

BIOGRAPHY OF A COLONISED HEART By Rajan Khosa

Having been asked by Vertigo to write on *Dance of the Wind* (exactly what I had been trying to avoid for long) - I make excuses. But they say, write anything... anything really, and then quickly offer their own ideas on the kinds of things I could write about. No journal is ever devoid of its ideology, and why not?

Well, why not, I tell myself - let me try to write a critique of my own film. Don't I remember the two months of intense depression after I finished the film? Don't I remember the inadequacy I felt about its craft and content? Don't I remember the various intellectual efforts at its construction? Five years of agony, co-production between six countries, thirteen financiers, and my begging bowl.

But the other part of me is screaming. To get into a critical mode is to undermine the power of the irrational. To analyse my own creation is to kill it. It seems at this stage of my growth I wish to criticise 'irrationally', to speak only in terms of, I 'sense' this, I 'sense' that. For this is the time to renunciate ideas and theories, the time has come when only the muse must dictate. But enough of that for now, let me first introduce you to the reality of an independent filmmaker in the U.K. who secretly dreams of blockbusters.

My mind gets forever tired of seeking solutions to support a roof, some equipment and to buy some bread. I go round and round through various angles as to how I can make the most of my meagre resources. It wouldn't take long to end up on the street. And I wonder - is there any relief from a scheming mind that is constantly securing survival? Is there a 'giving up' that doesn't reduce one to an animal?

So when I think of my creative experiences, I see tunnels, only tunnels. I walk through the passage of these tunnels. After some darkness there is light, but darkness again. I am not allowed to go back or to stop. And what do I hold in my hands? - Two hearts. One is centuries old, a collective yearning of my ancestors where meditation and work were synonymous. The other heart is colonised, first by the Mogul and then by the British. After all, I am an Indian and the various tunnels which led me from the Third World to the First have been full of propaganda. And I have been the choiceless sucker. Miles Davis played through the speakers in the canteen. Like a hungry dog I was lapping it up, while my other heart was screaming and with revenge listening to Indian classical music, almost a sedative for the calm I needed.

After four years of design, in 1982 I left for the Indian film school in Pune hoping that it would at least bring me back to my roots. But because of the Indian alliance with the former

Soviet Union, this tunnel thrust upon me the syllabus from VGIK, Moscow. We hero-worshipped Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Kuleshov, and the European cinema of the sixties. We breathed heavily with the slowness of Tarkovsky's pace while being drunk with French auteur theory.

Something wasn't quite satisfied in me, not because all methodologies were imported, but cinema as an art form seemed inadequate to address the fundamental questions of human life. So with reluctance I said goodbye to cinema, like parting with a lover who hadn't loved me enough. I steeped myself in Indian philosophy for the next five years. This was probably the most Indian experience I ever had. In this tunnel, magic, meaning, starvation, levitation, all mingled with such ease that I was temporarily satisfied.

But my old lover was beckoning me again. I was convinced I wanted to return to art, I was convinced there was no ulterior meaning to life, it was only my youthful idealism that searched for certainty, a direct result of my haphazard growing up, an oppression of various tunnels which had landed me in this desperate state of mind. If life was 'maya', a dream, a play, then all I could do was to use cinema as a way of bringing self-awareness to the contents of my life. And hopefully understand what the hell was going on.

In 1990, when I ended up at the Royal College of Art in London for my 'Post-Experience Programme', they asked, 'Did I have a property?' I said, 'What property?' I wasn't exactly a landowner, rather a Hindu Brahmin whose ideal is to renounce all possessions. Well, what they meant was a screenplay. Because in the other part of the globe, Robert McKee and John Trauby were perfecting languages, tightening the screws so tight so as to make things and life bereft of any juice. What I soon discovered was that this tunnel was too revered and looked to the other side of the Atlantic for confirmation. It had no vision of its own, no self-respect. I took it upon myself to acquire the skills and perfect the craft of screenwriting, and I discovered to my horror, the most difficult thing in cinema is to write a good screenplay. No... to write a screenplay that works.

I can see, quite clearly, by now I have successfully avoided saying anything about *Dance of the Wind*. But maybe I have said a lot.



I cannot hide the fact that anyone who has travelled through so many tunnels would naturally search for what was truly their own. Pallavi, the protagonist in *Dance of the Wind*, has a desperate need to find her original voice. Unlike me she is bereft of a multitude of tunnels (because in cinema one has to sculpt out the inessential, build an argument and focus the question in its utter simplicity). Hence, brought up in a strict oral tradition, under a single propaganda, she questions what is truly her own.

In India, traditions are living, they are not something dead, archaic, to be locked away in a museum. A true tradition is something that constantly changes clothes and renews itself. Traditions that have survived in India for thousands of years have had the capacity and strength to do exactly that. Since Creation, Preservation and Destruction is the Hindu Trinity, Destruction is most essential, it is a moment of transformation. The very moment when the cycle of birth and creation begins. So we have to destroy our teachers to be born again. And in this birth we individuate the tradition, we make it our own, we bring it closer to our times while embracing all the very changes that seemed threatening to our elders.

That is why I respect the experience of the elders, but I question everything - every method, every process, every belief. I feel that is the spirit of a true disciple or learner - to turn inward in a meditative stance while the heart and mind remain open to the external world. For all you know you might find a Tara inside you, the little girl in the film, whose innocence and gift is untouched by the critical judgement of the mind. In whose body pure music resides like the beauty of a fresh mountain brook. And it is that strength we need to deal with the ever-continuing haphazard tunnels of contemporary life.