Overture
The *Rasa* of Early Cinema, Humanism and the Emotional Indian Self: New Views, Moving Experiences and Shifting Identities before 1918

Rasa and the 'Good vibrations' of modern spectators in the cinema ...

"The concept for a **good** *chitrapat* ['picture'/ 'film'[1]]
requires a story [*kathaa*] full of ***rasa***, divinity and virtue,
Giving a real/ accurate **view** [*darshane*] of existence/ the **world** [*bhava*],
effordlessly showing the **true** path [*satpathaa*].
This is no easy task,
but by the grace of God
the mute will speak in dulcet tones
and the lame will scale the mountain peak."
(Phalke 1918B[2], cf. Appendix 1.3., bold letters by B. S.)

Bombay's pioneering filmmaker Dhundiraj Govind Phalke (1870-1944) concluded his informative four-part article series on "[Moving] pictures from India" [*Bhaaratiya Chitrapat*, written in a highly Sanskritised Marathi] in September 1918 with the above quoted poetic benediction to the 'cinema'/ 'moving pictures'. It resounds with ethics and revolves around *rasa*.

The polyvalent and historically specific dynamics of the Indian *rasa*-concept contain dimensions which are at the core of my reception- and context-oriented approach to 'cinema' which I am studying as a unique sphere of experiences of modernity in 'other-worldly' reflective, emotional-moral and sensuous ways.
In the first decades of the 20th century - whether it was in Bombay, in London, or, say, in more provincial cinema theatres in the South of Germany - the excitingly new 'world of cinema' enabled the ones who dwelled in it to extend their perceptions, their knowledge and their range of feelings, to reshape their 'world-views'.
Notably, one of the first sociological studies on the habits and preferences of cine-goers in those days, Emilie Altenloh's "*Zur Soziologie des Kino. Die Kino-Unternehmung und die sozialen Schichten ihrer Besucher*"

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[1]) *Chitrapat* actually consists of *'chitra'*, which can be translated as 'picture', and *'pat'*, which has a vast range of meanings according to the context in which it is used: 'a piece of cloth', 'fabric', 'screen', 'a pasteboard for drawing or painting', etc. Generally *pat* denotes rather the material which holds the 'pictures' (including photography and film). But in daily usage *pat* often becomes synonymous with what it holds: the 'film', the 'photograph', etc. Due to these important specifics I refrain from translating the term and use it in the original.

[2]) To sensitively translate the poetic finale of Phalke's "*Bhaaratiya Chitrapat*" it needed a combined effort. I am indebted to Asha von der Fink, Vijay S. Kumar and Pushpalata Jagade. However, the responsibility for any mistake in this final translation is mine.

(1914, 'On a sociology of cinema. The cinema industry and the class background of its audiences') often combined her sociological findings with the emotional and moral dimensions of the cine-experiences. Under the heading 'Music and cinema' [*Die Musik im Kino*] she mused about these sensuous 'echoes' of the picture-cum-music program in the spectator:

"Music performs in the cinema a truly curious task which might most accurately be compared with the orchestra in the opera. However, in contrast to this the cinema music doesn't exist for its own sake. It somehow illustrates the film, nevertheless, the music adds something totally different from the picture when it induces the feelings of the spectator to swing along. Thus, the mute shadows become eloquent, though one does not consciously hear the music" (Altenloh 1914, 20, translated from German by B. S.)

Rasa allows no simple word-to-word translation from Sanskrit into English. I will also refrain from any attempt to add another exegesis of *rasa* to the many already existing. In the sociological context of this book my approximation on its possible meanings within Bombay's modernising spheres of the stage and the cinema in the early 1900s is founded on Heckel's (1989) insightful comparative discussion of the two most influential interpretations of the *rasa* concept.

Heckel first analyses its prime canonisation by the *natyashastra* (the ancient Sanskrit textbook for the art of stage performance, cf. Act 3), and then its reinterpretation during the formative years of India's modern theatre with its strong links to the dialectics of what I term a colonised modernity from the end of the 19th century onwards (cf. Act 3). Following Heckel in my adaptation of *rasa* to the 'cinema' I put the stress on the processual and situative character of *rasa*/ 'sentiment', on its 'in-betweenness' that is at the same time induced by the objective quality of the performances and the stage production/ the film as by the subjective inner state of the spectator.

Rasa is the 'taste' and the 'tasted' at the same time (37), and since it has a sensual and cognitive aspect Heckel agrees with Gerow's term 'emotional consciousness' (38). Once *rasa* manifests itself in the spectator, the sensual resonance, the "correspondence with the heart" is highlighted which should not be mistaken for the 19th century European concept of identification (40).

This deliberately 'un-Indological' understanding of *rasa* forms the unobtrusive leitmotif of my unusual reflections on 'cinematic Indianness' and leads

to my core concepts of the 'national morality' and of the 'emotional-moral' element in the modern spectator/ citizen/ 'colonial subject'.
His/ her multifaceted, paradoxical and often contradictory 'world-views' on Self and Other vis-à-vis the silver screen form the main body of what this book sets out to do: to deconstruct a simplistic rationalist-nationalist idea of 'Indianness' that was allegedly fermented in the realm of the early cinema which Dhundiraj Govind Phalke started in the Bombay of the 1910s, and to provide a well-founded basis of historical data and historicised arguments to its complexities and ambiguities.

Tracing a forgotten 'humanist' middle-class based dissensus[3] on the construction of an exclusive, caste-Oriented Indianness

Sometime in 1910-11, in a Bombay cinema, Dhundiraj Govind Phalke[4], a lithographer turned photographer saw the French passion film *Life of Christ*. It was not the first film he saw. However, it left a particularly deep impression on him. He was so moved by this cine-experience which had made him a 'witness' to Christ's trials and tribulations that he found himself straying autodidactically into that widely unexplored terrain of filmmaking, dragging his family along. A few years later, in his article series "*Bharatiya chitrapat*" ('Indian *chitrapat'*, Phalke 1917A & B/ 1918A & B), published in Bombay's new political art magazine *Navyug* ('New era'), Phalke reminisced over the significant cine-experience as having been "a turning point" in his life which shook him "to the core and fomented a revolutionary change" (Phalke 1917A; the full paragraph is reproduced under Appendix 1.1.).

Phalke is widely known and remembered as the "father of Indian cinema". His name appears in any of the important film encyclopaedias world-wide. Yet, this pioneer of "Indian moving pictures" was turned into a lifeless icon of a simplistic construction of an Indian heritage culture. Phalke had even before his audacious experiment in filmmaking which he started at the mature age of 42, transgressed the borderlines of his *brahmin* family background and of the peripheral position of a 'colonial subject'. He is,

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[3]) I am using 'dissensus' and not dissension in order to highlight my theoretical affinity to Gramsci's concept of 'consensus'

[4]) Dhundiraj Govind Phalke was born in a village close to Nasik, a famous Hindu pilgrim centre in the Bombay Presidency of then colonial British India. He died in Nasik itself where he had established his spacious bungalow-cum-studio in 1917.

nonetheless, mostly revered as a preserver of "Indian tradition" on celluloid (cf. Act 1). But an intense study of the fragments of his films will reveal that the plot of his most celebrated films had been inspired as much by the Indian lore of the *puranas* (cf. Act 2 and 3 for a critical discussion of the view that the *puranas* form a homogenous 'Indian tradition') as by a 'Western' film like *Life of Christ*, as much by his talents in photography as by the unconditional support of his wife Saraswatibai, etc.
Thus, the cinephile from Nasik created a sphere for the contemporary spectators in Bombay *and* in London or Berlin to reflect about what they saw, and at the same time to reflect their own position vis-à-vis these happenings on the screen, to negotiate their 'identities' in the context of the respective types of modernity. The spectators as agents/ subjects of cinema not only experienced and thus engineered *rasa* in the above summarised sense, irrespective of their native cultural environment, but beyond this and in contrast to the stage, the new sphere of the cinema dialectically instilled in them new moral stands and psychological states (Münsterberg 1916/ 1970).
The *rasa*-elements and the new morality and psychology of these modern spectators in Bombay are the focus of this book. Its more general effort is to shed some light on the role that the cinema played within modernisms, respectively of Indianness, and of the relationship that existed between these modern identity constructions and the idea of being a part of an all-inclusive 'humanity'.

Phalke's first long narrative film RAJA HARISCHANDRA ('King Harishchandra') was supposedly made within a span of six months, some time between October 1912 and April 1913. The film was then previewed in Bombay's Olympia Picture Palace and later was shown as part of the variety-cum-film programme of the Coronation Cinematograph & Variety Hall. Like the Christ of the passion film had once had its consequential impact on Phalke, the 'truthful' King Harishchandra and his devoted Queen Taramati, and also the authentic realism of the "moving photographic images", were for its spectators in Bombay and London (as expressed in an article in the leading British film magazine *The Bioscope*, 29. 10. 1914) an unprecedented experience, and for a long time these moving pictures lingered in their minds and in their hearts. This can be understood from a letter to the editor of the local monthly *Kesari*, written by a person who must have attended the preview screening of Phalke's first *Raja Harischandra* film:

"[...] The show was admirable. All the **movements** and **expressions** of the characters on the screen were so **realistic** that the spectators **felt** that those moving characters were also speaking. Some scenes from this 'Harischandra' are **heartrending**. They have come out so well that the Harischandra and Taramati of the screen bring **tears** to the eyes of the spectators. This would perhaps not happen if one saw them in flesh and blood on the stage. The scenes of the forest, the forest-fire, the river, the hangman's house, the hen pecking around - all these are unrivalled and Mr. Phalke has displayed to the world his great skill in showing these on the screen [...]" (*Kesari*, Pune, 6. 5. 1913, in: Phalke Centenary ...: 84, bold letters by B. S.)

The Indian film pioneer had to endure much hardship to make his dream to produce *Bharatiya chitrapat* come true. Nonetheless, his debut film *Raja Harishchandra* with its 4 reels and 3700 ft. was unusually long for its times. It seems that Phalke lost the only print that he had of his first film during the generally prevailing turmoil under the war conditions. Yet, however unfavourable the environment for film production had been in British India, by 1917 Phalke's second and shorter version of *Raja Harishchandra* flickered across the screens of metropolitan Indian cinematograph establishments (Act 4). It is this second version of which the first and last reel could be saved from destruction. They are accessible at the National Film Archive of India, Pune.
However poor his living conditions were, and whatever technical shortcomings he had to handle, Phalke never compromised on his idea of producing *suchitrapat* ('the perfect/ 'good' *chitrapat*). It meant to him that a film had to be technically flawless, morally edifying and that it provided healthy entertainment.

His *Navyug* articles can be read as a testimony to the Indian visionary's conviction that his *suchitrapat/ Bharatiya chitrapat* contributed to a better understanding amongst people on the Indian subcontinent and in the whole world. Therefore, he spoke of the cinema as the provider of a "great social service" (Phalke 1918A). *Suchitrapat* fostered democracy, and in the film pioneer's view real 'Indian democracy' had to focus on the betterment of the situation of women. Phalke's 'good cinema' communicated in a language that was universally understood. At the same time it promoted India's complex and heterogeneous culture-mix to favour a peaceful co-existence[5]. It should be kept in mind, for instance, that Phalke referred to 'India' as a "Hindumusalman" entity:

[5]) Since the mid 1980s influential political forces ideologically forged 'Indianness' into an artificially homogenous **Hindu-Indian** entity in whose name Indians of any other religious, ethnic or cultural background - **Muslims** in particular - are abused as Non-Indians, and, in a growing number of cases, also attacked.

"All people, *Hindumusalman*, Chini, Japani are coming together in the cinema houses. The *pardah* [being veiled or sitting behind a curtain] of ladies has disappeared. Men and women have equal rights on the seats in cinema theatres." (Phalke 1918A, cf. Appendix 1.2.)

Exploring Phalke's *cinesrishti* - his 'whole world of cinema' - is as much a socio-cultural history of the culture(s) of the middle classes in Bombay around 1900 as it is the biography of Phalke, the artist-craftsman. He had already passed forty, when he and his family dedicated their lives to *suchitrapat*. This 'good cinema' actually became their life.
At the same time, in this first decade of the 20th century, the cinema emerged as a public sphere in Bombay, and besides the élites the growing middle classes started to incorporate it into their lifestyles and lifeworlds coping with Indian modernity (Act 1 and Act 2).

However, my argument that Phalke's first long narrative film *Raja Harischandra* was an experience that entered the lifeworlds of its Indian spectators and exerted an exciting new impulse on their perception, cognition, emotions and their moralities vis-à-vis Indian modernity, is an unusual one and has first to be established (Act 1 and 2).
Furthermore I will prove my thesis that Phalke's mis-en-scène of Indianness was the exact opposite to the hegemonic representation of the Harishchandra theme in the nationalist Marathi theatre. It will also be highlighted that it was exactly because the film's plot originated in the *puranas* (the *brahminic* canonisation of legends, cf. Act 2 and 3) that it stood out as a truly *dissident* view against what was otherwise represented on the streets and on the stages of Bombay as the more visible, politicised and vociferous Indianness (Act 3 and 4).

The main difference between the eminent nationalist Indian leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and his followers who promoted his politics on Bombay's stages and Phalke was that the latter had not defined, but was *searching* for Indianness. His evanescent and diffuse 'images' that flashed across the screen or across the minds of the readers of his cinema-related articles represented a body of the *realization* of being a searcher.

In contrast to this, the constructions of Indianness that Tilak, the *Lokmanya* ('leader of the people'), communicated were *fixed* and strictly defined (cf. Act 2, 3 and 4). He saw the essential nature of Indians in their adherence to "the Vedic Religion", and he interpreted it as being crucial for Indians to assert their particularity in "the religion of the Gita" [The *Bhagavadgita*]

and the "favour of the Parameshvara ['Supreme Being']" (Tilak 1915/1996, 712-713), which *chatur varna* ('hierarchical, strictly segregated and unchangeable system of the four castes') essentially contained:

"The ancient rishis had created the institution of the four castes - which was in the nature of a division of labour - in order that all the affairs of society should go on without a hitch, and that society should be protected and maintained on all sides, without any particular person or group of persons having to bear the whole burden. Later on, people belonging to this society became 'jatima-tropajivi' that is "persons, who forgetting their respective caste duties, belonged to a particular caste merely by reason of birth" and became mere nominal Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, or Shudras; [...] Originally, this institution had been made for the maintenance of society and it is quite clear that if any one of the four castes had given up the 'dharma' i. e., duties allocated to it, or if any particular caste had totally ceased to exist and its place had not been taken by some other persons, the entire society would to that extent have been disabled and would later on have either been gradually destroyed or at least have sunk to a very low stage."
(ibid., 89-90).

Phalke's remarkably 'anti-caste' view, with its universal morality that was grounded in the subjective sentiment and not in the submission of the subject to a strictly defined religious institution, is close to Rabindranath Tagore's uncompromising rejection of any demarcation on religious or nationalist grounds (cf. Nandy 1994). Yet, Phalke is neither a staunch thinker and "*karma yogi*" (who strictly adheres to his 'duty') of the nation as Tilak, nor an artist-philosopher like Tagore who so absorbingly communicated his dissenting thoughts by means of the word.
Phalke's tools were the 'life-like moving images'. And the peculiar difficulty in analysing his "Indian images" is that they were not conceived as a 'message' that had to be mediated as such or for the purpose of instructing about a clearly defined 'Indian (national) culture'.
Bharatiya chitrapat provided moments of moving (touching) and 'realistic' visual experiences with a non-nationalist emotional-moral perspective.

In his inspiring essay on Tagore's non-nationalist thinking, Ashish Nandy evaluates Tagore's position in comparison with Gandhi's standpoint on nationalism (cf. Act 5). *'Morality'* is what binds them, but their willingness to instrumentalise their moral views is the crucial point of difference:

"What linked the two was, however, their continuing attempts to reaffirm a moral universe within which one's politics and social ideology could be located. [...] For the global system of nation-states - which, according to Tagore, had made a science out of statecraft - did not recognize any link between politics and morality, unless morality was willing to articulate itself as a political force, so that it could not be ignored as a signifi-

cant presence in political calculation. Gandhi understood this and was perfectly willing to politicize his moral stance, though on moral grounds, not political. [...] A central theme in Tagore's reaffirmation of a moral universe was a universalism that denied moral and cultural relativism and endorsed a large, plural concept of India. [...] **Bharatchinta** [...] From the very beginning of the growth of Indian 'nationalism', there had been a conscious effort on the part of many Indian social reformers and political activists to develop a Bharatchinta which would project a self-definition transcending the geographical barriers of India." (Nandy 1994, 81, bold letters by B. S.)

In my view Phalke gave to his contemporaries another dimension of relating one's Self to India beyond *Bharatchinta*, 'the thinking of India', in his *Bharatiya chitrapat*. On this plane Phalke was a dissenter similar to Tagore. Like him the film pioneer detested the politicisation and the demarcation that is inherent to the politico-nationalist Indianness. Yet, he did not conceive this antipathy in cognitive terms that addressed rationality. His Bharat/ Hindusthan was a feeling/ sentiment/ emotion/ sense of essential beauty that could be appropriately conveyed only in the cinema.

This book assesses the reciprocal relationship between Phalke's *cinesrishti* as the realm of zeitgeist on the one side and the contemporaries' prevalent 'feeling Indian/ human/ modern' on the other.
Thus, I am going to document Phalke's *Bharatiya chitrapat*, explore his cinema in all its vast dimensions, and identify its agents and their agency beyond authorship in the historical context (Act 2).
Furthermore, the cosmos of meanings that the contemporary spectators/ audiences/ public had created will be evaluated (Act 3 and 4), its relation to other ideas as well as the cultural representations of Indianness and the politics of Indianness in particular (Act 2 and 3).

In the course of my analysis of the cinematic sphere that Phalke's two films *Raja Harischandra* (1913 and 1917) established - understood as this multidimensional space where one reflected/ mused on what was projected/ reflected of India and where one could 'feel India' - in an ironic inversion of the ideological history of brahminism this cinematic "*pauranik kathanak*" [term used on Phalke's title card: 'little story adaptation of a *purana*'] becomes intelligible as this noticeably dissenting vision of another India (Act 4). It presents an iconography closer to the philosophy of the non-*brahmin* movement, though within the Puranic framework. I argue that it matters to understand what the specific *quality* of any Puranic mise-en-scène is in order to get back to its ideological meaning. It can be further elucidated that in the case of the film adaptation of the Puranic story, the

'cinematic mode'/ technology that 'frames' the world in one plane thus opened up new dimensions in the representation of the two sages Vasishtha and Vishwamitra as equals. Contrary to this, in the contemporary nationalist agit-prop dramas Vishwamitra was projected as inferior because of his lower caste status (Act 3).

Phalke actually searches for "truth" [*satya*]. And I will conceptualise his early oeuvre as a cinema in search of truth. Its beginning is marked by the first version, the end more or less by the second version on the Raja Harishchandra-theme. This period between 1912-17 is crucial in the formation of the different kinds of imagining and constructing Indianness in Bombay.

On the world-wide level the modern national ideas and movements from below and above started around 1900 and continued undiminished during the whole 20th century. However, the formation of the multiple types of the modern nation states and their potentials to accumulate and exert an unprecedented violence, motivated contemporary intellectuals and artists also to reflect on that phenomenon against the grain of its ideologists. The latters' ideas and political practices were countered by critical voices who established alternative positions and another consensus. Phalke was amongst the latter. However, as a result of the vortex of the dominant power-based state politics and of the politics of identity which also played their part in the Indian nationalist movements, many of the dissenters' views and visions were marginalised in the writings of official or popular nationalist historiographies. One of the more obvious reasons for this is that the extinction of opposing histories is a concomitance of the dominant or hegemonic history. This is not always happening purposefully. But besides direct suppression, there are other mechanisms at work that marginalise dissension in the public memory. An obvious one in the case of the forgetfulness versus Phalke's 'dissensus' is the fact that there is no developed academic idiom and apparatus to theorise the cine-experiences of Indians, who lived more than eight decades ago.

Scholars hardly undertook the task of reconstructing for instance what is so vital about these first cine-experiences: their mental and emotional-moral vibrancy. In film studies and even in cultural studies - at least in those (rare) cases when Phalke' s cinema was systematically and thoroughly thought about (Rajadhyaksha 1993) - the empirical audiences got lost in the invention of "the (Indian) mass audience". Within the fringes of these approaches it has been impossible so far to grasp the dissenting views in

their dialectical dynamics and inconsistencies (cf. Crane 1994, 1-19), and not just as a homogenous 'opposite' to the coloniser. Particularly so in the case of Phalke. Because this dissenter is a colonial subject from a middle-class and *brahmin* background he has additionally been identified as the 'Other' to 'the' subaltern classes and castes.

Another difficulty lies in the fact that the researcher of 'cine-Indianness' is analysing evanescent moments in the complex histories of mentality and has at her disposal mainly sources of a highly subjectivist character. In the study at hand with its focus on the emotional-moral aspects of a dissenting cinema, these fleeing moments are at the very core of the research and of the sources that documented them. The films (having survived as fragments) and Phalke's articles (which are in fact more like a biography) played havoc with the theoretician's eye and mind luring her to believe in their objectivity.

This analysis, therefore, has also to search for that theoretical language and body which, first of all, does not provide a 'framework' for the subject but which, from the viewpoint of the historical (colonial) subject, puts the theorising scholar on a test bed (Act 1 and Act 5). To highlight my affinity rather to a (scholarly reflected) dwelling in the 'world of cinema' and its strong emotional-moral dimensions, I found the structuring of this book into Acts (like in the early cinema, and in the opera respectively) most appropriate.

In the Bombay of the first decades of the 1900s, Dh. G. Phalke lived as an artist, craftsman, philosopher and educator of *Bharatiya chitrapat*/ 'Indian cinema'.
His early cinema (1912-18) established a novel kind of a cultural sphere. Here the individual (spectator/ filmmaker) met the collective (the collectivised audience-filmmaker nexus) and participated in a complex 'dialogue'. This involved the senses, the intellect and the emotions. One was reflecting on the new views of the world while they were being reflected on the screen.

In the public sphere of the cinema started by Phalke, Indianness manifested itself not in an explicit language of words or images with an undisputed meaning - as most of the theses on Phalke's cinema insinuate. The Indianness that came across in his two versions of *Raja Harischandra* (1912/ 13 and 1917), for instance, came into being only in the moment of the viewing

in the cinema, a space loaded with a magic spell. It linked the moods and attitudes of the spectators on the one side, with the film on the other. Considering that Phalke's films were no agitating nationalist messengers of Indianness, what was established amongst the public was rather an ethico-cultural consensus based on the cine-experience and therefore it was evanescent in like manner.

Morality, which in Gramsci's concepts (as laid down in his Prison Note Books) of hegemony and consensus was as important a component as the intellect, was attained here as the emotional-moral consensus on what Indianness was and how it was situated in the world.
In Phalke's cinema, Indianness thus did not impose itself on its viewers in a spectacular way. It 'happened' in the cine-experiences, it depended on the echoes from the audiences.
It is these fluid manifestations of the subject-, community- and nation-oriented Indianness which I am interested in.

I am taking off from Partha Chatterjee's discursive positioning of the colonial subjects and the "fragments" of the nation (1994), which liberated the scholar's fixation on binary polarities between the different "castes" and classes involved in the making of the nation. I am following up the feeble traces that colonial subjects like Phalke have left in the realm of cinema in order to explore that dimension in Indianness which lies beyond wordy confessions: How did, under the spell of Bombay's modernity, colonial subjects feel Indian? What were the moral prerequisites of this sentiment? How did it relate to the Indianness of the intellect, that of politics?
I conceptualise this consensual morality/ sentiment of Indianness as 'national morality' (Act 1).

Phalke's cinema, the locus of deviating points of view and visions of Indianness that were collectively shared by the spectators for some moments, can not simply be deduced by looking at the remaining two of the original four reels of *Raja Harischandra* (1917).
The radicality of this cinematic culture/ space reveals itself step by step by critically discussing it in the context of preceding and contemporary artistic treatments of the Harishchandra story as laid down in the *Markandeya purana*. The role that the *puranas* were playing in ideologically supporting the mental, emotional and social violence of "caste", has been the subject of indepth and radical theories and of the political praxis. Were it the non-*brahmin* social reformer Jyotirao Phule (1827-1888), or the lawyer and re-

publican leader of *dalits*, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), historian Romila Thapar (1984/ 1993), or political scientist Partha Chatterjee (1994), all these critiques are founded on intricate analyses of the essential traits of the Puranic ideology.

With reference to Phalke's cinema, however, none of those who constructed their theories on it (Rajadhyaksha 1993 in particular), has so far looked at *how* the Harishchandra theme is interpreted here and represented. Nonetheless, it is maintained that *Raja Harischandra* belonged to "the traditional". Yet, the mere fact that Phalke adapted this Puranic story - because it was widely known - does not automatically imply that his interpretation was in line with others of his times. *Raja Harischandra* is therefore historicised here and contextualised in a comparative manner. The break with the past and this film's oppositional stand against the 'Harishchandra-plays' in the Marathi theatre which were influential in Bombay as a nationalist agit-prop culture, will be demonstrated in Act 3.

Film and cultural studies have subjected the dissenting views and visions of Phalke's early cinema in Bombay around 1900 to a rigid transformation. His dissensus with the aggressive tones of the hegemonic historical 'bloc' that forged the Indianness of the individual-community-nation-nexus, was made into the mystified representative of this bloc (in the Gramscian sense). *Raja Harischandra* appears to reflect a 'tradition' of story-telling so undisputably, that its categorisation as "India's first feature film" is always ready at hand for constructing the different variants of the national heritage culture.

My first chapter discusses this phenomenon that the scholarly reflections on *Raja Harischandra* have basically contributed to draping the veil of myths even tighter around the complex culture of feeling and reflecting on Indianness that once had existed in relation to Phalke's early films.
I see in the tendency prevailing in traditional film studies to decompose its object of study on the one side and in its film fixation on the other, main causes for the mythologisation. In most of the cases, only partial aspects are elucidated from an ex-post perspective. The historical context, the agency of the historical subjects, and the shades of difference in their contesting views which were negotiated in Bombay's emerging public sphere are eclipsed.

In contrast to this fixation on the film and on one-dimensional 'meanings', the film pioneer had a holistic view of *cinesrishti/* (the) world of cinema However, neither the text "*Bharatiya chitrapat*", nor the film fragments were ever studied in their entirety: in the way how they were linked or how they were situated in the larger socio-cultural and historical context.

Moving experiences and shifting identities: cinema-mediated modernisms that span from Bombay to Berlin

The book at hand also equips the reader with a new perspective on cinematic cultures that lie beyond one's own historical and geographical context. By means of the Bombay/ Phalke example, it tries to engage in a discovery of how subjective views of 'cultural identities' (e. g. Indianness) as represented in the sphere of cinema and - in either way linked to politics - are moulded by her/ his specific historical/ cultural background (may it be German, 'Western' or Indian).
The rediscovery of the Indian film pioneer's films, texts and their respective contexts before 1918 - a watershed year for any ambitions by Indians to achieve a democratic statehood in India - might also serve as a medium to rediscover similar aspirations in the Germany of the Kaiser, and how the cinema and its complex constructions of 'world-views' might have played its specific role in this process of the former vassals to feel (democratic) 'German' after the traumatising experiences of World War I.
In the fifth chapter I analyse the projection of 'India' in films by European or US-American filmmakers and compare it with Phalke's *Bharatiya chitrapat*. "Indian films" made by 'Westerners' had particularly been en vogue in Germany during the same period of time when Phalke's early cinema pioneered 'Indian films' in India's urban public spheres. What were the economic prerequisites of that highly developed international exchange of films as hot-selling commodities? How did these 'Indian moving images' shape the iconographies, moral attitudes and emotions attached to modern identities, like Indianness, Germanness, etc within the context of the international crossing over of views and visions of modern nation-state-related identities (cf. Act 5)?

Dh. Govind Phalke, unlike many Indian directors who made films two decades afterwards, was an artist somewhat removed from the nationalist politics of opposing identities like 'the British' against 'the Indian' (Act 3 and 4). It is particularly one aspect of the film pioneer's conception of cinema

that makes it very clear that the associated Indianness was as much a fluid composition as were the lived cine-experiences of the spectators. It was irritating and exciting at the same time. The spectators experienced that capacity of cinema to intrude into the configuration of one's *world-view* as well as one's *inner world*; one was moved by the "*rasa*"/ feeling/ sentiment/ emotion/ morality that permeated the cinematic world.

This *rasa* permeates Phalke's texts on cinema, his fuzzy ideas of Indianness, and is the life-impulse of his cinema-praxis which he loved and reared like a child. In the fourth and final part of his *Navyug* article series, Phalke resumes his concept of *bharatiya chitrapat /sinima* as "a service" [*seva*] to his "homeland/ nation" [*rashtra*], an "art" [*kalaa*] that had been possible only due to the kindness of God [*bhagvan*]. The highly engaged text about what is at the heart of his idea of the "Indian *chitrapat*" he conveyed in prose, but remarkably also in a *poetic* form which has so far not received the necessary attention by scholars of early Indian cinema (cf. Phalke's poem at the beginning and in Appendix 1.3.).

Phalke's concept of *suchitrapat* ['good *chitrapat*'] with its strong philosophical dimension is undoubtedly inspired by the *natyashastra*[6]. *Suchitrapat* was not synonymous with making a 'good film' with a 'good story' etc. These were just prerequisites to achieve what *suchitrapat* meant to him.
His 'translation' of 'Western' cinema into his very own composition [*sinima*] necessarily included the moment of its presentation and appreciation by the historically and culturally individuated audience. Thus the experiences of the spectators were inherent to Phalke's idea and praxis of cinema. *Sarasa* refers to the way it should ideally communicate to and 'resound' in its audience. Its perfection lies, again, in the synthesis of all the aspects, and consequently there will be the perfect artistic reproduction of *bhava* ['mode of being'] for the spectators to experience, as well as a moral value and a pointer to "the path of truth".

Phalke's philosophical reflections on the cinema encapsulate his *weltanschauung* in the truest sense of the word and are the fruit of his intense practical, mental and emotional-moral involvement with his family, with his dedicated friends and his co-workers, who stood by him and his film studio in the times of crisis (1914-17). Phalke craved for knowledge and

[6]) Saying this I am disagreeing with some of the film theorists' positions which just presuppose that *Raja Harischandra* is to be put in the wrongly constructed idea of the *continuity* of a 'tradition' in the performing arts which is ascribed to Indian cinema, too (cf. my critique in Act 3).

cognition. The cinema to him also was this mediator to the world in its essential and divine beauty. His high esteem for *satya* ['truth'], which according to him, should prevail with no exceptions in all spheres of life, and also on the political plane, ruled out that he would kindle exclusive national sentiments (Act 3 and 4).

Phalke's vision of a peaceful co-existence without dividing lines between human beings was not a lone vision during these years in the face of the raging World War I. His vision of a better world was grounded in the individual adherence to 'truth', in mutual respect and recognition, and the basics which I call 'humanist', he shared with his contemporaries in India and in other parts of the world[7]. As a filmmaker Phalke took up a public position for making his vision come true by creating a *rasa* sphere in his *'sinima'*.

Phalke's Experimental Self-Searching

Phalke was a searcher. He was reaching out, and in his self reference he was ironic. At the same time he could be bitter and cynical against the colonial state authorities and against his Indian (com-) patriots.

The third part of his article series he started with an existential question that was ever repeated "Who am I?", the "I" torn between his public and his private life. However, the latter he treats with sarcasm. He did not leave out the occasion to name the pitfalls of that specific exploitation by capitalist colonialism: money economy, the fatal dynamics of the market, of indebtedness, etc . He did not hesitate either to name those who sported attitudes that matched this structurally planted exploitation: the corrupt dealings of priests, of "the self-supposed vanguard of scholars", of those, "who are proudly knowing and appreciating the arts", "you, who want to be pragmatic and the makers of these modern times, who are in the frontline of progress", etc . Opposite to these, in a pointedly humble manner he placed himself, a "craftsman" and his struggle to establish an Indian *sinema*/ "this new *chalchitra mukhanatyakalaa*" ['silent dramatic art of *chitrapat*'] with my limited knowledge on Indian soil for the entertainment of the art lovers". He pleaded with his readers not to withdraw their sympathy for this "beautiful art" (Phalke 1918A, cf. Appendix 1.4.)

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[7]) Like Franz Hofer in Germany (Elsaesser 1996), Alfred Machin in Belgium (de Kuyper 1995), D. W. Griffith in the USA, to name just a few of them.

Phalke's world-view was a space of iconographical, intellectual and moral dissensus with the then dominating politics of identity that were on the one side engineered by the colonial state and on the other side by the nationalists associated with Tilak's *Kesari*. Questions like: Who is Indian, what was India, and what was the vision of a 'good life'? were answered in fundamentally different manners by Phalke and by the Tilakites. I argue that the proper delineation of how Phalke's conceptions and visions differed is of great relevance to the understanding of India's complex and tension-rich histories of the interconnected spheres of the construction of the nation, the communities and of modern subjectivity at the beginning of the 20th century. Since these intersecting spaces constitute the sphere of the colonial subject, the analysis of Phalke's early cinema can contribute to a more differentiating theorisation of the colonial subject's contradictory situatedness in the face of the nation and of modernity (cf. P. Chatterjee 1986 and 1994).

Coming full circle: Phalke's *satya*, Truth and the desire for unity

Raja Harischandra has as its main protagonist a king whose only mission in life is to serve *satya*. This was Phalke's philosophy of life, which was inspired by an experience that the film pioneer most intensely described as a revelation. He had this experience while sitting in a cinema in Bombay some time around 1910/ 11, watching a French film on the passion of Christ[8]. It made him compassionate and inflamed his desire to make a film on Krishna. He wished this to be seen by the Europeans so that they could wonder, feel moved and become sympathetic. Yet, was Phalke not one of those 'typical' middle class idealists of a liberalism adapted from the West (cf. Nandy 1994)? The more one knows about his '*satyavadi* cinema'/ 'cinema of truth', the more one realises that in his *cinesrishti* what might otherwise have stood in opposition to each other and was without the capacity to compromise, would have coexisted, and that in *cinesrishti*, the rapprochements could be brought about between *brahmin* and non-*brahmin*, man and woman, East and West, Christ and Krishna. Therefore it might well be that Phalke who fused his 'Indian' understanding of the *satyavadi chitrapat* with a trend that he found in 'the West', the 'cinema of truth', are

[8]) Within the framework of studies into the histories of Indian thinking and feeling like that of Nandy (e.g. 1994) it might be interesting to go deeper into an understanding of the parallelism in Christ having been of foremost importance in the biographies of Indian artists, philosophers and social activists like Tagore, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Phule and Phalke.

but two aspects of *cinesrishti* which should not be separated from each other or even put into a binary polarity against each other.

Tagore's philosophy of truth was closely connected with what the Gandhi persona meant to the versatile artist, as Sharma has so insightfully elucidated, drawing from an exchange of letters between the two on the question of *swaraj*, non-violence and truth in 1919. To Tagore, 'truth' came to life in Gandhi and became "visible" in this feeble man in all its might:

"This power of truth for Tagore was also the truth which defined the definitive inner core of Indian civilization. For him the "idea of India" rejects neat "separateness" from others". And hence it is that India has "ever declared that Unity is Truth, and separateness is maya" ['illusion']." (Sharma 1994, 95)

It is another similitude of Phalke"s '*satyawadi* cinema' with Tagore's worldview that the film pioneer celebrated India's particularity, say in *satya*, in her aiming at the universal Truth. In Phalke's *cinesrishti* the dialectical recognition of self and other could happen and contribute to the resolving of essentially destructive separateness. And it had happened to Phalke himself that a union could have been forged which did away with the separate "me" and "you", "mine" and "yours". He had been motivated by the film on the passion of Christ to create his *Raja Harischandra*, which in reverse he would, besides the Indians, show to the Westerners, who for their part would be instructed on Indian customs and culture .... A progressing dialectical process of cognition and recognition which was mediated by the viewing of films in the cinema, could be initiated. The spectators could again become "pure" and "childlike", the cinematic realm was not *maya*/ illusion but it was a real experience of beholding Truth.
In contrast to both Tagore and Gandhi (Sharma 1994, 94), Phalke did not exclude technology as such from his philosophy of searching Truth and unity. In the filmmaker there was the strong belief in the capacity of the cinematographic technology to achieve the overall fusion and synthesis. In the same way as in his cinema, in the third part of his article series published in February 1918, Phalke presented himself as a dialogic subjectivity in two characters, a 'man' and a 'woman' who were reflecting on the beauty of a recognitive intersubjectivity and the negative effects brought about by separation, duality and hypocrisies in all spheres of worldly being.

To express this in all its shades, Phalke plays with the plethora of meanings attributed to *pardah*. In his *cinesrishti* 'good films' would contribute to

an all-embracing liberation from *pardah*/ duality. A vision which is given an appealing expression in Phalke's third *Navyug* article where it is voiced by a husband and a wife unnamed, yet it is clear that it is Phalke and Saraswatibai as imagined by the film pioneer discovering the potential of cinema to prepare the ground for a better and more humane world:

"[... she says] ['] This *pardah* has only spread duality [*dwaita*] everywhere. For us women the *pardah* ['veil' and the separate seating behind a transparent 'curtain' to prevent strangers from looking at these women, thus, there were '*pardah* seats' in theatres and cinemas], and also for the men in their behaviour and in their thinking there is *pardah*, in speaking and talking there is *pardah*, in state politics there is *pardah*, in patriotism [*deshabhakti*] there is *pardah*, in truth there is *pardah*, inside the house and also at the doorstep *pardah*!! In short, *pardah* is used at the outside to pretend about what is inside, to guard and also to cover up secrets, to guard the plot so that it is not disclosed there is *pardah*, and this *pardah* is indiscriminately used even to hide what looks ugly. Nowadays, the nature of human beings [*manushya*] is becoming more and more hypocritical! I am fed up with all this! Isn't it that with the growing number of *pardahs* simplicity, oneness [with God] and piety are becoming very rare virtues nowadays?['] [he says] ['] What you say is all true [*khare*] ['] [... she says] ['] In proper entertainment [*karmanyuk*] and drama there should not be any fuzz about *pardah*. ['] [... he says] ['] Oh, no! As far as this new form of *natak* [the cinema, B. S.] is concerned - let not anybody blame the *chalchitra* ['moving picture'] which has established itself after entertaining the learned people continuously for more than two decades.[']
-['] In spite of that, these *chalchitras* require a *pardah*.[']
- ['] This is your wrong conception. What you are referring to as *pardah* here is in reality [*vastutha*, Sanskrit] not a *pardah*, but it is the *bhoomika* [basic requirement, substratum, basic viewpoint] for my *abhas drishya* [visual illusion, illusionary scene, particular vision]. Will you call a *pratibimba* [image] which is seen on the surface of the water a *pardah*? Can we call the image in a mirror a *pardah*? In the same way that *pardah* is only supporting/ holding my *chalchitra natyadarshan* ['visual drama of moving pictures']. Though this kind of a presentation of *chalchitra* is still in its infancy, the pleasant, flawless, and silent [*mukha*] childlike playfulness of this *darshan* ['view'] has charmed the whole world [*jagatas*]. Be it so. Enough of this analysis of the whole 'stagecraft'. Let me fulfil the promise that I gave to these scholars/ connoisseurs who are very fond of the *chitrakalaa* ['picture-art'] Come on, let us start it. (interlude over)" (Phalke 1918A, for the full paragraph see Appendix 1.5.).

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