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MAKING WAVES: ANAND PATWARDHAN, LATIN AMERICA, AND THE INVENTION OF INDIAN THIRD CINEMA

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Abstract: Using the early films and writings of Anand Patwardhan, this article examines the influence of New Latin American Cinema films and theory on his work, which was instrumental in creating a space for independent documentary in India. Patwardhan turned to Latin American revolutionary cinema as an alternative to the Griersonian tradition adopted by the state-funded Films Division, and in doing so, challenged the institutions dominating Indian documentary film production, distribution and censorship, all of which continued to function long after independence as they had in the colonial period, to which their origins could be traced.

Of all Indian documentary filmmakers, Anand Patwardhan is certainly among the most celebrated and censored. For a politically-committed filmmaker and outspoken Marxist like Patwardhan, celebration and censorship mean much the same. Both reveal the success of his cinematic interventions in the political realm. Today Patwardhan is best known for the films about communalism he has steadily produced since the late 1980s, about which he notes, “Communalism is such a complex and multifaceted issue that if I were to make a hundred full-length documentaries on it, I would have only touched the tip of the communal iceberg” (Chatterjee 1997: 33). The complexity of this topic and Patwardhan’s engagement with it are beyond the scope of an article of this length. Leaving aside this rich body of work, I will focus my attention instead on his first two films, *Waves of Revolution* (Patwardhan 1975) and *Prisoners of Conscience* (Patwardhan 1978), which document the Bihar movement, the subsequent Emergency, and the political repression that continued after the Emergency was lifted, as well as his fourth film, *Bombay Our City* (1985), which documents the struggle against slum clearances. The significance of these films transcends their value as historical documents

and their role in establishing their author as the great provocateur of Indian documentary. They are key works of Indian post-colonial cinema, for with them Patwardhan launched a challenge against the dominant Western forms of documentary which had been adopted in India as well as the state-funded institutions producing documentaries, both of which had had their origins in the colonial period and had persisted with remarkable continuity long after independence.

The majority of documentary films made in India during roughly the first three decades after independence fit squarely within the Griersonian tradition, and not without good cause. John Grierson, the Scottish-born filmmaker and administrator who became a leading figure in the British Documentary movement of the 1930s, began his career in 1926 as head of the film unit at the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), an organization charged with creating propaganda that would promote trade among the colonies of the British Empire, including India. It was at the EMB that Grierson developed the style that he would later bring to the British Government Post Office (GPO) film unit and the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), both of which he was hired to establish. In terms of style, the films produced under Grierson drew from the artisanal production practices and imagery of the European avant-gardes of the 1920s. At the same time, they relied heavily on “voice of God” narration and tended to follow the predictable problem/solution format that still characterizes much documentary production today, the goal being to convince the populace that a benevolent socialist-leaning state had the means and initiative to solve any problem presented, thereby discouraging direct political action on the part of the addressees.

If the Griersonian social documentary originally presented an appropriate model for the Nehruvian state during the immediate post-independence period, by the 1970s, as enthusiasm for and confidence in the state waned among the populace, it increasingly seemed irrelevant and propagandistic to filmmakers like Patwardhan and audiences alike. To challenge this tradition and the institutions perpetuating it, Patwardhan turned for inspiration to the films and theories of New Latin American Cinema, which, by the mid-1970s, was considered the revolutionary vanguard of political cinema worldwide, both in terms of its content and aesthetics, or, more precisely, the creative ways it reconciled the two. These films are thus also part of the transnational film movement Third Cinema, and this article will draw Patwardhan and India into and onto the map of its articulations. Patwardhan’s first two films also precipitated his first conflicts with India’s rigid, opaque and politically-driven film censorship regime, itself also a

legacy of colonialism and one that has proven more intractable for Patwardhan than the colonial inheritance of cinematic form.

Patwardhan's First Films

Anand Patwardhan studied at Brandeis University in Boston from 1968-1972, and it was there that he shot his first footage documenting student anti-war protests (Richter and Richter 1991:42). Returning to India, he joined a voluntary rural education and development project in Madhya Pradesh, for which he made a tape and slide show about tuberculosis treatment (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999: 174). An “unworthy but ardent admirer of Gandhi” also inspired by the writings of Marx and the Dalit leader and anti-untouchability activist B. R. Ambedkar, Patwardhan felt drawn to the emerging student protests in Bihar, which became a national movement under the leadership of one of the heroes of the anti-colonial struggle, Jayaprakash Narayan, also known as J.P. He set off from New Delhi, 8mm cameras in hand, to document a major rally of the movement scheduled for November 4, 1974, and this footage was eventually incorporated into *Waves of Revolution*. Originally, Patwardhan had no intention of making a film, and had taken the camera as both a witness of and protection from the brutality of the police. While in Patna, the site of the demonstration, Patwardhan interviewed protesters, peasants, and police, although later he found most of the sound was unusable (Patwardhan 1984: 451). Only in semi-sync with the image and difficult to understand, most of the interviews used in the final film had to be paradubbed, meaning they can be heard in the background while a narrator relays their content in voiceover. The footage obtained was equally poor, with uneven exposures and camera movements, and it was in the amateur 8mm gauge. There was no optical printer available, so Patwardhan had to blow up the footage to 16mm by projecting it on sheets and re-filming it. He was rightly convinced that the immediacy of images such as a protester picking up a smoking tear gas canister and hurling it back at the police might incline the audience to overlook the technical defects of the image. Switching to 16mm, Patwardhan returned to rural Bihar to conduct more interviews and, with the assistance of a sympathetic television news cameraman, was able to record an interview with J.P. using conventional lighting and synchronized sound. This interview accorded him a certain dignity and creates a strong contrast with the rest of the film. The surrounding material has wildly varying image and sound quality; it is roughly edited together, and the image track is frequently marred by scratches, since Patwardhan was unable to make a work print from the original reversal footage. These are all

recognizable characteristics, though, of what was then being referred to in Latin America as “urgent cinema.”

Knowing that it would not be granted the obligatory censor’s certificate, Patwardhan screened *Waves of Revolution* clandestinely to small groups of sympathizers. With the declaration of the Emergency in June 1975, Patwardhan left for North America, where he had been admitted to an M.A. program at McGill University in Montreal. After the Emergency was lifted, Patwardhan returned to India, and the film was immediately given a censor’s certificate and shown on television. The Field Publicity department of the new Janata Party government even offered to buy and distribute 200 copies of it on the condition that Patwardhan remove a recently added epilogue that labeled Janata Party the latest party of the ruling class and suggested that the struggle begun in Bihar would have to continue. Although this sale would have recovered the cost of the film and provided much needed funds for future projects, Patwardhan stuck to his principles, the epilogue stayed intact, and the film remained in underground circulation. To underscore his point about the essential continuity between the current and previous regimes, Patwardhan began his next film project, *Prisoners of Conscience*, which documents thousands of political prisoners who remained in prison, often without trial or even formal charges, despite the lifting of the Emergency. Composed of on-camera interviews with former prisoners giving harrowing details of the appalling conditions in which they were kept and the torture they suffered, the film also has striking, clandestinely shot footage of the prisons themselves.

Patwardhan’s later films are more technically accomplished than the first two, but it was with these films that he established the template for his documentary practice that he continues to follow till today. In *Waves of Revolution* Patwardhan often appears in the frame conducting the interviews, but this is only because the poor quality microphone he was using necessitated his placing it close to the speaker’s mouth. With *Prisoners of Conscience* Patwardhan recedes from the frame and, with better sound equipment, paradubbing disappears. As a result, it is the subjects of the film whose voices are heard, and only they are seen, often posed before the camera in “talking groups,” which Thomas Waugh refers to as a defining characteristic of the Indian independent documentary (Waugh 2011: 244-250). According to Waugh, Indian independent filmmakers of the mid-1970s onwards utilized 16mm sync-sound technologies associated with *cinéma vérité* in Europe and Canada and direct cinema in the US to capture a

“social voice” (Waugh 1988: 14). They gave a post-colonial inflection to these realist forms, however, by replacing the first person singular talking head of the Western films with the first person plural talking group. Sometimes talking simultaneously and overlapping each other, sometimes with one person holding the floor and ceding to others in sequence, this format always reveals the “social functioning and constitution of the group” (Waugh 2011: 246). The speakers directly address the filmmaker, who usually remains offscreen, asking questions periodically but eschewing commentary. The overlapping voices, captured in lengthy takes, create a revelatory profilmic rough cut of the film determined by the subjects that precedes and limits the filmmaker’s later ordering of the material. Combined with the lack of voiceover narration, this technique ensures that the film’s subjects have some degree of control over the film. As Patwardhan notes, commentary “forms about five percent of my films. The statements all come from the people” (Swami 2008: unpaginated).

Once again, Patwardhan knew *Prisoners of Conscience* would not receive a censor’s certificate, so the film went into underground distribution and he returned to McGill to finish his M.A. There he would produce a thesis in 1981 titled *The Guerilla Film—Underground and in Exile: A Critique and Case Study of Waves of Revolution*. The title indicates the impact Latin American film theory and practice had made on his evolving documentary practice. Thomas Waugh published Patwardhan’s gripping account of the making of *Waves of Revolution* in his edited anthology “*Show Us Life*”: *Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary* (1984). More pertinent for this paper are the unpublished early theoretical chapters in which Patwardhan makes the case against ideological manipulations of the dominant cinema and for a guerilla practice that makes the viewing of a film an act of political resistance. In these sections, Patwardhan provides the theoretical underpinnings by extensive reference to the films and writings of key figures in New Latin American Cinema, including Julio García Espinosa (Cuba), Jorge Sanjinés (Bolivia), and Fernando E. Solanas and Octavio Getino (Argentina), as well as to Bertolt Brecht, a key thinker for the movement. After briefly summarizing the history and goals of New Latin American cinema, I will survey the extent of its influence on Patwardhan’s filmmaking and the language he used during the period under consideration to discuss his work. After comparing *Waves of Revolution* with two very similar films from Latin America, one Uruguayan and one Argentine, I will discuss the limits of such comparisons,

detailing how Patwardhan distinguishes himself from New Latin American Cinema and the political and historical circumstances that account, at least in part, for such differences.

Patwardhan and New Latin American Cinema

New Latin American Cinema is a label given by scholars and the filmmakers themselves to a South American, continent-wide movement encompassing a range of film practices—fiction, documentary and, most conspicuously, the mixing of the two—united not by any formal institutions or aesthetic principles but by a shared desire to combat mostly US neo-imperialism and the repressive regimes it fostered and supported. Its practitioners sought to expose the reality of the social conditions experienced by the continent's majorities and, in doing so, provoke revolutionary action. The movement encompassed both industrial based filmmaking, such as *Cinema Novo* from Brazil or the products of Cuba's state institute for film, as well as artisanal productions like the films of Sanjinés. As it was a diffuse and uncoordinated movement, establishing the exact date of its emergence is difficult. Generally, *Throw a Dime* (1957) by the Argentine sociologist turned filmmaker Fernando Birri is considered to be the seminal work. Birri's film began as an enquiry into the lives of slum dwellers outside the city of Santa Fe. The final film features interviews with families (paradubbed because the sound quality was so poor) and concludes with dramatic footage of children from the community who supplement their families' meager incomes by chasing trains along a long trestle bridge begging the passengers to throw them a dime. Formally, Birri's film resembles Patwardhan's *Waves of Revolution*, while its content, a typical subject of the movement, more closely resembles *Bombay Our City*.

Birri, like his better-known Cuban contemporaries Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, had studied filmmaking in Rome under Cesare Zavattini, screenwriter of such neo-realist classics as *Bicycle Thieves* (de Sica 1948). Because of this inheritance, New Latin American Cinema is often characterized as a South American import or manifestation of neo-realism, whereas in reality, as I have attempted to show elsewhere, it is a transculturation or indigenization of numerous influences (Hanlon: 2010). In revealing the influence of Latin American political cinema on Patwardhan's thought and practice, I wish to avoid similar oversimplifications. As Waugh notes in a new preface to his first essay on Patwardhan, such comparisons, while useful, can be too reductive (2011: 240). Patwardhan's achievement, like that of his Latin American models before him, was the selective transculturation of certain forms within the cinematic and political context of his own nation. But unlike the Latin Americans, he

was working in a post-colonial context that necessitated the rejection of one of the foundational influences on New Latin American Cinema, the Griersonian social documentary, as will be detailed in the next section.

At first many Latin American filmmakers thought neo-realist techniques would suffice to counter the false images propagated by the continent's commercial cinemas in imitation of Hollywood. Before long they came to believe that such an approach was inadequate to exposing the political and economic dynamics of inherently unjust and oppressive social formations, of which the reality accessible to the camera was only a visible symptom or trace, so they added a heavy dose of Brecht to the mix of their influences. As Brecht notes in his "Threepenny Lawsuit," for the "refunctioning of art into a pedagogical discipline, the means of representation must be multiplied and frequently changed" (Brecht 2000: 162). This is so,

because the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions...the reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations (Brecht 2000: 164).

Both Gutiérrez Alea and Sanjinés argued that cinema, by virtue of its ability to construct new, dialectical relationships through the juxtaposition of images and sounds, could reveal the forces operating beneath the visible that are inaccessible to a purely phenomenological approach to reality. Here we might return to Patwardhan's statement quoted above about the percentage of his films taken up by commentary. In completing this quotation, we can begin to see the extent to which New Latin American Cinema had influenced him. Commentary "forms about five percent of my films. The statements come from the people. But it's the juxtapositions that bring out the contradictions of the situation" (Swami 2008: unpaginated). *Bombay Our City* is the first film in which Patwardhan extensively deploys a Brechtian rhetoric, as scenes of slum clearances are contrasted through dialectical montage with footage of Bombay elites in their swank, high-rise apartments so recently built by the people targeted for removal and officials who criminalize the poor as trespassers on state and private property. As Brecht argued, understanding the contradictions presented in such a manner requires detached reasoning on the part of the spectator rather than emotional engagement. Patwardhan's work has always valorized reason over emotion, partially inspired by Brecht but also as an act of resistance to the almost exclusive reliance on emotion in Indian popular cinemas. He has remained remarkably consistent in his efforts to expose the contradictions of Indian society while simultaneously presenting an

alternative vision through which his spectators can glimpse a possible India free of communalism with a democratic socialist government no longer directing violence towards internal and external enemies largely of its own construction.

Patwardhan's M.A. thesis has for an epigraph a quotation as typical for its time as it is a surprising choice for a Gandhian,

In the specific case of cinema—art of the masses *par excellence*—its transformation from mere entertainment into an active means of de-alienation becomes imperative. Its role in the battle for the complete liberation of man is of primary importance. The camera, then, becomes a gun and the cinema must be a guerilla cinema (Patwardhan 1981: 1).

This quotation comes from “Towards a Third Cinema,” an essay by Fernando E. Solanas and Octavio Getino that introduced the term “third cinema” to the film lexicon and described the method of their film, *Hour of the Furnaces* (1968). A second essay Patwardhan considers among the “clearest written pronouncements” of guerilla cinema is García Espinosa's “For an Imperfect Cinema” (Patwardhan 1981: 34). For García Espinosa, revolutionary cinema had to be imperfect in two senses. First, it should not even attempt to attain the technical achievements of the mainstream, an ambition in which it would always fail. More importantly, though, revolutionary cinema was imperfect in the sense of not striving for the Kantian ideal of disinterestedness. So long as society was riven with class conflict, the artist was obliged to make committed art, “a poetics whose true goal will be to commit suicide, to disappear as such,” leaving disinterestedness a legitimate option (García Espinosa 1997: 78)

In addition to providing the theoretical underpinnings to his writings and practice, New Latin American Cinema's influence on Patwardhan manifests itself in other ways as well. Like most of the New Latin American Cinema theorists, he is skeptical of theory divorced from practice and self-reflexive cinematic forms that render films inaccessible (Gandhy 1983: 25). In his interviews, Patwardhan often uses a language derived from Latin American theory, as when he describes his practice as an Indian “third category” over and against the commercial industries and the FCC-funded parallel cinema, or when he describes one of his favorite Indian films, Tapan Bose and Suhasini Mulay's *An Indian Story* (1981), as one the “system cannot absorb,” for Solanas and Getino the defining characteristic of third cinema (Gandhy 1983: 26). He has described himself as a “militant practitioner of ‘imperfect cinema’” (Gangar and Yardi 1993: 22), and like Sanjinés, who took his films into mines and villages in the Andes and created a new film language as a result of these encounters, Patwardhan also brings his films to their subjects

with impromptu screenings. He also created an organization, Samvaad (meaning dialogue), that screens his films and others, including films from Latin America, to unions and other activist groups. At such screenings, he, like Sanjinés, received feedback that shaped the form of future projects (Cubitt 1986: 64).

The influence of New Latin American Cinema can also be seen in the look of the early films themselves. For example, Patwardhan appropriated elements of style from *Hour of the Furnaces* for his second film. The intertitles are white text appearing on a black field accompanied on the soundtrack by a tabla player. In *Hour of the Furnaces*, white text in a variety of fonts and sizes on a black field flies at the spectator, also accompanied by drumming. Solanas and Getino had worked in advertising and had access to optical printers that allowed them to animate their titles. Patwardhan's crude, static approximation of their technique in *Prisoners of Conscience* makes it, in the senses described above, an "imperfect" copy of the Argentine original.

The film I would like to compare to *Waves of Revolution* is Uruguayan Mario Handler's *I Like Students* (1968).¹ Both films document student protests with crude urgency, both use popular protest songs as a musical soundtrack and, more importantly, both were made in the political context of an increasingly repressive state responding to restive students and workers and urban guerilla movements. In the case of Handler's film, the protests take place in the capital Montevideo in response to the visit by American heads of state, including US President Lyndon Johnson and various US-supported South American dictators, to the seaside resort town of Punta del Este (King 2000: 99). Handler alternates scenes of protests with shots of the heads of state arriving at the conference. The scenes of protest, much like Patwardhan's 8mm footage in *Waves of Revolution*, are composed of short, handheld, and unstable shots, as they were filmed in the midst of the riot police and smoking tear gas canisters. The shots of the heads of state have steadier framing and contain slow pans but seem comparatively washed out, largely grey images clearly shot using a different camera. According to Handler, the Bolex camera he used to shoot the protest was destroyed by riot police, so he was forced to borrow an inferior camera to shoot the conference, an experience not dissimilar to that Patwardhan describes in his account of *Waves of Revolution* (Burton 1986: 21). The post-production processes of the two films were similar as well. Like Patwardhan, Handler did not have the money for a work print and had to edit the original footage, leaving scratches and marks that appear in the final product.

For all their similarities, differences begin to emerge when we look at how the two films are edited. Despite the variety of gauges and stocks and the diversity of filming techniques used in gathering the footage for *Waves of Revolution*, Patwardhan attempted to integrate his material during the editing, privileging narrative and rhetorical continuity over process. The opposite was true for Handler, who notes, “There was already a tremendous disparity between the footage shot in Montevideo and Punta del Este, so I decided to exaggerate that contrast even more by adding music to the student sequences and leaving the footage of the heads of state silent” (Burton 1986: 21). The film is thus constructed according to a set of auditory and visual binaries; silence/music and short handheld shots of demonstrators/uninterrupted pans of heads of state. In fact, the footage from Punta de Este was executed in a single lengthy take or sequence shot, indicating that this set of formal contrasts may have been part of the plan for the film from the beginning. For all of its technical limitations, Handler is still concerned with the film’s aesthetics, deploying the kind of self-reflexive strategies Patwardhan has always strenuously rejected.

A Latin American filmmaker with whom Patwardhan would seem to have greater affinity than Handler is the Argentine Raymundo Gleyzer, who was disappeared by the military junta in 1976. His 1973 film *Neither Forgive Nor Forget* documents the capture of a group of guerillas participating in a mass jailbreak and their subsequent extrajudicial execution. The first two thirds of the film is a nineteen-minute single shot of an impromptu press conference held by the guerillas after their capture and filmed off a television screen. Spokespersons for the group applaud their fellow prisoners who succeeded in escaping and ask that a federal judge present certify that they will not be tortured or disappeared. This is followed by an eight-minute conclusion, a passage of montage using stills, mug shots, newspaper headlines, footage of demonstrations demanding the release of political prisoners, and a variety of other materials exposing the events subsequent to the press conference. There is an evident disproportion in the length of the two parts made more obvious by the contrast between the single take and montage, yet Gleyzer neither conceals this contrast nor heightens it like Handler did in his film. As with *Waves of Revolution*, the roughness of the film’s construction is simply there, indexing the conditions, both political and material, under which it was made. The second part of *Neither Forgive Nor Forget* functions like the epilogue to *Waves of Revolution*, urgently communicating an update on the subject of the film and oblivious to the impact on the film’s overall design or aesthetics.

New Latin American Cinema, like all left movements, was composed of multiple, sometimes antagonistic, tendencies. The films of Gleyzer can be seen as opposed to the aestheticizing tendency represented by Handler or Solanas and Getino. Unlike the latter pair, Gleyzer wrote no theory and saw himself, like Patwardhan, as an activist first and artist second (Patwardhan 2013). The aestheticizing tendency within New Latin American Cinema can be traced in large part to another of its key influences, the British Documentary Movement headed by John Grierson, which Bill Nichols and others have argued created the modern documentary by fusing high modernist experimentation with actualities and subordinating the whole to the propaganda needs of the liberal state (2001). For New Latin American Cinema filmmakers, the Griersonian tradition had some aspects, especially its strong engagement with modernist aesthetics, that were consonant with the movement's goals. Patwardhan, though, has consistently de-emphasized the aesthetics of his practice in favor of his activism (Patwardhan 2013). In any case, as a post-colonial Indian filmmaker, his relationship with the Griersonian tradition was fraught with colonial era associations in a way that it was not for Latin Americans, making it something to be rejected wholesale rather than adopted in part. Like the free mixing of documentary and fiction forms, a modernist aesthetics of the image was another key component of New Latin American Cinema Patwardhan eschewed, creating some distance between his work and that of the Latin Americans who originally inspired him.

Indian Documentary and the Griersonian Colonial Tradition

Although John Grierson himself never worked in India, film institutions there, especially those related to documentary production, were based upon the models he created and implemented by people he had trained during both the colonial and post-colonial periods. India's colonial administration passed the Film Act in 1927 setting quotas for foreign and Empire films, an effort to thwart Hollywood's penetration of Imperial markets (Jaikumar 2006: 49-51). In 1940 the Film Advisory Board was established to produce war propaganda in India. Grierson was asked to head it but was unavailable, having left for Canada two years earlier, so in his place arrived Alexander Shaw, who had trained under Grierson at the EMB and later worked at the GPO. 1942 saw the launch of Indian Movietone News, a joint effort with 20th Century Fox's British newsreels division (Garga 2007: 99). This lasted one year, following which Shaw made a series of decisions that decided the fate of documentary in India for the next half century. First, in July 1943 he placed an embargo on all unauthorized films under the pretext that it would

preserve limited film stock for government use; second, in September of the same year he launched the domestically-produced and much reviled newsreel, Indian News Parade; and finally, he instituted compulsory screenings of approved documentaries before all feature screenings, to be paid for by fees levied based on a percentage of ticket sales (Garga 100-101).

After Independence the scenario described above played itself out again in an almost *Groundhog Day* manner. A new Film Advisory Board was established in 1949, which led to the creation of the Films Division (FD), responsible for documentary production and housed within the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Theaters were once again compelled not only to screen FD documentaries before every film but to pay for the privilege as well. Officially, this was to encourage a market for documentaries, and it was true that theaters were free to purchase documentaries from private producers, so long as they had been approved by the Central Board of Film Censors. But in reality, as Barnouw and Krishnaswamy note, independent producers stood little chance of getting into the theaters because of the FD's policies of block-booking (i.e. making theaters purchase programming months ahead of time) and demanding pre-payment (1980: 193-4). This system was based in 35mm production and exhibition, resulting in the underdevelopment in India of the 16mm infrastructure preferred by New Latin American Cinema filmmakers and other politically and aesthetically oppositional film practitioners worldwide (until the arrival of inexpensive video in the 1980s-90s). Thus the development of independent documentary in India was hampered by lack of access to 16mm equipment and the high costs of 35mm production. By 1995 the FD was one of the world's largest film units, producing 160 films yearly, of which approximately a third were documentaries, 10% of which were made by freelancers. It released 700 prints of one documentary and one newsreel each week to over 10,000 theaters (Pandakur 1995: unpaginated). Sridala Swami evocatively describes these FB screenings:

For those of us who grew up in the 70s and 80s, the word 'documentary' inevitably conjures up memories of a wasted half-hour before the main feature in cinema theatres. We used this time to go to the bathroom and have a leisurely cup of tea before we entered the theatre laden with extremely yellow popcorn and something to drink. The 'documentaries' that were shown were usually about family planning (where young men in the audience would whistle) or the benefits of dams, or about the several government schemes the Films Division thought people should be aware of (2008: unpaginated).

Patwardhan describes an even more negative reception for these films: “In India the government use family planning propaganda films—but the people stoned them when they came” (Cubitt 1986: 62). Brigupat Singh and Ashok Bhargva argue one result of the FD documentaries is that “the term ‘documentary’ or ‘documentary realism’ has popularly come to have negative connotations, associated with the benevolent governmental polemics that have constituted state-sponsored attempts at various kinds of mass-mediatised instruction” (2002: 629). In his *Narmada Diary* (Patwardhan 1995), a film about the struggle to save the Narmada River Valley from being destroyed by a proposed hydroelectric dam, Patwardhan comments ironically on the FD/Griersonian tradition by juxtaposing contemporary news footage with the soundtrack from an FD documentary “Village of Smiles,” in which the narrator quotes Nehru’s famous statement that “Dams are the temples of modern India” (Ghosh 2010: 81).

If a comparison of *I Like Students* with *Waves of Revolution* can reveal the extent of Patwardhan’s transculturation of forms and processes from New Latin American Cinema, a similar comparison between one of the classics of the British Documentary Movement, *Housing Problems* (Elton and Anstey, 1935), and Patwardhan’s *Bombay Our City* will cast in relief Patwardhan’s wholesale refusal of the Griersonian tradition dominating Indian documentary. Again, the films deal with identical content—slum clearances—although their approaches could hardly be more dichotomous.

Housing Problems is a landmark documentary, one of the first to use synch sound interviews with subjects on location. The film’s sponsor was the Gas Light and Coke Company of London, which had been convinced by Grierson that the demolition of slums and their replacement by government-financed housing would lead to an increase in the use of gas appliances (Barnouw 1993: 94). The film’s *raison d’être* is not revealed until nine minutes into its runtime of fifteen minutes, when the narrator tells us that “The gas industry has designed suitable appliances for cheap cooking, and for room and water heating, specially to meet the needs of slum clearance schemes.”

Housing Problems begins with the narrator introducing a Councilor Lauder, Chairman of the Stepney Housing Committee, who “will tell you something of the problem of slum clearance.” Not appearing on camera, Lauder describes decaying buildings while a montage of images gives visual evidence supporting his points. Once an authority has framed the problem, the narrator returns to declaim, “And now for the people who have to live in the slums,” and we

see a series of interviews with subjects, all of whom face the camera and describe the condition of their housing, with occasional cutaways to details supporting their comments. The interview with the Berner family is particularly revelatory with respect to Patwardhan and his “talking groups.” It begins with Mr. and Mrs. Berner and their three children all in the frame. When a small child in the woman’s arms points to the camera and says something, there is an immediate cut to a closer shot of Mr. Berner alone. The children, now at some distance, are still barely audible on the soundtrack. This cut is motivated by the film’s insistence on presenting the slum inhabitants as individuals whose problems can only be solved individually by the state rather than through collective action.

By contrast, *Bombay Our City* begins with a dialectical audiovisual montage exposing the contradictions behind the official vision of the city rather than allowing that vision to frame the film. We see pages from a government-produced yearbook of Bombay showing modern buildings, orderly, near-empty streets, and networks of highways and flyovers. Meanwhile, on the soundtrack, we hear what seems like sticks banging oil cans, shouting, and other random noises that, after a title shot, are revealed to be made by the police demolishing an encampment, breaking up people’s possessions and chasing them off. Although the first words we see are “The Municipal Corporation of Greater Bombay” on the front of a book, from the start it is clear that, unlike *Housing Problems*, this film is not in service to the city administration and corporate interests. The first person to speak is an elderly woman who says they are being attacked on all sides and begs Allah for help. There follows a series of individuals and “talking groups” describing their ordeals and a passage with musicians performing a protest song. Only after the people have had their say do we get the first glimpse of officialdom, the municipal commissioner. While he describes the slum dwellers as trespassers on vacant private property who should be encouraged to return to the villages from whence they came, Patwardhan cuts to a series of pans revealing the opulent bungalow in which he lives and its verdant gardens. This sets the pattern for the film, which proceeds to alternate between the slum dwellers’ testimonials and the high rise apartments, yacht clubs and nightclubs of the city’s elite, most of whom discuss the poor as though they were an infestation and openly endorse vigilance committees that harass them, the closest they come to proposing a solution. Occasional superimposed titles record the progress and setbacks of legal efforts to stop the demolitions, but Patwardhan’s voice is absent

from the soundtrack, except for one brief moment when we hear him ask the commissioner what he thinks should be done.

Unlike the scene of the Berner family in *Housing Problems*, Patwardhan seems to encourage the subjects to crowd around and take turns speaking spontaneously, an approach dramatically and, again, dialectically underscored in a passage recording the visit of a politician to a slum. The politician interrupts his law and order themed address to the camera to make a motion as if preparing to slap someone, telling onlookers not to crowd him. We then see his assistants pushing back the curious and yelling at them, “Go back to your huts!”

Rather than exercise complete control over what is said, Patwardhan allows his subjects the freedom to challenge him. In one of the most arresting moments in the film, a woman accuses him of only taking images of the slums to make a name for himself and asks him what exactly he proposes to do for them. He does not respond or attempt to justify what he is doing. The subjects of the film were also allowed to choose what he should show. Near the end of the film we see the funeral of an infant that died when its mother was left unprotected in the rain. According to the cinematographer Ranjan Palit, Patwardhan was reluctant to film such an intimate moment, although he was eventually convinced by the parents, who wanted some record of their child’s life and death (Pandakur 1995). Scenes like this one, in which the subjects take control of their own representation, are reminiscent of the collaborative techniques devised by Sanjinés working with indigenous peasants in Andean nations.

In creating a new form of Indian documentary, Patwardhan intuited that what audiences rejected in the Films Division documentaries was not their realism but the use to which that realism was put: propaganda solidly in the Griersonian tradition, a tradition which, in India as opposed to Latin America, was further tainted by a colonial overlay. What post-colonial India needed was a critical, dialectical realism capable of revealing the structures of oppression, not just their symptoms, a cinema that gave voice to the people rather than officialdom. To construct this he turned to New Latin American Cinema, a movement inspired in part by Grierson to be sure, but even more so by Brecht, neo-realism and another globe-trotting documentarian, Joris Ivens, who, among other things, trained the first newsreel cameramen in post-revolutionary Cuba (Chanan 2004: 197-8).²

Censorship

“It’s not enough to make the films. The real battle has been to show them” Anand Patwardhan (Swami 2008: unpaginated).

No discussion of Patwardhan’s work is complete without addressing the matter of censorship. His ultimately successful three-year battle with Doordarshan, India’s state-run television network, to get *Bombay Our City* (Patwardhan 1985) shown “set a morale-boosting precedent for others involved in the precarious parallel documentary movement” (Chatterjee 1997: 29). By 2004 he had won four more similar battles before India’s Supreme Court (Patwardhan 2004: unpaginated).

Indian film censorship, like its documentary institutions and forms, has a long history dating back to colonial times, and its basic outlines and procedures were left essentially unchanged after Independence. The Cinematographic act of 1918 led to the establishment of censor boards in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1920. A year later the first films were censored; one, *Bhakta Vidur*, was banned because an actor in the film bore a passing resemblance to Mahatma Gandhi (Sukumaran 2003: unpaginated). Some 60 years later, Patwardhan’s *War and Peace* (2002), a film about India’s nuclear ambitions, was denied a censor’s certificate. At first the censors demanded six cuts. When Patwardhan lodged a formal protest, the number was upped to twenty-one.³ In a bizarre twist reminiscent of the earliest days of Imperial censorship, one of the censor’s demands was the removal of footage of the assassination of Gandhi that Patwardhan had acquired the rights to from the Gandhi Film Foundation (Sukumaran 2003: unpaginated). The extent to which the Indian government has been willing to go to suppress public access to *War and Peace* is exceptional. Historically, the Mumbai International Film Festival screened films without censor’s certificates, making it among the most open of Indian festivals. After *War and Peace* screened there in 2002, new rules were instituted requiring certification for all domestic films, while foreign films remained exempt (Sukumaran 2003: unpaginated).

The interested reader can find numerous accounts of Patwardhan’s censorship battles in India. In keeping with my efforts here to reveal Patwardhan’s transnational connections, I will limit my discussion to two examples of what might be termed “soft” censorship that occurred when he took his films abroad. My account is based entirely on Patwardhan’s version and is therefore unverified, but I think these examples are worth considering because, on the one hand,

they seem entirely plausible and, on the other hand, they reveal a further difference between him and his Latin American contemporaries, one determined by his differential positioning within the nexus of geopolitical forces, especially during the Cold War. Latin American filmmakers like Solanas, Gleyzer and Sanjinés worked clandestinely under oppressive circumstances but could also count on the support and sometimes protection of Western leftist groups in solidarity with their struggles and the European and Third World countries in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. As a citizen of a non-aligned country actively courted by both sides in the Cold War, though, Patwardhan lacked the same political leverage. He had to begin, as he did in the three films discussed here, by demolishing the belief widely held outside the country that India was a peaceful, democratic and free country that abided by the rule of law. The issues raised by his films, which he often brings to North American university campuses, continue to be something of a revelation, as the audiences are generally less familiar with, for example, the Emergency, than they would be with the Pinochet coup that took place earlier the same decade.

The first example of soft censorship occurred in the mid-1970s when Patwardhan was touring North America with prints of *Waves of Revolution*. When he approached Tricontinental Films, then the largest distributor of New Latin American Cinema in the US, seeking a distribution deal, they declined on grounds that the film's technical quality was not good enough. Patwardhan notes that the so-called alternative distributors operated according to the same "market mentality" as the big commercials, but he also suggests that the real reason might lie in a lack of interest in the West in the plight of India during the Emergency (Patwardhan 1981: 68). Indeed, given that Tricontinental was distributing films from Latin America of dubious technical distinction, there is something persuasive in Patwardhan's explanation. The irony of the distributor's name hardly needs comment. The incident, though, is illustrative of a general neglect in the West for Indian political cinema. If Indian filmmakers like Patwardhan and Mrinal Sen saw themselves participating in the same struggles as their Latin American contemporaries and vice versa, that perception was not often shared by the West. The connections between Latin America and India, so manifestly present in both the films and their makers' writings about them, has long passed unacknowledged, because even scholars of World Cinema have been loath to bring to light lateral exchanges of forms, practices and personnel that took place in the global South unmediated by Western metropolises. Fortunately, recent scholarship on Chinese transnational cinemas has begun to change all this, but it remains true that the cottage industry

surrounding Hindi popular cinema that has grown up over the last dozen or so years still tends to regard its object of study in isolation, if only from a desire to defend it against charges of being a factory for Hollywood knock-offs. If Satyajit Ray once conveniently stood in for all Indian cinema in histories of World Cinema, the same now risks being the case with popular Hindi cinema; “minor” cinemas in other languages and alternative practices like Patwardhan’s remain at the margins of Film Studies.

The second incident comes from the pages of *Film und Fernsehen*, originally the official publication of East Germany’s state-run film industry. In an interview given on the occasion of a screening of his *In Memory of Friends* (1990) at the 1991 International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film, Patwardhan concludes by praising the independence of the jury at the Mumbai festival, an independence that would be revoked a decade later in response to one of his films. He then adds that he would like to say something about Leipzig, and goes on to complain that he had been invited to the festival a second time, and for the second time, his film was shown out of competition and without German subtitles. Continuing, he notes that there were scarcely any films from Latin America, Asia and Africa at the festival that year, “only films about Europe and about Germany, Germany, Germany” (Richter and Richter 1991: 43 translation mine). The absence of films from the global South would strike him as odd, since during the 1960s-1980s Leipzig had been a key venue and meeting place for Latin American and other Third World filmmakers. After criticizing the lack of a non-European presence at the current festival, Patwardhan then speculates as to why *Bombay Our City* was shown out of competition in the mid-1980s when he had last been invited to Leipzig: “I think about what the reason might be for my films not being permitted to enter the competition. With *Bombay Our City* it was probably because the film attacked the government and the then German Democratic Republic was committed to maintaining good relations with India” (Richter and Richter 1991: 43). It is entirely possible that the long arm of Indian censorship pursued Patwardhan to the former East Germany. After all, the preservation of “friendly relations with foreign states” is one of the grounds justifying “reasonable restrictions” given by India’s Central Board of Film Certification (Bose 2009: 24). India officially recognized East Germany as a sovereign state, so East Germany would be disinclined to appear to endorse criticism of it. Contrast this with the East German policy during the same time period towards most Latin American countries, with whom solidarity in the struggle against oppression was the official line. Thus Colombian New

Latin American Cinema filmmakers Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva, every bit as denunciatory of their own government as Patwardhan was of his, could state that “Leipzig was always our home,” while by comparison the festival left Patwardhan out in the cold (Mückenberger 1996: 376). Assuming Patwardhan’s complaint regarding *Bombay Our City* has some validity—and the fact that *Film und Fernsehen* left it in the interview seems a tacit endorsement—this incident points to the complex overlay of Cold War politics that facilitated the circulation of some films and impeded that of others, an element that must be taken into account in any transnational study of films of the period, especially political films.

Critique of Patwardhan

In *Waves of Revolution* there is an interview with a peasant in which he says the village is abandoning dowries and ending the practice of untouchability. He concludes saying, “We are telling the women of the village that all these religious festivals they celebrate...only enrich the merchant class.” The man is shot from a low angle that gives him a slightly heroic look. The impression the viewer is left with is of an enlightened, secular peasantry ready to cast off the shackles of religion and caste maintained by the elite, whereas the opposite was in fact true. The peasant may well have been speaking his own mind, but the words he speaks are more characteristic of the slogans of the middle class students organizing the demonstrations than the peasantry in general. Patwardhan writes in his M.A. thesis, “Although in reality it was the students and not the poor peasants who gave the Movement its direction, because we considered this to be a weakness of the Movement, and because we wished the film to serve as an organizing tool which would help strengthen the Movement, we gave priority to the words of peasants rather than to those of students” (Patwardhan 1981: 62).

A similar moment from *Occupation Mill-Worker* (1996) is analyzed by Singh and Bhargava in their extended critique of Patwardhan’s films. The camera approaches a striking worker involved in a temporary occupation of an idled mill, who tells Patwardhan of his intent to pray for a positive response to the workers’ demands. When a second worker challenges the first, saying what is needed is conflict, not prayer, the camera attends to her and the first worker’s words, though still audible on the soundtrack, are no longer translated in the subtitles. His last words are translated as “He will bless us,” when according to Singh and Bhargava, a more accurate translation would be, “We will fight when he [meaning God] commands us” (2002: 630-1). This is not, they argue, a simple manipulation meant to heighten a contrast between the

two workers; rather, they argue, it represents an “incommensurable epistemological gap between Patwardhan and Worker 1” (Singh and Bhargava 2002: 631). In other words, Patwardhan cannot conceive of religious beliefs being an impetus for fighting social injustice. Religion, they go on to argue, has always been “wished away” by the secular militant left, much to the detriment of Indian politics, for such a stance has evacuated any space within Hinduism that might be occupied by the left, leaving the Sangh Parivar, the coalition of right-wing Hindu parties, uncontested as the spokespeople for the believing majority (Singh and Bhargava 2002: 631-2).

Though Patwardhan has defended himself against such a claim repeatedly, it does raise a larger issue that preoccupied New Latin American Cinema filmmakers during Patwardhan’s formative period: the relative political efficacy of reason and emotion. New Latin American Cinema’s theorists take differing stands on this question, with Solanas and Getino condemning emotion as the realm of mass media mental colonization and Jorge Sanjinés insisting on the necessity of beauty and emotion as a means, not an end, for effective revolutionary art. As noted above, Patwardhan has consistently valorized reason over emotion, no doubt out of personal and political conviction. We see this in his preference for the “reasoning” peasants and workers over their devout and sincere counterparts. Whether this preference for reason, this critical realism, has deprived Patwardhan of an audience in India beyond the community of secular left activists, is a question that cannot be answered here. But it is worth considering the context within which Patwardhan began making films. The documentary as such was all but invisible, churned out by the government and ignored by the masses. Cinema meant the popular fiction film, produced by industries that had beaten Hollywood at its own game, contriving astonishingly complex methods of orchestrating emotion that resonated powerfully among the Indian populace, making Hollywood imports seem wan and emotionless by comparison. Against this force, Patwardhan and other independent documentarians of his generation aggressively staked out a more sober space for documentary, a space where reason could have its day. In doing so, they freed up future generations to incrementally return emotion to documentary which, now that it had a well-established identity of its own, could safely absorb it. The floodgates keeping emotion at bay could be opened without the threat of inundation. In such an environment filmmakers like Leena Manimekalai are able to flourish, making films with more three dimensional characters that take the time to tell their stories, while still being uncompromising in their social critique.

Conclusion

The influence of one noncommercial cinematic practice on another can take multiple ideologically inflected forms: aesthetic, theoretical, technical, and procedural. In the case of Latin American Third Cinema's influence on the early documentary practice of Anand Patwardhan, it encompassed to varying degrees all four. New Latin American Cinema theory and practice was undoubtedly instrumental to the development of Patwardhan's documentary form and thus independent documentary in India. But as with all transculturations, it was not a wholesale import. Several factors contributed to Patwardhan's revision of Latin American Third Cinema; among them, the post-colonial society's legacy of Griersonian social documentary, the unusual popularity of local feature film productions, and India's unique in-between positioning within Cold War geopolitical structures. Patwardhan saw New Latin American Cinema as useful in creating a popular documentary form and dismantling the Griersonian tradition but kept his distance from its aestheticizing tendencies, in part because these were derived to a great extent from Grierson himself, but also out of a desire to privilege his role as an activist over that of an artist. His struggle on two fronts, creating a new Indian documentary form and challenging state censorship, helped create a space for the now-vibrant independent documentary production in India.

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¹ *I Like Students* may be seen in its entirety here, accessed 11 Feb 2013:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLh01IDPKtY>

² For more on Ivens, see (Waugh 2011: 267-81).

³ For detailed accounts of the censorship battle over this film, see (Bose 2009: 28-30) and (Patwardhan 2002b: unpaginated).

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