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Paternal Metaphors and the City-Village Dynamic in Nehruvian and Emergency Eras vis-à-vis *Naya Daur* and *Sholay*

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Abstract

The familial metaphors of the father, the mother, or the brother have been in use in Indian political rhetoric and discourse since independence serving both to forge an organic bond between the political establishment and the citizenry and to establish a continuity of political heritage and legitimacy. In the Nehruvian years, it served to level categorical differences in the Indian National Congress by appropriating the *spirit* of the Mahatma in order to grant legitimacy to Nehruvian policy and ideology, and in the Indira years, the appropriation of the paternal *spirit* meant to legitimize her rule amidst a thronging opposition. The city and the village as ideological signifiers also served to drive home this project of political consolidation negating basic differences such as the Nehru-Gandhi debate on the rural-urban roadmap of the nation. Where the city emerged as the Nehruvian public project- gone wrong in the Indira years because of the hostility of political Opposition in the cities, the village began to be projected as sites of welfare intervention thereby also serving to amend the failure of the paternal policy towards India's villages. Amidst these circumstances, the popular Hindi film serves to critique any such appropriative method thereby using the same political-familial signifiers to downplay their conservative assimilation. It therefore serves as a tool of ambivalence—granting legitimacy to the political project of figurative assimilation in the 'totality' of the plot while denying such a legitimacy in the non-essential/ excessive/ *surplus* dimensions of the cinematic plot, thereby exposing the *play* of signifiers so characteristic of pre-liberalization regimes irrespective of the nature and/or degree of their authoritarian character. Using the commonplace Derridean projections, the *spirit* of the father will be shown to trace its own *spectre* haunting the political narratives of the age. This will be the crux of our analysis of two films—one from the Nehruvian years (*Naya Daur, 1954)* and another from the Emergency years (*Sholay, 1975)*.

Keywords: Spirit, Spectre, Gandhi, Nehru, Indira, Ambivalence, Hindi Cinema

Resumen *Metáforas paternas y la dinámica ciudad-pueblo en las era nehruviana y la Emergencia en relación con **Naya Daur** and **Sholay***

Las metáforas familiares del padre, la madre o el hermano se han utilizado en la retórica y el discurso político indio desde la independencia, sirviendo tanto para forjar un vínculo orgánico entre la estructura política y la ciudadanía como para establecer una continuidad de la herencia política y la legitimidad. En los años nehruvianos, sirvió para suavizar las diferencias categóricas en el Congreso Nacional Indio al apropiarse del espíritu del Mahatma con el fin de otorgar legitimidad a la política y la ideología nehruvianas, y en los años de Indira, la apropiación del espíritu paternal significó legitimar su gobierno en medio de una oposición masiva. La ciudad y el pueblo, como significantes ideológicos, también sirvieron para recalcar este proyecto de consolidación política, negando diferencias básicas como el debate Nehru-Gandhi sobre la hoja de ruta rural-urbana de la nación. Si la ciudad surgió como un proyecto público nehruviano, algo que fracasó en los años de Indira por la hostilidad de la oposición política en las ciudades, los pueblos fueron proyectados como espacio de intervención asistencial, lo que también servía para corregir el fracaso de la política paternalista hacia los pueblos de la India. En estas circunstancias, la popular película hindi sirve para criticar cualquier método de apropiación, utilizando así los mismos significantes político-familiares para restar importancia a su asimilación conservadora. Por lo tanto, sirve como una herramienta de ambivalencia, otorgando legitimidad al proyecto político de asimilación figurativa en la "totalidad" de la trama mientras niega tal legitimidad en las dimensiones no esenciales/excesivas/excedentes de la trama cinematográfica, exponiendo así el juego de significantes tan característicos de los regímenes anteriores a la liberalización, independientemente de la naturaleza y/o el grado de su carácter autoritario. Utilizando las habituales proyecciones derrideanas, se mostrará que el espíritu del padre traza su propio espectro que acecha las narrativas políticas de la época. Este será el enfoque de nuestro análisis de dos películas, una de ellas de los años nehruvianos (Naya Daur, 1954) y otra de los años de la Emergencia (Sholay, 1975).

PALABRAS CLAVE: espíritu, espectro, Gandhi, Nehru, Indira, ambivalencia, cine hindi

The *spectre* is uncanny. It works in unfathomable ways to perform acts of subversion. The spectral signifier haunts the domain of presumed connotations but is forced to contest with its own ghosts which suppress it. Ambivalence therefore emerges from the battle between the 'ghosts' of the visible, the obvious and the present and the 'presence' of its haunting *traces* that let slip textual anxiety (Derrida 1994, 156). The dead and the undead marry each other in configuring the *spectre*. It is located in the interstices of such fixities. In the context of historical allegiance serving the function of hegemonic national mythopoesis, the *spectre* of the past lies in the unappropriated aspect of history. Unlike the profound anxiety of Benjamin's angel which is almost swept afar by the winds of progress, the spectral trace awaits its activations and reactivations to 'play' with dominant metaphors of history. National(ist) mythographies often deploy the metaphors of the family and this is invariably true in the Indian context since

independence. The Nehruvian policy of co-ordination among ministries as the supreme means to the nationalist goal after independence and the Congress System with its strategic co-option of voices at the margins to forge the 'Big Tent' (Kothari 1964, 1168) found their convenient historiographic equivalent in the edification of the '*spirit*' of Gandhi as the moral compass erasing all differences that had historically been observed within the party. The Mahatma as the moral *father* thus brings out the inherited continuity of party policies and guaranteed its legitimacy. Nonetheless, the '*spirit*' of Gandhi is a carefully used term in this context and has historical corroboration as well. As Reba Som writes, ever since the days of the freedom struggle, Nehru had been acutely aware of the *stirring, animating* impulse that Gandhi and Bose commanded among the masses. This led to the realization that he would need Gandhi in *spirit* even despite his fundamental disagreements with him (Som 2004, 116-117). This notion of the '*spirit*' to which national mythography of the post-colonial Indian nation aspired tends to be therefore qualitatively opposed to the 'spectre'. It is intended to maintain the aura of comprehensive unity instead of puncturing holes through which the latent ghosts of history emerge. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the '*spirit*' as 'an animating or vital principle; the immaterial or sentient element of a person' (OED 1325). While hinting at the possibility of the impulse and impact of the immaterial, this definition tends to conceal subversion by quickly resorting to the convenient principle of 'inspiration, animation, and encourage [ment]' in the final phases (OED 1326). However, when looked at from the perspective of continental philosophy and its history, the '*spirit*' conveys the inadmissibility of restraint in any form. Recuperating its philosophical traces therefore makes it possible to rescue it from the clutches of the hegemonic national(ist) mythography that had as its singular purpose the goal(s) of inspiring and encouraging enthusiasm for nationalist discourses especially in the years immediately following independence.

In a different context vis-à-vis European philosophy from Descartes to Rousseau, a different connotation of the *spirit* arises. The *spirit* in their understanding stood beyond the deterministic actions of the human subject and was rather the thinking consciousness which could reflect upon its desires and capacities without merely being subjected to natural laws. This emboldened the *spirit* to change the starting point of thought itself as opposed to the unilinear reasoning in the empirical philosophers that began with presumptions (such as Adam Smith's

desiring subjects). The Self was thus introduced as a *subject* rather than an object of laws and principles with the capability of introducing its autonomous principles (Lawler 2006, 319).

It is no wonder then that a champion of radical humanism such as Jean- Paul Sartre would later write about Descartes as the precursor of individual freedom (Sartre 1966, 622-628). The contention that such a philosophical tradition then broke away from the understanding that the *spirit* involved the unfolding of universal principles across time as a teleological certainty is established. Cultural Studies as a discipline becomes a befitting epistemic system at this juncture of philosophical demarcation. In pointing to the attention to Cultural Studies in post-war Europe, Stuart Hall wrote that the strict demarcations of class founded on class consciousness was occluded through the production of 'mass culture' which confounded this possibility (Slack and Grossberg 2016, 25-30). Cultural studies thus grew in response to this and with a view to examining both the 'interpellative' effects of popular culture and investigating strains of class consciousness prevailing in cultural expressions in the fringes. In other words, where the historical narrative pointed to the *spirit* of capitalism in contrast with its predictive resolution offered by Marx, cultural theorists were looking for possibilities of the emergent yet throttled expressions of the *spirit* of Marxist resolve in cultural domains itself. This is further emboldened by a trajectory of cultural analysis wherein a text presents pluralism of expressions not only owing to its connotative aspect but also by the multiplicity of effects that each expression has on the subject who interprets (Grossberg 1997, 170). Drawing on this tradition, our analysis delves into popular cultural expressions in order to elaborate the semantic plurality of the Hindi popular cinema itself in the pre-liberalization years. Despite not being a Marxist analysis as such, the analysis draws on the domain of culture as repositories of contending expressions of the *spirit* so much so that the film itself does not get defined as either conservative or subversive vis-à-vis the historical narrative.

Coming back to the domain of Indian political history then with a renewed understanding of this contentious play of the *spirit* in cultural discourse, we realize the use of the *spirit* of the deceased paternal figure (the Father of the Nation in Nehru's time and the biological Father in Indira's tenure) in consolidating legitimacy amounts to a suppression of the multiplicities of the connotative *spirit*. The dead cannot write back, respond or reciprocate indicating its convenience as an empty signifier—one on which writings can be etched *ad infinitum* but without any reciprocation. Nevertheless, the films discussed here show an irresistible urge to rescue the *spirit* from such appropriations. They hint at the prospect of the *spectre* of the father

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rather than its *spirit* although such a subversive propensity remains occluded by the popular conventions of the film medium. While acknowledging its role in proposing national iconographies, the films tacitly *trace* their concomitant suspicion regarding them. The examination of this methodology is the focal point of our representative reading of *Naya Daur* and *Sholay*—both films involving national icons qua actors and being representative of the Nehruvian and Indira years respectively.

The Father Appropriated in Indian Political History

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru took command of a nation reeling under acute desperation from two centuries of colonial rule and persistent social problems of class inequalities and caste prejudices. While his government took stringent measures to prevent untouchability and other evil practices, the abolition of landlordism or *zamindari* was something over which his executive actions fumbled. Moreover, Nehru's efforts towards building the economy tended to heavily concentrate on industrialization fuelled through public investment and had grossly failed to achieve self-sufficiency in food production and the solution of rural problems (De 45-50). On the other hand, his own mentor since the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi had persistently maintained his stance in favour of a self-reliant society with a vibrant community life as he found in the villages of Indian society. Notwithstanding the practical implications of Gandhian political economy, his persona becomes enmeshed in a past that the Nehruvian regime sought to transcend in their bid to modernize the nation. At the same time, the contention with the principal political opposition of the times—namely, the Communist Party of India (CPI)—was also a matter worth reckoning. The dispute with the Communist Party arose mostly on issues of social and economic problems plaguing the rural areas. The relative success of land distribution in the Namboodiripad-led government in Kerala could have probably been an implicit reason for launching the first President's Rule in the state. It is clear that the turn of events in the 1950s and 1960s at the level of global politics actually led to the long-lost primacy of the rural space in shaping political futures. This bode true for a form of Marxist *praxis* based on a revision of the Marxian understanding that a communist revolution was possible only in the most industrialized nations of Western Europe. As Raymond Williams observed with respect to the revolutions that had taken place in China and Cuba with a staggering industrialized labour force and a dominant peasantry, the assumption of the old imperialist countries that 'what has

happened to them is what was happening or would happen to everyone' was false (Williams 1973, 292-293). The peasantry in the Third World was already proving to be a potent revolutionary brigade.

The pressure from the opposition was undoubtedly a national manifestation of a global phenomenon. In these circumstances, the appropriation of the Gandhian *spirit* was only Hobson's choice for the ruling establishment in the attempt to suggest its humane and moral uprightness bolstered by the fact that Gandhi's opposition to Marx stemmed from his perception of the lack of *spirit*ual detachment from capital in Marxist discourse as well which, in his view, was bound to give rise to moral prejudices such as violence, apathy and avarice (Gurukkal 2012, 64-65). Gandhian morality was, in other words, the compulsive resort for the Nehru-led Congress in their resistance to the *spectre* of the Communists. This strategic essentialism of the *spirit* of Gandhi also abetted the concealment of differences between party figures with hegemonic command over the masses. However, such strategies did enable the propagation of ideological affinity for rural stakeholders (and cinema itself became a convenient tool to be utilized for the purpose) but could do little to bring about material transformations in the conditions of the rural poor and Indira Gandhi's subsequent turn to the countryside as the primary template for policy objectives was an indication of the same. This study resorts to the analysis of one of Dilip Kumar's blockbuster productions, *Naya Daur* (1962) as a case study for highlighting how the popular film was exploited to serve the ends of such strategic essentialism but the intent would also be to see how the *spirit-spectre* of Gandhi reproduces a hermeneutics of the text which is of serious concern to the Nehruvian establishment. The inadequacy of such appropriation gets reflected in precisely those junctures of the text which call for a structural reading of the film as a text rather than an affective medium for the unilinear conveyance of any politically sponsored message.

The Indira years in Indian politics were marked by the paradoxes of massive restructurings of the economic and political life of the nation (the Green Revolution and the 42nd Amendment touted as a 'mini-Constitution' are some examples) and the magnanimous continuity of paternal politics as can be witnessed in a proper genesis of the Emergency of 1975. As Gyan Prakash notes, the seeds for the vilest provisions of the Emergency were already sown in the initial Constituent Assembly debates where the consideration of the ground for suspension of rights as being the Parliamentary onus rather than the mandate of the 'due process of law' was indicative of the politics of power-play (Prakash 2019, 59-60). Thus, even when the forces of

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the opposition led by JP Narayan would call upon Indira Gandhi to follow in her father's footsteps, historical records show that she was observing a continuity of tradition of political struggle while amplifying its nature and outreach (and the Emergency was an eventful occurrence distinguished only by its scope and outreach). At the same time, Indira's turn to the rural countryside implied a course correction in Congress policies and the suturing of the gaps in the father's political career but was also characterized by the paradoxical intention to carve out her own identity in the process. In fact, the credit-based mechanisms for enhancing productivity also marked a new scheme for policy implementation (fuelled by private incentives and enterprise) as opposed to the public investment- led approach to modernization that was so dear to Nehru (De 2023, 79). Thus, it was clear that while Indira Gandhi had to garner the legitimacy of Nehru to consolidate her rule, the break away from the paternal political past dominated by volitional coordination and continuous compromise was a necessity. It is this 'anxiety of influence' that shaped her regime and led to the appropriation of the '*spirit*' of Nehru as the moral compass of legitimacy even if the policy objectives and political character differed on a large scale. However, the objectives of rural rejuvenation, while being accomplished to some extent, did not immediately translate into alleviation of rural poverty and inequalities and in fact sharpened those. Thus, the differential identity sought to be carved out of the paternal sphere of influence failed at the level of policy. Moreover, the urban space also became a disturbing site of political disruptions during her rule as could be seen in the turbulence in Bihar and also in the Railway Strikes of 1974. Indira's disgruntlement towards the urban youth and the corresponding appreciation of the moral high-ground of India's villages can be seen in the following excerpt from an essay entitled "A World Without Wait" published in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year 1975* where she compares privileged disgruntlement with actual dissatisfaction stemming from poverty in rural areas and other underdeveloped regions of the nation-

> And disquiet is most marked in those sections whose expectations are the highest, such as the urban, educated middle classes and skilled workers in the more sophisticated industries. In a way, the outlook of such groups is similar to that of the people of rich countries: a feeling that they alone matter and a disinterestedness in the welfare of the huge numbers who live in villages. Unless the minds of people are remoulded, infused with comprehension of and compassion for the suffering of the many, progress itself will be unreal. (Gandhi 2022)

Haunted by the ghosts of paternal subjugation (most of the members of the Congress Organization had been Nehru's close aides such as the veteran Tamil leader, K Kamraj), Indira

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Gandhi tried her hand at striking policy changes which ended up being haunted by the ghosts of the unfulfilled aspirations of the past. In this context, the analysis of another blockbuster cinematic production reflective of these conundrums, Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay (1975)* is attempted in this paper. While the film conservatively dwells on the idea of disciplining the vagrant urban youth and instrumentalizing their masculine vigour to achieve statist objectives such as granting protection to the rural space, our reading positions the latter as a contestable site with social ills stemming from un-redressed Nehruvian inadequacies itself—an instance of the *spectre-spirit* that refuses to be contained in the matrix of the politics of Congress Syndicate.

In both instances and epochs cited above, it is the *spectre-spirit* of the paternal signifier which reacts to its containment. While in Nehru's case, it is the iconized Gandhi which denies its edification as the politics of negative representation, in Indira's context, it is the 'failed father' (whose lapses give Indira a scope for a new identity and iconization) which reacts to the assumed break with the paternal past necessary for the novelty of the politics of the Congress Syndicate. However, one question that still begs for a proper explanation is the one pertaining to the suitability of the medium of popular Hindi cinema as a legitimate site for the intervention of the *spectre*. The answer to that might be located in the functional modalities of cinema in the pre-liberalization years where its evasion of statist gaze, albeit not directly foregrounded, was founded on ambivalence.

Whither Hindi Cinema?

As has been argued earlier, a trajectory of cultural studies in which the text exhibits a pluralist ontology and multiplicities of forms contingent on the effects it has on the reader is best suited to the analysis of the Hindi commercial cinema in the years before liberalization. This is so because governmental machinery since independence were insistent upon casting a definite outlook on cinema itself as a medium. The Chanda Commission reports coupled with the Cinematograph Amendment Act of 1949 tended to look upon cinema as a vehicle of national interest that had to realign itself along the lines of public morality in the years of nation-building (Vasudev 1974, 101). Poised at a juncture where the production and distribution system were largely private-based unlike the media and where strict censorship protocols loomed large, the film as an object itself exhibited a rather ambivalent product—one that shied away from any stance of critique in the guise of 'popular' ingredients such as the melodrama while leaving

traces of suspicion about its intent in places. It is perhaps this unique ontological stance of commercial cinema that drew from Indira Gandhi the following uncanny observation:

> I am sorry to say that the majority of the films exhibit violence and crudity… It is true that in the end virtue triumphs, but that it is not sufficient to wipe out the impact of two hours or more of continuous vice, crime and violence. The morality at the end is only a cloak (Bhattacharya Mehta 2020: 128).

While not being able to question the politico-critical intent of films that had already become commercial successes by Indira Gandhi's time, the statist response had been the promotion of Arthouse Cinema and the Film Finance Corporation (FFC). In this context, the ambivalence of the Hindi commercial leaves room for identifying its intent, scope and objective in the manner which the audience propensity thinks fit. It is a contention of this study that it is precisely in the 'non-ideological' that the film locates its critical interfaces. Such an exploitation of the 'popular' aspects of cinema could involve extrapolation of an inconsequential aspect of a scene that eventually conceals subversion or the occlusion of the critical message by means of the intensity of affect. In either case, the 'popular' will only be shown to perform the function of a double-knot which awaits readerly insight for its unpacking. Resorting to the popular does not simply erode the critical consciousness of such directors and it lies as the unyielding *spectre* in their otherwise popular film-texts.

It is in this light that we might proceed with our analysis of *Naya Daur (1957,* dir. B. R Chopra) and *Sholay (1975* dir. Ramesh Sippy) with a focus on the ambivalence of paternal association and identity as outlined in the beginning of this essay through the metonymic role-plays of the city and the village signifiers in film-texts.

Naya Daur (1957) and the Liminal Haunting in the *basti*

Acknowledged as one of Dilip Kumar's evergreen blockbusters, *Naya Daur* ('The New Era', dir. B. R Chopra, 1957) tells the story of the platitudinal debate between humans and machine and the debilitating impact of machinery on the relevance of human labour. Being aggrieved by the decision taken by a landlord-cum-factory owner's apathetic son to replace human labour with newly imported machinery and motor cars in a rural community, Shankar (played by Dilip Kumar) challenges him to a contest which amounts to a race between unequals—the horse-drawn cart of Krishna and the motor van imported from the city. The terms and conditions of the race are such that if the labourers on whose behalf Shankar competes win, the surge of

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machinery imports will be brought to a halt and the Chhote Babu will leave the *basti*. The narrative sympathy for the dwellers is brought out through the enormous toils, trials and tribulations they undergo in order to build a *pucca* road so as to compete with fairly equal chances in an impossible venture. Apparently, the harmonious reconciliation towards the end following Shankar's victory suggests a change of heart for Chhote Babu accompanied by moderate chastisement by his father who has always been considerate towards his tenants in the typical Gandhian fashion of trusteeship. In fact, the film evokes Gandhi's own disgruntlement towards machinery in the outset erecting thereby the moral compass which guides the narrative. However, it is rather a Gandhian *spirit* congealed in the fabric of Nehruvian modernity. This is evident in the narrative resolution of the co-existence of production relations, the acknowledgement of machinery alongside the humane considerations of livelihood for all and the incorporation of the *basti* in the discourse of national advancement thanks to the efforts of the reporter from Bombay (played by Johnny Walker). Perhaps the diegetic indicator of such congealing is the opening scene of the temple where a long-shot captures the pillars of the stairway uncannily resembling the towers of thermal power stations and recalling the famous 'temple of modernity' quip of Nehru. Nevertheless, despite these efforts at presenting a congealed Gandhian *spirit*, the spectre of Gandhi emerges in certain narrative fissures wherein it performs two functions—first, it points out which aspect of Gandhian philosophy it conveniently leaves out but whose *traces* can be tracked, and second, it reflects on the incomplete nature of Nehruvian modernity itself in in terms of its neglect of the village community (Gandhi held this so dear to his heart) which, as has been outlined in the beginning of this essay, was one of the lapses of the Nehruvian regime.

The community represented in the film is one which is neither rural-agrarian nor urban-industrial. It is rather a *third space* wherein the intricies of rural life are made to co-exist with factory-like conditions in its work units. The term *basti* is often used to describe it by its dwellers although the English equivalent, 'dwelling', easily bypasses geo-administrative taxonomies and instead signifies communitarian rootedness. In fact, the first reference to the term comes from Shankar right after the first song sequence involving him and his best friend, Krishna (played by Ajit Khan) and this sequence celebrates the brave martyrs of the nation (*desh*). However, the narrative consistently reveals inconsistencies between the ongoing march of modernity in the nation (*desh)* and the *basti*. In the confrontational episode involving Shankar and Chhote Babu during the promulgation of the bet, Shankar responds to Chhote

Babu's equivocation by claiming that the concerns of the *desh* and the *basti* may not always coincide. This is a direct reflection of the inconsistencies between hegemonic enforcements of nationalism and the organic demands of community life that Gandhi along with Tagore had talked about in their 'spurious nationalisms' as Ashis Nandy points out (Nandy 2006, 5). In fact, it is quite understandable from a historical perspective why the village as an agrarian production unit is not a friendly Nehruvian signifier, but in creating a liminal site, the film actually opens up the site for multiple and contrasting significations. The Gandhian *spectre* arises in such fissures. The fact that benevolent trusteeship can exist in the *basti* (and not the village with a different form of production) also traces the absence of such benevolent production relations in the agrarian *gaon* dominated by the predominance of landlordism and deteriorating production-relations. Where cinematic appropriation relies on the empirical demonstration of unidimensional meaning, the liminal space connotes by virtue of the absence.

The appropriation of Gandhian trusteeship is ideologically meant to promote the unhindered progress of Nehruvian modernity. To that end, the virile labour force that the narrative projects becomes a convenient appropriative signifier just as the road which is constructed as the villager's response to the absence of proper infrastructure in the village so as to enable equal competition—both perform indispensable functions for the post-independence obsession with modernity. This, however, is resisted by the film itself at several critical junctures which are not important sequences from the viewpoint of the plot as a whole. The village gathering that celebrates the star-struck lovers (Krishna and Lakshmi, played by Vyajanthimala) in the song, *Jeend Meriye*, shows the women dancers shaking their hands and ankle-clad feet in unison and harmony to the tune of the song. The shots capturing the collective hands and feet demonstrate a diegetic unity but also defy reification which inevitably is a part of the mode of production in modernity. The evocation that such unity serves both to create products of value and also to enhance the quality of the apparently non-productive act of leisure resists the unilinear appropriation of human identity tied to the concept of labour—a guilty trace of Marxist discourse itself. Instead, it restores the Gandhian faith in organic ties between people that he found in the ideal of the *gram swaraj* and wished to see replicated in urban dwellings (Jodhka 2002, 3348). Gandhi's critique of industrial modernity rested more on its tendency to restrict the identity of humans and this is what he found to be the reductionist core of industrialization disentangling identity from a rich horizon of meaning and exposing the 'for-ness' of tools and

even humans as operative tools (George in Srivastava et al. 2020, 226-227). Multi-layered approaches to human unity and collective will thus stir free from such reductionist impulse. It is worth noting that this is also a self-reflexive instance of the narrative owing to its occurrence right after the induction of the first machine into the *basti*. This is so because it proleptically suggests the collective unity that would be required henceforth on the part of the labour-force but also tries to allay the necessary evil of reification that is bound to emerge under the new conditions of production for which there ultimately seems to be no alternative in the new age of machinery. The message that Gandhi then remains a compromise alone in the post-colonial nation-state is blatantly brought out regardless of the harmonious narrative resolution. The placements of such plot sequences are far more relevant in fostering the subversive meaning of the text than the plot as a whole and thus certain aspects of the narrative *syuzhet* tend to be dissonant with its *fabula*.

The second aspect which represents modernization at the cost of neglect of the rural setting is best revealed when the labourers decide to first build the road in order to be able to compete in the race. In the years of Nehruvian socialism, the tremendous potential for public investment was always acknowledged. A perceptive viewer cannot but consider the fact that a public initiative such as the building of roads could have actually prevented the displacement and migration of people from the *basti* while also complementing the inevitable induction of machinery. However, in the absence of public investment or initiative, the task lies in the hands of the labourers and dwellers themselves. The labour that contributes to the building of the road is otherwise unproductive and is glibly affirmed to be such when the reporter from the city is surprised to find that it has led to the stalling of economic activities in the area. The intended purpose of a public investment-led initiative would have rather been to keep the economy in circulation. This leads to a broader understanding in which the narrative is not *per se* opposed to public investment-driven modernization but suggests its unfulfilled promise in the rural space—the very heart of Indian civilization as affirmed by Gandhi and Nehru. This further goes on to already locate the site of the rural as a politically rife space especially when the Communist opposition had begun to replicate public initiatives in the villages such as land redistribution and others in states like Kerala. The narrative thus projects these differing standards of rural policy by evoking mere *traces* of discontent. Critics like Probal Dasgupta find in the logic of the visual illusion that popular film projects an Indian critique of the Establishment discourse of positivist truth (Dasgupta in Lal and Nandy 2006, 20). Our

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contention is that the cinematic analysis offered here in this paper, instead of bypassing the power of the visual, exploits it to such ends that the visible invokes the *trace* of a presence not essentially foregrounded in the play of light and darkness. It is rather conceptualized beyond this play as the spectral metaphor which could destabilize the terrain of the narrative.

In this regard then one is also forced to wonder if Gandhi becomes the singular voice for the village in the Congress establishment that never hesitated to piggyback on the support of landlords. Perhaps, the political unconscious of the narrative lies in the resurfacing of the issue of the politicized rural space and the towering national icon of the Mahatma serves to alleviate its effect. The resolution of the conflict in the end is also conveniently articulated in the rhetoric of private sentiments as is characteristic of melodrama. This does not acknowledge the value of transformations in public policy for ensuring the principal message of the text, and instead relies on characterizations (good rent-seeker/ bad-rent seeker, conscientious *mazdoor*/ unconscientious worker) to fuel its meaning. It is no wonder then that the melodrama was the most convenient political tool for the ruling establishment in the Nehruvian era serving both to entertain and propagandize.

Sholay (1975) and the Specter's Smile

Ramesh Sippy's blockbuster production, *Sholay* coinciding with the Emergency in 1975 heralded the popular 70mm widescreen format with stereophonic sound. Not only was it one of the longest running films of all time but its legacy is such that its 3D version was released very recently in 2014. The film adopts many conventions of the Western but also fundamentally adapts them in the rural Indian context. Set in the fictional village of Ramgarh, the plot revolves around the exploits of two young urban vigilantes, Jay (played by Amitabh Bachchan) and Veeru (played by Dharmendra Deol) who are brought to the village by the cop-turned-patriarch, Thakur (played by Sanjeev Kumar) to rid it of the excessive malefices of the bandit, Gabbar (played by Amjad Khan). Intertwining this is also a personal plot of revenge involving Gabbar and Thakur wherein Gabbar's killing of all of Thakur's family members including his son after being released from jail fills the latter with immense wreath and hatred for the bandit. The rescue of the village through the efforts of the young urban vigilantes and the strategic mind of a trained cop symbolizes an affirmation of Indira Gandhi's ideological goal—namely,

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the channelling of the urban youth to the issues facing India's villages as their national responsibility, as her UN speech mentioned earlier in this essay clearly highlighted. The most contentious problems to her rather difficult reign arose from either urban centres as in the riots and strikes in Bihar, Jaiprakash Narayan's *dharna* at Jantar Mantar, or the nationwide railway *mazdoor* strike in 1974. The film begins with the by-now iconic scene where Thakur (as a police inspector) rescues a train from being looted by Gabbar's henchmen with due assistance provided by Jay and Veeru who were being taken to jail for a minor crime. The scene lays out the ideological agenda of protecting the very legacy of modernization heralded by Nehru (trains were a constant presence in Hindi films from the beginning usually symbolizing the progressive industrialization of the nation) while also appropriating the urban youth for the purpose of the goals of the establishment. The ambivalence, however, seems to lie in the fact that such a protection of Nehruvian legacy required the obfuscation of settled paradigms of criminality. Thakur's firing at the handcuff to untie the two men captured by a close shot with singular focus on the torn cuffs bears narrative proof of the same. Thus, the preservation of a paternal legacy also has to go hand in hand with the breaking of the law by its patrons which was also a paternal endowment thereby miserably entrenching the narrative in the complete lawlessness of the times. The *spirit* of the father was the site of contestation for Indira and her opposition, and the debate lay over the question of who would best preserve it. On the contrary, the *spectre* of Nehru emerges in such paradoxes wherein any stance of its appropriation serves to negate the continuity of paternal legacy in totality.

Responding to the question of the flawed morality of the 'angry young man', Javed Akhtar once remarked: "In this kind of society, what do you expect?... A hero at any given time is the personification of contemporary morality and contemporary ambitions" (Gehlot 1992, 53-54),

In this regard, it might be said that the paradox of morality also accompanies the hero's characterization. Although, as has been claimed, the redirection of the urban vigilantes' efforts towards the protection of the village is a reflection of an ideological goal to sublimate the excesses of urban rage, the melodrama dissuades the audience from believing it to be ideologically driven. The steady pace of the narrative action alongside the characteristic displays of rage on screen (the staple ingredient for the characterization of the 'angry young man') follow moments of exclusively private sentiments and emotions. Though the mercenary motives are clear from the beginning, Jay's death propels Veeru's vengeance at the cost of forsaking pecuniary gains. Similarly, the cathartic atonement for Jay and Veeru comes when

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they witness Thakur's maimed hand when the latter recalls the tragic fate of his own family. While both these instances bring back the moral high ground of the mission, their intensely personal/private affiliation questions the public discourse of national duty as the lasting source of positively redirecting virile urban rage. Anger then becomes the symptom of an unfulfilled purpose rather than the fuel for conflict resolution in a narrative accomplishment. Recursion to the domain of the private *qua* personal in *Naya Daur* had served a conservative purpose while such a detour in *Sholay* does the opposite—it unsettles the settled motive of the establishment.

It is worth recalling at his juncture that Indira Gandhi's period was marked by incorporations in the Constitution of ideals believed to be Congress embodiments since the founding fathers including the 'secular' and 'socialist' character of the state. Alongside this, the incorporation of the Fundamental Duties in Article 51A vide the recommendation of Swaran Singh committee in view of the Emergency is also a point of significance in this respect. In other words, the act of inscribing in the text of the Constitution accorded to Indira the status of being more in tune with the *spirit* of the father than Nehru himself (the written word serving as the proof of record and immediacy)—the hegemony of 'presence' in documentation. The film launches a critique of this hegemony as the outward displays of anger, violence and melodrama (the affirming ingredients of the popular film) only veils the failure of political and ideological motives. This is true in the case of the characterization of Gabbar Singh as well. Using *Sholay* as a reference point, scholars have noted the emergence of the 'angry young villain' in cinema in the 1970s characterized by excesses of violent behaviour and 'propelled by pure greed unlike previous villains who were propelled by unrequited love…' (Bhugra 2006, 169). Also the lasting impact of such characterization was bolstered by the audio-visual excesses surrounding it (dialogues such as '*kitne aadmi the*' which was Gabbar's intimidating query to his henchmen about the two conmen after their first encounter with the former, harsh monstrous laughter and cruelty, etc.)—all affirming the cinematic 'presence' and after-presence of Gabbar as the villain 'who, though killed or captured at the end…had to be loved by the audience for the film to be successful' (Athanickel in Kishore, Patra et al. 2016, 80). Notwithstanding all this, the critical aspect of Gabbar's characterization lies in the distorted yet uncanny rhetoric of social contract. Its distortion stems precisely from the fact that the rational logic of social contract is voiced rather perversely in Gabbar Singh's enunciation. In addressing the residents of the village, he speaks in the language of exchange—food grains in return for protection. Although the

excesses of the feudal system are explicit here, the fact that Gabbar can perversely occupy the political alternative to the sanctioned hegemony of the state makes him a far more threatening 'presence'. It is worth considering that the setting of the film is a geographical pastiche—it is filmed in Karnataka, the setting and plot resemble the Hindi-speaking North Indian belt, and it aspires to a pan-Indian audience. However, in presenting an archetypal village community, the text actually leaves out a more intimidating rural reality of the 1970s—the Eastern Indian uprising with its epicentre in Naxalbari in West Bengal. Although the anti-feudalist movement had its roots in the social and economic misery of the peasantry in Bengal, Bihar and other surrounding areas, the appropriation of the village as the site for statist protection and ideological exposition leaves out any resemblance to the same, or at least seemingly does so. In such circumstances, Gabbar's political 'presence' is a threat for a parallel system of government in the village. Of course, Gabbar Singh does not embody the progressive precepts of the People's Uprising in Naxalbari but the parallel power politics he symbolizes uncannily equals the preoccupation with snatching of state power that such political dispensations unabashedly declared as their goal. The distortion of characterization which is evident in the regressive rhetoric and mannerisms of Gabbar and his gang of men is thus an amplified cover-up of the streak of political similarity that is located in a rather un-intonated (and hence the not-so-memorable juncture) aspect of the narrative. If the hullaballoo and fanfare surrounding the 75mm screen production and the gory audio-visual excesses of the production affirm *Sholay*'s presence in its after-lives, the critical undercurrents of the text serve to present its subversive *traces* in the 'popular' ingredients which have turned into the memorabilia of Hindi commercial cinema. The entry into political populism which marked the political decade of the 1970s and even ran into Indira Gandhi's second term following the defeat of the Janta government is affirmed by cinematic productions like *Sholay*. The larger political mission of uprooting the semi-feudal traces in Indian village societies could be sacrificed at the altar of politics of power and gains in the short term. Thus, Gabbar's removal becomes a far more significant political function of the film at the service of the ruling dispensation than the complete resolution of feudal proclivities which continue to thrive as the social hegemony of the upper-casteThakur remains unquestioned. What was intended to be written into the fabric of Indian polity, *viz*. that Indira remained more in tune with the *spirit* of the father, is dislodged in the cinematic resolution proceeding from the starting-point of the *trace* rather than the presence. The *specter* of Nehru smiles through the text's ambivalent façade.

In conclusion then, it could be said that while *Naya Daur* situates the very ingredient of popular cinema as a conservative tool, *Sholay* exposes the ambivalent role of the very elements that popularize mainstream Hindi cinema. In both cases, however, one is able to resuscitate popular cinema from the clutches of a reading that takes its apparent uncritical and un-nuanced character for granted. The mechanism of cinematic response is such that the outcome of any reading is premised on the intertextual interface that one posits as the starting-point of one's analysis. In fact, this flexibility offered by the domain of cinema as is brought out in this essay shows how popular Hindi cinema can not only represent but also speak in a language *contra* politics especially in times when political obeisance is based on conformity to strict modes of behaviour and other discursive aspects. Indian politics is still poised in circumstances where the family becomes an important political signifier—whether it be as a reference to dynastic authority (Nehru-Gandhi family), or as an index of proximity (by addressing the electoral base in the familiar coinage of brotherhood or *bhaiyo-behno* in the Hindi lingo). However, the unilinear and unproblematic intent of such familial metaphors tend to run the risk of disrupting the very unity they are intended to forge. The metaphor of the father, being a decade old index since the years after independence, is therefore revealed to be deconstructive in the realm of popular representative media such as Hindi cinema. This bodes significant political implications for ruling establishments and the prospect of the scope of this study could provide the logic behind the undertaking of futuristic studies of Indian politics in this respect not only through the lens of cinema but also through other mediums and modes of political communication. The study also locates a new ground for the study of the pre-liberalization years of Indian politics bereft of the rueful ruminations of the period in other disciplinary approaches such as economics and political studies. Instead, the conservative rigidities of said epoch could be shown to be potent when seen through the ambivalent space within which mainstream cinema operates. Thus, a cinema-based approach to the pre-liberalization period in Indian politics finds in the inherent stolidity of the period its own fodder for 'play' thereby treating something as serious as the Emergency as a mere play of political power—the very aspect attempted to be covered up through the barrage of reasoning so that, as Pranab Mukherjee writes, the 'prophets of doom' could begin to see sense where it lacked (Mukherjee 2015, 52).

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