

The Desire of Unconscious: Depiction of Dream Sequence in Indian Parallel Cinema (1950s to 1980s)



“Experiment in any medium is the extension of the potentialities of the medium itself. Experimental films are explorations in the cinema, by people who seek selfexpression in art. ... Psychologists have proved that such kinds of experimentation have a tremendous impact on audience minds. I considered that the Surrealistic approach in cinema which was headed by Salvador Dali, Luis Buñuel, Man Ray, Dulac and others , it had perpetuated a new genre of cinema movement. This approach calls for the abstraction of reality for its essentials.”

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Ritwik Ghatak (1925-1976) was one of the eminent maestro of Indian cinema who always envisaged a newer form of expression. In his book *‘Cinema and I’* (1987) Ghatak repeatedly argued that as a filmmaker its very difficult to slack on a particular art form but an artist should remind that every art form derived from a particular philosophy. Ghatak

considered that Luis Buñuel was one of the pioneers who depicted the immense power of dream through the cinematic lens. With an application of superimpositions, stop motion and distorting lenses with ‘strange’ cinematography, and using the camera as enhancing the tool to create extraordinary as a Surrealist filmmaker Buñuel introduced to cinema as the unique form of modern art. It can be said that surrealism in cinema was born simultaneously with cinema itself. Since, the pillars of Indian parallel filmmakers were inspired by western aesthetics and film technique so, here in the article, I would like to explore that how Indian Parallel filmmakers imposed the abstraction of dream as a logic of unconscious?

Surrealism was one of the most influential art movement in the 20th century. Though initially it was concentrated in the literary movement, nonetheless many surrealists were ambivalent about the possibilities of painting and pop art. While contemporary political violence and uncertainties addressed by Surrealist artists,

but they were interested in exposing the complex and repressed inner worlds of sexuality, desire, violence and transgressive behaviour. Many of them introduced psychoanalysis as the medium of exploring human feelings and behaviour as a part of morality and social justice. Surrealist thought that cinema is the perfect medium for expressing the subconscious. Ado Kyrour's vast panorama '*Le Surréalisme a Cinema*' (1953), he started to envisage why Surrealists were interested in cinema which engendered a tumult of debates in the world of aesthetics. Kyrour was one of the pioneers who first drew the attention on a history of Surrealist responses to the cinema. He always believed that cinema is essentially surrealist experience which grounded on several rudiments and one of the basic element is an analogy between film viewing and dream state.

The dream sequence, which is an unique form of surrealist cinema, was influenced by Freud's psychoanalysis. The father of surreal-



ism Andre Breton also considered that Freud prominently depicted his critical faculties to bear upon the dream, which was admissible as the considerable place of cognitive action. (Breton: 1924) For Sigmund Freud dream remained untranslatable in words and was expressed through images. Freud explored that the dream was the psychosexual instincts and complexes of daily ideas and behaviours,

what the world surrealists introduced as part of the secret of existentialism in the mysterious world.

Since the fantasy accepts the rules of realism and sometimes goes beyond them and it intensifies to feel the sources of reality, and while the extraordinary refutes the realistic attempts to be convincing so the western Surrealist filmmakers tried to explore the difference between the fantasy and the extraordinary. In Surrealist cinema, fantasy appears more than real, or else it does not exist. Surrealist preferred to refute the attempt to be seen as a doctrine. Instead of implementing the particular technique, surrealist preferred to invent new demands on Surreality with appropriate movement and production. Surrealists try to set the unconscious as free from the mechanism, which interrupts the conscious mind by using the process of irrational and the mysterious and to use violence and eroticism in their approach. Surrealist considered cinema as the magical place since the darkness and isolation from the outer world creates an affinity between conscious and unconscious, which helped to spectators to cross the binaries between reality and fiction, or between reality and dream.

Richardson argued in his book '*Surrealism and Cinema*' (2006) that what the dream offered the surrealists more than anything was an experience of otherness. For them "the unconscious did not simply contain the detritus of everyday life, nor was it principally the realm of repressed memory." (Richardson: 2006:10) Luis Buñuel was one of the eminent surrealist filmmaker who considered dream as an arena of unknown experience, once which was contained within the individual but was also projected onto the collective. As a Surrealist filmmaker, he believed that films communicated as the point of convergence with collective myth and emanating from within the unconscious of society as a whole. According to the statement of Octavio Paz '*Sur-*

realist film was the visual medium, centred on the images. In these terms the essential quality of the images as being not to explain. It invites one to re-create and literally, to relive it'. (Paz: 1973:97) Paz considered that the power of the image was invoked in the first sentences of Surrealist Films and painting, in what is perhaps the most hyperbolic statement in Surrealism, which is 'The eye exists in a savage state'. Indian filmmaker Shyam Benegal considered to Luis Buñuel as one of the best Surrealist filmmakers who depicted the triumph and limits of the traditional surrealist cinema. After seeing Buñuel's '*Un Chien Andalou*' (1929) Benegal mentioned that "... Buñuel 'shows us that a man with his hands tied can, by simply shutting his eyes, make the world jump..." (Benegal: 2018). Simultaneously Octavio Paz mentioned Buñuel's films are something more than a fierce attack on so-called reality; they are the revelation of another reality which contemporary civilization has humiliated.' (Paz: 1986:17)

In so far as '*Un Chien Andalou*' (1929), was the realisation of both Dali and Buñuel where they represented the miraculous meeting of minds, and the convergence of sensibilities. Buñuel narrated in his interview that, "When I have a scope to share my experience with him, I shared the dream what I saw before, in which blue flying harmless cloud and the man cut the eyelid. Transparent jelly-like tissue fills the eyeball behind the lens. Dali told me that he had also seen that the hand covered by the ants. Dali told me that why we didn't use it as the starting point of films?" (Buñuel: 1971) In the film, they envisaged the unsettling images to embrace confining identities, sexual repression and nihilism. Dali and Buñuel they negated rational explanation since they were not confined to the arts, attempted to unified and changed public perceptions of realities through metaphors. They influenced by Freud's concept of the unconscious and particularly the notion of dreams which was un-

controlled by reason and depicted to the primitive uncivilised area of the mind, from where repressed sexuality and other desire were derived. In his interview, Buñuel explained that he was influenced by Freud where he mentioned the sexual desire was thought to be the strong human influence and key of life. Repressed sexuality and desire are key themes of his creations. '*Un Chien Andalou*' (1929) was one of the Surrealist attempts which disrupted the narrative approach of time and space in terms of plot, and character. By dissociating spectator and rendering to the unconscious, it was evoked to the irrational world of dreams.

Buñuel and Dali's '*Un Chien Andalou*' (1929), and '*L'Age d'Or*' (1930) were two appropriate Surrealist cinema where conscious



hallucination and fusion of dreams released in the cultural domain. Buñuel and Dali tried to establish art as the desire of illusion, but also a medium of the greatest evocative power in terms of concrete details, cinema offered the privileged instrument for de-realising the world and the means for alchemical transmutation of reality. The cinematography in these two films envisaged the promise of a miraculous non-verbal language that proclaimed a new audacious aesthetic, a sense of modern beauty. Luis Aragon mentioned in the Buñuel's production Surrealism senses the miraculous potential of the cinema in this direction of the unseen, the unknown.

It is very significant that Surrealist film move-

ment has enthralled to the sphere of Indian parallel cinema, and Indian parallel filmmakers also adopted few concepts of it. Nonetheless, they have a basic difference with world Surrealist. With the influence of Freud's interpretation of the dream, while the most of Surrealist filmmakers incorporated 'Dream sequence' as the description of the operations, while the images were considered as either

tial for artistic production. Buñuel and Dali were influenced by Freud's analysis while Freud himself applied the concept which he developed about the dream to jokes, which the art are generated by a mixture of the conscious and unconscious process which are the derived has a physical desire of individual paying with an entity-language-that transcend individuals. But if we have gone through the



mental or physical and raw materials to the artist, juxtaposed Indian experimental filmmakers considered dream as the collective forms of Memory. Which is dynamic in character and its movement is largely ungraspable. They believed that the dream cannot be clearly situated withinspace and time, nevertheless, it can be exposed new linguistic, economic, historical, and energetic combinations which could be either normalise or reinvent that how the social field organises itself.

It is noteworthy that western Surrealist filmmakers always tried to introduce the dream-work as only an unconscious process, which is assimilated with internal, mental operations while artistic labour controlling the manipulation of physical materials consciously. In the first sequence of '*Un Chien Andalou*' (1929) Buñuel tried to incorporate the Freudian concept that unconscious operations of dream-work and physical transformation are essen-

dream sequence in the aspect of Indian cinema, we observe that the dream has been used as the form of collective unconscious while memorial culture is not simplified as the re-creation of the past but it is projected as the restoration of memory. In terms of subjectivity, it has found that dream depicted as the collective memory which 'involves a distinction between consciousness – as in an impersonal presence to the world. Indian parallel filmmakers depicted a dream as the pursuer of human memory, as long as it exists.

Eminent Indian filmmaker Girish Kasaravalli explained in his interview that though he didn't experiment with the dream sequence, nonetheless what the trends he has been found in the Indian parallel cinema (1950s to 1980s) that the filmmakers used dream as the disruptive social life of trauma, which was derived from the contemporary socio-political uncertainty and the combination of cultural

production and collective traumatic memory. (Kasaravalli: 2018) Indian experimental filmmakers considered that the manifest content of dream is a kind of pictographic script, which represents in an indirect manner a latent, hidden content, which could be mentioned as the 'Dream of Thought', which helped to artist to investigate the relations between the manifest of dream content and in the process of distributing them. As similar as Surrealist filmmakers in West, Indian parallel filmmakers also depicted, that the correlation between artwork and dreamwork is made quite explicit and representation in works of art as examples of how dreams are formed. Nonetheless, there is a basic difference between them, that while the western Surrealist filmmakers tried to incorporate uncanny images in a casual manner to create a temporal dream sequence, there Indian experimental filmmakers introduced dream sequence as the part of Collective trauma. It has pushed and poked the social field to the point where the disordered flows of intensity and effect emerge as the raw material of memory labour.

Ritwik Ghatak explained in his interview that he depicted the dream sequence in the film '*Jukti Takko Arr Gappo*' (1974) as the part of collective trauma which derived from the socio-political flux. He elucidated that at times the social force of collective trauma and turbulent political realities merge and other times they collide. He believed that as a form of social organization, trauma is not just managed and created through the process of social remembrance it also organizes a social habitat. Sociality of desire is more significant than the repression of an individual. ' (Ghatak: 1970) Ghatak's argument on improvising dream sequence was a collective form of social trauma, which was theoretically very closer to the Deleuze and Guattari's concept, while the 'desire is social.' In the dream sequence of '*Nayak*' (1966), director Satyajit Ray tried to depict the concept that sometimes econom-

ics and ideology do not accord. It is not just a matter of individuals being marginalised by their economic conditions, for on another level economics are also material conditions and processes embedded in the psychic structures of individuals and society. Here Ray's perception was strengthened the Marxist approach what determines the possibility which is not just economics that determines ideology but ideology can also determine economic existence, in so far as psychic factors, not just economics also constitute a socio-historical force. This specific scene when the protagonist goes down inside the currency it has given a real glimpse to the spectators about the connection between desire, memory, and social organization. What Reiche said that the 'ideology of every social formation has the function not only of reflecting the economic process of this society, but also and more significantly of embedding this economic process in the psychic structures of the people who make up society.' (Reiche: 1989) Through the dream sequence of '*Nayak*' (1966), there not only depicted that the power not only wielded on the basis of material wealth, but it has been also changed to the degree of moral corruption which reveals to the uncertainty. Simultaneously Ray tried to depict, that the intensity of emotions what trauma produces has to find a means of escape. Ray envisaged the concept through the scene that the subconscious has a symbolic language that is truly a universal dialect, for it speaks with the vocabulary of the great vital constants that the feeling of death, physical notion of the enigma of space-these vital constants are universally echoed in every human. In the dream sequence of '*Nayak*' with the scream of Arindam '*Shekhar Da Please save me*' it has depicted that the forces of darkness become visible through the convulsion what produces in the body, and forces of death that make weaken. The scene proclaimed as '**life screams at death**'. The scream concentrates all those forces into one action, an action that is the sign of the struggle, what Deleuze

calls these affirmative forces that are liberated in the combat the powers of the future. In the scene, the funeral song is used as a metaphor that indicates ends with a scream, or ‘cry against death’.

Satyajit Ray deliberately jettisons the classi-



cal style in the film ‘*Pratidwandi*’ (1970). The switch to negative, introduction of dream sequences, abrupt use of flashbacks, the playful flash-forward identifies the hesitance, inner conflict and anguish of protagonist which envisage as the form of social trauma. He explained that “...*the film opens for instance with the death of the father, shown in negative, and there were several reasons for doing it that way. The scene describes the death of a person whom you don’t know, and who is not a character in the film. It is a totally impersonal death scene, and death is very difficult to portray on the screen. If it had been in positive, everybody might have looked for signs of life because they are not emotionally involved with this character. And that mustn’t happen: the theme must immediately capture the audience. So I started with a negative, and since I had done it once I thought, why not do it again later. In the dream sequence I also find it perfectly valid; and use the effect in another sequence, which might equally well have been in positive. This means a shift away from symbolic meaning to the singularities of style and expression. Here I tried to encounter the most ‘classical’ forms of dreams. I am extending the debate between Freudian*

and Deleuzian oneiric from surrealist echoes, through hybrid forms to new cinematic grammars of the dream...” (Ray: 1973). In the film ‘*Pratidwandi*’ (1970), the first dream sequence, which set on a beach, Ray tried to depict that how Siddhartha caught in the vortex of a rapidly changing society, which is continuously confronted and challenges to his established worldview and moral values. Through the first dream sequence, Ray tried to depict that inner self is also formed of memory, but this is not limited by actual, familial experience: it belongs to the durational process of perpetual becoming and the continuum of memory and action. Ray tried to explain that the dream as the ‘outermost envelope’ of the circuits, the furthest away from actuality. In the last interview segment of the film, while last time Ray introduced dream sequence, there Ray dealt with the humanist commitment. He used screaming of Siddhartha as the form of political resistance which is not only the result of an injustice, but also it reveals negative; and it has connected to the spectators with the unethical, corrupt norms of social institutions.

Indian Parallel filmmakers always tried to envisage that dreams have a double meaning (latent and manifest), and the ways images function (signifiers and signified) and symbols work as literal and metaphorical terms of meaning. They tried to establish that the correlation between the artwork and dreamwork, which is quite explicit because the representation in works of art is the example of how dreams are formed. Furthermore, Indian parallel filmmakers sometimes task as psychoanalysts in interpreting dreams to appear to match that of the spectator seeking to grasp the meaning of a work of art, a meaning which like that of a dream often stubbornly resists decoding. In an interaction, film director Mrinal Sen tried to argue that symbols in dream sometimes act as one of the indirect methods of representation, it appears that another close parallel to the intellectual methods of artist has been identified

but simultaneously dream makes use of this symbolism for disguised representation of the latent thought, doubt arises, because one assumes that artists employ symbols in order to make the meaning clear rather than to disguise them. (Sen: 2012). In his film the '*Kolkata 71*' (1971), where he symbolically introduced 'death' as a metaphor of rebirth which is yield to life and life screams at death' while scream concentrates all those forces into one action, an action that is the sign of the struggle. In the final scene of the film '*Kolkata 71*' when a youth chased and killed by police there director Sen tried to embraced death, as not a finite moment, it became a practical undertaking to participate in moral value and divine power and an exercise aimed at producing a change an entire society.

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Interview

- 1) Mrinal Sen's interview has taken by the author, at his residence. Date 12.10.2012.
- 2) Girish Kasaravalli's interview has taken by

the author. Date 15.1.2018. in Dhaka Filmfestival.

3) Shyam Benegal's telephonic interview has taken by the author. Date 26.11.2018.

4) Shyam Benegal's interview has taken by the author. Date 16.12.2018. Mumbai

Film (s) and Documentaries

1) '*Un Chien Andalou*' (1929), Buñuel and Dali.

2) '*L'Age d'Or*' (1930) Buñuel and Dali.

3) '*Nayak*' (1969), Satyajit Ray

4) '*Pratidwandi*' (1970) Satyajit Ray

5) '*Kolkata 71*' (1972), Mrinal Sen

6) '*The case of Surrealism: the Art Assignment*' directed by Joanner Fiduccia on 2009

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtP-BOwE0Qn0&t=72s>

7) "Surrealist Film: The Stuff of Dreams Documentary directed by Rae Hoffman.

<https://youtu.be/IMDLKLGqRaM>

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