

# Parallel Cinema

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## Manifest Pedagogy

Modern Art and Culture is part of the syllabus for UPSC both Preliminary and Mains. Parallel cinema is a major artistic movement in Indian cinema and it has the potential to be an independent question. The death of one of the pioneers of this new age movement can be a trigger for the questions.

## **In news**

Death of Mrinal sen the last of Bengal Triumvirate

## **Placing it in Syllabus**

Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

## **Dimensions**

1. Contribution of cinema to Indian society.
2. Cinema as an art form.
3. Parallel cinema's contribution to Indian cinema.

## **Content**

### **What is the parallel Indian cinema?**

Parallel cinema is a film movement in Indian cinema that originated in the state of West Bengal in the 1950s as an alternative to the mainstream commercial Indian cinema, represented especially by popular Hindi cinema, known today as Bollywood.

It is inspired by Italian Neorealism, Parallel Cinema began

just before the French New Wave and Japanese New Wave, and was a precursor to the Indian New Wave of the 1960s. The movement was initially led by Bengali cinema and produced internationally acclaimed filmmakers such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Tapan Sinha and others.

It is known for its serious content, realism and naturalism, symbolic elements with a keen eye on the sociopolitical climate of the times, and for the rejection of inserted dance-and-song routines that are typical of mainstream Indian films.

### **Influences and impact of the parallel cinema**

The emergence of parallel cinema had one simple aim: to give movie-goers something more than meaningless entertainment. It won't be too wrong to call it a "rebellious" branch of our otherwise conforming cinema. *Mandi* (1983), by Shyam Benegal is one such movie **dealing with issues that the society talks about in dulled whispers**, if at all. The story revolves around a brothel and its prostitutes, who ultimately fight for their place of residence, when under threat by politicians who are themselves frequent visitors. Not many people know this, but **Gulzar**, besides being an impeccable lyricist was also a film director. In 1982, he came out with *Namkeen*, a movie that uncovered **oppression of women** in rural India.

Cinema is a very powerful weapon that works both ways. While **cinema influences people, people influence it right back**. That is why, parallel cinema plays a very crucial role- **mirroring our society, as well as affecting it**. The films of Sen, Benegal and ray offered their audiences a political message about the social conditions they represented.

This cinema borrowed heavily from the Indian literature of the times, hence became an important study of the contemporary Indian society, and is now used by scholars and historians alike to map the changing demographics and socio-economic as well as political temperament of the Indian populace. Right

from its inception, Indian cinema has had people who wanted to and did use the medium for more than entertainment. They used it to highlight prevalent issues and sometimes to throw open new issues for the public.

They created a genre of films which depicted reality from an artful perspective. Most films made during this period were funded by state governments to promote an authentic art genre from the Indian film fraternity.

### **Mrinal Sen and the Bengal triumvirate**

**Mrinal Sen** was a noted Bengali filmmaker based in Kolkata. Along with his contemporaries Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, he was often considered to be one of the greatest ambassadors of Bengali parallel cinema on the global stage.

- Like the works of Ray and Ghatak, his cinema was known for its artistic **depiction of social reality**. The three directors charted the independent trajectory of parallel cinema, as a counterpoint to the mainstream fare of Hindi cinema in India.
- Sen was an ardent follower of Marxist philosophy.
- In many Mrinal Sen movies from Punaschato Mahapritihivi, Kolkata features prominently. He has shown Kolkata as a character, and as an inspiration.
- He has beautifully woven the people, value system, class difference and the roads of the city into his movies and coming of age for Kolkata, his El-Dorado.

**Satyajit Ray** was an Indian Bengali filmmaker, screenwriter, graphic artist, music composer and author, widely regarded as one of the greatest filmmakers of the 20th century. Ray was born in Calcutta into a Bengali Pandit family which was prominent in the field of arts and literature. Starting his career as a commercial artist, Ray was drawn into independent filmmaking after meeting French filmmaker Jean Renoir .

- Ray created two popular fictional characters in Bengali

children's literature—Feluda, a detective, and Professor Shonku, a scientist. The Feluda stories are narrated by Topesh Ranjan Mitra aka Topse, his teenage cousin, something of a Watson to Feluda's Holmes.

- The science fictions of Shonku are presented as a diary discovered after the scientist had mysteriously disappeared.

**Ritwik Ghatak** was a Noted Bengali filmmaker and script writer. Along with prominent contemporary Bengali filmmakers Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen, his cinema is primarily remembered for its meticulous depiction of social reality. Ghatak stood entirely outside the world of Indian commercial film. None of the elements of the commercial cinema (singing and dancing, melodrama, stars, glitz) featured in his work. He was watched by students and intelligentsia, not by the masses.

- Ghatak was not only a film director, he was a theorist, too. His views and commentaries on films have been parts of scholarly studies and researches.
- As a filmmaker his main concentration was on men and life and specially the day-to-day struggle of ordinary men. He could never accept the partition of India of 1947 which divided Bengal into two countries. In almost all his film he dealt with this theme.
- Filmmaking was not only art for him. In his opinion it was only a means to the end of serving people: It was only a means of expressing his anger at the sorrows and sufferings of his people.
- He was a lifelong communist and actively supported CPI in his earlier life. He believed that the film was just a medium of his larger thoughts about the society.

## **Decline**

By the early 1990s, the rising costs involved in film production and the commercialisation of the films had a

negative impact on the art films. The fact that investment returns cannot be guaranteed made art films less popular amongst filmmakers.

One of the major reasons for the decline of the parallel cinema in India is that the F.F.C. or the National Film Development Corporation of India did not seriously look into the distribution or exhibition of these films. The mainstream exhibition system did not pick up these films because these films did not have the so-called 'entertainment value' that they were looking for.

Since most of the parallel cinema rejected the regressive worldview that was largely embodied the mainstream cinema they never found acceptance in the mainstream production, distribution and exhibition system. With an absence of an alternative exhibition system or an art house circuit as it is called in the west

## **Mould your Thoughts: Test Yourself**

1. Parallel cinema is a true reflection of the Indian social condition immediately post-Independence. Account for its departures with mainstream cinema and the causes for its decline.