the universe."<sup>13</sup>

Death keeps returning to Avikunthak's films, but in *Katho Upanishad* (2013) it emerges profoundly, where Nachiketa faces Yama, the God of Death and questions him about mysteries of death.<sup>14</sup> Strangely, Death accompanies Rati in *Rati Chakravyuh* in a form that ends in dissolution and not termination; the mass suicide or *samuha atma-hatyā* is not the end, it is birth of a desire.<sup>15</sup> Rati is often personified as one of the two wives of Kāma-deva (God of Love) together with Priti. Rati is also the noun of the sixth Kalā of the Moon; in the planetary constellation, where the Moon has the lowest essential dignity, it is at the critical nodal axis of *Kāla Sarpa*, Serpent of Time. *Rati Chakravyuh* is born in a coil, in the Sakti consciousness, in the temporality of *Kāli*, and the *sutradhāra* keeps holding his thread through.

#### **Srichakra Puja, the ritual worship and cinematographic circumambulation.**

श्रीचक्र पूजा और सिनेमेटोग्राफिक परिक्रमा।

*Rati Chakravyuh*, the film, is born on a night of the complete lunar eclipse (*chandra grahana*) when the Srichakra Puja (a group ritual-worship) is performed, it is on this night the six newly-wed couples and the priestess meet in a circle (sitting cross-legged on the ground) and reflect on many issues concerning life and its mysteries, physical and metaphysical, existential and ephemeral, rational and irrational, carnal and incarnal, immediate and remote, political and apolitical, personal and impersonal, mythical and mundane! It is believed that during a lunar eclipse a special energy fills the atmosphere which is considered to be very effective for Tāntric *sādhanā* (ego transcending spiritual practice).<sup>16</sup> The worship of Devi in Srichakra is regarded as the highest form of such ritual. Iconographically or ritually, Siva and Sakti are engaged in the eternal dissolution and recreation of the universe. Rati represents kinetic energy, in its completeness; she is in the superior position. Foremost *Yantra* in Tāntrism, Srichakra represents the Yoni. The basic goal of the Srichakra Puja is expansion of consciousness into higher powers. This ritual is a group attempt to rise to a specific higher brain power, finally reaching the most difficult state of the Eternal Being.

In this context, I personally would like to hazard a guess that though Avikunthak had bounced off with the idea of *The Last Supper* (in fact that was the original title of the film, if i am not mistaken), the entire imagination of the film *Rati Chakravyuh* is much closer to the aspect of *Srichakra Puja*. In *Rati Chakravyuh*, Avikunthak does choose six couples (men-women, twelve of them, like twelve apostles in the Last Supper) and a priestess as he calls her, following the Biblical *Last Supper* legend, and then he imagines them to killing themselves, picking up from the mass suicides by devotees of some extreme cultist traditions. But the notion of *chakra* or the circle seems to have emanated from the Tantric Srichakra Puja ritual, which is in line with his belief in the Sakti cult. Avikunthak employs the word 'chakra' in a Tantric sense, i.e. mystical circle (or diagram), *chakra* is also whirlpool, while *vyuh* is a circular flight. Chakravyuh is any circular array of troops (as in the *Mahābhārata*). *Vyuh* would also mean to shift, transpose, alter, separate or resolve.

The so-called priestess in the film is like Chakranāyikā, or leader of the group (interestingly one meaning of mandala / mandal is also group or assemblage), but in the film obviously all hierarchies dissolve, physical or metaphorical, what remains is the myth, the *māyā*, and dissolution. The circle of *Rati Chakravyuh* turns into a *chakra* of reflections on the ontological beginning and the end, life and death, on copulation and fertility, libidinous or otherwise, on unions and disunions, on *Prakriti*'s (Universal Nature's) three basic qualities (gunas): *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. And the play of all this leads to the film's references to bloody riots, wars, masculine sexual aggressions and digressions verging on masochism and sadomasochism, mythologies and mythical beings popping out of the memory's crevices, the real stories cropping up on a cricket ground or in an automobile, a dysfunctional turning into a functional; the film in this sense turns into a huge archaeological ground where memories and myths are buried, upside down, downside up and dug out, as if in and from *tantra*.<sup>17</sup>

The *sabda* turning into a *sarira* and its surrealist or erotic phantasy, its sensuality of Rāvan's body with ten tongues and twenty arms, and hundred fingers that can become an object of carnal desire for Sītā! These imaginations are so familiar to the pan-Indian mindscape that keeps blurring the division between the sacred and the profane, moral and immoral, good and evil; they are all profusely absorbed in Kāli. This is how one of the brides fantasizes (sub-textually representing herself and the womanhood at large) Sītā's love for Rāvan, the passionate carnal love:

After a brief resistance, Sītā began to like Rāvan kissing her simultaneously with his ten lips at her toes, feet, fingers, navel, breast, eyes, vagina, buttocks, ears, forehead and lips; all at the same time, all at once. Sītā, as one of the brides says, had gone ecstatic, while expressing her preference for such a physical pleasure. "Any woman would have liked this," she said. According to her story of killing of Rāvan by Rām was a hoax and Rām had developed a liking for Rāvan for Sītā's satisfaction. On the other hand, Krishna had shot Rādhā dead in a dream where he had entered all naked. Rādhā asked him the reason for being naked in her dream. Without responding to her, Krishna pulled his revolver and shot Rādhā. And as this bride's phantasy goes, "The gun had only three bullets. The first hit her chest, piercing her left breast and entering her heart. The second hit her right forehead and the last one hit her stomach but could not pierce it. The bullet ricocheted and hit three behind Krishna and it set the tree on fire. As

Rādhā lay dying she cursed Krishna, and told him that he would not be happy making love to anyone else in his life. By killing Rādhā he had killed his own happiness.

Krishna commits suicide and as we are informed, he was the only God who had committed suicide. The couples' along with the priestess's seemingly automated, uncontrolled mind-projections effortlessly slide into many myths and associative analogies alluding as if to integrated deviations on a *tantric* template, mundane becoming *mārmik* (discerning, piercing the vitals); one of them is about Māruti (Hanuman) and his namesake Indian car that was "a monkey in its past life."

According to mythology, Māruti, the Hindu wind god, Vāyu, had two sons, Hanumān, the bachelor God and Bhima. His mother Anjanā was an *apsarā* (wife of a heavenly musician) born on earth as a female *vānara* (monkey) due to a curse. She was redeemed from this curse on her giving birth to a son. Being son of Anjanā, Hanumān is also called Anjaneya. There are so many legends around Māruti or Hanumān, and one of them interprets him as the incarnation of Siva.

Māruti Suzuki India Limited, commonly referred to as Māruti and formerly known as Māruti Udyog Limited, is an automobile manufacturer in India. It is a subsidiary of Japanese automobile and motorcycle manufacturer Suzuki. The name Suzuki is a common Japanese surname meaning 'bell wood', 'bell tree' or 'bud tree'. And this 'tree', as i imagine it, also connects with Hanumān and Sītā. According to one version, Hanumān finds Sītā under a tree, thinking of committing suicide because she saw no way out of her captivity at Ashok Vātikā in Lankā by Rāvan.<sup>18</sup>

*Rati Chakravyuh*, the film, keeps us engaged with such crazily linked stories turning myths into realities, realities into myths or both into both, as the camera keeps encircling on faces mouthing words, without any dramatization or acted intonation, manifesting the power of *sabda*, and its abstraction that can give birth to million stories. It is the phantasy, it is the eroticism (sans titillation) and psychic energy that challenges our established notions and draws us into the cyclical time and the space in depth, perceived and imperceived and like children we stay askance curiously. The fact of the single-shot recedes into the *Yantra* that Avikunthak so cleverly sets up like huge mass of micro and macro memories, crossing three times, past, present and future, all circulating within *trikāla*, the tri-temporalities as it were!



### Rati Chakravyuh and its sub-text.

रति चक्रव्यूह और उप-सूत्र।

Every text of this film has a sub-text and every round that the camera takes has its sub-round or sub-circle, as i perceive it. This ‘sub’ is of significance. And this sub-ness (sub-consciousness) emerges from two aspects, viz. Yantra and Tantra. Among its many meanings, Tantra would mean a class of works teaching magical and mystical formularies (mostly in the form of dialogues between Siva and Durgā) and said to treat five subjects (1) the creation, (2) the destruction of the world, (3) the worship of the gods, (4) the attainment of all the objects, esp. of six super-human faculties, (5) the four modes of union with the supreme spirit by meditation.

Tantra also means the warp or threads extended lengthwise in a loom, an uninterrupted series – perhaps *Rati Chakravyuh* works like a loom with circulating spindles accumulating yarn upon yarn, *sabda* upon *sabda* as its sub-text. And this very *sabda* as it is impregnated with sensuality turns the film much more tactile

and haptic than it seems on its skin; it is in our minds and imaginations that such tactility or hapticity keeps endensing itself.

*Tantra* is a theory, a science; Yantra, a mystical or astronomical diagram used as an amulet, machine, Yantrak is the one who is well acquainted with machinery, a mechanist, *Rati Chakravyuh* is both *tantra* and *yantra*, it is a technology of the *manas* (mind) and *sarira* (body), and it is Jantar Mantar, the observatory of the machine called the movie camera and its levers and lenses, its *eye*.<sup>19</sup> It is the sub-text of the main-body, finally sub-merging into the *tattva* (essence) that could be material, sensorial, mental or egotic, all amounting to a mixture of pure and impure, comprising the soul and its limitations and the pure, signifying the internal aspects of the Absolute. These form the sub-text of the film, as i would suppose, considering its overall Tantric enclosure. It also emerges from the goddess’s triad of Will (*Icchha*), Knowledge (*Jnana*) and Action (*Kriya*), under the *sabda* skin of the film, there lays such sub-text of sub-consciousness that governs it, that governs the world beyond logic and rationalism.



Cinematographer Basab Mullick’s keenly circumambulating camera embeds its sub-texts with the director Ashish Avikunthak’s *vāchic* rambling (but still in a coil) sub-texts. And whatever is being stated by the couples and the priestess through obvious words, the sub-text would make a very broad sub-templatic layer underneath, e.g. Kali’s three manifestations – creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. Graphically, her form would assume a straight line in time of protection, while in time of destruction she takes the form of a *circle*, and for creation, she becomes the brilliant appearance of a triangle. As if, Avikunthak sets up this *circle* of ‘destruction’ through the Kali sub-text, the *tāntric* sub-template! But i will call this destruction, a dissolution, and that’s how the film ends – in darkness, without showing the actual mass suicides of the thirteen. It is these sub-texts that keep opening up the viewers’ individual memory boxes, the older the viewer, the fuller the memory box, the younger the viewer, the fuller the amusement box!

### Space. Time. Ellipsis / Inference.

आकाश. काल / समय. अध्याहरण।

The circular physical space occupied by the six newly-wed couples and the priestess as i presume is placed within the square space of the room (imagined as a temple space) and through that space remains *adhyāhāra* (elliptical), it still gives me the sense of the Kali Yantra or the Mandala, where the centre of the circle also remains *adhyāhāra* in some sense, the void encircled has life of its own. The film provides us this spatial experience, it has its *sparsh* (tactility), and so even *samaya* (time) remains *adhyāhāra* within the spatial womb, *ākāsa garbha*. And the film in its circularity seems to be developing two simultaneously ontological and epistemological (which also includes *avidyā* or ignorance) in both its sub-textual *time* and *space*.

Mullick’s camera most of the time captures the faces of the memory and myth-making couples but at times it slips into an *adhyāhāra* as we don’t see a face but hear the words, the camera-eye is somewhere else. This *adhyāhāra*, i suppose, compliments the *amurta* (*abstraction*) of the words, of *sabda* that Avikunthak employs. In the process, *Rati Chakravyuh*, the film, becomes a *lilā* of the *amurta* enlightening the burden of *realism* in the elastic spaces of our minds. This abstraction or the imaginary along with ellipses provides the film its temporal enclosures and disclosures, its own *vyuh*, the stratagem in its cyclical. And though we know in advance the film was to last for 105 minutes (102 +

3 minutes of titles and darknesses), this knowledge stops being pre-deterministic as the abstraction of words keeps enveloping *time* in its *myth* and *maithuna*. Even we are told beforehand that all these young couples (along with the priestess) would commit suicide before their honey-moon on the night when the moon has been eclipsed, this knowledge too does not seem to become pre-deterministic as we proceed listening to their stories transporting us to a kind of free-zone beyond death as termination of life. As if the physical reality of human bodies was awaiting a kind of redemption in the space-in-predicament along with the encircling camera as the observer of unfolding of life and its mysteries. *Rati Chakravyuh*, the film, in its intrinsic dynamism saves *space* from being claustrophobic, *ākāsa* does not become oppressive. And it is neither dramatized through acting or through lighting, it is non-theatrical, non-proscenium.

### Feminine and Masculine / Prakriti and Purusha.

प्रकृति और पुरुष।

In *tāntric* cosmology, the whole universe is seen as being built up from and sustained by dual forces, Sakti and Siva, the feminine and masculine, *prakriti* and *purusha*; although as Devi says in the *Devibhāgavata*: ‘At the time of final dissolution I am neither male, nor female, nor neuter.’ She is formless, attribute-less, in her ultimate aspect of Reality.<sup>20</sup>

The monthly efflorescence of woman in her menstrual cycle is in rhythm with the lunar cycle and creates a body-consciousness which is related to the processes of the universe.<sup>21</sup> Since, according to *tantra*, the body is the link between the terrestrial world and the cosmos, the body is, as it were, the theatre in which the psycho-cosmic drama is enacted. *Tāntric* literature records an extensive body-language usually known as the science of *Amritakalā* (kalā as a fraction), which charts the energizing centres of female body according to the calendar of the light and dark (*shukla* and *krishna*) halves of the moon, the *Chandrakalā* (moon-fraction). Woman’s body is both a unity and an organism directed towards oneness, wholeness.

In the Yantra, the goddess’s unfolding is represented by five triangles, indicating the five *jñānendriyas* or the organs of knowledge and the five *karmendriyas* or motor organs; the encompassing circle, which is *avidya* (ignorance or delusion); and the eight-petaled lotus, indicating the eight-fold *Prakriti* (Nature): earth, water, fire, air, ether (space), *Manas* (Mind), *Buddhi* (Intellect)



and *Ahamkāra* (ego-consciousness). Her cosmogonic diagram is imbued with the pulsation of *prānas*, the life-force.

Geometry as a contemplative practice is personified by an elegant and refined woman, for geometry functions as an intuitive, synthesizing, creative yet exact activity of mind associated with the feminine principle. But when these geometric laws come to be applied in the technology of daily life they are represented by the rational, masculine principle: contemplative geometry is transformed into practical geometry, observes Robert Lawlor in *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice*.

### **The Circle: Where is the beginning? Where is the end?**

वर्तुलः आरंभ कहाँ? कहाँ अंतः?

After a momentary darkness on screen (once the titles had rolled by) as the film unfolds, i was filled with anxiety as to from what

point of the circle the cinematographer Basab Mullick's camera would begin, as he was not dealing with a linear line! The circle was a pre-knowledge, so were the newly-wed couples and a priestess forming it in a chosen place and its space but not the camera's predicament. This obvious *vāchik-vartul-lila* (dialogic-circular-play) is sandwiched between two momentary passages of darkness, of nothingness, in the beginning and at the end, as if it evoked the Jaina principle of *time* as having no beginning nor end, being *ananta*.

As a geometrical form, the circle (also the sphere) has always been an enchanting figure. In spherical geometry, the Euclidean idea of line becomes a great circle or a circle of maximum radius. This great circle could be *Kāli*; and perhaps triangles within the Mandala! It is this geometry, I think, that keeps infusing energy into the film *Rati Chakravyuh*'s yantra. Basab Mullick's camera on a trolley or dolly gives us the sense of rotation (besides revolution) too, as if there was its axis in the centre, the *bindu*.<sup>22</sup> Else,

its movement gives us the sense of *ether* or *ākāsa* as it moves in *time*, real and irreal.

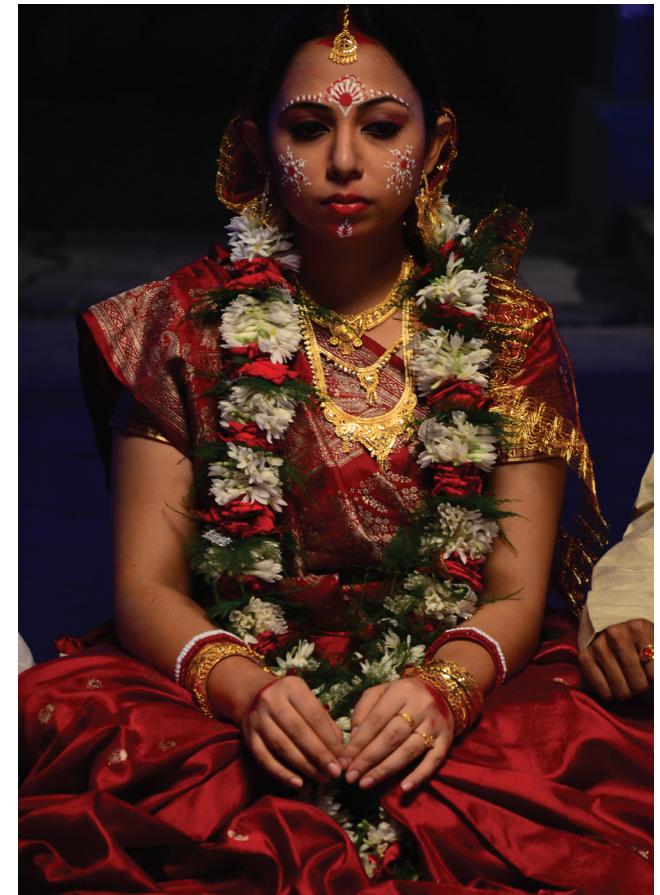
Where did the camera begin on the circle after the inaugural darkness? It began slightly leftwards (*vāma*) to the priestess (who is single without her spouse, and hence maybe she earns the priestess's status and she is as young as other couples). Mullick's camera inaugurates its movement with a male (groom) who reflects upon the beginning of our universe and says, "In the beginning was rain. It was not falling but was all around."<sup>23</sup> "But," says one of the brides at an unpredicted circular moment, "[...] that rain gave birth to sadness. In the beginning was rain." The circle has no sequence, no uni-dimensional view, as the story of *genesis* has none – between the two definite points, birth and death; the camera is not equidistant, it keeps changing its relational proximity to the speaking mouths, the facial geographies. This is an interesting sub-textual *vyuh* (stratagem) set up by the cinematographer Basab Mullick.

And from that point it sets its 102-minute real-time journey. And where did it stop? Just before the darkness returns towards the end, the camera almost abruptly stops slightly right of the priestess. The circle has its temporal uncertainty as death is, but as I said before, it is dissolution (*vilaya*) and not termination (*anta*). Interestingly, the camera has picked up its velocity towards the end! Had everyone reached her or his ontological orgasm? Had everyone reached the moment of her or his *vilaya*? At the end as if everyone had uttered 'swāhā' with the priestess and consigned her or himself into the unseen *agni* (fire) in the pit of the circle, we don't see.<sup>24</sup> Where did the film end – on the circle or in the unseen great ritual, the *mahā-yajna* in its unseen *kunda*, the centric sanctum sanctorum of *agni*?

### **Magic of words and the cinematographic transference. Not information.**

शब्द-माया और सिनेमेटोग्राफिक अनुप्रेषण।

On his loom, Avikunthak (along with Saugata Mukherjee), weaves the yarn of words in a fabric, but that has no linear pre-deterministic logic in its spindle rotations. It has a typical group psychology at play, both six young men and six women are independent minded with their own views about phenomenal and objective realities / non-realities. But then the words they speak create a certain seductive enchantment along with the *charmed circle*. In one of his comments, Le Bon had described the group



mind thus, "A group is subject to the truly magical power of words; they can evoke the most formidable tempests in the group mind, and are also capable of stilling them." And as he says reason and arguments are incapable of combating certain words and formulas.<sup>25</sup>

Though *vāchik* as i described *Rati Chakravyuh* before, it does not cater to providing information or become an usual information-film, on the contrary i would think it raises the question about the function of art, or the relationship between the work of art and communication as it is not an agent for conveying pieces of information. In one of his lectures, Deleuze had commented that there was a fundamental affinity between a work of art and act of resistance. Quoting Andrei Malraux he said, "Art was the only thing that resisted death."

**"Rati Chakravyuh is obviously a political film at both text and subtext levels, as it keeps politicizing myth or mythologizing politics—phenomenological, ontological, epistemological, existential, historical, national, intra-national, sports, sexual, iconic, biological as it memory—veins show us the wounds, healed and open, into the redness of blood and blackness of Kāli."**



Explaining this Deleuze comments, "You only have to look at a statuette from three thousand years before the Common Era to see that Malraux's response is a pretty good one. We could then say, not as well, from the point of view that concerns us that art resists, even if it is not the only thing that resists." Though, as he clarifies, not every act of resistance is a work of art, nor every work of art an act of resistance, and 'yet, in a certain way, it is.'<sup>27</sup>

More interestingly, Gilles Deleuze refers to *Not Reconciled* or *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. "Bach's speech act is his music, which is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the partitioning of the profane and the sacred. This musical act of resistance culminates in a cry. Just as there is a cry in *Woyzeck*, there is a cry in Bach: 'Outside! Outside! Go on, I don't want to see you!' And as Deleuze argues, when the Straubs underscore the cry, that of Bach or that of the old schizophrenic in *Not Reconciled*, revealing a double aspect. The act of resistance has two sides. It is human, and it is also the act of art. Only the act of resistance resists death, whether the act is in the form of a work of art or in the form of human struggle.

Deleuze raises a question to answer, "What relationship is there between human struggle and a work of art? The closest and for me the most mysterious relationship of all, exactly what Paul Klee meant when he said, 'You know, the people are missing.' The people are missing and at the same time, they are not missing. The people are missing means that the fundamental affinity between a work of art and a people that does not yet exist is not, will never be clear. There is no work of art that does not call on a people who does not yet exist."

The six newly married couples' mysterious dissolution, the *vilaya* as the film *Rati Chakravyuh* closes its circle with, is a sign of its resistance, the sign of their resistance – resistance to many dispensations already embedded in circumambulating sub-texts as it were. And to my mind, in the present filmmaking scenario, *Rati Chakravyuh* as a film itself, is an act of resistance, when the films as 'products' are constantly consumed by the market and its seductive powers! *Rati Chakravyuh* is a grand *cinema of prayoga*.<sup>28</sup>

**Nation! Violence! Death! Blood!**  
राष्ट्र! युध! हिंसा! मृत्यु! रक्त!

*Rati Chakravyuh* is obviously a political film at both text and subtext levels, as it keeps politicizing myth or mythologizing politics – phenomenological, ontological, epistemological, existential, historical, national, intra-national, sports, sexual, iconic, biological as it memory-veins show us the wounds, healed and open, into the redness of blood and blackness of Kāli. I counted some individual words and the number of times they recur and found out that the word 'death' occurs the maximum times – 56, followed by 'blood' – 47 times, both Kāli and rain – 45, followed by Rāvan – 41, and then come Sita – 33, Rām – 33, Krishna 31, Sex – 25 and Haumān – 13 + 14 Māruti, towards the end before they talk of darkness, light, soil, fire, ego, death, sex, Kali, water, sun and devil, a groom refers to a 'Dakhin Murti Hanuman' alluding to his many forms. The word 'dakhin' 'or 'daksina' is significant, which means 'one who is facing south. South is the direction of death, it would also mean the right (not left) side. Since Daksina Murti Hanuman (in fact it should be more proper to say Daksinamukhi Hanuman or Māruti), and since he faces the south, black magic is often performed in front of such idols.

The *Mahākālasamhita* gives nine names of the goddess Kāli and one of them is Daksinā; others being Samshāna, Bhadrā, Guhyā, Kalā, Kāmakalā, Dhāna, Siddhi and Candikā. Kali is also known as Vāma, one who is on the left. The *Nirvāna Tantra* says that Vāma is the granter of Great Liberation after conquering Siva who is on the right. The left, female, conquers the right, male, hence the goddess is called Daksina-Kāli. As James Joyce warns in his novel *Ulysses*, "... beware of the left, the cult of Shakti." Black Kāli is worshipped in cremation grounds as Smashāna Kāli. She makes her abode there to receive those who come to take rest in her.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, I would venture to suppose, the thirteen of Avikunthak's characters have gone to this form of Kāli – to the smashāna – to take rest in her on their own volition.

Why does the word 'blood' recur as many as 47 times in the film? It does because there are wars, there is killing, there is Kāli, there is nationalism, there are nations at war, neighbours at war, there is a pent-up anger inside human-beings, and there is the over-powering 'death' (56) mixed with existential angst. One of the brides consid-



ers blood as the ‘beginning’ of our being and non-being, and she says, “it was the blood that gave birth to Kāli; it was the blood that was sacrificed to Kāli. It was the blood that killed Krishna.” And one of the grooms sees not only their end in the blood, at the same night. The End.” Was it his individual and collective premonition?

Remembering the first day of her menstruation, yet another bride, memorizes the blood, “I also remember the first day of my menstruation. Instead of urine, blood came out. I was terrified. I thought I was dying. My mother told me that there is nothing to worry. She said that death happens when blood comes from the mouth. She said death comes when you stop urinating. She said blood from the vagina makes your body pure. You become goddess when blood passes through your Yoni. From a Yogini, you become a Yakshi. One day this blood that you shed will give birth to a life and that day from Yakshi you will become Mātrika.”

Yogini is one of Kāli’s countless partial manifestations, among whom are living women. The yogini’s gesture, the *Ahuryavaradā mudra*, suggests: “I am the Universal Feminine.” Like all the Mahāvidyas, Kāli is a Great Yogini.<sup>30</sup>

Though countless forms of yoginis emerged from the body of Kāli, sixty-four of them are named in the *Kālika Purāna* with their prescribed worship, and in the *Bhutadāmara* (a tantric text) eight different methods of yogini-worship are described. Yakshi is goddess of wealth and guardian of the treasure.<sup>31</sup> Mātrikas is a group of Hindu goddesses (singular: Mātrika), always depicted together. Since they are usually depicted as heptads, they are called Saptamātrika or ‘seven mothers’, viz. Brāhmani, Vaishnavi, Maheshwari, Indrāni, Kaumāri, Varāhi and Chamundā or Narasimhi. In Nepal, Ashtamātrika or ‘eight mothers’ are venerated. In *Saktism*, they are described as assisting the great Saka Devi in her fight with demons. As already stated, for *tantra*, the human body is the microcosm, the theatre in which the psycho-cosmic

drama is enacted. In the *Yonitantra*, the menstrual flux is designated the ‘flower’ or *puspa*.<sup>32</sup> Through the use of non-linear psycho-linguistic apparatus (within Tantra cosmogony and cosmicity), *Rati Chakravyuh* transports us to different terrains of memory depending on what we remember through our own acculturation and assimilation of past memories and experiences.

### **Myth and Reality of Viewing and Engagement.**

मिथक-रूप, मूल-रूप, प्रेक्षण और लगाव।

After viewing *Rati Chakravyuh* in Mumbai at its Chatterjee & Lal Gallery premiere (followed by its five weeks of daily screenings during July-August 2014), I heard several viewers, both young and old, saying that though they did not understand the film, they found it extremely engaging. Where does this engagement come from? I think it comes from its magic of words, its language and the sub-texts about which I had already discussed, and these sub-texts as transference create a certain subterranean environment in the viewer’s mind – this environment is filled with a strange psychic energy in turn filled with a sense of curiosity.

The entire drama is created through the *sabda-lila* (word-play) and like the gopis of Krishna, the words keep dancing in circle as in *raas-lila*, sensuously, seductively, libidinously, crazily, challenging your established notions of gods and demons, of sexual morality and immorality, of popular beliefs and disbeliefs, Avikunthak and Mukherjee spare none, not even the popular cricketers because they are part of the larger *lila* of three *gunas*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, human history cannot escape them!<sup>33</sup> You cannot escape *Rati Chakravyuh*’s engagement...<sup>34</sup> It can touch your five body organs (the *panchendriya*) through the abstraction of words, the *sabda*... And *ākāsa* (space), internal and external, invisible and visible evoked by the *sabda* and *samaya*, the three that also melt in the end, they dissolve into nothingness, into *shunya*...<sup>35</sup>

#### **END NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Amrit Gangar in conversation with Ashish Avikunthak, *Cinema of Prayoga*, Eds. Brad Butler and Karen Mirza, a no.w.here publication, London, 2006. Kali represents the cyclical time-consciousness that transcends individual destiny.

<sup>2</sup> I personally think it is important to understand Avikunthak’s faith in the Saka cult which has its influence on his cinematographic oeuvre. In this context, I would like to refer to Robert Bresson’s work and the influence they have of Jansenism, which took the form of the recurrent themes of free-will versus pre-determinism. Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), a Dutch theologian. Between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Jansenism was a distinct movement within the Catholic Church, largely in France. The idea of *swaroopa sakti*, as I imagine and believe, should resolve the clichéd dichotomy between form and content as it essentially merges both into a unitary conscience very akin to my concept of *Cinema of Prayoga*.

<sup>3</sup> It is said that the word ‘mercy’ occurs 102 times in the Holy Bible.

<sup>4</sup> A sensorium is the sum of an organism’s perception, where it, as the seat of sensation, experiences and interprets the environments within which it resides. I think *sabda* as sensorium of sound, of *dhvani*, evokes an interesting sense. In the film, one of the grooms says in the beginning was *sabda* or sound which is Brahma or God. For him sound is truth, sound is the truth you hear.

<sup>5</sup> Right vision, tele-vision and dharma, Amrit Gangar, *The Speaking Tree*, The Times of India, 30 August 1997. In a seminar *Kala Darsana: Philosophical and Formal Approach to Arts* at IIT-BHU, Varanasi (14–30 June 2014) organized by the Center for Exact Humanities, International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad, Kumar Shahani said that religion was aroma, I would like to add that religion is also sound (and color). And in that sense the employment of *sabda* by Avikunthak in his films becomes interesting.

<sup>6</sup> Even during the kingdom of Christ those people who do not belong to the community of believers, who do not love him, and whom he does not love, stand outside

## END NOTES (continued)

this tie. Therefore a religion, even if it calls itself the religion of love, must be hard and unloving to those who do not belong to it. Fundamentally indeed every religion in this same way is a religion of love for all those whom it embraces; while cruelty and intolerance towards those who do not belong to it are natural to every religion. (Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.)

<sup>7</sup> *Psychic Energy: Its Source and Its Transformation*, M. Esther Harding, with a Foreword by C.G. Jung, Pantheon Books, 1963.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Rig Veda* is counted among the four canonical sacred texts of Hinduism known as the Vedas, the other three are *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. *Rig Veda* is one of the oldest extant texts in any Indo-European languages. Its most likely date approximates to somewhere between 1500 and 1200BCE.

<sup>10</sup> *Ritual Space (Tribal-Nontribal Context)*, Baidyanath Saraswati in *Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern*, Ed. Kapila Vatsyayan, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Kaul presented this paper at an international seminar on *Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern* conceptualized by Kapila Vatsyayan, New Delhi, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> For Plato, Reality consisted of pure essences or archetypal Ideas, of which the phenomena we perceive are only pale reflections. The Greek word 'Idea' is also translated as 'Form'. These Ideas cannot be perceived by the senses, but by pure reason alone. Geometry was the language recommended by Plato as the clearest model by which to describe this metaphysical realm. [Ref. *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice*, Robert Lawlor, Thames & Hudson.]

<sup>13</sup> *Kali: The Feminine Force*, Ajit Mookerjee, Thames and Hudson, 1988. In Tantra, Chhinnamasta, one of the Mahavidya goddesses, is depicted severing her own head and standing on the copulating couple of Kama and Rati, with the latter on top, i.e. *viparita-rati* (*viparita* means opposite, reverse). This is interpreted by some as a symbol of self-control of sexual desire. The love-deity couple also symbolizes *maithuna*, ritual sexual union.

<sup>14</sup> The *Katha Upanishad* (or *Kathopanisad*), also titled *Death as Teacher* in English is one of the primary and widely known Upanishads. Its early Persian translations first found their way to Europe. Max Mueller translated it in 1879. Edwin Arnold rendered it in verse as *The Secret of Death*.

<sup>15</sup> They had a *samuhā-lagna* or group-marriage.

<sup>16</sup> In *Srichakra Puja* of the 'left-hand' (vama) tantriks, a special homage is paid to the yoni (vulva: the female organ of generation). A famous temple at Kamakhya near Gauhati in Assam is dedicated to yoni-worship. Avikunthak's forthcoming film tentatively titled as *Devi* boldly deals with this Yoni aspect of Tantra and its morphology. I personally believe that Ashish Avikunthak is the only filmmaker in the world to have so consistently embraced and explored Tantra in his cinematographic *srarī* / oeuvre.

<sup>17</sup> In *Samkhya* philosophy, these are three *gunas* or constituent qualities of all material substances. *Rajas* is the second of the three *gunas* and is supposed to be the cause of the great activity seen in creatures, it predominates men, as *sattva* and *tamas* predominate gods and demons. *Rajas* also means menstrual discharges, menses. *Samkhyā* is one of the six schools of Indian philosophy, other five are, *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Yoga*, *Karma-Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*.

<sup>18</sup> In the name Hanuman, 'hanu' would mean the cheek. As Basab Mullick's camera encircles the couples, it keeps signifying the facial geographies and the brides' cheeks painted with bridal patterns, and they become prominent as perhaps beautiful spaces where Hanuman can have his free flights of imagination.

<sup>19</sup> The Jantar Mantar, meaning 'calculation instrument', jantar – instrument, mantar – formula or calculation, but it would also mean mantra. It is an observatory based in Jaipur, built by Sawai Jai Singh II (1688–1743). Among other five such observatories (Delhi, Mathura, Benaras and Ujjain), the Jaipur's is the largest and still operational. Relying primarily on Indian astronomical theories, the observatory predicts eclipses and other astronomical phenomena. Some of the yantras, the observatory has include, *Ram Yantra*, *Samrat Yantra*, *Digamsha Yantra*, *Narivalaya Yantra*, etc.

<sup>20</sup> *Devi Bhagavata Purana* or *Devi Bhagavatam* is one of the most important works of Saktism, along with *Devi Mahatmya*.

<sup>21</sup> Associated with the fertility cults, the annual celebration of Mithuna Sankranti or Raja Praba in Odisha is interesting. It is a four-day long festival and the second day signifies beginning of the solar month of Mithuna from which the season of rains begins, inaugurating the agricultural year, marking through biological symbolism. It is believed that mother goddess Earth, the divine wife of Lord Vishnu, undergoes menstruation during the first three days; the fourth day is called Vasumati gadhua or ceremonial bath of Bhudevi. The term 'raja' or 'rajas' is also traced to 'rajaswala' or a menstruating woman in this sense. During medieval period, the Raja Praba festival became more popular observing agricultural holiday. Bhudevi is also said to be Lord Jagannath's wife. A silver idol of Bhudevi is still found in Puri Temple aside Lord Jagannath.

<sup>22</sup> Mullick has a tremendous control on the circular movement of the camera, and we should appreciate the amazing role played by his focus-puller, Manas Bhattacharya, a young student from the Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute of India, Kolkata, where Mullick had himself studied, and the trolley-pushers, Anupam Poddar and Anupam Das from Kolkata's Tollygunge film industry. Since Mullick's proximity to faces is constantly variable, the task of focus-pulling must have been extremely difficult to achieve the desired sharpness and the unity of vision and movement.

<sup>23</sup> This is interesting because as I see in tropical countries such as India the humidity causes a high amount of water vapour in the air, which is in gaseous state of water and is invisible, but it does sweat the body wet as if under falling rain. I would assume the tropical countries have a kind of perpetual 'rain'. Maybe in the beginning was just humidity, absolute, relative or specific. *Rati Chakravyuh*, the film, is *relative*.

<sup>24</sup> In Hinduism and Buddhism, the Sanskrit lexical term *swaha* is a sacrificial oblique interjection while reciting the mantras. In Tibetan language, it is translated as 'so be it'. In the *Rig Veda*, it may also mean an oblation to Agni, the god of fire or Indra, lord of the heavens. And as oblation personified *swaha* is a minor goddess and the wife of Agni. It is a common belief that the gods to whom offerings are being made through *yajna* refuse the offerings unless the word *swaha* is uttered during the sacrifice. In this context you may read my essay *Transplantations*. In *Transcendence on Avikunthak's film Vakratunda Swaha* (2012).

<sup>25</sup> *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Sigmund Freud, 3rd edition, Tr. James Strachey, Hogarth Press, 1945. Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931) was a French social psychologist, sociologist, anthropologist, inventor and amateur physicist.

<sup>26</sup> Most films, non-fiction or fiction turn out to be providing pieces of information and become highly boring, as they lack in the basic essence of cinematographic temporality or its evocation. In the final analysis they get reduced to just databases, good or bad, and most of the discussions around these films turn out to be data-based.

<sup>27</sup> *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, Eds. Eleanor Kaufman, Kevin Jon Heller, University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Reference is to Jean-Marie Straub's film *Not Reconciled* based on Heinrich Böll's novel. *Not Reconciled* is widely regarded as an enigmatic work of the *New German Cinema*. Jean-Marie Straub had decided to abandon his homeland to avoid the draft during the Algerian Crisis and instead move to Germany where he was later joined by his wife Danièle Huillet whom he had met in Paris. The couple would become famous for the stage adaptations of Greek and Roman plays as well as a biography of Anna Magdalena Bach and minimalist version of Kafka's *America*.

<sup>28</sup> *Cinema of Prayoga*, a theoretical concept and a notion of cinematographic praxis that I have tried to develop and expand over the past eight years or so itself is such an act as it resists market, as it aims to retain the temporal essence of cinematography and its grace.

<sup>29</sup> *Kali: The Feminine Force*, Ajit Mookerjee, Thames and Hudson, 1988.

<sup>30</sup> The 'knowledge' aspect of Kali is represented by a sakti-cluster of ten goddesses known as the Dasa-Mahavidyas, the Ten Great or Transcendental Wisdoms. The first Mahavidya is Kali herself, as the power of Time, and the other forms are Tara, the potential of recreation; Sodasi, 'sixteen', the power of perfection, fullness; Bhuvaneswari, supporter of all existence, the distributor of life-energy; Bhairavi, the active power of destruction; Dhumavati, the power of darkness, inertia; Bagala, destroyer of negative forces; Matangi, the power of domination, dispeller of evil; and Kamala, the state of reconstituted unity. These nine goddesses are no longer worshipped separately from Kali, or if they are, their cults are esoteric. (*Kali: The Feminine Force*, Ajit Mookerjee, Thames and Hudson, 1995.)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> One of the brides thought that it was Krishna-Kali in the beginning. Now, from the Tantra perspective this notion of Krishna-Kali is interesting. According to *Tantraraja Tantra*, it is said that the goddess Lalita after charming men wanted to charm even the womenfolk on earth. And to achieve this, she assumed the form of Krishna. The association of Krishna with the goddess could be found in some parts of Eastern India, where he is worshipped as a black deity. It is believed that he is the male form of Kali, in other words, Krishna-Kali. But this view is negated by the priestess as she thinks in the beginning was blood and that encompasses even Krishna and Kali. Thus the *lila* of affirmation-negation, between beginning and the end, between birth and the death, goes on between minds and movements.

<sup>34</sup> The Rasalila is a divine dance of Krishna with Radha and her sakis, the gopis in Vrindavan when one night upon hearing the sound of Krishna's flute, they sneak away from their households and families to the forest to dance with Krishna throughout the night, which Krishna supernaturally stretches to the length of one Night of Brahma (*Brahma Roti*), a unit of time, said to be lasting about 4.32 million years. Loosely translated, the Sanskrit word 'lila' would mean a 'play'. There is yet another word, 'krida' that could also be re-contextualized here, e.g. *sabdakrida*, a 'play on words'.

<sup>35</sup> The ultimate *shunya*, if we interpret the film in that sense becomes significant to enter into the mystery of the origin of the universe. The early Western thinkers had tried to explain the revolution of the universe from finite things. Later they turned towards the Absolute or an Infinite Being. Infinite as the only reality and rest of the things its reflections. The philosophy of *shunya* forms the part of a larger mind, along with God, Supreme Spirit, Brahman, Infinite Being, et al. Probably, Nagarjuna (150–250CE), who expounded the philosophy of *Shunyaada* was one of the most important Buddhist philosophers after Gautama Buddha. He is also considered to be the founder of *Mahayana* Buddhism, which forms the distinguishing feature of *Vajrayana*, understood as an extension of *Mahayana*. In short, *Rati Chakravyuh* is not just a film, it is a filmosophy...

# Biography

## Ashish Avikunthak

**Born 1972 in Jabalpur, India**

**Lives and works in Calcutta, Bombay and New Haven**

Most recently named Future Greats 2014 by Art Review,

**Ashish Avikunthak** has been making films for the past 20 years. His films have been shown worldwide in film festivals, galleries and museums. Notable screenings were at the Tate Modern, London, Centre George Pompidou, Paris, Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, Taipei Biennial 2012, along with London, Locarno, Rotterdam, and Berlin film festivals among other locations. He has had retrospective of his works at Rice University (2014), Sings Festival Trivandrum (2013), Festival International Signes de Nuit, Paris (2012), Yale University (2008), National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai (2008) and Les Inattendus, Lyon (2006). In 2011 he was short listed for the Skoda Prize for Indian Contemporary Art, 2011. He has a PhD in cultural anthropology from Stanford University and has taught at Yale University. He is now an Assistant Professor of Film Media at the Harrington School of Communication & Media, University of Rhode Island.

### SOLO SHOWS

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2014 | <i>Rati Chakravyuh</i> – Aicon Gallery, New York<br><i>Rati Chakravyuh</i> – Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai<br><i>Rati Chakravyuh</i> – Experimenter Gallery, Calcutta |
| 2012 | <i>Katho Upanishad</i> – Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai<br><i>Vakratunda Sawaha &amp; Kalighat Fetish</i> – Aicon Gallery, New York                                    |
| 2010 | <i>Vakratunda Sawaha</i> – Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai  |
| 2009 | <i>Endnote</i> – Aicon Gallery, London   |
| 2005 | <i>Foot Fetish</i> – Seagull Arts and Media Resource Centre, Calcutta  |
| 2004 | <i>Calcutta Street Portraits</i> – Goethe Institut, Max Muller Bhavan, Calcutta  |
| 1999 | <i>Still Life and Bridge</i> – Piramal Galley, Center for Photography as an Art Form, National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay                                |

### SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2013 | <i>Hundred Years of Experimentation (1913–2013)</i> , Mumbai |
| 2012 | <i>Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction</i> ,         |

Taipei Biennial 2012

*Filament*, Experimenter Gallery, Calcutta

Five- Anniversary Group Show – Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai

*You Don't Belong: Pasts and Futures of Indian Cinema*, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou & Kunming

*Generation in Transition. New Art from India*,

Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Paris-Delhi-Bombay, Centre George Pompidou, Paris

*Video in Progress 4: Feelings of Distress*, Kolektiva, Ljubljana

*Human Frames*, Kunst-im-Tunnel, Düsseldorf

*Royale with Cheese*, Aicon Gallery, London

*Re-Frame*, Centre George Pompidou, Paris

*Re-Frame*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde

*Indian Experimental Films*, La casa Encindida, Madrid

*Cinema of Prayoga*, National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay

*Lightcone*, Centre George Pompidou, Paris

*Cinema of Prayoga*, Tate Modern, London

*Indian Experimental Films*, Cinema-Nova, Brussels

### RETROSPECTIVES

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2014 | Plan9, Gallery Fotografic, Prague             |
|      | Rice University Chao Film Festival, Houston   |
| 2013 | Signs Festival, Trivandrum                    |
| 2012 | Film Division, Bombay                         |
|      | Festival International Signes de Nuit, Paris  |
| 2008 | National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay   |
|      | Whitney Humanities Centre, Yale University    |
| 2006 | Les Inattendus, Lyon                          |
| 2004 | Goethe Institute, Max Muller Bhavan, Calcutta |

### FILMOGRAPHY

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2015 | <i>Kumbh Kalki</i> , DCP, Color and B&W, 80 minutes       |
| 2013 | <i>Rati Chakravyuh</i> , DCP, Color, 105 minutes          |
| 2011 | <i>Katho Upanishad</i> , 35mm, Color, 80 minutes          |
| 2010 | <i>Vakratunda Swaha</i> , 35mm, Color and B/W, 22 minutes |

2007	<i>Nirakar Chhaya</i> (Shadows Formless), 35mm, Color and B&W, 82 minutes	<b>FILM FESTIVAL, GALLERIES &amp; MUSEUMS SCREENINGS</b>	<b>Endnote</b> , 2005	<b>Kalighat Fetish</b> , 1999
2005	<i>End Note (Antraal)</i> , 16mm, Color and B&W, 18 minutes	<i>Rati Chakravyuh</i> , 2013	2014 <i>Plan9</i> , Gallery Fotografic, Prague	*Best Documentary, Tampere Film Festival
2002	<i>Performing Death</i> , DV, Color, 16 minutes	2014 Parramasala, the South Asian Arts Festival here in Sydney Australia	2010 <i>Rice University Chao Film Festival</i> , Houston	2014 <i>Plan9</i> , Gallery Fotografic, Prague
2001	<i>Dancing Othello (Brihnnlala Ki Khelkali)</i> , 16mm, Color and B&W, 17 minutes	Aicon Gallery, New York	2010 <i>Human Frames</i> , The Substation, Singapore	Rice University Chao Film Festival, Houston
	<i>Rummaging for Pasts: Excavating Sicily, Digging Bombay</i> , DV, Color, 27 minutes	Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan	2011 <i>Human Frames</i> , Asian Hot Shots, Berlin	2011 Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona
1999	<i>Kalighat Fetish (Kalighat Athikatha)</i> , 16mm, Color and B&W, 22 minutes	Gallery Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai	2009 Tramway Café Bar, Glasgow	<i>Generation in Transition. New Art from India</i> , Zacheta National Gallery for Art, Warsaw
1998	<i>Et Cetera</i> , 16mm, Color, 32 minutes	Experimenter Gallery, Calcutta	2009 Aicon Gallery, London	2010 Artprojx, London
		Rice University Chao Film Festival, Houston	2008 Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde	2007 Sommerszene, Salzburg
		Film Studies Program, Yale University	2008 Centre George Pompidou, Paris	Broadway Media Centre, Nottingham
		Film & Television Institute of India, Pune	2008 Jerusalem Film Festival	Cornerhouse, Manchester
		Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute of India, Pune	2007 Expanded Forum, Berlin International Film Festival	2006 The Hat Factory, Luton
			2007 River to River, Florence Indian Film Festival	The Peepul Centre, Leicester
			2007 Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival, New York	Arts Picturehouse, Cambridge
			2007 International Bunker Film Festival, Italy	Arnolfini, Bristol
			2007 Tongues on Fire - Asian Woman Film Festival, London	Watermans, Brentford
			2007 <i>Let It BE! A Festival of Independent Films</i> , Bombay	Bite The Mango! Festival, Bradford
			2007 San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival	MAC Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham
			2007 International Film Festival Rotterdam	Tate Modern, London
2008	Best Director, Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival, New York	<b>Vakratunda Swaha</b> , 2010	2006 European Media Art Festival, Osnabrück	Centre George Pompidou, Paris
2001	Best Documentary, Tampere International Short Film Festival, Finland	2014 Plan9, Gallery Fotografic, Prague	2005 Espace Croise, Roubaix	Espace Croise, Roubaix
		Rice University Chao Film Festival, Houston	2005 South Asian Film Festival, Seattle	Bite The Mango! Festival, Bradford
		Contemporary Art Platform, Kuwait	2004 Scratch Projects, Paris	MAC Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham
		2012 <i>You Don't Belong: Pasts and Futures of Indian Cinema</i> , Hong Kong	2003 Queer Filmistan, San Francisco	Tate Modern, London
		<i>Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction</i> , Taipei Biennial 2012	2002 New York Gay & Lesbian Film Festival	Centre George Pompidou, Paris
		2011 <i>Human Frames</i> , Kunst-im-Tunnel, Düsseldorf	2001 Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Film Festival	Espace Croise, Roubaix
		<i>Video in Progress 4: Feelings of Distress</i> , Kolektiva, Ljubljana	2000 Tampere Film Festival	Bite The Mango! Festival, Bradford
		<i>You Don't Belong: Pasts and Futures of Indian Cinema</i> , Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou & Kunming	2000 Chingari Video Fest, Madison	MAC Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham
		<i>Generation in Transition. New Art from India</i> , Zacheta National Gallery for Art, Warsaw	2000 London Film Festival	Tate Modern, London
		Paris-Delhi-Bombay, Centre George Pompidou, Paris		Centre George Pompidou, Paris
		2011 Rotterdam International Film Festival		Espace Croise, Roubaix
		2010 Jordon International Film Festival		Bite The Mango! Festival, Bradford
		Hamburg International Short Film Festival		MAC Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham
		Gallery Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai		Tate Modern, London
				Centre George Pompidou, Paris
				Espace Croise, Roubaix
2009	<i>Shadows Formless</i> , 2007	<b>Dancing Othello</b> , 2001		Bite The Mango! Festival, Bradford
	*Best Director, Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival, New York	2014 Plan9, Gallery Fotografic, Prague		MAC Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham
	*Best Actress, Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival, New York	Rice University Chao Film Festival, Houston		Tate Modern, London
		2010 Royale with Cheese, Aicon Gallery, London		Centre George Pompidou, Paris
		2009 Gallery Chatterjee & Lal, Bombay		Espace Croise, Roubaix
		2006 "Desire under Banyan: Beyond Bollywood", Pacific Film Archive, UC Berkeley		Bite The Mango! Festival, Bradford
		2005 Retrospective of Indian Documentaries, Cinema-Nova Brussels		MAC Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham
		2004 "Shakespeare in Asia", Conference on Theatre, Stanford University		Tate Modern, London
		2002 "Dance in South Asia", Conference on Performance, Swarthmore College		Centre George Pompidou, Paris
				Espace Croise, Roubaix
				Bite The Mango! Festival, Bradford
				MAC Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham
				Tate Modern, London
				Centre George Pompidou, Paris
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				Tate Modern, London
				Centre George Pompidou, Paris
				Espace Croise



35 Great Jones Street • New York, NY 10012 • 212.725.6092 • [newyork@aicongallery.com](mailto:newyork@aicongallery.com)