



## Mani Kaul: DU: KH ke Prakar

There is a deep and undivided bond between art and the feeling of pain (दुःख), of sorrow or melancholy (वेदना, विषाद). And deep down it embeds an oftenly undefined feeling of joy (सुख), perhaps a very curious chemistry! A true work of art touches your heart where mind meets without really explaining or analyzing the peculiar phenomenon. It is said, the poet's acquisition (उपलब्धि) is obtaining a greater pain than herself! Interestingly, उपलब्धि would also mean perception. On the other hand, अनुपलब्धि would mean non-perception, which according to the Mimamsakas, is one of the instruments of knowledge (ज्ञान). There is no coming to consciousness without pain, said C G Jung. Jung also brings about the perception of 'darkness' (One does not become enlightened imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious) and that inevitably reminds me of Mani Kaul's film *Satah se Uthta Aadmi* (1980) and Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh's epical poem *Andhere Mein* (In the Dark), which the film so intensely evokes and invokes. Like the poem, the film touches in me a layered feeling of pain, of melancholia. It has forms of pain, more than one, दुःख के प्रकार! Personally for me, Kaul's *Siddheshwari* (1989) is quite an emblematic film of दुःख के प्रकार! And when I first saw it immediately after it

was made, I felt peculiar layers of pain embedded within its state of being (भाव). As an artist, Kaul stuck to his own nature, own स्वभाव in his cinematography, its practice. He risked for expressing himself, for आत्मिय अभिव्यक्ति ॥दुःख॥

Muktibodh wrote, अब अभिव्यक्ति के सारे खतरे / उठाने ही होंगे। Now, all the risks of expression will have to be undertaken... ॥दुःख॥

1989. Chitrakoot, Altamount Road, Mumbai. Around 1 O'clock in the afternoon. The house where Mani Kaul and Lalitha Krishna lived with their children.

I had shown *Siddheshwari* as part of Screen Unit's program (I had the fortune of leading this Mumbai-based film club for over two decades, and it was very active those days); the screening (brand new 35mm print) was held at the Mini Eros opposite Churchgate railway station. Along with Mani Kaul, the film's cinematographer, Piyush Shah was also present. The following day, I was at Chitrakoot talking to Kaul about *Siddheshwari* and how deep down in my heart I was feeling pain in its various forms, perhaps my own middle-class pain of being. Barely any other film had touched me with such earthly, unearthly feeling. And the feeling I thought had emerged from the way Kaul had filled the 'movement' with 'time', e.g. the mental and physical agony experienced by young *Siddheshwari* and the feeling of pain being evoked through fleeting moments while she was washing kitchen utensils, creating peculiar metal sounds. Such abstract (and yet palpable) feeling perhaps only music could invoke though it is very different for cinematography to attain the temporality of music (संगीत). "But, as I know through your cinematography, you have been striving to offer it a certain musical experience," I told Kaul that afternoon. And I thought my words had made him happy and joyous. ॥दुःख॥

However, after listening to my दुःख के प्रकार thoughts with regard to the film *Siddheshwari*, Kaul had kept quietly staring at me for a few seconds. Those were amazing moments at Chitrakoot as the Sun threw its softened oblique evening rays from a window. But much later someone gave me a copy of Udayan Vajpeyi's Hindi book, *Abhed Akash: Mani Kaul se Udayan Vajpeyi ki Baatcheet* (Undivided Space: Udayan Vajpeyi's Conversation with Mani Kaul, Madhya Pradesh Film Development Corporation, Bhopal, 1994), and I was sweetly surprised to see Mani Kaul referring to my दुःख के प्रकार response to *Siddheshwari* in this book. Vajpeyi's question had referred to Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and the sense of polyphony that we find in his literary works, and the polyphony that we see in Kaul's cinematography. ॥दुःख॥

Mani Kaul: “The question is about how you experience polyphony. Once my friend Amrit Gangar told me about *Siddheshwari* and the presence of various forms of pain, in it दुःख के प्रकार, दुःख के प्रकार!!, like the forms of the (raga) Sarang in our music.” There are several संसार in a single संसार, Kaul told Vajpeyi among several other interesting things. The poet Muktibodh also refers to the system of created things, the world or the संसार. ॥दुःख॥

As referred to earlier, I also intensely felt a layered feeling of pain while watching Kaul’s *Satah se Uthta Aadmi*. In his epical poem, *Andhere Mein*, Muktibodh wrote:

भूमि की सतहों के बहुत नीचे  
 अंधियारी एकान्त  
 प्राकृत गुहा एक।  
 विस्तृत खोह के सांवले तल में  
 तिमिर को भेदकर चमकते हैं पत्थर  
 मणि तेजस्क्रिय रेडियो-एक्टिव रत्न भी बिखरें,  
 झरता है जिन पर प्रबल प्रमात एक।  
 विचारों की रक्तिम अग्नि के मणि वे  
 प्राण-जल-प्रपात में धुलते हैं प्रतिपल  
 अकेले में किरणों की गोली है हलचल  
 गोली है हलचल॥

*Deep under the surfaces of the earth, the poet sees a dark solitary ancient cave and a wide hole in its dark bottom. Piercing the darkness, stones shine, and on irradiating radioactive pearls cascades a mighty waterfall [...] They are jewels of thoughts like blood-red fire, dissolving every moment in the cascade of life and water... And the poet hears the moist bustle of the rays in loneliness. Perhaps underneath Kaul’s film, we hear the moistness of sound, the moisture gathered over several संसार and civilizations. And the layers of दुःख के प्रकार. ॥दुःख॥*

2002. *Den Bosch railway station, Holland.*

While in Rotterdam, I visited Mani Kaul, Maryam and their children in their Den Bosch house. One afternoon, we were sitting on a bench of a Den Bosch railway station platform. There was barely anyone around and the weather was sunny and warm. We were talking about *Naukar ki Kameez* (The Servant’s Shirt, 1999) based on a novel in Hindi by Vinod Kumar Shukla. In this film, Kaul takes his thought of temporal randomness further. As we know, one of the three experiments that Kaul had desired to attempt in this film was not let the cameraman look through the camera while a shot is being taken.

This was not completely new as Kaul had already tried this experiment to a limited extent in his earlier films, particular *Nazar* (The Gaze, 1989) based on Dostoevsky's story, shot by Piyush Shah.

Kaul believed that the moment the eye looked through the camera it 'appropriated' the space it was filming by a dichotomous organisation that split the experience of that space into a fork: of being sacred and/ or of being profane. "The random happening, an inch outside the four lines of the format, when thought of as equally significant to an elaboration makes the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane irrelevant," Kaul said. For him, elaboration was not a construction. And as Kaul believed (and practiced), not looking through the camera freed the camera from a slavish synchronicity with the placements and movements of objects and figures in space.

That afternoon on the quiet Den Bosch railway platform was a precious one for me as I could talk to him about my concept of *Cinema of Prayoga* and he was very encouraging. However, that afternoon, I saw a strange feeling in Mani Kaul's eye, and a bit disturbing. He was a lonely man, and terribly so, I thought. ॥दुःख॥

6 July 2011. New Delhi – 1 O'clock in the morning. Kutch – 6 O'clock in the morning.

Film scholar, teacher, Sufi singer, thinker and a dear friend Madan Gopal Singh's phone call from New Delhi – "Mani Kaul has passed away!" A complete silence for a few moments! And as he continued on my query, "Mani was brought home from the hospital and he breathed his last at one a.m." When Mani was seriously ill, Madan would often sing for him. सहृदयी सान्निध्य।

Then, I had just returned from London and Paris, where I had the opportunity to talk about *Cinema of Prayoga* at a seminar organized by the University of the Arts and at the Pompidou Centre, respectively. In London Prof. Thomas Elsaesser (from Amsterdam) and the Tate Modern film curator, Stuart Comer had shared some interesting memories of Mani Kaul's, whom I had quoted quite frequently in my presentation. On my return, I had joined Kuntal, my wife, who was recuperating at the Navjeevan Nature Cure Centre in Kutch, near the port town of Mandvi. Madan's phone call at dawn had filled the cloudy July sky of Kutch with many memories of Mani Kaul's. अभेद आकाश।

A little afar, a handsome peacock had stopped singing and dancing. Where had his voice gone? Why was so much void around? And - ॥दुःख॥?