

RAY'S MEMORY GAME  
SIBAJI BANDYOPADHYAY

*Prologue to a 'journey'*

At first things are muddled. Mrs. Jaya Tripathi, for instance, confuses the names of the four young men she and her sister-in-law had chanced upon a few days back. Ashim is called Sanjay, Sanjay is mistaken as Sekhar – Mrs. Tripathi faces trouble in remembering who is who: the nominal affiliations of the recently jilted cricketer, the successful but a little brash executive, the soft-spoken editor of a long-dead literary magazine and the the poacher of friends, good-for-nothing joker, are for a brief moment held in suspension. And next, when Mrs. Tripathi suggests, to pass time, to while away the luxurious afternoon in the cosy shades of a grove, they play a game, she can neither recall its rules nor name. She turns to her sister-in-law for help; but Rini, her self-composed but somewhat distant companion, does not respond: a screen-like sunglass shielding her eyes, Rini looks on without speaking. One of the new acquaintances however, reacts promptly and comes to Mrs. Tripathi's rescue — fortunately for her, Ashim knows the rules. And then, the four urban youths, out on a trip to Santhal Parganas, men in search of things 'fundamentally' dissimilar to those provided by 'Civilization', in dire need of 'mysterious objects', which would temporarily seize them, enchant them to the point of making them oblivious of their dreary 'everyday', and the two women, benign, sophisticated, a bit discomfiting perhaps, but by no means 'primitive' or 'artless', form a ring and start the game.

The game is 'memory game': mnemonics of sorts it requires each participant to call out the proper name of someone commonly known, and at the same time to keep track of those contributed by others, so that when the next turn arrives, s/he is able to recite the entire list at one go. Only if there is no fault, no gap or upsetting of order, is the contestant allowed to continue: s/he is then free to extend the series, stretch it further by adding yet another term. Obviously, longer the game, longer is the list — each new call makes the tapestry more colourful and impressive. And correspondingly, the business of

remembrance becomes more taxing: increasingly burdensome and complicated. When all but one drop out the game ceases, comes on its own to a natural end. The various names, names of remarkable men and women, which have been successively accumulating over the rounds are now stored in this person's memory-bank. S/he emerges as the victorious keeper of records. The catalogue is flawless – neither is any item missing nor is the order wrong.

Indeed, the picture is rich in irony. Here is a band of Calcutta youths bent upon dissolving, albeit for a few days, all ties with their usual, humdrum habitat. On the morning after their arrival, they had symbolically enacted their will to self-erasure by consigning *The Statesman* to fire. Performed in the manner of a ritual, a rite that marks both exit and initiation, they had ceremoniously declared: 'All links with Civilization (are) hereby severed.' And to physically demonstrate the fact that they were lapsing into the nether regions of their beings, hollowing themselves out in order to be receptive to the calls of 'nature', they had decided to keep their razor-blades sheathed. This decision to let go the daily ordeal, the routine task of 'trimming' and 'shaving', is imbued with rather a 'profound' meaning: by flouting one of the strictest codes of male-culture, the youngsters were indicating that they were in the mood to behave like hot-blooded rebels. That one move, a single gesture, bespeaks of a general principle: it applies just not to the chin or the part between the nostrils and the upper lip, but to the entire 'body'. By allowing hair to grow on its own they were letting their 'hair down', going 'wild'; giving a metonymic, synecdochic twist to a metaphor, the four were making known their intention to 'loosen' their bodies from all 'artificial' wrappings. That 'withdrawal' then, is also a 'release' – a kind of 'untying' which simultaneously permits one to resituate the 'body', place it in a context 'free' from every 'technological' support. The 'hidden razor blade' functions like a sharp pointer- it stands for all mechanical devises, devises without which it is impossible to imagine the 'civilized' human form. By the same movement is also alludes to the 'stress' and 'discontent' machines – engines, toys, trinkets – necessarily engender. Sekhar, the unemployed youth and bit of a joke himself, brought along by his better-placed friends for general amusement only, makes explicit their intention when he

announces: 'All hippies'. Though made in a mock-serious note – cupping the mouth by his hands Sekhar utters the two words - the 'slogan' has a distinctly ominous ring to it.

Santal Parganas then is a setting, a land elsewhere, a kind of 'free' zone; it allows the 'long city-pent' men to relax and reinvent themselves. The home of the 'aborigines' is as though a 'magnetic field'– it induces the longing to 'activate' elements that are habitually 'repressed', 're-energise' those that are customarily harboured within and nurtured secretly. This 'willingness' to give a 'fresh' look to their dry-as-dust dreary selves is what prompts the urbane men to cultivate the uncultivated-display thorny stubble, for example.

One has the suspicion — in fact, it is difficult not to have so – that the four youths are putting up a sham. They seem to be participating in some pre-arranged therapeutic session, undergoing one of those 'analysis' in which the analysand and the analyst are in perfect complicity. The 'mutual understanding' that rests between the two parties turns the 'analysis' into an elaborate hoax. The analysand then merely goes through the motions of being psychically dissected and by the same association the free thoughts and the frank confessions of the subject become devoid of meaning. Although subjected to the sagacious inspection of some probing 'other', he comes out of the treatment unscathed: though 'ripped apart' and 'seen through' he still remains unaltered because the analyst merely confirms what the patient had always known or wanted to know. There is no more than trick-therapy. Transcribing signs in terms of codes previously arranged and agreed upon, translating in a manner that does not cause any kind of transposition, is cryptography at best. Such modes of 'exchange' are geared to culminate in a specific form of 'recognition' – a form that simply validates the primacy of the prefix 're-'. 'Cognition' in this case, is just a strategy of self-corroboration, 'investigative interrogation' merely a pretext for the re-inscription of already available answers. It is a duplicity of sorts – it promises something 'strange and new' but ends up supplying only a duplicate, albeit a duly attested version of the original. In short, there seems to be an element of 'bad faith' in the four youths, men who have come of age during the troubled

decade of the sixties, voluntary abdication of their conscious selves. Even the accessories they carry, bring to the jungle, testify to the fact.

One of these accessories is a copy of a book: *Palamou* by Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay. First serialized from 1880 to 1882 in *Bangadarshan*—emblematic of Bengal's 'modernity', the literary magazine began by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay — it is one of the most celebrated travelogues in the language. The four young men from Kolkata not only bring the book with them, they literally treasure it; in particular they cherish this one-liner from the nearly century-old travelogue: 'Foresters are beautiful in forests; children in mothers' arms.'<sup>1</sup> So relentless is the appeal of the statement, that it still serves as a popular maxim — though perpetually reiterated, it is yet to become an outdated cliché. Combines as it does the aesthetics of 'nativity' with that of 'naivete', the statement is paradigmatically crucial for both the construction of Sanjib Chandra's 1882 text and the organization of the 'economy of gaze' of the educated city—bred men we encounter in Satyajit Ray's 1970 film *Aranyer Din Ratri*.

Sanjib Chandra narrates his experiences in the jungles of Santhal Pargana with rare brevity. Written crisply, the sketch has the additional merit of being extremely short. And like all self-conscious chronicles of expeditions to unknown terrenes, it too is punctuated by remarks critical of the world from which the chronicler sets out. The interjections are sharp and laced with deadly sarcasm. Those comments in fact stand as a guarantee that the narrator is not engaging in idle curiosity; instead, he is bent upon a meaningful travel. Musing about his brethren at home, the bhadralok narrator of *Palamou* says: 'All around one hears bravos about the improvement of Bengalis, Bengalis are learning English, receiving honours, going to England, Bengalis are climbing the stairs of civilisation, what can be the worry of Bengalis?'<sup>2</sup> Obviously, there is much to worry about them. As a rude reminder of the Bengali's inadequacies the narrator invokes the figures of the Santhal and the Kol. In stark contrast to the frail and pale Bengali stands the solid-as-rock, black Santhal or Kol. While the former, subjected to foreign pressures has become aliens in their own homeland, the latter are firmly rooted in their age-old traditions. The Rousseauesque fascination for the 'nobility' of the 'pure' and the

‘pristine’ prevents the narrator from going into the rather gross issue of the political economy of the area he visits. Though he mentions the subject in passing, talks about the evil of usury introduced by the Hindustani moneylenders, Palamou’s narrator is not sufficiently interested in it: in his eagerness to underline as thickly as possible the continuity of ‘aboriginal’ heritage he remains blind to the palpably obvious ruptures the residents of the ‘jungle’ are witnessing—Chotanagpur; the home of the Santhals and Kols has become, by the same colonial process that has given a facelift to the Bengalis, a major labour catchment area for the tea plantations of Assam. For a little relief from the strains of ‘civilisation’, the Bengali traveller passes off its burdens onto the people of the forest: bereft of ‘history’, arrested in a freeze, they are suitably mythified, turned into ‘masks’ for the enlightened bhadraloks to put on and conceal their ‘faces’.

Following the same track, the Kolkata boys try retracing the century—old map outlined by the narrator of *Palamou*. Meanwhile the wilderness has suffered many traumatic upheavals—it no longer is as ‘wild’ or ‘distant’ as previously. Travelling to outlying corners is not much of a hassle any more. The middle-aged narrator of *Palamou* had to depend on the shoulders of palanquin-bearers to reach his destination; the youngsters of *Aranyer Din Ratri* make the trip by car. Yet the world-view of the bhadraloks remains unshaken: these ‘makers’ of ‘history’ don’t seem to be affected by changes, structural changes that occur elsewhere. Like Sanjib Chandra’s narrator, Satyajit Ray’s young men too are exotically predisposed: placing the ‘unfamiliar’ in some proper ‘environment’ is simply a necessity for them, absolutely mandatory for their mise-en-scene. And what is more, besides the attitude, the four men—a little jaded but still green enough to face new challenges—also have the tact to manage the tricky business of ‘putting-in-the-scene’ to the best of their interest. ‘Locating’ the aliens in their rightful milieu—‘location shooting’ for short—enables them to keep their return-passage safe. It is this pragmatism which allows the forward-looking adventurers to forego their bearings, ‘forget’ themselves, dance to the raptures of ‘nature’, but still maintain a strong foothold on ‘reality’. After all, the boys are not mad—‘cultured’ as they are, they know full well that their hobnobbing with ‘nature’ cannot but be brief.

Sekhar—Ashim—Sanjay and Hari, the four nature-enthusiasts of *Aranyer Din Ratri*, are victims of a double interpellation. They are simultaneously interpellated by two brands of ideology: the ideology of ‘primitivism’ and the ideology of ‘tourism’. The former has had a longer run, a longer history. Its career was particularly checkered during the heydays of the Raj, in those earlier moments of ‘discovery’ when Europe was falling all over heels at meeting people who looked ‘different’. This fascination with ‘difference’ in turn produced a discourse focalised on ‘sameness’-to ‘name’ the mass of non-whites, the one word that was highly prized by the discourse was ‘primitive’. But such was the colonial paradox, the exigencies of rule and roosting over others, that the same homogenising zeal had also to be partly tempered. Since the supervision of the colonial machinery needed the help and support of a section of the colonised, a more cunning system of classification had to be conceived. The system had to be ‘cunning’—it had to break the monotony of ‘sameness’, add colour to the monochromic black world without however affecting the assumption vis-a-vis the essential ‘nature’ of the subjected ‘races’. Adding subtle, nuances of ‘difference’ by mixing a little bit of ‘white’ to the raging ‘black’ could only lead to the formulation: ‘Though all non-whites are equally primitive, some non-whites are more equally primitive than others.’ It goes without saying that this variegated ‘primitivism’ was further strengthened by the ‘pre-modern’ faith in the superiority of the upper castes in relation to those who live in the margins of society. Coupling colonial gentility with Brahminical gentility furnished a new image for the ‘aborigines’ - the gap between those who were being duly ‘nurtured’ and those who dwelled in the state of ‘nature’ increasing, people like the Santhals become progressively more ‘primitive’. It is of course ironic that more they turned into things of curiosity more endangered they became as species. The primeval people of the ‘jungle’ drew attention as store-houses of beliefs and practices which were both residual and fast vanishing; and the ‘jungle’, by the same token, got more to be like reserve-forests.

Tourist—brochures assure nothing is more pleasant than spending a vacation in such ‘retreats’. Improved communications, technological wonders like the railways, motor—cars, airplanes, have made global net-working feasible; and that same easy accessibility has allowed the concept of ‘tourism’ to dim the aura, lessen the awe that

earlier surrounded the term ‘pilgrimage’. Paying ‘homage’ to the ‘primitive’, taking ‘pilgrimage’ to the ‘jungle’ is therefore not much of a trouble today—it can all be organised in the form of ‘tourism’.

And it is this dual—bond of ‘primitivism’ and ‘tourism’ that facilitates Sekhar-Ashim-Sanjay and Hari to switch from one order of masculinity to another—from the demure, docile, mostly self-apologetic Bengali to the raw and robust, full-blown male. A veritable categorical shift, no less. Relying upon the conceptual charge packed in the term ‘hippie’, almost in accordance with Sigmund Freud’s astute observation that, ‘in following the usage of language, neurosis, takes words in their original, significant sense, and where it appears to be using a word figuratively it is usually simply restoring its old meaning’<sup>3</sup>, the four youths try transforming themselves. In their alacrity to relinquish the bothersome aspects of social identification, they shed ‘character’ for ‘characteristics’ — hold up to themselves the ‘elemental’ and ‘organic’ ‘characteristics’ which they believe constitute basic ‘maleness’.

And then comes the jolt, a rather rude and violent shock. They are caught bathing stripped to the waist by, no, not by any scantily dressed, illiterate Santhal woman—that would have naturally blended with the landscape, fitted to the letter their primordial scheme of things—but by two highly ‘accomplished’ women. By no stretch of imagination can they be called ‘primitive’. And this chance meeting so confounds the men—each in his own style a master of urbane cynicism—that they get caught up in a whirlpool of memory. Those who were anxious to ‘forget’ are cajoled into ferreting out public names from their archival repository, and by the same move are forced to declare their private identities. The Memory Game becomes the game of unwitting self-betrayal.

Before we propose a reading of the Memory Game, proceed to decipher it, it would be prudent to pause for a while and digress a little. Taking detours is obligatory if we have to probe touristic mind-sets. Opting for straight roads in matters dealing with ‘consciousness’, ‘perception’, ‘reality’ or ‘memory’ may itself be problematic. It is bound to be more so if we choose to use these loaded terms, much used and abused words, in

connection with a filmmaker whose works are generally viewed as ‘humanist documents’, monumental achievements worthy of universal attention. Hoping to somehow guard against the false charms of ‘humanism’, and also to be aware of the dangers of that mystifying, corrupting ideology, known now as the ‘metaphysics of presence’, we shall restrict ourselves to basic, rudimentary facts alone. Suspending—‘suspending’ in the two opposite senses of ‘sustaining’ and ‘ceasing’—the discussion on the Memory Game for the time, we shall now enter into issues involving ‘life’ and ‘death’; talk about the perpetual tussle between ‘forgetting’ and ‘remembering’, about the never-ending struggle between the impulsion to ‘sign out’ and the ‘will to record’. Only after doing some groundwork can we lift the ‘suspension’ and return to Ray’s cinematic treatment of ‘memory’.

### ***‘Will to Record’***

The ‘Will to Record’ may very well be one of the more driving, more provoking passions which sets apart the humans from other beings, gives it a seat and a seal of distinction in the animal kingdom. While closely connected, kneaded with man’s propensity to ‘play’, the ‘will to record’ alludes to another powerful and equally primitive tendency — the compulsion to hold at bay, to stand witness to happenings which are in the process of passing over and fading away, turning in the run of things into ‘quiet nothings’. This ‘will’ to refer back, an urge as pressing and obstinate as those of instincts, works also in alliance with the ‘Will to Truth’. The latter, now almost of proverbial repute, points to the determination to render fixity to all that is innately flimsy and fuzzy by assigning names, epithets that circumscribe and cling to things.

‘Will’ however is not an easy-to-be-had category, easy to pick and easy to unpack, a term that can be traded in or exchanged with another unthinkingly. For, ‘will’ is a complex mix of ‘need’ and ‘desire’ — compounded further by the charge of constant change, it can hardly be defined, given a strict, formal meaning. In matters dealing with ‘will’ one has no better option than to manage with make-shift arrangements, frameworks which can be dismantled without much ceremony or pain. The borderline dividing ‘need’ and ‘desire’ is bound to be wavering — what is generally considered dispensable today,

merely a fall-out of excessive play, may so consolidate tomorrow as to feed a regular 'economy of need'. Its omission at some strategic moment may even precipitate a crisis. And conversely, that which is taken to be systemic now, considered inarguably necessary, may get upturned someday and be shown to be no more than a forgotten joke, a jest long suppressed. And by revitalizing the lost joke, by underscoring the breach it had caused once, a cleft that was only subsequently filled up, a fresh start can be signalled. 'Laughter', in that case functions doubly as a setting and a dramatic prop for the performance of a 'critique? Contrary to the expectations of those who, forgetting earlier pleasures become stodgy and judgemental, there is simply no map of 'will' with permanently settled frontiers — any or all of them can be drawn and re-drawn, re-figured incessantly. Just as 'nature' and 'culture' constitute an unstable binary, so do 'need' and 'desire' — though forever joined, forever together, they get variously distributed in varying places and times. Their proportions keep altering as either new elements are introduced or the existing ones switch allegiance from one to the other domain. This crossing over, an act quite comparable to translating a work into a different register of syntax and idiom, modifies not just the form but the content of 'will' as well. Tracking 'will' therefore requires context-sensitivity, calls for attention to political exigencies, even to details regarded mostly as trivia. For, to clarify a point hinted at earlier, the 'will to play' in man is so over-whelming and unaccountable, so terrifying in effect, that it can at any moment seize upon and break asunder a pre-laid scheme. The violent interruption resulting in unforeseen inversions, the 'trivial' and the 'precious' may suffer abrupt changes in status. The *Homo Ludens* might, for all we know; take delight in suddenly changing the rules to make the 'serious' and the 'sombre' appear as 'ludicrous' and glorify the 'ordinary' and the 'pedestrian' — belittle and cut to size the 'high' with the express aim of placing the 'low' on a pedestal. The anarchic threat implicit in 'play', the randomness, the thorough-going relativism inherent to it should never be underestimated. Particular sorties may result in sheer silliness or gross stupidity — but that does not take away the importance of 'play'. To do so would be to court more trouble than we can handle. Armed with this qualifier, let us now broach the question of the 'will to record'.

Like those of 'Play' and 'Truth', the 'Will to Record' also leads to various directions, meets diverse ends. Keeping registers, preparing documents, building monuments, maintaining diaries, composing reports, jotting a few impressions either on paper or canvas — each such action is motivated by the agent's craving to let others, including oneself, know now or later, of her/ his experiences. All else may be false, but the 'text' *itself* is not a lie — it is a substance, a material crafted and designed consciously. The last thing that can be refuted is the thingness of texts. And this implies that one has to reflect, reflect planfully on the activity designated as 'recording'.

To record is to engage in a double-faced act: an act of 'enclosure' which is at the same moment an act of 'disclosure'. Whether what has been enclosed within the wrappings of the text and disclosed for other's benefit, the bundle of marks compiled privately for public dissemination, tallies with the 'Real' or not, may then emerge as a major issue. And a problem.

Doubtless, there is no single infallible yardstick for measuring the distance between 'referent' and 'record', no transcendental measure which can convincingly weigh the 'truth' of a representation with surety. But again, every representation purports to give 'evidence' of some sort. The 'Real' may be elusive, inescapably unapproachable, yet the 'evidences' stand, have a feel of durability about them. The means and ways by which this miraculous relative durability is purchased differ from case to case, and therefore no simple straight-forward accounting proves sufficient. Neither 'intention' nor 'correspondence', gossipy confabulation around 'authorial purpose' or matching items to uncover the depth and degree of 'verisimilitude', helps in understanding how real connections are made. It would perhaps be more prudent to shift the focus to, no, not to 'text' per se, but to 'texture' instead.

'Texture' involves two aspects: in fact, it is their infusion which gives rise to it. Framed under certain conditions and within specific limits, every text is of a certain making; then again, each of them enunciates a claim, spells out a principle of self-

sufficiency peculiar to it and spins a relation vis-a-vis 'Truth'. Charting the trajectory of 'textual-make' brings us to the arena of medium and machine, technical innovation and technological leap, the manifold modes of processing and storing impressions. Doing the same along the axis of 'textual-claim' makes us ponder over the conflicting discursive regimes, the niceties of protocols and procedural complexities which link the business of 'representation' to that of 'reproduction', shape the relationship crucial to the status and stature of impressions stored in a text. A 'document', an old and soiled piece of parchment for example, is a 'document', is partly because it succeeds in persuading the users to treat the inscriptions borne by it as 'authentic' and therefore 'authoritative'. The very being of a 'document' projects itself as a testimonial, a magic object that rings out loud and clear: 'It Was So'. Even if the evidences, the so-called factual information supplied by individual documents are not accepted at face-value, the proclamation integral to the species cannot but be respected. On the other hand, say, a painting, a 'work of art' in common parlance, does not boast of such reproductive skills — it is not naturally very particular about exactness, similitude or such other 'petty' details. The ludic impulse enjoying a freer scope here, a sketch done with brush and colours, a pretty little 'nonsense', may even paint a Utopia, dare to move forward in time and dream about realizing unfulfilled promises, become surreal to the point of absurdity. Nonetheless, this re-presentation too is a response to the transient present, it too springs from the immediacy of 'nowness', from that concrete yet indeterminate in-between space which opens out to both 'what is' and 'what was' simultaneously. In other words, being an instance of arrested instant, a picture of things in flux, an 'imaginary' product too qualifies as a 'truthful record'. Those who seek shelter, dwell in shallow empiricism, trust that what cannot be verified need not also be true, may look askance and turn deaf to the truth-possibilities of 'art'. But that is the price a person pays for taking a particular mode of recording as solely viable. After all, trying to pass off one variation as the blue-print, master-pattern for all others, treating it as being all-encompassing and paramount, is the hobby-horse, the favourite occupation of the orthodox. 'Will to record' being unquenchable, impelled by it one can move to the extreme opposite of empiricism: in the name of combating scientism give up on all forms of scientific control and constraints of accuracy and head for the fantastic, a venture that may very well culminate in a

downright surrender — trapped in a time-warp, the hedonist adventurer, the foot-loose, free-floating subject might then fall into the world of the pre-fabricated, into some nether region of repetitions: where fantasies and fetishes rule, rule with the iron hand of market. The range of choice, the gamut of expectations is indeed wide; the variety offered by the ‘will to record’ is amazing just as much puzzling. And the same holds true for the ‘will to play’ — it is no less diabolic, no less commanding in its powers to confound every wilful player.

To return to ‘texts’ and ‘textures’, a text — one may posit — is a site where the ‘will to play’ and the ‘will to record’ crisscross, co-mingle and part ways, where ‘traces’ are worked upon, recast and deposited: a house of ‘signs’, in short. The difference between a ‘trace’ and a ‘sign’, between etchings curved in the memory-caves and marks systematically generated, between the receptions and the responses of the human brain is too huge for words. And also, in all probability, there may just be no ‘trace’ worth the name, not one that can be certified as ‘original’ — not a ‘trace’ which is ‘untouched’, not somehow contaminated by human mediation, not already a ‘sign’. Still it pays to keep the pair thematically distinct. The ideational separation may come handy in mapping the ‘truth-position’ of heterogeneous textual organizations and in coordinating their generic locations. Needless saying, in determining whether a particular text is loyal to its generic roots, tied firmly to them or whether the link is only tenuous, one has to factor in the climate of reception along with the circumstances of production. Nonetheless, the notional partitioning of ‘trace’ and ‘sign’ provides a passage, offers an opening — it helps in forming some idea about the thickness and the specific density of a ‘record’, the degree to which ‘re-presentation’ and ‘re-production’ are mutually implicated in it and accordingly the degree of ‘reality-effect’ mustered and displayed by the self-same object. Take for instance, the signs which enjoy the title ‘documentary’. They are so because they put across strong denotative claims. ‘Diegesis’ being the soul and style of documents, they must perforce propose a second coming, hold out the promise that signs enclosed in them are more or less duplications of traces. To lay access to them means to go for the literal, to opt for ‘repetitions without displacement’. There is obviously a bit of wear here, a bit of tear there, re-presentational ‘distortions’ which smudge and

metamorphose the perceptions received by and gathered in the brain, yet Signs Documentary possess a transparent trace-like quality. Hence, the unambiguity of meaning. It is to minimise the gap between the trace-source and the sign—target, to keep their difference at some optimum level, that documents are formulated in the first place. It is because we believe in ‘documents’, that we can talk about forgeries. At worst, a document, a record deemed ‘clean’ and ‘tidy’, is a ‘genuine fraud’. The art, rather the science of ‘history writing’ depends much upon judicious discrimination — the skill to spot the ‘bona fide’ pieces amidst heaps of ‘fakes’, ‘counterfeits’ which hide their connotative intentions behind artful veneers of denotation. The urgency to re-produce traces is acute in man is because he knows staying powers of things are naturally limited; there is never any perfect repetition, all repetitions are at best substitutions, every recurrence a re-enactment, a construction, a newly staged ‘play’. Hence, also the necessity of aide—memoires.

On this shaky foundation, a foundation ceaselessly attacked and weakened by the ‘will to play’, man attempts to devise reminders, ready-reckoners for himself. His constant endeavours to loosen the strangle-hold of the prefix ‘re-’ attached to the word ‘presentation’ so as to strengthen the ‘re-’ part of ‘reproduction’, have yielded numerous kinds of ‘records’ in human history. These have induced man to fashion, work out for himself, contraptions which can testify to his immediate presence, objectify his sensuous and mutable body, dress him to appear as a Law unto himself: ‘Auto - Nomos’, that is. Possibly, among all the self-attesting tools, machines manufactured for prompt and automatic confirmation of ‘presence’, the most ancient is the ‘mirror’. Hence perhaps the long-abiding connection between ‘mirror’ and ‘narcissism’, between the glass-surface that plainly reflects and the self-image one fondly cherishes. The charm of mirrors is further accentuated by a queer paradox: the paradox of ‘seeing’. No ‘I’ ever sees eye to eye with oneself, no person ever looks at himself including his external covering in its entirety with his naked eyes. There is no self-exposure which is not mediated by some other, by somebody else. And perhaps to look more intently, more searchingly at others, and also to delay by defying the natural ageing process, the eyeglass is invented around 1260 in the western hemisphere. But much before that, pressed forward by the ‘will to

record', and of course in conjunction with the 'will to play', man, at some point, hit upon a novel technique, a new 'make' which transformed the very texture of his being. And that momentous invention, also an 'intervention', is what is commonly known as 'writing'. Writing gives altogether a new dimension to the art of re-collection, redefines the dealings between 'memory' and 'amnesia' — it literally allows people to 'remember' things as they wish. Acknowledging the strong recording—potential of 'writing', Sigmund Freud had remarked once: '(by writing) I can be in possession of a permanent memory-trace.'<sup>4</sup> Absolute permanence being a chimera, the word 'permanent' in the preceding sentence should only be read relatively. Man however, possessed and consumed by his 'will to record', continues to narrow the field of relativity. Discovery of the printing press in the mid 15th century unfolds a new horizon for mechanical reproduction, making thereby re-viewing, laying eyes on imprints produced previously, more easy and habitual. In liaison with these shifts, paradigmatic turnings in textual-make, the sensual apparatus of men — though, given the asymmetrical distribution of opportunities along the class-caste-race-gender axes, differentially—experience cumulative changes. By the same dint truth-claims keep multiplying, more and more new laws of self-sufficiency proliferate and flourish. And then comes photography — almost at one stroke it reduces portraiture done in oil to redundancy, makes those pictures of happy bourgeois family which once endowed rare aura to respectable drawing rooms look far too arcane, much too smug and embarrassing. Photograph is soon joined by the phonogram, a joining which is quickly followed by the Cinema. A major technological break-through, described as the latest 'Scientific Illusion' of Europe by the Calcutta Statesman on 15 January, 1897, cinema changes almost beyond recognition the substance of intercourse between 'trace' and 'sign'. Let us now punctuate the tale of cinematic transaction, also a new mode of trafficking in 'memory', by introducing, rather superimposing, a text penned by Sigmund Freud in 1924. This short six page article is truly seminal — perforated though with countless blind-spots, it does bring insights to the mysteries of recording machines. It has the additional advantage of being glossed by the sentinel of our times, namely, Jacques Derrida. In the summer of 1966, Derrida published a lengthy commentary on it in *Tel Quel*, and in June 1994, during the international

colloquium entitled Memory: the Question of Archives he returned to it in his lecture, whose English translation now bears the title: *Archive Fever — A Freudian Impression*.

### ***Freud's Tool***

Freud's essay 'A Note upon the Mystic Writing - Pad', justly deserves re-visiting, re-opening. It records at once Freud's child-like fascination with modern recording devices and an adult-like super-vision of things judged merely mechanical. While the first admits of an uncontainable excess, the second presupposes, dutifully re-asserts the 'punctual simplicity of the classical subject'. Freud finds that a small contrivance marketed as the 'Mystic Writing-Pad' has marked similarities with his hypothetical model regarding the human perceptual apparatus. As a memory-device, the wax-tool, the writing tablet is far more promising than a sheet of paper or a slate. The contraption is indeed cleverly designed; it performs two mutually incompatible operations. What gets written on the pad's celluloid portion of the covering-sheet which rests on a wax slab can also be removed at will — you have to pull the covering-sheet or press a button and presto, the inscription vanishes. The child's toy combines, howbeit discreetly, as two separate but inter-related components, the double function of providing a receptive surface and a store-house for memory-traces. In Freud's estimate, though a close approximate, the mystic pad fails beyond a point to 'explain' the human perceptual apparatus. The 'spectacle', the eye-glass for example, is a poor substitute for unscreened eyes and the same is true for the 'mystic writing-pad' in its relation to the human brain. For, Freud argues, the analogical efficacy of all auxiliary devices is necessarily limited; they can never measure up to the organs whose prototypes they are. Which means, like writing itself, no recording technique, no matter how technologically advanced or superior, can claim the two stellar qualities the Freudian human mind is said to possess: 'a potential for indefinite preservation and an unlimited capacity for reception'<sup>5</sup> of memory-traces; all mechanical reproductions, therefore, are at best surrogates; they re-play not memory, *mneme* proper but supplementary *hypomnesis*.

Derrida, as to be expected, is quick to seize upon this perverse Platonic move, the logos-logic of privileging 'psychic memory' over and above 'technical memory'? He

obviously derives immense pleasure in highlighting the dangers implicit in the very concept of the ‘supplement’. Following this Derridian interruption several points emerge; schematically put they are: first, ‘recording’ is an activity that attests ‘presence’, freezes humanly what is naturally fleeting; second, problem arises if that ‘presence’ is imagined as self-validating, a principle of cohesive wholeness, eternally fecund yet forever closed, which simply loans or lends parts of itself differently to various recording agencies but always stands apart and remains constant; third, cast in the role of the autonomous donor, as the unmediated source of memory and meaning, this full-to-brim self-governing ‘subject’ cannot but be forgetful of its own finitude — it must make the one certain truth, the truth of dissolution look like a fiction to give the fictive self the currency it enjoys; fourth, despite the evidences of the ‘mystic pad’ and its mechanical demonstration, the clear proof that there is no trace that is not liable to erasure, to ‘record’ means to accord provisional presence to things destined to disappear someday, Freud held on to the mythic space of the unconscious, where ‘nothing ends, nothing happens, nothing is forgotten’. And fifth, and this is the crux of Derrida’s argument, precisely because his concept of the trace remains entangled in the ‘metaphysics of presence’, Freud forgets that ‘the machine —and consequently, representation —is death and finitude *within* the psyche’ and hence he ignores the possibility that machines too can begin to ‘resemble memory’, in fact, ‘found memory’.<sup>6</sup> The last observation takes us straight to the art of Cinema —for surely as of now there is no other recording mechanism or representational mode which can ‘resemble memory’ as densely as the cinema does.

In 1927, only three years after Sigmund Freud wrote his piece on the ‘Mystic-pad’, sound was grafted to moving images. That happened in a Hollywood film named *Jazz Singer*. H G. Wells, another writer foxed by and fixated on machines and the fictions they generated, once quipped to Charlie Chaplin: ‘There is no such thing as a bad film. The fact that they move is wonderful’. And Chaplin, the master of the silent-era, despite his initial hesitations, reservations about making the mobile but mute images vocal, was compelled to move ahead; neither could he resist the wonder of mixing sound with images. And when, in 1966, Jacques Derrida was proposing to radicalise the Freudian concept of ‘trace’, colour films were on the verge of overshadowing the black and white

ones — soon all screen-space and reel-time would get coloured, light and shade become truly spectacular. 20th Century being the century of permanent technological revolution, various other developments have constantly aided and abetted the cinema. It literally is symbolic of the Machine Age, its sum and substance. And this poses a problem, problem vis-a-vis ‘remembrance’.

So far it has been feasible to record only two of our senses: at the cost of others, ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ have vastly profited from man’s exertions to ‘capture’ himself. The discovery of photography in 1839 and the subsequent invention of phonograph by Edison in 1877 have made these two senses primary in more senses than one. Relentlessly worked upon, continually put to use by newer and improved machines, ‘sight’ and ‘hearing’ have been invested with powers way beyond others: the vision and the auditory faculty can now ‘speak’ for the rest. Subsuming taste, touch and smell to the point of obliteration, this couple alone can ‘represent’ the human body. Uneven development of recording vis-a-vis the senses has rendered possible the production of a synthetic wholeness by the mixing of sound and image. And the site where that momentous contact, also a contract, takes place is of course the ‘Cinema’. It may passingly be observed, parenthetically put, that though ‘pornography’ is a 19th century coinage, the modern erotica had to wait for the camera and the sound-box to flower, to mature into big business, into a full-fledged industry. Only the film, with its talents to engineer the human body, reproduce it mechanically almost at verbatim, could have given so dark a blue tinge to man’s carnal dealings.

The rapid and near-continuous changes within recording industry, the variety and quantity of recorded material available today, the ease with which sight or sound produced in a particular time-space can be consumed here and now almost with no loss, would certainly have baffled, taken the breath away of the medieval, not to mention, the ancient man. ‘Xerography’, a word derived from Greek meaning ‘dry writing’ is now too common place a phenomena to be even remarkable. ‘Writing’ can be so securely preserved today, that scribes of yesteryear as well as stenographers trained in shorthand and capable of transcribing cryptic codes on typewriters seem similarly distant. Given the

preponderance of machine-driven copyists there is no room for an actual human to sit and ‘take down’ what another has written or said. Following the introduction of Xerox in 1960, the speed with which a text can be documented, meaning, be delivered in ditto, is to say the least, superhuman in achievement. Within 5 years of its institution, a Xerox machine could furnish almost a copy a second—a feat that made it both popular and cheap. By 1971, in the U.S. alone, 24,000,000,000 pages were being photocopied each year. The replicas manufactured by ‘dry-writing’ and ‘dry-picture’ copying were soon to overtake, outdo carbon copies. Signs are so easily traceable today, amenable to such quick recoveries, mechanical likeness so striking, the world so populated by twin-images, dotted by dittoes and haunted by Dostoyevskian Doubles, that for all practical purposes distinguishing marks between ‘originals’ and ‘facsimiles’ have vanished. Needless saying, this ‘vanishing’ has serious consequences for interactions between ‘traces’ and ‘signs’ and also for those involved in converting ‘inputs’ to ‘outputs’. Perhaps there is nothing more symptomatic about modern times than to be hunted down by what is ‘present’—the ‘will to record’ in man has brought him to that impossible Utopia where nothing need be lost, where any and every object can be kept in store, slotted and sustained eternally. It has, by a strange stroke of re-turn, almost made manifest the Freudian ‘Unconscious’, the ‘deep-down horde’ where “nothing ends, nothing happens, nothing is forgotten.” One of the outcomes of the present reprographic environment is to make us *feel*, even if not *think*, that history of man has finally reached its appointed goal. With everybody becoming a clone of someone else, with commodities forever fetishised, there is no reason to look beyond the enchantments offered by market and the ruinous logic of capital. Apocalyptic terror seizing him or her, a person may even start wondering whether the ‘will to play’ itself has reached a dead-end. Compelled and condemned as we are now to repeat the same, endlessly as well as perfectly, isn’t the very ‘will’ held in animated suspension? On the other hand, a more cheerful view would be to assert, in spite of appearances to the contrary, ultra-modern recording techniques have not stifled man’s ‘will to play’. Instead, they have opened up a host of new opportunities—inviting us to a new space of play, they have given a fresh lease to our imagination. ‘Will to play’ and ‘Will to record’ will keep crisscrossing to produce texts but then they would be of different makes and will carry different claims. Apprehending a catastrophe or

anticipating a bright future, no matter which 'frame of mind' we adopt regarding communications, this much can be stated with certainty: the improvements in recording technology have had at least two far-reaching impacts on the 20th century man and his sensibilities. One, the conditions for repetition are far more realised now than ever before; and two, the ratio and the relation between retention or impressure and reification or erasure are almost wholly, radically altered. Add to this the fact that 'memorable perceptions', that is, perceptions which lend themselves to be re-stated or re-played more fluently, are traditionally routed through the much cultivated senses of 'seeing' and 'hearing', we are bound to confront the art known as 'cinema'. It may seem a truism, but nevertheless it's worth repeating, that cinema does dictate world-wide attention, is captivating, is precisely because it is an audio-visual medium. Hence, the trouble. Seeing and hearing being most susceptible to conscious re-collection, there is no medium that comes anywhere near the cinema in the business of 'resembling memory'. So strange and superior is its powers of simulation that, even while the plot is thin, situations fantastic, the speech and diction of characters miles away from everyday language, cinematic signs have the look, the texture of being raw, unprocessed data. Traces are so fluidly, effortlessly converted into signs, that an equivalency nearing identity is established between them — the intermediary role of the 'trace' downplayed, the cinematic signs appear as self-authenticated; as though the 'things-out-there' they picture are not pure fabrications but are really Real. Cinema as a recording technology has the in-built tendency to rub off the 're' part of 'representation' and present thereby what is unique to it or is best achieved by it: the phantasma of presence. Surely it's no accident that, despite flash-backs, jazzy jump-cuts and flash-forwards, the tense proper to cinema is neither the past nor the future: cinema speaks naturally in the present tense. Discussing 'the characteristics common sense 'attributes' to the photographic image, Roland Barthes had written in 1961: 'The purely "denotative" status of the photograph, the perfection and plenitude of its analogy, in short, its 'objectivity', has every chance of being mythical.' And when the 'photographic' combines with the 'phonographic' the result becomes more incredibly credible. The Cinema, as it were, clinches the truth of Barthes' acute observation vis-a-vis photographic images and messages: 'The connotation is now experienced only as the natural resonance of the fundamental denotation... and we are

thus confronted with a typical process of naturalisation of the cultural'.<sup>9</sup> This then is the paradox: while it can and does 'resemble, memory' most thickly and effectively, conceive amazing verisimilitudes and unbelievable make-beliefs, Cinema, by the same dint is most amenable to amnesia. Why? Simply because, 'naturalism' is endemic to cinema and 'memory', to use the words of Derrida, inevitably eludes, escapes the grasp of naturalism'.<sup>10</sup>

### *The 'Ancient' Divide: 'Nature' vs. 'Nurture'*

But then 'naturalisms' are not 'born' but 'made'. There is no singular ontology that can be ascribed to them. All spheres of art undergo seasonal crises: they occur when things tend to stand still, when novelties too become variations of the same. Every such period of stagnation generates ennui and along with it contempt; for nothing breeds contempt as vigorously as does familiarity. The scorn for artifacts which reign supreme in the absence of alternatives, those which cash in on the adjective 'popular' purely by default, is often the force behind the rash impulse to cross over boundaries. There is an element of impatience, an expression of exasperation in each such outburst: never mind how 'calculated' and 'controlled' the exposition, how 'decorous' the diction, how 'proper' the show, there is bound to be a note of defiance, an air of irreverence about them. In direct opposition to the rolling stone, anything that stands for too long gather moss around it—as tokens of frozen remembrance, all relics tend to turn weighty over time, get progressively dated. Whatever lacks the dignity to sign out gracefully when the bell tolls, either ends in a ponderous grayness or grows stubborn and mulish. The futile desire — to hold on when there is no call for it gets translated into a mindless obstinacy. And when this cathectic mania, object-cathexis, causes much too strain, things snap, snap with a suddenness which confounds most. What was earlier 'in order', hence 'natural', is then shown to be no more than a particular configuration, a compilation of signs saturated with handy signifieds. And precisely because of that, such wonders of nature possess a rare virtue — having regular contours and transparent surfaces those loaded signs are amenable to quick summoning: they are exemplars of 'lucidity'. And surely the most revealing aspect of transparency is its capacity to provide clear passages, inviting openings to dusky interiors. One hardly looks at a light-pervious object, mostly sees

through it: the exterior poses no obstruction as such. By the same token, the dress, the costume, the covering, the cut, all those which fashion an object lose charm — considered merely decorative, accessories only, they become secondary. With not a chit to block the vision, nothing obscure or inscrutable, the viewer or rather the voyeur, can then safely indulge in leisurely depth-studies and reach to the bottom of things: stare straight at some bare essence, as it were. Yes, there is a touch of the lurid in spectacles Haunted as ‘lucid’. It is doubly so, for frank nakedness is at best an elegant chimera, the one constant yet unattainable vanishing point in the ever-receding horizon of expectations. And that is why, what one age believes to be expressly manifest, ‘exposed’ for eternity, appears impregnable to another: the taken-for-granted ‘natural’ irradiance itself may, at some point in history, become so mystifying as to suggest a new possibility, in lieu of the fixed destination promise a fresh departure.

Candidly put, the semiotic conduct of ‘naturalism’ is patently pretentious — it impresses by pretending not to pretend. Though ‘cultured’ like any other sign, cultivated consciously and processed systematically, ‘naturalist’ signs behave as if they belong to a different domain of mechanics. They are affected no doubt; but then they are mechanically natural, hence also, naturally mechanical. In sum, ‘naturalist’ representations appear neat and clinical, have a transcendental gloss about them, is because they somehow succeed in killing two birds at one go: they suppress the ‘re’ portion of ‘representation’ by making it appear that they show only what are already present, and at the same moment veil their ‘production’ aspect by making one suppose that the prefix ‘re’ in their case admits of no displacement. There is no realm of art where this ‘trick’ is not to be found —Literature, Music, Theatre, each abounds with examples when certain ‘textual-makes’ become so conventional, so acceptable, so filled-to-the-brim with meaning, that the ‘textual-claims’ they signify look almost uncontestable. And then neither the extraction of the "rational kernel from the mystic shell" nor the abstraction of the mystic kernel from the ‘hardened’ ‘rational’ shell seems viable. Speaking rhetorically, with just an onion in hand, peeling the coverings to ‘reveal’ its ‘secret’ core loses all efficacy as a critical exercise. And this attempt to ‘seek’ the ‘hidden’ gets to be more self-defeating in case of the Cinema — given its ‘texture’, its

closeness to 'reprographic' recording, its 'novelty', earlier well-known steps hardly help in entering it or leaving a mark of distinction there. Without a realist appraisal of the almost innate, natural tendency of the Cinema to keep spectators spellbound, it is impossible to break paths against resistances, use ruptures as new routes. Though general, true for all branches of art, this maxim has a special force for the Cinema: the last person who can entertain any kind of totalising ambition is the filmmaker who dares to label himself a 'realist.' In a medium where 'trace' and 'sign' cohabit in such a way as to render the two virtually indistinguishable, it does not pay to imagine that lost traces can be recovered by seeing through signs. Not being a priest gifted with the special powers to unravel the mysteries of signs and lay them out for the scrutiny of the uninitiated, the 'realist' must perforce give up on all hopes of retrieving any 'unimpaired whole'. Content with a part, and that too a handiwork of many, s/ he has no better option than to don the robe of a 'jester'. For who else is a 'jester' but the practical person who understands and acknowledges freely that all moves intended as retaliations against hegemonic forces can at best be tactical-they are merely circumstantial, commonsensical retorts employed under pressures of time. In stark contrast to the measures which go by the name of 'resolutions', 'tactics' are always open to negotiations. 'Flexibility' and 'erasure' being integral to them, they can, depending upon the exigencies of the moment, be suspended at will. Since to be forgetful of one's own finitude is death, it follows logically that only those who 'play out' their ends are alive. Conscious of their 'mutability', hence 'materiality', only the wizards of tactics, the unsettling jesters, deserve the epithet 'realist'. The 'comic relief' they provide, the relief of intermittent blanks in compact, claustrophobic narratives are far from being 'naive'. Quite in opposition to being simply 'funny', the 'comic' entails a special 'cunning': the 'cunning' to occupy in-between positions, the dexterity to be and not to be concurrently. For undercutting or making a mockery of things considered indisputable, for effective 'irony', neither the 'positive' nor the famed 'negative' capability proves sufficient-unless the potential of 'in-betweenness' is marshalled, pressed to service, no project of 'disenchantment' can be put to motion, discharged satisfactorily. Making light of the 'serious' is indeed forbidding, a painful business-no joke really.

Sigmund Freud in his outstanding treatise on jokes, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), had remarked that, though the ‘instinct of conteretation’ or the impulse to come into contact with another person is as strong as ever, with the ‘progress of civilization’, ‘looking has (mostly) replaced touching and consequently the desire to exhibit oneself and see others stripped have gained a peculiar piquancy. He noted, undoubtedly with a chuckle, the inclination to ‘flash’—backwards or forwards — is ‘almost invariably buried under the imposing reactive function of sexual modesty, but not without a loophole being left for it in relation to clothes’<sup>12</sup> The last observation leads straight to the crux of the matter: the technical magic which makes moving objects speak and speaking subjects visible keeping them still ‘frozen’, has equipped its practitioners to suggest, even stimulate strong tactile sensations. The ability to evoke the ‘synthetic body’ in the Theatre of Cinema, itself a startling achievement of ‘civilisation’, a fascinating ‘triumph’ of ‘Will’ in the arena of ‘recording’, has in a roundabout manner reinstated the most primitive of all senses: the ‘lost’ touch, the warm proximity, the sensual feeling due to the nestling ‘closeness’ of physical bodies. Though ‘in camera’, it can somehow be simulated and restored on the screen. Cinema is patently a Revelatory Revolution; and that is because it manages to rub off the ‘re-’ part of ‘representation’ with such ease, that one even forgets to notice the surreptitious transmutation. The extraordinary capacity of Cinema to conjure and flesh out bodies and to configure immediacy of presence’, has in its turn given a new magnitude and a direction, a new vector to our shared ‘instinct of conteretation’.

Digressing for a second, one may here tangentially refer to, merely touch upon a special feature of the Indian Cinema. For many, the centrality enjoyed by the ‘Mythological’ films in India is a cause of political consternation and embarrassment. It is often seen as a ploy devised by the arch-conservatives to keep alive the ‘rustic’ faiths, the ‘folk’ ‘memories of underdevelopment. Both the celebration of the ‘mythological’ in the Indian Cinema and the ‘nausea’ it provokes in some of our ‘Patrons of Art’ deserve a detailed study. Linked intimately to the ‘mythological’, the ‘puranic’ is the ‘*Bhakti*’ cult: originating roughly around the 6th century A.D. in down South and for most parts spearheaded by the under-caste toiling poor, many of whom were ‘untouchables’, it rose

to become a pan-Indian movement: from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Assam-Bengal to Gujarat-Maharashtra, it spread like wild fire across the length and breadth of the entire sub-continent. It literally seized the 'popular' imagination. Though myriad and multi-faceted, also internally fractured, *Bhakti* DID voice a common cause: it expressed the 'discontent', the 'neurosis' natural to a 'Civilization' predicated on a strict hierarchical order. In the process, the poetry, music and dance composed by the 'god-immersed' Bhaktas met with two marvellous, almost miraculous successes. Their short and sharp poems, mostly instances of 'orature' in origin, diction and essence, dealt a heavy blow to 'Literature' spelt with capital L, to those 'Good Old Books', the bulky *Vedas*, and by extension to their various officious legal-juridical offshoots. Codified as scriptures, these canonical texts lend a heavy support to that *fundamentally* a-symmetrical social organisation called *Brahmanism*. And this entailed sanctifying a particular mode of instruction, particular mode of transmission of 'knowledge'-the recipient had to abide by its strictures if he (no question of a 'she' however upper-caste) desired enlightenment. Either in the form of *Sruti* ('revealed') or *Smriti* ('remembered'), knowledge had to be received in a manner, which would guarantee that the *distance* between the seat of the addresser and that of the addressee remains constant. Since an admiring addressee is no better than an aspiring addresser, once he 'graduates' and climbs up, maintaining that 'respectful' distance gets automatically to be his primary focus. That is, it is immaterial how much distance has been covered in learning the *Sruti* texts like, the *Vedas*; or the *Upanisads* (meaning literally, 'sitting down near') or the *Smriti* texts like Manu's Registry of socially acceptable codes or the *Puranas*; the main point is to ensure that all 'distances' are mapped judiciously, measured in a manner that keeps the neat 'displacement' nil: the world may be 'transient' but change as a conceptual category must remain devoid of any substantive content; it must never arouse the sensations of 'practical-critical activity'.<sup>14</sup> In such a scenario--a setting dominated by 'insightful' 'seers' and 'speculative' 'visionaries'-it is quite logical that 'seeing' and 'hearing', the two 'distant' sensory modes, would be highlighted at the cost of 'smell', 'taste', not to mention the unmentionable, (the object of ultimate abhorrence) 'touch'. And in this calmness of things, in this situation of stillness and stagnancy, the *Bhakti* cult appears as an interruptive event. It's no wonder hence, that for the spokespersons of Bhakti, the

most 'articulate' sense is the sense of touch; '*Bhakti* is contact, contagion', '(the *Bhakta*) thrives on communion in community'.<sup>15</sup> Since undermining the superior-sounding Sruti-Sriti traditions and de-valorising the prestigious 'distant senses' are co-terminus, *Bhakti* poetry, particularly in its early phase, in its first incarnation, announces itself by recklessly playing upon and delighting in words and metaphors associated with '*twch*', the Sanskrit equivalent of 'touch'. By assuming, as though without a second thought, the breath-taking 'presence' of the real referent here and now it could blur all socially engineered distinctions between 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong', 'licit' and 'illicit'. This breaking out, rapturous rupture, must have put the staid and the prig at unease. The delirious celebration, frenzied festivity of the primal and the primordial was certainly a shocking sight- an onslaught against *Brahmanical* piety, the 'excess' of the *Bhaktas* must have been like a punch on the face for the sober devouts. The 'Anti-nomian', 'Against-the-Law', counter-hegemonic, thrust of this Shudra uprising is undeniable--even if all its participants were not under-caste by occupation or birth, the movement, at least initially, was Shudra in temper and orientation: it rose from the below, from the belly, as it were. The high tide would of course peter away, the militant mood evaporate and the belligerence become blunt over time. The clarion call of the early *Bhaktas* for egalitarian empathy and carnivalesque bonding would solidify to shape yet another orthodoxy. And from that soil would flourish texts, rich glosses in chaste Sanskrit. Soon they would compose into a heavy-corpus, into a new canon for people to be saddled with. And so when Cinema appears in India, with not just its popular democratic potentials but also with its peculiar strength to convey the sense of 'touch', ironically enough, by exploiting first 'seeing' and then both 'seeing' and 'hearing', 'mythologies' naturally come 'alive' on screen. This indeed is a startling, for some, an alarming illustration of 'poetic justice'? Not the 'matter' alone, but the 'medium' itself, not the *Bhakti* thematic alone-confused ideologically as it was with varying accents and conflicting accounts-but the 'technique' itself facilitated a part re-entry, a partial come-back of the 'touch' as 'poeticised' by the *Bhaktas* 'sunk in god', like, for example, Sant Tukaram or Mira.

But the problem with the craving, the impulsion to come into contact with another at the most basic level is, even while insatiable, prone to quick saturation. Predicated on

‘nearness’, on the pressing need for tactual frankness, it tends to be short-lived—given the number of obligations the ‘mind’ has to ‘suffer’, palpably obvious, hand-minded affairs can at best be episodic, brief and discrete. Moreover, the ‘short-sighted’ discourses and practices carry the same risks as do the ‘long-sighted’ ones. In a bid to render subjectivity to the masses and to ‘activate’ them, a ‘touching’ genre or medium, equipped though with the right apparatus, might get to be so narrow in compass, so exclusionary and sectarian in temper as to make ‘exchange’ itself meaningless. Cinema, by the virtue of its very ‘being’, is not only not an exception to this rule, but is a medium most likely to block inter-active communication and intra-active production, and thereby ‘remembrance’. To be ‘truly’ constructive then—plays around as it does with the ‘far’ and the ‘near’—cinema has to have an agenda of its own. But how would that agenda be ‘grounded’?

### ***The Hall of Shadows***

The Formalists, since almost the beginning of the 20th century, have ceaselessly emphasised, while the sole ‘cure’ for benumbing empathy is ‘distancing’, there is no secure formula for it—the search for any such panacea is bound to be misdirected. Just as reflex-actions are inimical to reflexivity, so are the readily available counter-moves; applying them to overcome the ‘allure’ of the ‘near’ is foredoomed — they cannot but end up as being self-defeating. Those who take stock of ‘nearness’ in terms of stock-responses alone, pay dearly for their mistake. In the name of neutralising what are at home or close by, they start to nurture, mostly unwittingly, the ‘pathos of distance’ — a sickness of sorts, it lends rather easily to nostalgic melancholia. And what else is brooding nostalgia but a ‘mindless’ breeding of names, a cataloguing that presents the conglomerate as a stable signifier of ‘meaningful’ hence ‘memorable’ ‘history’? In other words, nostalgic packaging is that instance of collating where the ‘will to record’ is almost devoid of ‘will to play’ — ‘unhampered’ by the latter, it congeals into a ‘neat’ document, calcifies into a cultural show-piece. This ritualised re-play is what ‘naturalises’ ‘culture’, makes ‘memory’ itself ‘amnesiac’.

Sigmund Freud, a warm admirer as he was of Aristophanes, the Master of the Old Comedy, had not failed to observe that, though ‘buried’, a ‘loophole’ is left for ‘nudity’ in

its relation to clothes. Extending this, one may plausibly argue, once these ‘loopholes’ are used to put up ‘peep-shows’, things turn pale and plain; and the game, now only a matter of decoding unclouded, pellucid signals, inevitably loses all attraction. Bereft of the ‘ludic’, ‘disrobing’ itself becomes so teleologically geared that it cannot but cease to be exciting. The initial, hesitant, uncertain steps becoming far too firm, energy starts to flag and the object too begins to lack in shine-tamed, hence stale and boring, it gets to be too well-known to merit any further ‘knowing’. To keep the ‘probing’ lively, one must constantly watch over one’s own viewing-critically look at the ‘look’ itself so that it does not degenerate into a steady ‘gaze’. Steering the ‘look’ so as to maintain and multiply the sensations of flux, makes it obligatory to focus on the clothing which simultaneously screens and puts the bare body in a better relief. To ‘organise’ the critical ‘look’ one has to be attentive to the frills, fashion-designs, fanciful motifs, on all those cultural trappings which sustain and render ‘substance’ to the ‘being’. This imperative needs to be honoured both in the case of a single *person* and a composite whole, for specific concrete individuals as well as general abstract communities. It was in this sense that Karl Marx discussed with such telling details the ‘dress of class’ in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). In sharp contrast to that unsurpassable, genuinely thrilling study on fraud, hypocrisy and double-dealing, there are umpteen examples of ‘historical’ explorations which while promising to deliver a demystified account of the ‘social body’ have finished up by treating the same body as just another site for the procreation of more soulful metaphysical abstractions. Using ‘Political Anatomy’ as a heuristic device, as an all-divesting conceptual apparatus has, in modern times, yielded a variety of mind-boggling speculations. Again, even though we vow to stop fantasising about ‘uncovering’ some ‘authentic’ body we may err on the opposite: submit to the established, entrenched regulations, the highly structured injunctions regarding ‘social shame’, ‘sexual modesty’ and the rest of it and become so soul-searching as to finally deny the body completely. To preserve the determination to conceive the ‘body’ as a field of ‘possibilities’ instead of a system closed on itself, as a palpable whole yet a thing-in-process being invented all the while, it is binding on us to check our ‘natural propensity’ to strike the postures of righteous indignation and gush forth with moralistic ranting, froth, that is. ‘Moralism’ here works as a short-hand for all those sanitised and sterilised, basically anti-erotic

utterances and practices which prompt immediate, 'clear-headed' responses to complex issues. Not having to carry the burden of exercising 'judgment', the moralist can with utmost ease sound 'judgmental'; lacking in compunction to tackle conflicting moral and ethical *nomoi*, s/he has no trouble in adopting the straight middle road. And in the course of it the person may turn so obliviously narcissistic as to become indifferent to her/ his own disease. The 'moralist' has delusions of grandeur, considers her/himself 'Auto-Nomos' but remains nonetheless socially acquiescent. In short, a 'moralist' is an insufferable bore: not the kind who can deal with moral questions or, dabble though s/he may-say, in Cinema-be artistically innovative.

Those who mouth formula-like 'moral-*mantras*, and react instantly with the 'right' words, are capable of both uniting vacuous solipsism with spurious solidarity and *setting* apart, separating an 'individual' from any collectivity. The Moral Hero then can speak for all, pass judgment and distribute justice. Combining in himself the dual functions of the 'police' and the 'censor', he condemns people to a curious isolation-bonded though they are by their joint-consent, their approval of the Hero as someone who is emblematic of some pristine, natural scheme, each is left alone with her/his own lives. The Hero 'remembers' for all, acts like a conduit for the smooth passage of Culture-Memory, and the rest, in the absence of support from the permissible discourse, fail to communicate, exchange or share their intimate thoughts with each other. In other words, more monolithic the Public Memory, more thick the consensus around it, more underground gets to be Private Memories. The number of moralists increase and so does the number of disgruntled 'passivists' — split and thrust into cellular, regularly-shaped slots, they find no expedient language, no memorable moral-code for combating the Sanctified Speech, the Naturalised Silence, that is. There is an implicit contract, a secret understanding between 'naturalism' and 'moralism'. And it is on that firm, unshakable ground rises the architectural wonder, the monumental achievement of 'modernity', namely, the 'Panopticon'. Pleased as he was by its multi various utilities, Bentham, the architect himself coined the sonorous word to christen his Dream House. Karl Marx characteristically uncharitable and caustic-said about the Utilitarian Visionary: Jeremy Bentham (was) that insipid, pedantic, leather-tongued oracle of the ordinary bourgeois

intelligence of the 19th century.<sup>16</sup> And, almost a century later, analyzing the intricate networking of various institutions such as the ‘school’, ‘clinic’ and ‘prison’, and thereby mapping the uniform yet rugged contours of ‘modernity’, Michel Foucault had this to say regarding the Model Prison proposed by Bentham: ‘The Panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power.’<sup>17</sup> ‘Panopticon’ then is a metaphor, a stretchable, elastic signifier. One may ask in all humility, if EM. Cornford could suggest, Plato’s famous cave-simile would be best grasped once we replaced the ‘cave’ by the ‘cinema’<sup>18</sup> and saw the similarities between those ‘ignorants’ who are mesmerised by shadows, the images that fleet across the walls of ‘primitive’ caves and the modern spectators, what is so wrong in drawing a parallel between the Panopticon and the film industry? After all, the ‘Panopticon’-the ideal utilitarian prison where the inmates are so disciplined, have such docile bodies that guards become superfluous-is explicitly organised around the principle of ‘gaze’ and the Cinema, by the dint of its recording prowess, its ability to reproduce the ‘said’ and the ‘seen’ in unequivocal terms, seems eminently suited for cementing the unholy nexus between ‘naturalism’ and ‘moralism’. ‘Heroic Romance’ and ‘Romantic Heroism’ thus get a new tenure in films-‘heroes’ pour in thick numbers and multivarious colours. Ranging from the mythological gods and ‘other-worldly’ sages to the ‘this-worldly’ leaders and keepers of General Conscience, from the frisky but mother-worshipping and father-abiding Son to the introspective but pain-stricken and forlorn individual, all ‘present’ themselves on screen. Often the aspects of one merge with those of another to equip the ‘Man’ at the ‘centre of attention’ with a ‘new perspective’. But since each heroic figure-each an ‘icon’ shining resplendently in its own glory — enunciates a mythos with the sole aim of ‘gripping’ the audience, descends from above only to dazzle the viewers with his acuity of ‘presence’, ‘mouths’ words only to hold the onlookers ‘tight’ in their seats, the furnishing of the ‘new’ becomes just a means of laundering of the old — it forges yet another link in the same chain of heroic deeds and pursuits and contributes by perpetuating the ultimate, the Mother of all Modern Myths: the myth of the Nation-State.

Cinema is truly fabulous: its powers of possessing, confiscating and taking away things from the right palm which it had itself placed on the left is prodigal. To excite by 'touch', to relent by releasing instinctual charge and then to pacify the 'receivers' by assuring that what they have grasped is 'virtually actual', the 'recorded' version is indeed 'as it is', creates nothing short of a 'tantalizing' situation. Hoodwinked by the soundlook of film data, mistaking the 'embodiment' for the 'body', the 'filmy-eyed' spectator may get so enmeshed in 'him/ herself' as to become as abandoned as the lonely Tantalus, and lose 'touch' with 'reality'. Cinema, after all, is a 'touch and go' business; things are so precarious in movies, that being capital-intensive does not ensure that all labour will not be lost. So, 'distancing' alone, even if it fits the bill in Theatre and succeeds in encouraging criticality there, does not work as a manoeuvre for a new 'opening' in Cinema. Unless 'talking pictures' work in tandem with 'hide-bound' 'nearness', no exercise in cinematic 'estrangement' bears fruit-only those which occupy shifting, in-between positions, allow the flowing and moving images to 'camp out', be 'nomadic', prove to be 'memorable'. For nothing demands more inventiveness and virtuosity than conceptualising a 'shocking' film. To 'provoke' the audience, to 'release' the *Homo Ludens*; from the House of Light and Shadows, the 'Panopticon' of Cinema, the filmmaker has no choice but to take decidedly to 'surface-readings', concentrate on the screen, as it were. To do otherwise, would be to hinder the 'will to play' in an institution which at the same time provides perhaps the most powerful of all the recording instruments. Precisely because Cinema lends itself to any kind of 'naturalism', there can be no better site where one or all of them can be relativised, put in place, situated, that is. And that requires strategies of disaffection, context-specific tactics which, even while working with the same textual-make, violate, write-over the reigning textual-claims without taking recourse to the 'punctual simplicity of the classical subject'. And whether that 'subject' is 'Western Classical' or 'Eastern Classical', foreign-bred or conceived indigenously, is completely beside the point; the only point being, 'what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic'<sup>20</sup>, there can be no cause for 'rest'. Cinema, after all, is an audio-visual medium; the ground where sight and sound interlock resulting in an association of senses which in turn creates 'movements'. As Ray put it, one can feel the 'joy of unencumbered motion', say in slapsticks, as one derives in the 'allegro-like part of

*khyal*<sup>21</sup>. And, what is more, nothing is easier than to achieve the opposite of stasis there; there being no single, sacrosanct formula for cinematic navigations, negotiations with the 'given', one only has to devise one's own, devise with things already-made and available. The only burden is, the text has to bear the burden of its own proof take account of not just the conditions but the context of production in a manner that it can perform for us its 'scene of writing',<sup>22</sup> rather, the scene of 'shooting'.

We have dragged the issue-kept the moment of 'recollection' in Ray's *Aranyer Din Ratri*- 'suspended' for far too long. But before we re-animate the scene, re-open it to examine its 'viewing' of 'memory', let us re-call these two lines of a 12th century Indian poet, one of those Masters of yesteryears who sang of the pain; and pleasures of 'touch': 'Things standing shall fall, / but the moving ever shall stay.'<sup>23</sup> We shall take this as a maxim, as the *vacana*: that provides a dependable yardstick, in judging Ray's treatment of 'remembrance'. The moot question is, does Ray, in constructing his 'Memory Game' invite us to 'blow' life into some 'petrified' past in the vain desire of reconstituting it, or does he, in keeping with the paradoxical saying quoted above, trigger off a pursuit for things as yet not distinctly focused. Does he too — a titan among Bengalis, a man of towering cultural presence in post-partition Bengal — fall into the same pattern, into the habit of getting so used to a set of clothes as to believe that it has been designed by Nature herself and is no worse or better than the skin which shelters and keeps out of sight the embarrassing skeleton? Or is he asking us to alter the fabric to which we are accustomed? In brief: is the famed exponent of Realist Cinema genuinely framing a game, a naughty prank, or is his 'Memory Game' merely a means of mechanical recapitulation of dead material; is it a scintillating swan-song or a deadpan, moralizing elegy? Or none? Or both?

### ***The Memory Game***

Hari is little slow on the uptake. Initially, the rules of the game are not sufficiently clear to him. The fact that it is Rini who explicates the laws may have further confused him. Sensing the discomfort of the cricketer, Sekhar adds as a caveat: any name would do, name of any famous personality, whether he be a poet, a philosopher or a jockey. To

make matters even simpler he provides a series as an illustration: ‘Gandhi; Gandhi-Nehru; Gandhi-Nehru-Azad.’. Uttered though on the spur of the moment, this series becomes like a prologue to the Memory Game — hovering over the rest, the names of the leaders of ‘free’ and ‘modern’ India keep casting their shadows all through the game. Architects of the self-dependent Nation-State, these shining figures constitute in their togetherness the framework for what follows. Gandhi may have been an Apostle, strictly vegetarian and staunchly non-cooperative in issues relating to high technology, such as factories and railways; Nehru may have revised Gandhi’s vision of the ‘Hind Swaraj’, mooted long-drawn plans in favour of heavy industry, described the newly-laid mammoth dams as the new ‘temples’ of India; Azad may have had an altogether different idea as how best to wrest freedom from the plundering British-but conflicts in perspectives are of no consequence here. What is material is the sound of their names—the phonetic substance that crystallises once ‘Gandhi’, ‘Nehru’ and Azad’ are put together. The triad sets the parameters, the ideological terrain within which the names of the other renowned persons are received, said or heard. After all, Sekhar-Ashim-Sanjay-Hari-Mrs. Tripathi and Rini are trading in cultural capital at a moment when the decade of emancipation is about to be officially declared. There is indeed defiance in the air—the turbulent 60’s have made all, particularly the young, skeptical of the Nehruvian dream. His ‘tryst with destiny’ seems to have floundered for good. The participants of the Memory Game in Ray’s 1970 film *Aranyer Din Ratri* are literally standing at the crossroads of history — it is hence expected that while refreshing their memory, they would willy-nilly re-examine their cultural heirloom. The atmosphere is too volatile — it will induce irreverence, make even the sober and the sane go for iconoclasm.

Mrs. Tripathi inaugurates the memory-trip by calling out the most obvious of all names: ‘Rabindranath’. Her deportment, diction, the nimble artistry with which she carries the weighty name, all attest to Mrs. Tripathi’s rich acquirements. As though in retaliation, Sanjay, the editor of a long-extinct literary quarterly, jerks out: ‘Karl Marx’. The game now does begin to get exiting. The successive invocation of Tagore and Marx instantly lights up, lights up almost in its entirety the mindscape of the participants. Rabindranath, the fountainhead of much that is most valuable, the most endearing and

enduring aspects of Bengal's high-modern venture, and Marx, the symbol of radical class-politics, the intellectual inspiration behind the worldwide struggle against the extraction of surplus value, meet to weave a complex web of emotions. It isn't as if Marx cancels out Tagore — Tagore is far too indispensable for such a casual treatment. Nevertheless, the juxtaposing does generate a curious tension — it brings an edge of nonchalance to the admiration customarily reserved for Rabindranath, and adds a note of caution to the agenda of the whole-scale rejection of the past launched ostensibly in the name of Marx. Thus what is rendered problematic is the *relation* crucial to all exercises of remembrance — the relation between 'reproductive' and 'revolutionary' practices, the intercourse between the will to preserve and 'record' and the will to change and 'play'. Hinging on this relation — an alliance that cannot be either foresworn or be given a fixed form — the Memory Game continues.

The names that accumulate over the rounds can well be distributed along two axes. The symmetry in the scheme of association is too uncanny to go unnoticed. During the roll call one keeps hearing two kinds of chiming — one paradigmatic and the other syntagmatic. One set is determined by answering to the question: 'what goes with what', and the other to: 'what follows what'. Mrs. Tripathi's call, 'Rabindranath', prompts Ashim to — like Sanjay he too had literary ambitions once-match its splendour by introducing 'Shakespeare', Lord and Master of English literature. No doubt, such calling of 'spirits from the vastly deep' is guided by the logic of family resemblance — the feeling that, Rabindranath and Shakespeare somehow bear affinity with each other, have the same kind of status and prestige. These high-sounding names, part and parcel of drawing room chatter and elite conversation, does not however befuddle or fox Sanjay: he keeps his nose to the road. Though quite in tune with paradigmatic propriety and the euphony it dictates, Sanjay maintains political rigor and consistency: signalling the current phase of the Marxian project, he, in his second turn, brings in the reigning contemporary cult: Mao Tse Tung. The list now begins to look formidable.

But Rini, as if to lighten the atmosphere, lessen the stress and burden caused by 'Rabindranath' and 'Karl Marx', had already in the first round added a non-serious note

to the game. Sitting by the side of her sister-in-law—who would soon assume a reclining, regal posture, Rini had said: ‘Cleopatra’. This offering — the name of the woman who much troubled the Roman chiefs during the first period of the Augustan rule and precipitated a series of political crises, providing Shakespeare thereby the material for his sauciest tragedy, must have amused all, including Rini’s sister-in-law Mrs. Tripathi’s ‘salad days’ may have long passed, her husband may have chosen to commit suicide, but she is not so sour that she can not appreciate a joke. And Sekhar —the joker at hand—further fortifies the jocular mood. Picking Rini’s goggles, he solemnly rings out: ‘Atulya Ghosh’. So naturally he utters the name, that it seems, the mere sight of eyeshades is enough to bring the august man to mind. For, doesn’t Atulya Ghosh, the Big Boss of Bengal Congress, always keep his eyes hidden behind a pair of dark glasses? And of all persons, it is Mrs. Tripathi who draws a further parallel from this sardonic linking and makes explicit the political commentary implicit in it. She does so in complete innocence; in truth, it is her oblivion which allows Sekhar’s performance to get better staged. While repeating the list, she unwittingly calls out ‘Prafulla’ instead of ‘Atulya’. Although on account of it, Mrs. Tripathi forfeits her chance to continue, the mistake itself plays a stellar role in the Memory Game — it is far too glaring to be ignored. For, going by both assonance and political kinship doesn’t ‘Prafulla’ naturally follow ‘Atulya’? Isn’t the connection between Prafulla Chandra Sen, the Chief Minister of West Bengal under whose stewardship the Indian National congress met with a decisive debacle in the elections of 1967 and Atulya Ghosh, the lordly kingmaker, syntagmatic in nature? Don’t they in conjunction sum up the sordid situation in which Bengal finds herself in the late 60’s? Gifted though he is with powers of parody, isn’t Sekhar jobless, doesn’t Ashim, the successful executive, undergo pangs of conscience, feel in his bones that he has betrayed some higher cause? Mrs. Tripathi’s exclamation: ‘How did I make the mistake!’, ironically enough, underlines the fact that ‘Atulya’ and ‘Prafulla’ compose the dyad necessary for setting in context the general resentment against authority as well as for the violent undercurrents in the apparently harmless Memory Game. The verbal-pictorial game is indeed elegantly constructed — but the elegance, even if deceptive, is by no means ‘pretty’. The very act of remembrance is so fraught with dangers there, that it makes us, against our better judgment perhaps, look at things present in their

‘nowness’—the game becomes memorable precisely because it captures the flux in which they are caught up. Subjects are structured but then the structure is fluid too.

Hari, the sportsman, perchance picks the cue from Rini. His first and last, the single contribution to the game is ‘Helen’. He may have said that in sympathetic association with ‘Cleopatra’ (and thereby with Rini). But this happy paradigmatic telescoping of the two-women who brought such turbulence among men that the very running of the Greek and Roman *polis* were threatened-is rudely spliced by Sekhar. He asks for a clarification: ‘Helen of Troy or Bombay?’ But surely Bombay’s Helen is inadmissible — the name of the voluptuous cabaret-dancer of Popular Hindi Cinema is too profane to be included in the list. Though referred to, she is quickly dismissed. But that mere mention is good enough to show up the pretense involved in the act of ‘unconscious’ recollection undertaken by members, particularly the male members of the elite class. Helen of Bombay —esteemed by commoners as a symbol of unabashed sexuality — has too strong a hold on these men’s libido. Though pushed beyond the margins of permissible genteel discourse — the *bhadra* discourse — ‘Helen of Bombay’ and such other coded sex-bombs can at any time erupt and invade it. The situation is actually so fragile that it is possible to undermine the carefully designed discourse, ruin its intricate subtleties simply by putting to shame its spokesmen. The embarrassment of the jawsmiths is eloquent enough. As a result, the invocation of the belly dancer from Bombay — invocation promptly followed by excommunication — has a queer effect. Her name is like a slip of the tongue — it is more telling than those that are proudly borne by the middle class, borne on the tip of the tongue, as it were. She establishes another sequence of following — a syntagmatic chain that makes transparent the gaps between the theory and practice of men who have sworn to become elementally masculine in the ‘jungles’ of Santhal Pargana.

One element in that chain is ‘Mrs. Tripathi’. The way she pronounces the words, splits the syllables, when she tries to remind Sekhar and Sanjay the names they were missing is itself suggestive. She certainly was being expressive, when by suitably altering the emphases she managed to extract from ‘Shakespeare’ the words ‘sex’ and ‘spear’.

Little later she gets to be even more daring — nudging at Sanjay and accenting almost aggressively on the second syllable of the word he is desperately searching for, she rings out loud and clear: ‘Brad-MAN’. In relation to Sanjay at least, that extra-little emphasis proves to be misplaced. It would soon dawn on Mrs. Tripathi that her expectations of him, expectations regarding his manliness were rather exaggerated. It isn’t as if Sanjay does not respond to the charms of the widow. After his exit from the game he strikes up a chat with her. Ignoring everybody else, he rushes into the rest house — the government bungalow which the four young men were illegally occupying — to fetch a pillow for Mrs. Tripathi. While there Sanjay looks into the mirror to see if his hair is too dishevelled, starts humming a Tagore-song that tangentially echoes the ‘age-old’ Indian metaphors of the bee and the flower, and then on becomes Mrs. Tripath’s constant companion. Yet when the climax arrives and Mrs. Tripathi offers herself to him and he gets the much sought-after chance to prove his maleness, Sanjay’s nerves fail him, he simply flees.

Another element in the ‘Helen of Bombay’ syntagma is the Santhali woman whom the macho cricketer Hari does ‘conquer’. Possessed as they are, ‘twisted’ by an ‘organicist’ anthropology, the quest of the four urban youths, middle class Bengali men, couldn’t be complete without the Santhali woman: she had to appear in the scene. Foredoomed to enter, ‘she’ could make her appearance only in accordance with their pattern of misc-en-scene. After all, they had declared, hadn’t they-declared in a drunken stupor on the day of arrival — that they were VIPs, ‘Very Important Persons’, ‘Very Important People’. So, as a woman belonging to a local ‘tribe’, being only an exemplar of some ‘little tradition’, the dusky Santhal had to give in to one of the guest-like VIPs. Of course, her hospitality only confirms the belief of the ‘Very Important People’ that one can still discover the uncorrupted and connect to Mother Nature through those who are not that ‘important’. Reacting strongly against ‘cultivated’ women, Hari seeks the bliss of total absorption in one of the long-haired Santhal maidservants hired by them. Yet, during the post-coital lull, his ardour cooled, he fondly promises the girl that he would bring a set of false hairs from Kolkata for her. The girl of course is completely mystified by this strange offer but then she has no clue that in the beginning was ‘false hair’. This

outing has been organized primarily for Hari's sake. To pour cool and comforting balm onto his burning heart, to heal the wound he carries within, his friends have brought him here. The person responsible for Hari's acute depression is a city-bred, double-dealing woman. Cheated in love, he realized, his object of desire was no more than a cheap doll-machine, 'false' from head to toe. And horror of horrors, he found to his utter dismay during the tempestuous showdown, that her shining, gorgeous hair too was false. The shock of that final reckoning was so traumatic that since then he has been living in a state of psychic paralysis. The expedition to the Santhal Pargana is arranged by Hari's well-meaning friends as a way of therapy. But then, when the moment of therapeutic cure comes, he again 'breaks down'. Instead of breaking out he remains, as it were, 'obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as contemporary experience instead of remembering it as something belonging to the past. And the material emanates with an uncanny 'unwished-for exactitude': Hari re-inscribes his obsession vis-a-vis 'false hair' onto the woman he has 'seduced'. He dreams of embellishing the body of the rural Santhal woman by a 'tattoo' as it were — a 'tattoo' that would keep the memory of the 'false' urbane woman festering in him. Hari's journey into the depths only casts him ashore — his excursion into the 'bowels' of 'nature' reinforces his attachment to the cultural 'surface', keeps him knotted as before. And neither does this go unnoticed. Always alert to comical situations, comedies of error, Sekhar lightly touches upon the theme of 'repetition' central to Hari's experiences. After Hari receives a stunning blow on the head from the poor man whom he had earlier falsely accused of theft, Sekhar consoles the bull of a man by repeating the remark he had made at the very beginning of their pleasure tour: 'Don't worry, the soar will heal.'

But it isn't as if all the elements that constitute the 'montage' centred around 'Helen of Bombay' are present in flesh and blood. There is one that is missing-no, it is not conspicuous by 'absence'; it simply is non-existent, not there at all. Of the four youths, three are paired. Whether any of them merits to be paired with a member of the opposite sex is beside the question. The point is, no matter how unsuccessfully and for how little a time, they get to be 'close' with women. Sanjay meets Mrs. Tripathi, Hari becomes intimate with a Santhal, Ashim finds an intellectual partner in But Sekhar, the

perennial joker remains isolated — he has no luck in the business of man-woman coupling. May be, we can only guess, he does not have much stake in it either. Though he shares his friends' agonies, assists them in handling their angst — which incidentally happens to be the technical term for the psychological posturing most current in the world of the 60's — by being as if a personification of 'comic relief', Sekhar is not really 'involved'. Probably, it is only he who understands that the libidinal hankering and the concomitant anxiety his friends have, the desperate need they feel to see 'nature' and 'culture' as being antithetical, is at best 'much ado about nothing'.

The last element in the Hellenic chain is 'Rini'. Sensing that Ashim is too much of a male chauvinist to court defeat in the hands of a woman, she feigns forgetting. The game by then had become extremely tiring, absurd even. The jumble of names that included 'Rani Rashmoni', 'Kennedy', 'Tekchand Thakur', 'Napoleon' and 'Mamta Mahal' could not but be perplexing. Victory however tastes sour to Ashim. All said and done, he is not that thick-headed as not to understand, the 'victory' is only a 'gift' by Rini, just the result of a playful gambit on her part. Slowly, as the afternoon unfolds and merges into the evening, Ashim steadily wakes up to realize how lamentable his condition is. His acquaintance with Rini activates a process of gradual self-awakening in him. The more Ashim wakes up-wakes up, for example, to learn that Rini, even after a gap of so many hours, has all the names clearly etched and that too in the correct order etched in her memory-Rini gains in prominence. Moral prominence, that is. It seems, though inscrutable herself she can see through every other body-her vision is piercing enough to reach to the bottom of all souls. Only the day before, standing below her balcony, Ashim, the immature fool that he is, had quoted a line from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: 'It is the east and Juliet is the sun'; but Rini is no earthly Juliet. There is something positively ethereal about her. Standing above all, transcending all, she looms over the rest. She virtually comes to occupy a point of convergence-a point where dilemmas are set to rest, order is restored and tranquility achieved. And then when 'emotive' names such as those of Rabindranath, Shakespeare, Marx are 'recollected' from the standpoint of that 'tranquility', they acquire an altogether different quality. Harmony replacing confusion, menstrual symmetry replacing hurried haphazardness,

they become like blocks of a jigsaw puzzle, a puzzle that has the answer already tacked on it. As night descends, thickens in the jungle, in the very 'heart of darkness' as though, Rini gets to be more and more resplendent-functioning as an attesting authority she presages, even foreshows an enlightened resolution of the 'problems' raised in *Aranyer Din Ratri*. Her composure completely contradicts, contradicts to the point of almost wholly overriding the nervy, jerky reactions of the other protagonists, of those other troubled souls. And it is this 'composure' which is the most troublesome aspect of the film. Rini herself is transformed into a 'record', a 'document' in which signs worth the name are forever 'sealed'. With no 'trace' of 'erasure' anywhere, the 'record' then can be made to play the same tune for all time to come. In the process however, in this over-privileging of the 'will to record', a 'picture' of 'tradition' emerges — a kind of 'plastic' 'tradition' capable of accommodating fresh new 'individual talents' within its frame, but itself not subject to 'will to play'. The self-adjustment, rather the self-management of the 'tradition' ensures that no individual, complacent or otherwise, breaks rank. Colluding with 'Received Wisdom', remembrance here gives a 'natural' hue to 'tradition' and this 'naturalisation' in turn, almost on its own accord, blends beautifully with 'moralisation'. 'Nature' after all does not brook 'cultural' caprices; she is too rigid to humour humans, a mere species placed in the 'isthmus of the middle state' in the unending 'chain of beings'. It is therefore not surprising that in *Aranyer Din Ratri* it is the introspective Rini who, besides being the Book of Names also becomes the Moral Priestess. By the end of the day she commands almost a Deity-like presence. Delivered though mildly, her moral rebuking shows up to Ashim how rotten he is within. As leader of the group it was Ashim who had taken the initiative to seize the government bungalow — despite having come unprepared, without prior intimation or reservation, the Kolkata-tourists were able to take over the rest house by 'bribing' the *chowkidaar*. He had dismissed the episode, 'explained away' the event of the poor bungalow-keeper accepting money with a shrug as it were. Thanking God for 'corruption', the 'sickness' which keeps the entire Indian body-politics in its grip, Ashim had given no further thought to it. Rini's moral intervention makes it 'transparent', that the satisfaction with mono-causal explanations is itself an index of insensitivity, a characteristic common to cynics afraid of bearing responsibility. Rini leads Ashim to the *chowkidaar's* quarter; and peeping through a

window Ashim sees the poverty-stricken ‘corrupt’ man nursing his bed-ridden ill wife. As if for the first time it strikes Ashim that the poor are also ‘helpless’, they do not have much choice in matters related to money or ‘morality’. Ashim, one hopes, will not become blind to this insight; in his revamped self, put in a similar situation, he will behave charitably. While the value of the moral point Rini makes is undeniable, what irks one is her mannered delivery. In the apportioning of moral blame she seems to be leaving herself out. In the rather supercilious way Rini teaches the lesson to Ashim, she becomes guilty of the worst possible fallacy—the *self-expecting* fallacy. Rini’s humourless moral certitude damages the film to a great extent—by violating its basic premise of chance play, the overbearing, brooding Rini blunts the critical edge of the text, blocks the possibility of the burlesque growing into a full-scale critique of class-psychology. The danger is such that if we get far too enamoured of Rini, we are likely to miss the significance of one of the most startling ‘breaks’ that occur in the Memory Game. Sanjay was pushed out of the game in the third round; he did not get the opportunity to continue the paradigmatic sequence whose first two elements were ‘Karl Marx’ and ‘Mao Tse Tung’. Nothing is more productive, pregnant with possibilities, than this ‘blank’. That Sanjay is thwarted just at the point where he could have added a third name to the Marx-series to both adduce and cement the connection between the Marxian notion of surplus extraction and the Maoist emphasis on the ‘primacy of the political’, is itself instructive. Since then much water has flowed by in the rivers of Ganga-Volga-Rhine, but that ‘blankness’ remains as articulate as it was in 1970, the year of *Aranyer Din Ratri* making. The question ‘what is to be done?’ still looms large; and no matter what the Rinis of the world think there is still no plausible answer available. Any affair with a person as ‘complete’, as well-provided with the heavy rhetorical machinery integral to the blooming of ‘self-sufficient’ individuals as Rini, is fated to be disastrous: it can only be consummated in some or the other heaven of ‘liberal lipmanism’, in some ‘Eden’ where ‘alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham’<sup>26</sup>. Unfortunately for us this inclination to go along with the killjoys becomes progressively pronounced in Satyajit Ray’s film-career subsequent to *Aranyer Din Ratri*. And more he gets embroiled in the project, less becomes his ability to undercut.

Ray's last film *Agantuk* is worth remembering solely on the count that it perfectly illustrates what havoc is caused once a Rini-like figure fully takes over. The film is dominated by which, by the way, suits our purpose very well, fits into our hands like gloves — a professional anthropologist. It is his monologic voice that sounds and resounds throughout the film. A man widely travelled and possessing great amounts of 'information', the anthropologist Manomohan too stitches a pattern of names: a patchwork that is supposed to tell us his biography, explain the genealogy of his being. The point is: despite his expertise in Structuralist Anthropology, he is too 'civilized' to feel one with 'savages', Manomohan's 'cultured' sensibility prevents him from establishing empathetic contacts with the sons or daughters of the 'soil'. Neither does he feel 'at home' in his 'natural' surroundings—the spirit of wonder and wander that drove Captain Nomo of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* also drives him. He IS Nomo, 'No One', that is. Some of those who have thus 'soiled' him, made an eternal outsider of him include: Shakespeare, Bankim Chandra, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and of course Rabindranath. Though content-wise the list is similar to the one in *Aranyer Din Ratri*, they are pole opposite in terms of form. The formal logic differs, so does 'ideology'— while 'ideology' is shown being 'formed' in *Aranyer Din Ratri*, *Agantuk* presents us with a slice of 'formalized ideology'. The stalwarts of 'modernity' are 'conjured' up in *Agantuk* in dead seriousness—there is not a shade of sarcasm in the anthropologist's speech. Manomohan gives, as it were, a gist of 'authentic' culture and prepares accordingly a Readers' Digest. He therefore merely enumerates the names—they keep piling, one on top of another, and at the end of the recital we have before us a bright and beautiful constellation. Enclosed in its halo, Manomohan shines in reflected glory. Empowered thus, the anthropologist passes judgment on humanity, pontificates on man's foibles and failures, issues with utter ease moral writs. Manomohan speaks as if he is the last vestige of some Model Renaissance; and people, if they wish to rectify their misdirected ways must take him along with his intellectual-spiritual heritage as THE model. Lacking in eminence the best the ordinary mortals can do is to emulate the vainglorious model, simulate the Secular Moral Hero as passively as is practically possible. Become, as it were, a *bhakta* who doesn't dare dream of touching his master—a 'depressive' *bhakta*, not a 'manic' one.

Manomohan-Rini manage to produce this kind of alienating effect is because in their programme of 'evocation' there is no charge of 'revocation'. What they make us forget is, 'remembering' and 'forgetting' are neither binary opposites nor are they amenable to perfect separation and consequently to be 'informed' may mean to know all but to be 'knowing' means to have partial information only. Unless it is remembered that valorising 'memory' at the expense of 'amnesia' is only a ploy to keep things in place, it would be impossible to contextualise them and harness the two kinds of activity usefully. Only that which carries a sense of contradiction can be called 'useful'. And since Rinis and Manomohans propose synthetic joining of parts, treat 'knowledge' and 'information' as interchangeable, their 'resolutions' are but emphatically 'false', a positive hindrance to any historically meaningful enterprise. It is exactly here that 'Artistic Creations' are most liable to connive with 'Popular Manufactures'— the former, at moments of 'weakness', can jolly well usurp the most precious stock-in-trade of the latter: the farcical 'sentimental ending', that is. One may agree with Ray when he says, 'rebellion is not the sole definition of modernity'<sup>28</sup>, but that does not mean it has to be understood in terms of 'surrender' alone.

Mercifully, however, no mercenary of peace overshadows Satyajit Ray's *Aranyer Din Ratri*, as it does *Agantuk*. Rini is an aberration in the film—she is there only to give a hint of the later texts of the Maestro, to keep us waiting in anticipation for the worst. The film otherwise maintains a racy pace and a rugged look, maintains them to the last. After all, had not Ashim-in spite of being hypnotised by the phantom like, airy Rini—said to her: 'I want to *touch* you to see whether you are real'. And wasn't Sekhar—the man who has always had to depend on his friends for blades—*forgetting* to take back his shaving razor to the city?

### ***Epilogue***

*Aranyer Din Ratri*, however, has more to offer. In fact, if it were not for this 'extra' bit the film would not have been as compelling as it is. Without it, the study of 'masculinity' the film undertakes—uproarious though it is—may have degenerated into a

mere dabbling in psychonomies. It is Ray's hard practical sense, which saves him from giving into that pathetic eventuality. Ray has indeed made a virtue out of 'pragmatism'. Even while admitting some kind of 'mystique' does help film makers to sustain their ego and conceal their vulnerability, he writes: 'Any film maker who while at work bears any resemblance to the popular conception of the artist as a withdrawn individual in rapt communion with his use is obviously shirking and has no business to be within miles of a movie camera'<sup>29</sup>. Ray was the last person to *forget* the business aspect of Cinema. He had more or less classified film makers into three groups: i) the avant-garde experimentalist director who 'creates' esoteric off-beat art-films; ii) the non-serious commercial producer who, keen only on box-office returns, 'supplies' popular but easy-to-consume, throw-away 'goods'; and the serious commercial film maker who knows how to 'strike a satisfactory balance between art and commerce'<sup>31</sup>. Ray of course thought of himself as belonging to the third class: 'Somebody... has defined the Cinema as the highest form of commercial art... I have no quarrel with that definition'<sup>32</sup>. He was not interested in either 'Pure Art' or 'Popular Commercials'; instead, he tried to 'graft' 'art' onto the 'popular' and vice-versa, patch together what may be called 'Popular Art'. To those who are used to seeing clear distinctions between 'Art films' and 'Popular Cinema', the term may sound like an oxymoron. But it was the express will of Ray to play on that contradiction in terms, blur the divide between 'High' and 'Low' by concentrating on possible overlaps-to work 'in-between', that is. Ray makes no bones about the climate of economic constraints within which the filmmaker has to operate: 'Cost, indeed, (is) a dominant factor at all times, influencing the very style of the film'<sup>33</sup>. As if to demystify, disabuse those who go giddy over his minimalist approach, the precision and proportion, the rare economy of his style, Ray writes: 'The critics may well talk of a laudable attempt at a rediscovery of silent cinema, but you know within your heart that while there may be some truth in that, equally true was your anxiety to avoid the uninspiring business of dubbing and save on the cost of sound film'<sup>34</sup>. He doesn't hesitate to spell out the mercenary logic that lies behind the deployment of 'silence' in his Elms; more than the concerns of abstract aesthetics, the very capital-intensity of Cinema motivates, invests Ray with the zeal to make the most of least little things. 'Maximizing by minimizing' is then not only his aesthetic credo and artistic motto, but also his 'trade-mark'. This is what

Ray had to say about *Pather Panchali*, his first film that earned him international fame and the enviable repute of being a ‘humanist’ in a world governed by ‘mechanical reproductions’: ‘I like to think that it was a shrewd move on my part to have selected for my first film a story where one had to put the emphasis on the human aspect. Not only was this wise from the box office point of view but with the means at our disposal, any preoccupation with technique would have been disastrous’.

Ray also was shrewd enough to make a ‘realist’ appraisal of the ‘camera’. Graphically describing his gradual realisation of the potentials of the machine, Ray writes: ‘After all, you said, it is only a recording instrument. The important thing is Truth. Get at it and you’ve got your great humanist masterpiece. But how wrong you were! The moment you are on the set the three-legged instrument takes charge<sup>36</sup>’. Freud may have been mystified by his Writing-Pad, the mechanical toy that he took to be capable of receiving and retaining impressions in their ‘originality’, but Ray is certainly not deceived by the transparency of camera-lenses. Clearly, in his eyes, in place of being a mute tool camera is a thing, that is, it has a will of its own. Just as money is not dead substance, an object that keeps on circulating to no purpose, cinematic camera too is not listless, a device that allows you to see whatever you choose to see. On the other hand, there is a deep-lying nexus between ‘money’ and ‘camera’: in fact, ‘money’ speaks through the camera of Cinema. So eloquent is that speaking that it makes all the finer details regarding *differences* in Art Films and Commercial Pageantry quite irrelevant. Ray’s *Aranyer Din Ratri* stands out precisely because the film itself *speaks* of ‘money’. Ray ‘records’ via the Cinema, the greatest gift of technology and capitalism, how ‘money’, a ‘filth’ loathed by aesthetes, remains decisive in shaping ‘human’ relations even during the days and nights spent in a jungle. Obviously, to be of any value, ‘money’ has to be dealt in a manner that *shows* more than it says. As Ray had observed once, the relative unimportance of ‘saying’ is particularly true in cinema: ‘No. Words are not enough. Words need the backing of action, or there is no revolution’.

Marx in his famous—now almost legendary—treatise on ‘money’ in *Grundrisse* had introduced a peculiar twist to the truism, ‘existence of money presupposes the

objectification of the social bond'. Adding as if a footnote to it—a footnote that went on to become a tome, 'a detour that became the main road' —Marx said: 'It is an insipid notion to conceive of this merely *objective bond* as a spontaneous, natural attribute inherent in individuals and inseparable from their nature (in antithesis to their conscious knowing and willing) bond is their product. It is a historic product'<sup>39</sup>. Reacting violently against the romantic yearning for a return to the 'original fullness' of beings, to the state where 'money' doesn't mediate to mess up inter-subjective relationships, Marx wrote: 'The bourgeois viewpoint has never advanced beyond the antithesis between itself and the romantic viewpoint, and therefore the latter will accompany it as legitimate antithesis up to its blessed end'<sup>40</sup>. That the myth of the pure-as-gold, prelapsarian Man as a symbol of 'undifferentiated unity' will always abide by capital, no matter how generalized and global gets to be its production, is well-illustrated by Ray's last film *Agantuk*. In *Aranyer Din Ratri* however, he laughingly, even lovingly faces up to the romantic specter and shows it to be for what it is.

Although, speaking geographically, the four youths of *Aranyer Din Ratri* are very far from the original home of the *Homo Economicus*, they nevertheless bear familial connections with that species. And in all probability, it is the same familial compulsion which makes the four middle-class Bengalis, each a glowing specimen of the 'developing' 'economic man', come to the jungles in the first place. Mimicking their erstwhile masters, the colonial sahibs, they march in looking for their 'non-economic' brethren; and in the process mix up everything. The robust Hari, the sportsman who apes Tarzan to bellow out a thundering mating call, wrongly accuses Laka, a local boy, of theft. Long before the accusation was lodged, Ashim had said, said muttering to himself while giving money to Laka for the purchase of goods from the market: 'Who knows how much you are pilfering!' So, Ashim does not bother to 'investigate' into the charge or listen to the protestations of the boy; he simply dismisses Laka and says disgustedly to his friends: 'Can't you people keep your moneybags safe?' From this point on 'money' and 'moneybags' becomes of primary interest in the film. The antithesis between those who hire labour for cheap and those who sell it for a pittance, those who don't work and those who do, gets to be more and more pronounced. While the Bengali babus lie in

leisure and talk about 'development' and 'technology', express their heartfelt admiration for Japan, 'the land of the rising sun', the Tiger of all Asian Tigers, the Santhali women quietly tidy up the rooms. This much is straightforward, plain sailing but soon the theme of 'money' gets enmeshed with sexuality. It acquires a peculiar erotic charge only to recoil on the presumptuous men, hit them where it hurts most. Hari's wallet was of course not stolen; in his forgetfulness, perhaps in his eagerness to meet the Santhali girl he had spotted earlier, Hari had left it behind at Mrs. Tripathi's house. After returning it, Rini asks: 'Have you counted the cash?' And to the utter embarrassment of his friends, the dull-witted Hari honestly replies: 'Yes'.

It could be because Hari was particularly vulnerable, sexually vulnerable that is, or for some other equally plausible but unfathomable reason, but it is through his actions that 'money' makes its way, establishes a tight nexus between the 'pre-modern' and the 'modern' forms of life. Watching him eyeing the Santhali girls at the bazaar, Sekhar comments: 'Don't give such hungry looks'. The jobless joker finds himself at wit's end to explain why, every now and then those dusky girls break out in peals of laughter: 'No work, yet they laugh! *Peculiar?* Combining Hari's 'hunger' and the 'joy' of the unemployed Santhali women, Sekhar whispers into Hari's ears: 'Want to buy slaves?' Said though in a hushed voice, this is the question that puts the bodies of the 'aboriginal' women in the real perspective: while both brute 'might' and circulating 'money' can imprison them, curiously enough, it is 'money' whose 'presence' is more blatant in the jungles. In this chance remark, purchasing power of the 'moneyed' and bodies of slave-women unite suddenly to create a shattering effect. The vexing issue of Political Economy that was skillfully skirted by Sanjib Chandra in *Palamau* is brought to the fore. Those same Santhals who are employed as domestic 'helps' in exchange for 'wage' paid in cash by the boisterous *babus* are also coaxed and coerced to operate at a different plane of social organisation. It is in the jungles that the *real* implication of the *formal* subordination by 'capital' and the *formal* subjection of labour are made manifest. No, the Slave mode of Production is not merely a stage in human history; as an abstract generalised form it allegorises all the remaining class-based modes of extraction of surplus. That 'elementary form of co-operation continues to subsist as a particular form

of capitalist production side by side with the developed forms of that production<sup>42</sup> is highlighted by the 'co-operation' the Santhali woman extends to the cocky Hari. While she thinks of Kolkata as the heaven where jobs are freely available, the Kolkata boy sexually uses, exploits her body for free. Presenting diachronic arrangements, successive stages and phases, synchronically, the whole scenario is imbued with a synechdochic quality. It may, simply by the force of comparison, remind us the remark which Marx so approvingly quoted in *Capital* Volume I: 'Why do large undertakings in the manufacturing way ruin private industry, but by coming nearer to the simplicity of slaves?'<sup>43</sup> The conjunction of the 'cunning' of Hari, the 'moneyed' city-man and the 'simplicity' of the Santhal girl is like a *displaced* duplication of the 'encounter between an army furnished with breach-loaders, and one armed with bows and arrows.'<sup>44</sup> And this makes Hari's gaze doubly piercing: he not only 'surveys' the women and their flesh as any hungry 'primitive' would, but also like a guard of some Benthamite Panopticon. Hari warns the girl he had hooked: 'Be sure to come, otherwise I'll give you a hiding. I will give you more money'. Typical of the homo economicus, Hari assumes, since 'money' is the 'god among commodities' it must be an 'object of greed'. After promising the girl that he would 'give her money for free', he immediately adds in a mocking tone: 'Feeling greedy? Given his hidebound nature, Hari may not have understood what the illiterate Santhali girl meant when she put in his hands the wallet he was forgetting to take back after having spent himself out, was simply this: 'Greed itself is the product of a definite social development, not *natural* as opposed to *historical*'<sup>45</sup>. As if in a demonstration of the obvious truth that of the four, the foolhardy cricketer has the lowest quotient of 'quiscent cathexis' and hence the 'least capacity to take up inflowing energy'<sup>47</sup>, it is Hari who receives physical injury. Freud put it succinctly, weaker the 'system' 'the more violent must be the consequence of the breach caused by the rush of energy from elsewhere 'in the protective shield against stimuli'<sup>48</sup>. Hit by Laka with a stick, the 'wound' that surfaces on his head serves three purposes all at the same time. It makes vivid three types of breaches: 'physical', 'psychic' and 'economic'. He was guilty of a 'breach of contract' when he cheated the girl, wasn't he? This is 'poetic justice' then. In passing it may be mentioned that the Santhali women who dance to the delight of the anthropologist in Ray's *Aguntuk* reveal no such 'sensitivity'-leave alone living in

conflicting ‘structures of feeling’<sup>49</sup>, as museum-pieces they have no ‘structure’ which they ‘feel’ to be their own.

The recurrent motif of women ‘returning’ ‘money’ or ‘moneybag’ to men in *Aranyer Din Ratri* becomes especially dense in the sequence following the Memory Game. Along with Rini and Mrs. Tripathi, Sanjay-Ashim and Sekhar go to visit a local fair. And verily, the visit turns into a game of ‘money’ and the fair into a ‘Vanity Fair’. Dutifully attended by Sanjay Mrs. Tripathi goes on a buying spree—she keeps buying Santhali ornaments. Only later, when Mrs. Tripathi puts them on and asks Sanjay in the secrecy of her room, ‘weren’t you saying that Santhali ornaments won’t suit me?’, does her real intention, the impulse behind her manic buying get told. And then, as we know the sight of pre-modern ornaments donning the body of a modern woman gave Sanjay the jitters — despite his appetite he wasn’t able to stomach it.

While Mrs. Tripathi shops, Sekhar tries his luck in gambling and Rini and Ashim take to the swing. The trip to the local fair would have been quite uneventful and ordinary were it not for an out-of-place ‘happening’, an ‘interruption’ that occurs repeatedly. Whenever the women go forward to buy anything the men, coxcombs as they are, offer the money. And to their bitter amazement they are, more often than not, prevented from making the payments. The ‘moneybag’—symbolic of male prowess in both its economic and sexual dimensions—is more or less ignored by the women. This repeated refusal so deeply hurts the male—ego that it causes a kind of phallic paralysis in Ashim and Sanjay. Sekhar however doesn’t face the problem—being a ‘desolate’ soul he has no qualms about borrowing money from the ‘weaker’/‘fairer’ sex. The ‘vanity fair’ concludes on rather a sorry note for Sanjay— he has no clue as how to handle a hodgepodge of a woman like Mrs. Tripathi. Ashim however manages to pull it through to a brighter end. He receives from Rini — besides the sobering moral lectures —her phone number. She hands it out to Ashim as though she were giving him a bonus or rewarding him for his promise to be better in the future. And, Rini writes her phone number, no, not on a piece of paper, but on a promissory note, the ‘rupee’.

And so the men resume their journey back to home. But they are not returning unscarred or unchanged. Hari has the bandage on his head as a 'reminder' of what may happen to 'moneybags' if and when 'pre-modern' forces decide to strike back; and Ashim has the rupee note bearing Rini's signature as a pointer to a new threshold. In spite of conflicting signals, *Aranyer Din Ratri* does succeed in staging the 'difference' between the first and last stages of the 'journey' in the form of a 'contradiction'. It is a 'contradiction' because it cannot be wished away, 'abolished through quiet metamorphosis'<sup>50</sup>. It again is a 'contradiction' because it somehow instills in us the faith that, 'if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic'<sup>51</sup>.

It may seem strange to many, even preposterous, that we bring in primary contradictions and revolutionary pragmatism in relation to a work by the 'arch-humanist' filmmaker Satyajit Ray. But then, we were not discussing 'author' or 'authorial purpose'; we were talking of *text* and *texture*, of *will to play* and *will to record*, of *cross-dressing* and *crisscrossing*, of *memory* and *amnesia*, in short, of things in a muddle. Weren't we?

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[I am grateful to Sri Anirban Mallik for his help in preparing the text.]