

**Unravelling Mani Kaul's *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*:
Reception of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh and the Role of Hindustani Classical
Music**

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Abstract:

Mani Kaul's *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, when studied within the purview of Indian parallel cinema, will open up the space for a discourse that looks into the various tenets of film language. This paper will attempt a reading of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* in terms of the various tenets of forms that it explores to create a unique cinematic language of expression. It receives heavily from the works of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, but not in the form of a typical adaptation. The film also draws upon the structure of Indian classical music to create a specific form of cinema where temporality and spatiality is approached in a unique style. This paper will deal with the reception of the literary works of Muktibodh to the cinematic medium and in the process, will try to problematize the specificity and usage of source text in the reception.

Keywords: Muktibodh, Reception, Indian classical music, Indian parallel cinema, Mani Kaul.

Indian parallel cinema talks of a changing form that focuses more on the aesthetic aspect of cinema, thereby giving utmost importance to the medium itself. Arun Kaul and Mrinal Sen in the 'Manifesto of the New Cinema Movement' (Kaul and Sen 166) write:

New Cinema is not only a matter of finished results and effects, it also involves methods and conditions of film-making, the relationship between the creative artist and his audience, awareness of the changing grammar, expanding powers and soaring ambitions of the film medium. New Cinema offers the film-maker, above all, the indispensable freedom to realise his vision, untrammelled by all considerations except creative and aesthetic. New cinema looks upon a film as the personal expression of an individual artist.

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This paper will attempt a reading of film-maker Mani Kaul's *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* (Kaul 1980) in terms of the multifarious tenets of forms that it explores to create a unique cinematic language of expression. *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* receives heavily from eminent Hindi author and poet Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh's (1917-1964) works (essays, poems and short stories), but is not a typical adaptation. The film uses a one of a kind narration with direct readings from Muktibodh's works as well as a narrative progression that runs parallel. Temporality within the film has been dealt with, again in a unique manner, drawing from the structure of Indian classical music. All of these together have, in turn, given rise to a distinct form of expression. The paper will deal with how Kaul, in *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* has attempted a reception of Muktibodh into a different medium as well as how the structure of the film resonates with that of Indian classical music.

It is imperative that the discontinuous and fragmented narrative progression that *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* follows becomes an important tool in the formation of the cinematic language that Kaul devices. The structure of the narrative is inherently related to the multiple of layers of reception of Muktibodh within the film – both the literary and the political. The narrative of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* revolves around three characters, Ramesh, Keshav and Madhav. Ramesh embodies Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, while Keshav and Madhav are his companions who participate in the dialogue that Ramesh initiates in the film. The portrayal of Ramesh is that of a lonely person who is waiting for someone who would understand him. He is torn between his idea of his inner self and his actual life as a married man. The narrative progression is fragmented as it moves to discontinuous spaces and times – Keshav and Ramesh talk about their disillusionment of the post-Independence modernity as they go to desolate places. The friends also reflect about their ideas on suicide. While exploring the lives of the three characters, the film also reflects on the life of a poet – the dilemma of what the poet wants versus what the world that the poet resides in expects of him. As the characters travel, Keshav once meets a teacher of a madrasah and talks to him about religion; this conversation finally leads to even more self-doubt. Keshav is unemployed, neither does he make any amends to change his position. It is the difference between his needs and his ideals that keep him trapped in his situation. As the fragments of stories proceed, it touches upon larger elements like politics, corruption and the compromise of values. Ramesh once tells Keshav how important Keshav is to him as Keshav is Ramesh's ideal audience. Although Ramesh is not satisfied with what he writes, Keshav admires him for not compromising in

what Ramesh writes. As the friends discuss poetry and its aesthetics, Ramesh begins to realise his own failure. At this point, Ramesh's character dissolves into Muktibodh. The narrative culminates into an exploration of the experience of dissociation that everyone who is not content with their own expectations go through. In the end, the narrative dissolves into images and texts of Muktibodh.

Before delving deeper into the film text, it is important to understand Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh's position within the domain of Hindi literature as well as Indian literature. Muktibodh stands at a juncture of Hindi literary history where the transition from *Chhayavad*² to *Pragativad*³, *Prayogvad*⁴ and the *Nayi Kavita/Kahani*⁵ can be clearly traced. Equally important is to understand Muktibodh's politics, his inclination toward Marxism, his understanding of modernity, all of which, in turn, shape his thought. It is only important to spare so many words on Muktibodh's politics while talking about Muktibodh's literature is because of the importance that he himself has given to politics. Muktibodh's language, his aesthetics, his philosophy is not devoid of his politics. Chanchal Chauhan in the essay titled "Ideological Content of Muktibodh's Poetry" (Chauhan 185-186) writes:

... Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh did not give up his commitment and fought a battle of ideas against Modernism which harped on man's alienation in the modern world, his loss of identity and his sense of disintegration of self and society ... The Modernists in Hindi literature attacked the ideology of the working class and propagated total autonomy of literary works and negated all social concerns and commitment.

² A movement in Hindi literature spanning through the second and third decades of 20th century. Often considered a parallel of Romanticism, *Chhayavad* is marked by its inclination towards the themes of nature and love.

³ A post *Chhayavad* movement in Hindi literature, *Pragativad* emerged before the Independence of India and is intrinsically related to the Progressive Writers' Movement.

⁴ *Prayogvad* emerged out of *Pragativad* with the publication of *Taar Saptak*, a journal of poetry edited by Ajneya. *Prayogvad* emphasizes on the search of an individual which had been lost in the subjective nature of *Pragativad*.

⁵ *Nayi kavita* is a tradition in Hindi literature that marks a departure from *Pragativad* and *Prayogvad*. In this case, *nayi kavita* or new poetry tries to establish a complete new language of poetry which embraces human life in its entirety. It talks of doing away with traditions and of searching for the ultimate truth in human life itself. Poetry of *nayi kavita* has abundant use of symbols.

Muktibodh in his polemic against those writers had to expose the hollowness of the formalistic poetics based on false consciousness and a reactionary worldview.

Muktibodh is known for his innovations in the form of poetry; his use of ‘fantasy’, personal symbols and imagery in long poems is well known, and this will be spoken about with reference to *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* in a later part of this essay. Muktibodh has been explicit in terms of his political preferences and his inclination towards Marxism. Through the use of symbols and imagery, he focuses on the class reality of Indian society and speaks of the liberation of the proletarians from all forms of exploitation.

In *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999: 448), Ashish Rajadhakshya and Paul Willeman write an intriguing and important review of Mani Kaul’s *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*. In this seminal work, they write:

Kaul’s film addresses the writings of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (1917-79), one of the main representatives of the Nai Kavita (New Poetry) movement in Hindi (Tar Saptak, 1943; Chanda Ka Mooh Tedha Hain, 1954). Muktibodh also wrote several short stories, one of which (1971) provides the film with its title, and critical essays. The film integrates episodes from Muktibodh’s writings with material from other source, including a reinvented neo-realism derived from Muktibodh’s literary settings. ... Kaul has begun his studies of *Dhrupad* music, the classical North Indian music known

mainly for its extreme austerity, and derived a number of cinematic styles from this musical idiom which have continuously influenced his films since: e.g. the continuously mobile camera, the use of changing light patterns and the importance of improvisation.

Except some reviews, blogs and interviews in *Madhyam*, a Hindi magazine published from Bhopal, the above mentioned paragraph, however inferential, is the only prominent source of writing about Mani Kaul’s *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*. In terms of viewing, this film is one of the rarest. Because, except some film society screenings in India, some screenings in

the festival circuit of the United States of America and a single screening at Cannes⁶, a single copy of the film was stored in the dark corner of the National Film Archive of India, along with some other Indian masterpieces of the same period, which have recently been restored.

Satah Se Uthata Aadmi interacts with the texts of Muktibodh in the sense that they provide a frame of narration for the film. The protagonist, Ramesh, plays the character of Muktibodh and also narrates Muktibodh's texts. The film uses motifs, references and of course, philosophical understanding of Muktibodh. In *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, Kaul builds the narrative with three characters – Ramesh (performed by Bharat Gopy), Madhav (performed by Vibhuti Jha) and Keshav (performed by Raina). Muktibodh's writings are spoken and enacted by Ramesh as the first person voice of the text while Madhav and Keshav are posited as his antagonists regarding their debates on modernity. Then increasingly, the fictional settings are minimized by Kaul. And the influence of *Dhrupad*⁷ music can be observed through the continuous movement of camera, the use of changing light patterns and most importantly, improvisation. Moreover, the sensorial expression present in the inherent nomadic structure of Indian cityscapes can be experienced in Kaul's film. This sensory experience is about the affect created from an under-developed materiality that surrounds nomadic nature and the peculiarly structured hierarchy of age, caste and most importantly class that dominates them (Trivedi 2018). The film also continuously complicates the relationship between the Left and Right ideologies, which is constantly at work within the complex class structure of Indian small towns.

Opposing Eisenstein's idea of montage in creating a film (Eisenstein 1949: 72-83), in his film, Kaul emphasises on French filmmaker Robert Bresson's style of filmmaking where a film is broken into separate domains of information, sound and image (Barrett 2016). He tries to ensure that every shot of the film is discontinuous from the last. The effect that is created by this fragmented discontinuity in time which is continuous in nature is inherently governed by the logic of the writings of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh. Most of Kaul's films are received from a literary source, in some way or other. Kaul alienates his texts from the source, its background and subjectivities. He uses the source text to produce a sketch of the

⁶ Refers to the Cannes Film Festival. The film was screened in the *Un certain regard* section in 1981.

⁷ Literally meaning classical, *Dhrupad* refers to a genre in Indian classical music. It is derived from the Sanskrit words *dhruva* meaning constant and *pada* meaning verse.

body of images and characters. Direct lines from the source texts are often used in monologues delivered by the characters of the films. For example, he quotes from Mohan Rakesh's short story '*Uski roti*' in his film *Uski Roti* (Kaul 1969), but in different times and spaces. The same can also be seen in his film *Ashad Ka Ek Din* (Kaul 1971) which is a reception of Mohan Rakesh's play with the same title. The voice/body of the actors are used by Kaul, governed by the logic of the text, to document a space through which a unique perception of the space can be created, which can be termed what Gilles Deleuze calls 'perception-image'⁸ (Deleuze 2013). This phenomenon is referred to by Bresson in one of his interviews, where he talks of placing the camera in a particular place which should be found by the *metteur-en-scène*⁹ (Bresson 2016). The subjectivity should be absent from the text and expressionism should be absent from the actor's voice as also explained by Bresson: "the pace of the words is much more important than their respective meaning". Kaul in *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* receives Muktibodh's essays, poems, short stories and even memoirs as a uniform text which is mediated by the representation of Om Puri's voiceover. This transforms Muktibodh's writings into language-utterances creating a cinema which is purely improvised.

Satah Se Uthata Aadmi was criticised during its premiere by a number of leftists who adored Muktibodh's writings for the representations that he used in his language, that is, a language built with motifs of extreme rhetoric. Muktibodh's structure of writing generally deals with a kind of narrative progression that tactically builds an intrinsic anger with which the readers easily identify themselves. His sentences structured typically in a cause-effect relationship where he emphasizes on the later. This intrinsic causality of Muktibodh's writing has been defied by Kaul throughout *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* and the logic of representation

⁸ Perception-image is the way in which characters are perceived and the way in which characters perceive. It creates characters and world within a film. Deleuze categorizes perception into three types, namely, solid perception (human perception), liquid perception (where images flow together) and gaseous perception (pure vision of non-human eye achieved through foregrounding montage).

⁹ *Metteur-en-scène* is a phrase that refers to the *mise-en-scène* of a particular [film director](#). It suggests that the director has technical competence when it comes to film directing, but does not add personal style to the aesthetic of the film. The term was coined by [André Bazin](#), and the expanded meaning of the term was introduced by the French New Wave filmmaker and film critic [François Truffaut](#) in his 1954 essay "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema". See *The Film Experience* (Corrigan and White 2018).

has also been questioned by Kaul's form of cinema. Mani Kaul confronts the process where an object is transformed into subject through representation. Instead, he tries to explore the domain of the 'unknown' while moving away from the 'known'. This contradiction between Muktibodh's and Kaul's work created a divide among the audience. While a section was overwhelmed by the extraordinary cinematographic treatment (not in the literal sense; used here in terms of Bresson's cinematography), others were continuously searching for a 'genuine' adaptation of Muktibodh's work. The style of using the source text, removing it from its specific circumstances of subjectivity, in Kaul's film form in a certain way aspires to be transcendental. But a lot of similarities can also be observed between Kaul's and Muktibodh's work. The function of art in society and the formation of space through art are questioned by Muktibodh; whereas Mani Kaul continuously searches for a cinema that 'plays like a dream'. An interest in fantasy as well as *abhivyakti*, that is, perception can be observed in the works of both. While Muktibodh tries to find a unique perception of the space created in his works through the appropriation of the characters, a creation of Deleuzian perception-image is attempted by Mani Kaul. Kaul tries to construct an image where the space that is perceived by the viewer meets the psychotic mental space of the character without trying to recognize its meaning (Trivedi 2018), which results in the formation of a sign as opposed to a signal, as discussed by Deleuze in his *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 2014). Here, 'signal' refers to a system which is diverse with dissymmetrical elements and 'sign' refers to the resultant within such a system. In *Uski Roti*, there is an attempt to record just the space present between sensory and motor perception, which can also be observed in Bresson's style of reception of Dostoevsky or Bernanos.

Paul Willeman and Ashish Rajadhakshya in the entry of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* in their *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* identify music as one of the most important and significant element of the film (Rajadhakshya and Willeman 1999:448). The reception of Muktibodh's literature into Mani Kaul's cinematic form involves the use of the form of Indian classical music. Incidentally, Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar¹⁰ was Kaul's guru of *dhrupad*. Mohiuddin's younger brother, Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar's rendition of *raga*

¹⁰ Zia Mohiuddin Dagar (14929-1990) was a renowned Hindustani classical musician. He belongs to the eminent Dagar family of musicians who were patronised by the Maharana of Udaipur since generations. Mohiuddin revived the *rudraveena*, which used to be an accompanying instrument of vocalists and made it an primary instrument.

*Bilaskhani Todi*¹¹ was used in *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*. This film was the first of Kaul's work that had been structured following the form of *alaap* and *jod* of *dhrupad*. The scale is presented and laid as *alaap* and the improvisations are performed in *jod* where it is allowed to move in numerous ways while maintaining the scale, which makes the use of camera and soundtrack in a very formal approach. Kaul's works of this period generally starts with immobile camera positions which establish the camera distances, just like certain music scales in case of *ragas*. The camera, in Kaul's films, starts to move after a certain time between the designated scales. The camera is moved away from one static space and panned to a different set of static spaces. The primary set of static space indicates the point analogous to the *jod* section of the film, while, on the other hand, the later static spaces designate the rest points between the *jod*. These points are distinctly underlined by Mani Kaul using the song of the Ustad. This certain style of camera movement in the film to signify the starting points of the improvisatory phase becomes recurrent in filmmakers who later followed Kaul's style of filmmaking and termed it as 'Cinema of Prayoga'¹² (Butler and Mirza 2006).

Dhrupad is a form of music in which expressions from *Shaivite* literature¹³, such as 'Hari om Narayana tan tarana tum' are used as the body of a raga through the three octaves. While this phrase, which has a literal meaning that celebrates the omnipotence of Shiva, can be used as the primary text of the *raga*, each word from this phrase can also be taken, deconstructed and explored in a number of ways. Similarly, Kaul uses a certain primary text, be it a short story, a novel or essays, poems and a short story like in the case of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, to create a cinematographic form with the help of soundtrack, editing and most importantly, camera. This phenomenon can be compared to the use of the *bandish*¹⁴ *Shankar Girijapati* in *dhrupad*, where an abstract scale of *raga Malkauns* having the structure of *Sa Ga Ma Dha Ni Sa* and *Sa Ni Dha Ma Ga Sa* is explored. The *raga* is divided in a three-

¹¹ *Bilaskhani Todi*, a Hindustani classical *raga* of *Todi* family, is a blend of *Asavari* and *Todi ragas*.

¹² *Prayoga* refers to experiment in Sanskrit. It also can mean application or representation. The term 'Cinema of Prayoga' was coined by film historian and curator Amrit Gangar that refers to a practice of filmmaking in India which dodges the art-commerce binary and emphasizes on the 'practice' or 'prayoga' of cinema.

¹³ *Shaivism* is a tradition within the *Puranic* system of belief that considers Shiva to be the absolute power. A vast body of literature within this philosophical school has existed that were written in praise of Shiva.

¹⁴ *Bandish* can be translated as something that binds together. It is a fixed melodic composition in Indian classical music. *Bandish* provides the scope for the literary text for a standard structured singing.

part structure consisting of the *alaap*, the *jod* and the *jhala*. In *alaap*, the distinct scales of the *raga* are presented and the scales are improvised to lay bare the core of the *raga*. In *jod*, the rhythm of the *raga* is established and the combinations are exhausted through improvisations and then it reaches the crescendo, which is called the *jhala*. The primary text is used by Kaul as the abstract scale and the characters (bodies) along with the dialogues and objects are the primary constituents. In *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, a specific cinematographic form is developed where the structure of *alaap*, *jod* and *jhala* is maintained.

In the beginning of the film, *raga Bilaskhani Todi* is used while the titles appear in front of a saffron background and the *alaap* of the early morning *raga* is sung by Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar. The *raga* is a part of *Todi* family which are performed at dawn and it is named after the maestro Bilas Khan, Miyan Tansen's¹⁵ son. There is a myth that the notes of *Bilaskhani Todi* came out from Bilas Khan's stomach when his father died. It is said that the notes made dead Tansen cry, and these notes later came to be known as *Bilaskhani Todi*. The viewer is introduced to a psychotic space in the introductory sequences by Kaul and the paranoid actor's movements are laid over the consciously structured space simultaneously creates an effect but moves away from the cause. This psychotic effect can be read by historians as of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 but there is also a possibility of reading the psychotic state differently. The deficiency of space which is being produced by the psychotic state is fulfilled by the characters where bodies are perceived as objects whose purpose is to acquire and occupy space. Right after the titles, follows a frame showing a landscape of green fields and water bodies, followed by a sequence that focuses on the walls of a house, and then jumps to Ramesh. The camera first focuses on Ramesh's face, and then shows Ramesh moving and finally him walking down a flight of stairs. In Kaul's signatory style, the *alaap* and the sound of footsteps are overlapped together with actor Gopi's eyes moving away from the frame. The facial muscles of the actor are totally expressionless but the eyes are the only source of expression. A particular space which suggests an Indian sensorial expression is achieved here in a typical Kaul style as the actor moves down the stairs. The construction of this particular space is attained with the help of a specific location

¹⁵ Tansen (1493/1500 - 1586), a prominent figure of Indian classical music, was the court singer of the Mughal emperor Akbar.

and particular objects which signify nothing but represents the ‘deterritorialized’¹⁶ spaces (Deleuze and Guattari 2014) where there is absence of matter. This sequence, followed by the tracking to the stairway, creates the signatory cinematic style of Kaul. Om Puri’s heavy voice and Muktibodh’s text is juxtaposed in the sequence when Gopi starts walking down. After the introductory sequence, the foundational shot is used by Kaul which, in a number of ways, characterizes the whole film. Houses made of stone representing materiality and the nature being used side by side can be compared to cinema, a medium where industrial celluloid is used to record the nature. The camera is zoomed out to a purely material space by Kaul to introduce a dream-like quality in the film with the help of Warli wall paintings¹⁷ on battered walls. A soundtrack introducing unknown footsteps outside the frame while Gopi lies down on the floor creates a union of fear, psychosis and consciousness in him. Here the form of an uncertain style of filmmaking is clubbed with the uncertain movements of the character actor. Here recitation of lines from the poems and autobiographical writings of Muktibodh by Om Puri creates a dialectical relationship within sound and language, which is a unique style taken by Kaul to receive Muktibodh. Faiz Ahmed Faiz¹⁸ once explained the poet as a person who thinks in terms of sounds and gradually comes up with words. Kaul, in one of his arrangements, uses Muktibodh’s poem to define the ambience he tries to create with the combined effect of his images and sound.

In a relatively new form of Hindustani music that originated from Akbar’s court, called *Khayal*, the text is generally composed in admiration of the supreme power or to describe someone’s longing for the beloved. In this case too, the text can be improvised within the scale of a particular *raga*. This can be explained through the case of *raga Madhmad Sarang*, where the logic of emphasizing and using the text is structured within the scope of the *raga*. In such cases, “one word is either stretched for a longer period of time or a number of words are compressed into a short period of time, accompanied by a steady pulse

¹⁶ Deterritorialization is the separation of social, cultural and political practices from location and refers to weakening of connection between subjects/objects and space/time. Deleuze and Guattari uses the term to oppose colonial processes with nomadic processes.

¹⁷ A style of art that originated and is practiced in north Sahyadri range in Maharashtra, India. It uses simple graphic geometrical patterns.

¹⁸ Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) was an eminent Urdu author and poet associated with the Progressive Writers’ Movement.

or rhythm.” (Trivedi 2018). The speed of the phrases is sometimes slower and sometimes faster than the rhythm, which was used as a technique by Kaul in *Uski Roti*. According to Kaul (Kaul 2008):

I was first interested in the spatial aspect of cinema until I engaged with the temporal aspect of cinema i.e. two minutes can be stretched to five minutes, five minutes can be compressed to two... and I had my actors either move or speak slower or faster than the intended rhythm of the film.

The improvisation supersedes the meaning of the text in *Madhmad Sarang*, where in case of the *Khayal* ‘*Jab se man lagiyo Shyam*’, Krishna’s psycho sensorial effect on his devotees becomes more important than the description of a space which is occupied by Krishna and his *gopikas*¹⁹. The inherent logic of the primary text changes; this process of change in the inherent logic of the text has been used by Kaul while receiving Muktibodh.

In the opening sequences of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, Gopi engages with the creative process of Muktibodh and Muktibodh’s being. These sequences become significant as they are typically designed in a certain way to be able to generate a stratified pure image obtained through cleansing. Muktibodh’s contemplation about his art that he creates as a poet is recited in the background by Om Puri. The next shot is a cut to a terrace from which a lake can be seen. Kaul elaborates in the film that the lake is situated in the heart of the city. This unique use of nature becomes prominent within these two shots exploring purely material spaces. Again, the continuous recitation of Muktibodh is heard accompanied by images of uninterrupted nature. Through this, Kaul tries to create a pattern which is mediated, organic and anticipatory in nature, which again, can be compared to the *alaap*. In *alaap*, the audience knows the coming note due to the structure of the *raga* and also anticipates the note before the recognition at the same time.

Kaul introduces Keshav (Ramesh’s friend) through sequences where nature is used along with the arguments and short story of Muktibodh debating Gandhian thought²⁰. Kaul

¹⁹ The Sanskrit word *Gopika* is used to refer to the girls who are associated with cowherding. Within [Vaishnavism](#), *Gopikas* of Vrindavan are known for their unconditional devotion (*Bhakti*) to [Krishna](#) as described in the [Bhagavata Purana](#) and other [puranic](#) literature.

²⁰ Philosophical and political thought of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

evokes the style of Ritwik Ghatak²¹ where the use of human being and nature is structured in the logic of feminine nature being occupied by the masculine. Kaul frames eucalyptus trees or the lake along with Keshav's movements in the forest in a way which is similar to the movement of a slow machine. The camera is quickly zoomed out by Kaul from the landscape when the suicide of Tiwari's wife is mentioned by Keshav, contradicting the *alaap* structure. The camera is then panned to a truck approaching a suggestive landscape accompanied by a shrill cry of a woman, in turn suggesting, rape and the distance of the camera is maintained deliberately to retain the suggestiveness. The suggestive use of machines as a motif by Mani Kaul can be compared to the motif of trucks and fire engines in Muktibodh's writings.

In *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, we can see Kaul receiving from different sources to prepare a philosophical framework. Ramesh plays the central character of the narrator who narrates Muktibodh's writings as well as the character of Muktibodh himself. On one hand, the character himself becomes a part of the text and on the other hand, also enables the progression of events within the text. Here Kaul creates a dual function of the character through participation and distancing. He tries to differentiate the characters at three levels, levels of history, society and myth, where myth is combined with a sense of irrational which is depicted through dream. Presence is suggested by myth and absence is suggested by dream or someone's death. In the film, Kaul also uses shots an independent unit where the logic of the presence is different in every case. Sometimes this 'difference' deals with the appropriation of events and sometimes with rhythm. Primarily events, characters are represented as a critique on Muktibodh; to be specific, on the creative process of Muktibodh. Gradually Kaul uses images in a way that creates a narrative which would obstruct the appropriation. It reaches its final stage in the sequences of the factory which is climactic in nature but not the climax, thus enabling the decentring of the film. Kaul claims this decentring to be between the sacral and the profane.

Through the reception of Muktibodh, Mani Kaul in his film rigorously constructs a particular form which is materialised from thoughts of random imagination. He investigates the question of a film being a carrier of violence by questioning why, when and where the violence gets transformed from abstract to its concrete form in the process of making cinema.

²¹ Ritwik Kumar Ghatak (1925-1976) was a prominent Bengali filmmaker and litterateur. He influenced Mani Kaul and other Indian filmamakers.

Assemblage deals with “violence as the making of a film, its processing through light and showing to audiences is a violent act” (Trivedi 2018). Kaul’s films, and specifically *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* has been marked as right-wing due to its political indifference. According to the critics, using Muktibodh’s text out of its context, use of sanskritized Hindi as well as the use of Hindustani classical music create confusion between the domains of public and private, and thus may fall within the domain of the political right. This has been opposed by Kaul as his characters are bodies who fail to enable a dialogue with their surroundings and solely perform the act of occupying space. In fact, numerous dialogues from his films can be interpreted in different ways as they produce different meanings in Urdu and Hindi. The process of occupying space has an inherent ignorance towards the troubled reality, resulting in a construction of a sanitized idea of India in terms of objects, subjects and even language. It can also be read as a text where hunger oppresses the characters though their experience of alienation has been explored. There is an inherent absence of freedom in each character of the film and as the narrative dissolves, Muktibodh’s writings rise to the surface.

But Kaul’s works, specifically, *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, can be read in relation to Muktibodh to understand the formation of the Indian parallel cinema and the influence of Indian literary movements on the cinematic ones. According to V. K. Cherian, Mani Kaul’s films were “technically innovative, and were influenced by the film-making style of the French avant-garde film-maker Robert Bresson... continuing his fascination with revolutionary themes, Kaul went to make films based on works of radical writers” (Cherian 2020).

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