

Mrinal Sen :

'Every Moment I Put Myself in the Dock'

A Star Special by Samir Dasgupta

After 27 years and Satyajit Ray's Pather Panchali, the next Indian film to win an award (Prix du Jury) at the Cannes International Film Festival was Kharj (1983) by Mrinal Sen, the acknowledged maverick of the New Indian cinema.

and politico-didactic points of view that were meant to stir revolutionary urges. The trend was clearer in Padatik, a film which probed with loving care and considerable artistic insight the questionings of a Naxalite activist, thereby exploring and encompassing the raison d'être of the whole movement as well as the sense of self-defeat which ultimately pervaded the political scenario of West Bengal and some other regions of India at the time.

the common man's sufferings and struggles. Yet the film made its maker more acutely aware than before of the hiatus between the reaction of the intelligentsia and the ordinary film fans towards his treatment of themes that blended the private feelings, acts and

generalised theme of class struggle now convinced him to take a closer look at himself. His camera focused on middle class values and resulted in a moving portrayal of complex human relationships in the contemporary social context.

'When I look back, I don't do so for any nostalgic kick. Neither have I any emotional involvement with the past. I simply look back.'

thoughts of individuals with the dimensions of impersonal thoughts and behaviour. Ekdin Pratidin (1979) marked a major turning point in Sen's creative process. Known for his persistent obsession with political themes, Sen was suddenly seen by many as one who was mellowing down and becoming increasingly introspective.

outcasts ... I have been talking about self-criticism and Kharj is its intense and merciless manifestation. Every moment I put myself in the dock while I was making the film. I accused myself all the while, and I am still doing it. I was convicting myself, the milieu in which I live, and the entire middle class society. One of my old and sensitive friends told me that for sometime, particularly after making Ekdin Pratidin, I have been castigating my own class in the name of self-criticism. It's true. I'm trying to face myself, making an honest attempt at self-purification. I can say in clear terms that I'm not one of those who benefit from the games of their class and, at the same time, always try to discard their class. Our middle class has always played a vital role in the formation of the economic structure of our present day society and this role is indispensable for a society which is passing through a transition. I have never denied the phenomenon. I am an active member of the middle class society. So when I confront myself, I feel the presence of the entire middle class sentiment within me. Then I put questions to myself. I argue with myself, I ostracise myself, I analyse myself and try to rectify the faults. Through this process I am transformed. Here I mean my entire class.



message. Reacting sharply to a suggestion (during an interview soon after his Khandhar (1984) was released) that he was escaping "political issues" altogether, Mrinal Sen shot back: "What are the political issues you are referring to? Land reform? Class struggle? I ask you a simple question: Do you think what I am doing these days does in any way negate the broader political issues? I do not think it does. I think all this helps you to sharpen your vision and your ability to take up the issues you think of."

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having a cup of coffee when I heard on my walkie-talkie that a senior Somali colleague, Haroun Abrar, had been shot in the head while resisting a hijacking attempt in a town called Gorooley. He was not as lucky as the Finnish man. He was shot at point-blank range and part of his skull and brain had been blown away. I rushed to the hospital, which was a hospital only in name. There was no electricity and the feeble generator could barely provide enough power to light up the operating room. There was no blood, no oxygen, no medicine, and no diagnostic or life-support medical equipment. An appeal had been made over the walkie-talkie network for blood and oxygen, and many people who heard the appeal braved the possibility of being killed on the way as they sought safe routes to come to the hospital to donate blood. Despite all the valiant efforts into the night, little could be done in Mogadishu if Haroun were to have even a fighting chance of survival. The next morning, he was evacuated to Nairobi by a private plane. He never regained consciousness and died two weeks later.

Escape from Terror

evening fell and the sound of the azan calling the Muslim faithful to prayers wafted hauntingly from distant mosques, the guns gradually fell silent. But it was only a momentary respite. I imagined the rebels and the army were taking time off to plead their case with Allah and each side was trying to convince the Almighty of the righteousness of its cause. Strangely enough, for the first time, I felt a sense of relief, reckoning that with the fighting going on between two armies, bandits would not venture out. I slept fitfully that night as sounds of sudden explosions or gunfire kept waking me up.

At mid-morning, I received a coded message from the security coordinator, whose call sign was Alpha, that it has been decided that the remaining UN personnel will make an attempt to escape as soon as the small charter plane was ready. He asked me to be at his house by noon. Sweeter words had not been spoken on the walkie-talkie since Alexander Graham Bell first threw his voice with the aid of his new-fangled gadget! But welcome as the decision was, carrying it out was fraught with danger. Since early morning, there were numerous reports of vehicles attempting to use the roads but being commandeered by soldiers and the occupants killed at whim. Far from having diplomatic immu-

other cars or vehicles. Only streams of people on foot, heading away from the city. They walked silently, and curiously looked at our car as we drove down the middle of the road. We were furtively watching them to see if anyone was raising a gun in our direction when we noticed a pick-up truck carrying half a dozen armed men heading towards us from the opposite direction. We held our breath as the distance between the two vehicles shrank. The men only waved at us as we passed. Alpha opened the gate when we reached his house. He looked haggard from days and nights of listening to endless reports from all the walkie-talkie holders. As security coordinator, it was his job to receive the bad news and offer whatever little advice or reassurance he could. As we waited for the others to arrive, the walkie-talkies kept bringing news of bombing here, an explosion there and the sound of small arms fire everywhere. Suddenly, the walkie-talkies fell silent. What we had dreaded finally happened. We lost our only means of communication with the pilots at the airport and other colleagues.

'I must have dozed off just before midnight when all of a sudden there was a deafening sound of explosions from every direction. Startled and frightened, I crouched in the most protected corner of my house and turned on the walkie-talkie.'

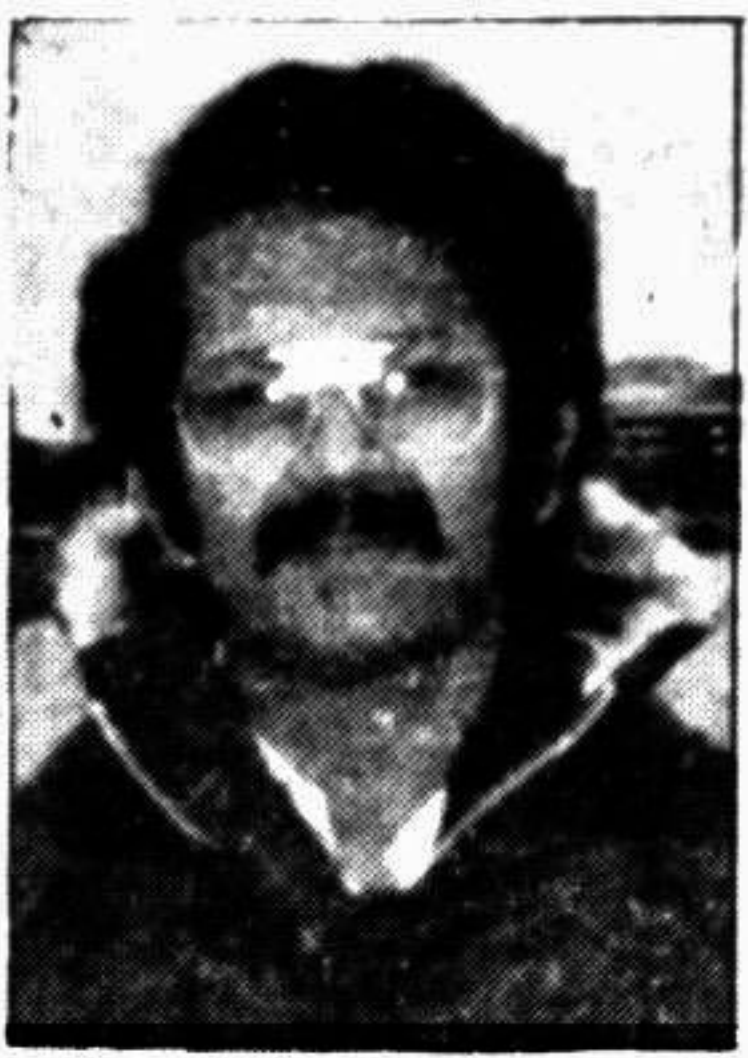
nity, vehicles belonging to expatriates were even more vulnerable since it was a safe bet that an expatriate vehicle did not carry men armed to the teeth. We were soft targets and likely to be profitable ones too because every Somali believed that we had huge amounts of hard currency and other valuables. The pilot and crew of our plane somehow made it to the airport, flying a huge white flag. They reported safe arrival and that the plane was ready. I wondered if I should tell my faithful driver right away or wait until an expatriate colleague came to pick me up. Afuweyne had been up all night also and was probably sleeping in his room. I decided to wait. I began to prepare for the final dash. I put on ordinary, comfortable clothes and canvas running shoes. I packed a small flight bag with a change of clothes, a packet of biscuits and a bottle of water. I decided against taking anything of value or anything too heavy, in case I had to run from my life. The sound of fighting continued intermittently. After what seemed like eternity, my colleague arrived to pick me up. Afuweyne was either sleeping in the annex or had gone out. I called his name halfheartedly a couple of times. I did not know how I could say goodbye to him. It was better that I left without looking into his eyes. The car, flying a UN flag, gingerly moved out of the residential area, darted across a major road and got on to another road. There were no

themselves were sufficiently satisfied to give the final clearance for our plane to take off.

It was half past five and the sun was disappearing over the horizon as the pilot cautiously positioned the aircraft on the runway. He revved the engines, the little plane shook mightily and began to move as fast as its wheels could carry it. On both sides of the runway, we could see soldiers setting up gun emplacements. The pilot pulled back the stick and banked the plane sharply over the ocean, moving as fast and as far away as possible from the doomed city and country. I closed my eyes and fell asleep. I was tired, very tired. The writer, a national of Bangladesh, was the Deputy Representative of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Somalia, when the African country was caught in the political turmoil described in his article. Mr Zaman who is currently on leave from UNHCR had previously served in Geneva, New York, Malaysia and Thailand. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the views of UNHCR.

A Book on Green Revolution by US-Based Dhaka Author

THE book, titled 'Investment Opportunities, Household Savings and Rates of Return on Investment: A Case Study of the Green Revolution in Bangladesh' is due to be published soon in the United States by the University Press of America, Inc (4720 Boston Way, Lanham, MD 20706, USA). It author: Prof. Abdullah Shibli, a national of Bangladesh, a former teacher at the University of Dhaka, who is now an Assistant Professor of Business Administration at Stonehill College, N. Easton, MA. Earlier, Dr Shibli was a doctoral fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC.



ety, or HYV technology) brought about the Green Revolution in the peasant economies of South Asia. This book explores the impact of the Green Revolution on the economic behavior of farmers in Bangladesh. Prof. Shibli analyzes the relationship between technological change and farm savings. He uses household survey data from rural Bangladesh and finds that household savings increased after farmers adopted the new technology. The book also includes a fascinating comparison of returns from productive investment, land speculation, moneylending and usufructuary mortgage. The book discusses the agricultural policy of the government of Bangladesh and different options to utilize the immense potential hidden in the farm sector and the innovative peasants.

In a forward to the book, a 159-page hardback cover publication, Prof. Gustav F. Papa-neck, Professor of Economics, Boston University says, "A major contribution on the relationship between technological change, and specifically the adoption of the HYV package, and savings Dr. Shibli

points out the implications for government policy ... an important contribution to our understanding of the functioning of agricultural households in Bangladesh and, by implication, elsewhere in South Asia." Introduction of the new seed-fertilizer-irrigation technology (the high-yielding vari-

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita, We were so much in love when we got married. What happened now is we hardly talk to each other. He is busy with his business and earns a lot of money. I occupy myself with the children, family, in-laws etc. We never have a conversation except when there is an important family decision to be made. It makes me very sad sometimes. Is it too late to do something about it? I feel dejected, isolated and bored. Shamina, Eskaton Garden, Dhaka. Dear Shamina, Your case is a classic example of what happens to many marriages when it is not taken care of. It takes time, effort and care to build an interesting, supportive and loving relationship. It also needs nurturing. Good marriages are made and does not "just happen". Start to talk to your husband about these issues. Seek his support, show him that you care. Maybe he does too, but cannot express himself. Go back to where you began and slowly come forward, you will perhaps find out how this problem started. Dear Mita, I am the only child of my parents and therefore live with them with my husband. We have had to listen to taunts and criticisms from family members. People say my husband is not capable of looking after his family so he keeps them with his in-laws. We have been married for only 2 years but this is creating friction between us and sometimes he wants to leave. My parents get very upset whenever we talk of leaving, what should I do? Please advise. Suma, Chittagong. Dear Suma, When men live with their in-laws they are called "Ghar Jamal" and ridiculed. When women live with their in-laws they are called the ideal "Bou". This is the way it has been in our society for a long time. You are being pulled from both directions. I would suggest that if your parents are not too old and do not need constant looking after and if you can afford to live independently then you should think of leaving. It might be painful for them but will work out better in the long run. Dear Mita, My mother-in-law is very young energetic and friendly. We get along well but sometimes her energy and friendliness creates problems. She insists on visiting my friends with me and sits in the living room whenever they come to my house. What should I do, how can I make her stop without hurting her feelings? Anonymous, Dhaka. Dear Anonymous, I am sure you realize how lucky you are to have a mother-in-law who is young, energetic and friendly instead of an old, sickly, nagging, interfering one. The problem you mention can be mildly annoying and there are ways of getting around it without hurting her feelings. Meet your friends in someone else's house, invite them over on days when she is away. I am sure you can manage to get together with your friends without her being present. Dear Mita, What can I do about servant problems? I have changed so many over the past few years. They are mean, ungrateful and dishonest. My children and husband never help in the house so there is always a lot of work, otherwise I would really not have any servants. Is there a way out of this situation? Shireen, Purana Paltan, Dhaka. Dear Shireen, There is really no way out of this problem. You will have to live with their ungratefulness, meanness, dishonesty as they live with our eccentricities. One of the problem is that we do not recognize that they are as human as we are and have similar desires, wants and aspirations. Their problem is because of the way life has treated them, they cannot trust anyone. Does it make sense at all? If it does then see if you can act on it. It will not be easy. Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toynbee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.