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Bageshree TRIVEDI

**Dramatizing Democracy through Cinematic
Counterdiscourse: A Comparative Analysis
of Govind Nihalani's *Aakrosh* (1980)
and Kundan Shah's *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (1983)**

Abstract: This paper analyses parallel cinema from the post-Emergency period in India, that dramatizes the politics of discourse and counterdiscourse in the 'democratic' nation, using Louis Althusser's framework of ideology and ideological state apparatuses. *Aakrosh* (1980) and *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (1983) mark a crucial period in the nation's consciousness. As the propensity of 'democracy' to collapse into an autocracy and the precarity of ideas like 'equality' and 'justice' were laid bare by the twenty-one months of state-imposed Emergency, despair, suspicion, and angst underscored the veneer of a stable political leadership in the country. Using two different modes of realism and satire respectively, these two films question structures of authority and power persisting in a seemingly egalitarian political structure—questions with abiding relevance in contemporary global politics. This paper analyses these two movies to examine the constitution of hegemony, the silence and self-estrangement of the margins, and 'hegemonic closure,' i.e., the nature of the state as an absolute Subject that functions to preclude a space for counter-voices. It, further, discusses the subversive employment of prevalent cinematic conventions to argue that the cinematic medium itself possesses the potential to transform into a potent medium for a variety of (counter)discourses.

Keywords: Indian cinema, counterdiscourse, ideology, democracy, Althusser.

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This paper analyses parallel cinema from the post-Emergency period in India, that dramatizes the politics of discourse and counterdiscourse in the 'democratic' nation. It employs Louis Althusser's framework of ideology and state apparatuses to engage in a comparative analysis of two films—*Aakrosh* (*The Cry of the Wounded*, Govind Nihalani 1980) and *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (*Who Pays the Piper*, Kundan Shah 1983), to exemplify:

- (i) on one hand, the functioning of the twin tools of ideology and repression, the constitution of hegemony, the silence and self-estrangement of the margins, and 'hegemonic closure,' and,
- (ii) on the other, the challenge presented to it by the form and content afforded by the cinematic medium.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part lays out the methodological framework of discourse and delineates the post-Emergency period in India as the context for the counterdiscourse of cinema. The second part analyses how the two films engage with the question of discourse specifically using Althusser's framework of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses. The third part lays out how the two films open up cinema as a space of/for counterdiscourse.

I. Discourse-Ideology

Purvis and Hunt have analysed how the concepts of "discourse" and "ideology" have remained intertwined in the varying critical-theoretical traditions of the West and thus, saturated "modern social theory" (473). The most significant contribution of Marxist social critique was an insight into the essentially economic nature of social relations whereby replication of power structures is achieved through reproduction of social relations. To explain the mechanism of such reproduction, the role of "ideology" became significant, as "[i]n its simplest and most pervasive form ideology presents the existing social relations as both natural and inevitable" (Purvis and Hunt 478). While classical Marxism failed to problematize ideology beyond an overarching characterization in terms of "false consciousness," Althusser overcame this reductionism to undertake a rigorous theorization of "ideology," bringing culture and language to significantly bear upon the reproduction of social relations (Purvis and Hunt 481). Answering the question of how ideology "naturalizes" social relations, he presented the "concept of 'interpellation', the mechanism through which ideology constitutes people as subjects (subjectivity + subjection)" (Purvis and Hunt 482). This not only offered an insight into how the subject is constituted within ideology (which then occasions his/her 'subject'ion), but how "interpellation...situates or places subjects within specific discursive contexts" (Purvis and Hunt 483). Thus, Althusser opened up the route to Foucault's conception of discourse.

Purvis and Hunt observe that “[t]here is a direct link between Althusser’s interpellation thesis and the concept of discourse that is too striking to be ignored,” and tentatively summarize the link thus: “it is through discourse that individuals are interpellated as subjects; ideology represents those specific forms of discourse whose contents are inadequate to articulate the interests of those social categories (classes, groups, etc.) who are constituted through those discourses” (483–84). Therefore, I shall analyse the functioning of discourse through the concept of interpellation, as well as the discontent that ideology or the “inadequacy” of discourse engenders.

I further acknowledge that “...only those who have been oppressed by a discourse can form a counterdiscourse” (Moussa and Scapp 93). In light of this, I shall now discuss how the post-Emergency period constituted a setting ripe for opening up of counterdiscourse(s), by locating content (of cinema) within discontent (with contemporary politics).

Post-Emergency India

Rochona Majumdar identifies three noteworthy events that impacted the second phase of the film society movement in India during 1965–1980: “The Naxalite agitation (1967–1971)” (754), “the 1971 Bangladesh war” (755), and “the National Emergency declared by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975” (756). Succeeding this tumult, the 1980s in India are marked by the restoration of political order. The first general elections after the infamous Emergency period were held in 1977, resulting in the victory of the Janata Party by a vast majority, thereby dethroning the single-party hegemony of the Indira Gandhi-led Congress. However, the Janata party failed to establish stability. By 1979, the Janata coalition succumbed to infighting following the death of its leader. Subsequently, the then president Neelam Sanjiva Reddy dissolved the Parliament and fresh elections were held in 1980, bringing Indira Gandhi back to power. However, this victory did anything but attest to the absolute faith of the people in the Congress party.

Following the instability and loss of direction experienced under the rather brief rule of the Janata Party, the only hope remained in restoring to rule a figure who had successfully governed the nation during previous terms. Further, some promise lay in the fact that the Congress party was now obliged to nurse the wounds of the Emergency and restore Indira Gandhi’s image as a capable leader. Thus, the electoral victory reflected a case of elimination of the weaker alternative, rather than absolute preference for a strong one on the part of the people. Hardly three years post-Emergency, it was the logical state of the masses’ psyche that they bore the still fresh memory of those terrifying twenty-one months. Moreover, the true motive behind the call for Emergency was disputed. Although internal security threat and economic crisis were the official reasons cited, suspicions were rife that the move

was aimed at acquitting Indira Gandhi of the election fraud case of which she had been declared guilty by the Allahabad High Court. These suspicions were grounded in several amendments made in the Constitution by Gandhi during the Emergency, to exculpate herself from the case. Such manipulation of constitutional provisions and the ensuing dictatorial rule unleashed the reality of how a democratically elected leader could murder democracy itself in a bid to retain power. Thus, people were compelled to restore Gandhi to power in the interest of political stability, while still seething with anger towards this perpetrator of atrocities during the Emergency. As a result, a state of despair, suspicion, and angst, under the veneer of a stable leadership, marked the nation's political consciousness in the early 1980s.

Govind Nihalani's *Aakrosh* and Kundan Shah's *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*, that arrived during the same period, capture this transitional period in the masses' consciousness. *Aakrosh* depicts an idealistic young lawyer who has procured his first case as the defence of a 'tribal' convicted with the murder of his own wife, and his subsequent struggle to discover the truth behind the murder. *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* is the story of two idealistic professional photographers, hired by the editor of a newspaper to spy on a corrupt builder. They uncover some dirty secrets in the process and resolve to get to the heart of the truth. By replaying the familiar cycle of 'faith in the government—encountering shattering reality about state machinery—compulsive re-investment of faith in the same leadership,' the two films function as a microcosm of the modern Indian state in the 1980s. Thus, I argue that the conflict(s) depicted in the two films serve to dramatize Indian democracy.

Thereby, I use State as the entry point of my analysis. Marxist theory conceptualizes the State "as a function of *State power*"; consequently, "[t]he whole of the political class struggle revolves around the State..., i.e. the seizure and conservation of State power by a certain class or by an alliance between classes or class fractions" (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 94).¹ State power is conserved using two different forms of state apparatus which may employ either coercion, embodied in the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), which include "the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, etc.," or deception, embodied in the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), including "the religious ISA...the educational ISA...the family ISA...the legal ISA...the political ISA...the trade-union ISA...the communications ISA...the cultural ISA" (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 96). The RSA functions through violence, while the ISA through interpellation.

Thereby, I begin by analysing how the two films dramatize the functioning of the State in their depiction of the nature and structure of state power and state apparatus(es).

II. Domination and Interpellation

Aakrosh is set in Kondachi Wadi, in rural Maharashtra, divided between a tribal settlement in the peripheral hilly region and a ‘civilized’ settlement in the central region. This combination makes it representative of the Indian social formation, where “political power is shared by a coalition of bourgeoisie, rural rich and bureaucratic elite” (Prasad 7). In Kondachi Wadi, political power is retained by a similar nexus of local officers—local member of the legislative assembly Ganpat Rao, President of the District Committee Bhonsle, and forest officer More; representatives of the law and police—the Deputy Superintendent of Police, and public prosecutor Dussane; and the established Dr Vasant Patil. This nexus is fundamentally based on protection of mutual interests and maintenance of collective dominance, notwithstanding any scruples of morality, social responsibility, or constitutional duty. This state of affairs has been effectively symbolized through the game of cards—a regular pastime of the members of the ruling coalition. This trope affords several layers of meaning. Firstly, the game of cards represents that the sole objective of the members in their respective professional domains is satisfaction of self-interest through successful manipulation of the entities under their power; in other words, “use of the State apparatus by the classes (or alliance of classes, or of fractions of classes) holding State power as a function of their class objectives” (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 95). This ‘apparatus’ would be articles of the law for Dussane, judicial decisions for the judge, the tribals for More, and so on. The implications of their decisions for others are of little or no importance to them. This approach is illustrated in Dussane’s agitation over losing a game of cards and his advice to Kulkarni—his apprentice preparing for his first independent case—that “a player must play the game and play to win” (00:19:14–00:19:18). There is no allusion to winning by ‘fair play.’ Secondly, the insertion of the game in their daily routine conveys that such manipulation is a way of life for them; in other words, they display “the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression” (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 89).

Further, *Aakrosh* offers a keen insight into how “submission to the ruling ideology for the workers” is ensured (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 89). The tribals from the hilly region are employed as wage labourers for lumbering activity in the forest. While the state employee, i.e., the forest officer, must possess the sole power over regulation of the means of production—the tribals under his aegis—the moribund feudal system continues to persist in rural areas. Hence, the officer must function in tandem with the landowners and their foremen to operate the lumbering activity. The underlying semblance between feudalism and democracy—two apparently contradictory systems—is revealed by the ease with which they collaborate. It becomes obvious, then, that the fundamental goal of wealth extraction

from and subordination of masses by the powerful class remains constant, irrespective of the different labels—democracy or feudalism—attached to various modes of socio-political organisation. These collaborative forces own the sole means of subsistence of the tribals, who must submit to the wish and will of those who control the means of production. The owners of the means, in turn, try to extract surplus value from labour by subjecting all the labourers, irrespective of gender, age, or health, to harsh physical labour of equal intensity and duration.

When the convicted tribal Lahanya Bhikhu is in prison, his unmarried younger sister, entrusted with caring for Bhikhu's infant after the death of Bhikhu's wife Nagi, is obliged to work along with the child to provide for her and the child's nourishment. The only other member of the family left to assist her is her old father whose physical condition does not deem him fit for the strain involved in chopping huge trees. Yet, he must work to compensate for the absence of Bhikhu's income. Further, the wages provided in exchange of this labour are insufficient for providing wholesome nutrition to the labourers, who also suffer difficult conditions of living. Thus, surplus monetary value is extracted by the owners through minimization of material means of subsistence offered and expansion of total physical labour extracted.

'Physical exploitation' takes on a different intensity and significance when the forest as a site of work doubles up as a site for the sexual exploitation of the workforce by the 'employers,' symbolized through a packet of biscuits offered to a female labourer, coupled with the remark "Maalik bahut khush hai tumse" ("The boss is very happy with you"; 00:38:45–00:38:47), which indicates that she is the next victim of the landlord's sexual advances. Owing to ignorance of this mechanism, Nagi falls prey to the landlord's crooked tricks, resulting in her rape and consequent murder by the landlord and his company. Physical assault and murder are two clear manifestations of the Repressive State Apparatus which "functions by violence" (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 96). The awareness of this signification explains the reluctance of Bhikhu's sister in accepting the packet of biscuits brought to her by one of the foremen. This entails that the exploited, in spite of being aware, cannot register their resentment against the exploiters in the form of organized protest owing to the expropriation of the means of production by the exploiters. Thus, the labour force is denied its ultimate and only right—to protest—and is condemned to a survival in silent suffering.

This denial of a voice is depicted on a subtle level in the silence of Bhiku's father and on a magnified level in the silence of Bhikhu himself. Bhikhu's father remains silent in spite of Kulkarni's repeated attempts to extract information from him that could aid Bhikhu's defence. This silence is kept even when the foreman offers his daughter the symbolic packet of biscuits. Similarly, the conviction of Bhikhu and awareness of Bhikhu's imminent hanging agonizes him, but he continues to suffer silently and succumbs to his physical exhaustion and mental torment only in death. His silence testifies to the absolute power of the RSA that offers the

labourers an option only between an exploited survival and forced death. Bhikhu's silence, on the other hand, holds a different significance that will be elaborated later in the paper.

Some of the most striking visuals in the film are the prison scenes of Bhikhu wrenching and twisting his body restlessly under the mental affliction brought by the memory of his deceased wife. The situation of the exploited contrived by the agents of repression is clear: for the exploited, preservation of the only capital in one's possession, the body, supersedes all extra-economic considerations, such as justice and equality. In this way, the functioning of RSAs ultimately results in alienation of labour from the act of production, as well as the product itself. Mamkootam summarizes the mechanism of alienation thus:

At work, the worker... does not feel content but is unhappy; does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. He feels at home when he is not working. His labour is coerced. Thus, the relation of labour to the act of production and to the product of his labour is a relation of the worker to an activity alien to him. Work becomes suffering; strength becomes weakness; begetting becomes emasculating; the worker's own physical and mental energy, his personal life, is turned against him. The result is self-estrangement, in addition to estrangement from that which he produces. (98–99)

This self subjected to self-estrangement may be understood at three levels: (1) the individual self, (2) the family unit as self, and (3) the entire class of the exploited as self. *Aakrosh* offers an insight into alienation at all three levels of selfhood. Alienation of the individual self is illustrated in Bhikhu refusing to divulge the truth to Kulkarni in spite of Kulkarni's assurance that the confession was crucial for Bhikhu's acquittal. At the cremation of his father, Bhikhu kills his own sister, on being unsure of her security in absence of a protective companion. Thirdly, during Bhikhu's trial, we witness self-estrangement on the third level when one of Dussane's witnesses—a woman from Bhikhu's own community—testifies against him. Besides, Dussane himself, who belongs to the lower caste, but has been mobilized upward in the social hierarchy owing to his profession, is indifferent to the protection of the interests of members of his own caste. He pointedly advises Kulkarni against getting involved in caste politics. Thus, by possessing absolute power over labour, the state machinery brings about self-alienation at all three aforementioned levels, and ensures reproduction of existing relations of production via direct dominance, both in material and physical terms; in other words, by exercising RSAs over the wage labourers. It could be, thus, argued that owing to the complete absence of any functioning of ideology in the process of 'subject'ion of the tribals, they seem to be deemed non-subjects, given that "the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological" 698).

In contrast with the tribal workforce stand the rational, 'independent' and idealist thinkers—Bhaskar Kulkarni, the apprentice lawyer; and Samant, the editor of *Rashtrabhit* newspaper and owner of the Rashtriya Press, respectively. Their educational and professional backgrounds suggest their constitution as subjects by the ISAs. Both Kulkarni and Samant are educated individuals and, thereby, expected to have undergone a prolonged interpellation by the educational ISA. Their professions indicate their interpellation in the functioning of the legal and the communications ISAs. Moreover, Kulkarni being an upper-caste Brahmin, his family ISA can be assumed to be structured with a social attitude towards the maintenance of caste hierarchy and subordination of 'lower' castes. Thus, sufficient conditioning in multiple ISAs demands that the two figures turn out to be ideal subjects and fulfill their ideologically imagined role in society. Being a Brahmin,² as well as Dussane's apprentice, Kulkarni is expected to interpret the law to protect the interests of the ruling class, and Samant is expected to justify the ruling class ideology through the agency of the press.

Both Samant and Kulkarni espouse the "idealism" through which ideology typically forecloses its critique. Yet, while the "ideal" grand narratives of ideology seek to universalize it as "equal for all," their idealism ironically lays bare ideology's "*directionality*" whereby it "works to favour some and to disadvantage others" (Purvis and Hunt 478). Samant uses the power of the press to expose the dirty secrets of the local big shots. Kulkarni, on the other hand, is hell bent on fighting his first case with complete integrity as an advocate whose only duty is to bring justice to the wronged. Thus, both these figures impede the smooth reproduction of domination and turn out to be "bad subjects" (Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological" 701). In the trajectories of Kulkarni and Samant, one can observe the struggle between the "critical conception of ideology," which serves to mystify and naturalize existing social relations as "universal and eternal," on one hand, and the "sociological conception of ideology" whereby "[i]deology is the result of objective social position and, [...] as a sphere or arena of struggle, a conception that opens the theoretical door to notions of a multiplicity of competing 'ideologies,'" on the other (Purvis and Hunt 478).

To take the example of Kulkarni, one can see the critical dimension of ideology at work in his complete faith in the 'absolute Subject' which here stands for the state, the judiciary, and the constitution that are 'supposed' to protect all its subjects by a fair, just, and equal treatment. His initial acceptance of the reality refracted through ideological lenses, as the ultimate reality becomes apparent during his first interrogation of Bhikhu. Some of his initial questions are: "pehla khun kiya hai tumne?" ("Is this the first murder that you have committed?"; 00:16:01–00:16:03), "tumne apni gharvaali ka khun kyun kiya?" ("Why did you murder your wife?"; 00:16:36–00:16:39). Thus, all his questions are built on the initial assumption that Bhikhu has indeed killed his wife, dramatizing what Althusser calls "the elementary ideological effect" imposing its obviousness and "which we cannot *fail to recognize* and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out...: 'That's

obvious! That's right! That's true!" ("Ideology and Ideological" 698). Bhikhu maintains a stiff silence in response to such questions. Thus, in the breakdown of the 'discourse' between Kulkarni and Bhikhu, one can observe the inadequacy of ideology, which by definition is the discourse of only a specific social class/category. Further, after asking the above questions, Kulkarni asks Bhikhu to speak freely without any hesitation or reservation, mimicking the mechanism through which ideology first imposes limits on freedom and then insists that the subject act 'freely.'

Yet, as Purvis and Hunt point out, "discourses 'channel' rather than 'control' the discursive possibilities" (486). The sociological conception of ideology concedes that the limits of discourse can be encountered, and alternative discourses may emerge, as can be observed in Kulkarni's arguments with Dussane. Dussane repeatedly tries to discourage Kulkarni from delving too deep into the case, summarizing Bhikhu's case as a "watertight case" that offers "no chance for defense" (00:19:46–00:19:49). Kulkarni initially aspires to win the case to bolster his professional reputation. Thus, the need to discover the truth is economic rather than ethical in nature. Taking note of this fact, efforts are also made to lure Kulkarni to a case in Bombay, which would bring him higher remuneration and boost his professional worth. But, by then, Kulkarni's initial self-serving motive in uncovering Bhikhu's truth has translated into an internal moral need to expose the apparently respectable personalities of the area.

The pervasiveness of the power structure, however, is revealed at the very moment that Kulkarni seems to have reached its limits. No sooner does Kulkarni refuse to leave the case than the RSAs are mobilized against him. While his persecution is initially restricted to a man trailing Kulkarni everywhere since the day that the latter approached Samant regarding the case; violence is unleashed when Kulkarni explicitly refuses to get accommodated by the ISAs. Initially, Kulkarni's residence is attacked and later he is physically assaulted. In this way, *Aakrosh* vividly depicts the collaborative functioning of the twin categories of State Apparatuses.

Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro, on the other hand, offers keener insight into the contiguous space between ideology and discourse, by showcasing how "the interpellation of subject positions operates systematically to reinforce and reproduce dominant social relations" wherein "discourse [acts] as *process* and ideology as *effect*" (Purvis and Hunt 496–497). Its narrative is front and centre about the modern Indian state, given that the story is located in the urban metropolis of Bombay. At the centre of the narrative are the two professional photographers, Vinod and Sudhir, who have recently set up Beauty Photo Studio in the prestigious Heera Panna complex, in the Haji Ali area. At the beginning of the story, the two have been waiting for two and a half hours for the invitees of their studio inauguration to arrive. In spite of the zero turnout, the duo does not lose hope, and they boost their self-confidence by singing the inspirational song "Hum honge kaamyab..." ("We shall overcome...")

(00:02:08–00:02:35). The spectacle of the two singing the song in unison, with puffed-out chests, chins up and faces incandescent with an expression of inextinguishable hope and courage recalls the parallel or rather ‘source’ image of a school compound with scores of children filed in neat rows, standing in an identical posture with heads high, reciting the same song in unison. This visual signifier recalls Althusser’s thesis regarding the “the School” as a silent yet “dominant Ideological State Apparatus” (*Lenin and Philosophy* 104–106). Further, the practice of standing and singing in unison certain songs that inculcate specific values, illustrates the “rituals” within which the “material existence of an ideological apparatus” is inscribed to create the emblematic ideological effect whereby “[t]he individual in question behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which ‘depend’ the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject” (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological” 696). Vinod and Sudhir can, therefore, be identified as the “ideal subjects” who “freely” view the world in the “image” of the reality that the ISAs have trained them into seeing.

The zero turnout of invitees at the inauguration is a succinct commentary on the capitalist social formation, where social relations are essentially utility-based. Vinod and Sudhir are neither big shots in their professions nor do they have affiliations with any socially or politically powerful figure. Besides, they are ethically strong, conscientious professionals and firm believers in the ideological slogan: “ise hamesha yaad rakho: kadi mehnat aur imaandaari ka fal hamesha meetha hota hai” (“Always remember this: hard work and honesty are always rewarded well”; 00:02:37–00:02:44). Reality knocks on their idealistic doors soon, when they encounter a large group of people approaching their studio, who are on their way across the street to Super Photo Studio to be inaugurated by Mr. Kamdar, assistant editor of the *Khabardar* magazine, hailed a ‘friend’ to the Super Photo Studio. While Vinod and Sudhir try to divert the crowd to the inauguration of their own studio, the expensive snacks and drinks they had reserved for their guests are vandalised by a miscreant hired by Super Photo Studio. However, Vinod and Sudhir do not confront the owners on the issue and leave them alone after some petty harassment. Such a response confirms the paralyzing effect of ideology. The subjects Vinod and Sudhir do not take the task of wresting justice for themselves in their own hands but choose to depend on some abstract higher authority for meting out justice and equality to subjects. Vinod’s slogan “achchai ki jeet hogi aur buraai ki haar” (“Virtue will be victorious over vice.”; 01:19:10–01:19:13) suggests their submission to the ‘absolute Subject’—which may be God, who is believed to render poetic justice, or the legal system that rewards law-abiding citizens, or the police, who ensure the just enforcement of law. Here we see the realization of two functions of ideology: “1. the interpellation of ‘individuals’ as subjects; 2. their subjection to the Subject;” (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological” 701) whereby they fulfil “the role of the exploited” who must act

according to the transcendent ideas of the “good,” “just” and “right” structured into their “‘highly-developed’ ‘professional’, ‘ethical’, ‘civic’, ‘national’ and a-political consciousness” (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 105).

The duo’s first assignment offered by the *Khabardar* magazine involves capturing images of the underhand activities of the rival construction magnates, Tarneja and Ahuja. As they begin work on their assignment, the power structure begins to unravel before them.

Power is shared typically by the functionaries of the RSAs which, here, consist of the commissioner D’Mello and later, the assistant commissioner Srivastava; as well as ISAs consisting of the owners of capital—Tarneja and Ahuja; and the editor of the *Khabardar* magazine, Shobha. They further represent how “coalition functions through protocols which reflect the pressures that each element of the protocol brings to bear on the other elements in the pursuit of its own interests” (Prasad 12). Tarneja’s use of adulterated construction materials and infringement upon the state sanctioned construction guidelines would not be possible unless the commissioner of police D’Mello permits these violations in return for monetary and material benefits. D’Mello, in turn, provides for his hedonistic extravaganza by accepting favours in cash and kind from both Tarneja and Ahuja, thereby engaging the two in an incessant game of one-upmanship. D’Mello can afford such manipulation owing to the power vested in him by the state and Tarneja and Ahuja can enjoy their monopoly by the liberties permitted by D’Mello, but none of these can sustain if the journalist Shobha exposes them to the public through her magazine. Therefore, she must be bribed to maintain silence. Thereby, to avoid jeopardizing their respective powerful positions, D’Mello must please both the construction rivals; Tarneja and Ahuja must cater to the demands of D’Mello and Shobha; and Shobha must allow the profligacy to proliferate to source scandalous content for her magazine, as well as to blackmail Tarneja for money. Having established the ruling coalition thus, it would be misguided to designate the activities of these proprietors of power as ‘corrupt’ in ideological jargon. This is because the ‘directionality’ of ideology is oriented to serve the exploiter rather than the exploited. Tarneja underlines this when he reminds an employee that “kaanun aam aadmi ke liye hota hai, Tarneja ke liye nahi” (“The law applies to the common man, not to Tarneja”; 00:16:13–00:16:15).

Secondly, “no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses” (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 98). Therefore, these individuals, as nodal units in the smooth operation of power, must not only maintain their positions as functionaries of the state apparatuses, but perform their roles as agents of “exploitation,” “repression,” or “professional ideologist” (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 105) with great “integrity” because “ideology never says, ‘I am ideological.’” (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological” 700). Thus, the foremost requisite for maintenance of ideology is to furbish the reality in ideological terms, or in other words, to

process ideology through discourse. Correspondingly, D'Mello, while accepting a gift from Tarneja, points out to him in broken Hindi that "hamaara kuchh usul hai, ham ek zimmedar officer hun" ("I have some ethics, I am a responsible officer"; 00:18:05–00:18:10). In a series of manipulations to secure the tender for the lucrative project of construction of the flyover, Tarneja murders D'Mello and literally buries this secret under the flyover. However, during the inauguration of the same, he narrates his enterprise as an altruistic act aimed at the benefit of the people with these words: "Yeh pul ...bambai shehar ki unnati mein ek bahut badaa kadam hai...yeh kisi ek aadmi ke liye nahi balki pure samaaj ke liye hai....kai garib log ek din iss pul ke niche apna ghar basayenge" ("This flyover...is a huge step towards the development of the city of Bombay...it is not meant for a single person but for the entire society... many poor people shall build their homes under this flyover one day."; 01:10:50–01:11:27). In this way, Tarneja even legitimizes the poor building their homes under such flyovers in the absence of well-constructed shelters provided by the government. Shobha projects herself as a champion of the masses devoted to social welfare, while she craftily uses Vinod and Sudhir's unconditional loyalty to serve her clandestine purposes. When Vinod protests on the grounds that she offers them very meager remuneration for their work, while constantly putting them in precarious situations that jeopardize their lives, she artfully convinces Vinod that she looked upon him as an "imaandar, bahadur, aur jaanbaaz" ("honest, brave, and dauntless"; 00:44:18–00:44:20) companion in her fight against corruption. This scene explicitly parodies the process of ideological interpellation. The end of interpellation is recognition by the subject that "'it really is he' who is meant by the hailing" (Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological" 700). Shobha does not mention even once that the man she considered her "saathi" ("companion/comrade"; 00:44:16) is Vinod. Yet, Vinod recognizes that 'it really is he' who Shobha is signifying. Thus, one can observe how discourse functions as "ways of constituting knowledge...[that] constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (Weedon 108). In this case, a purely economic and utility-based relationship between Shobha and Vinod is cast into the discourse of solidarity in the sacred fight for a cause.

Upon discovering the truth about the malpractices of the ruling coalition, Vinod and Sudhir set out to punish them at the hands of the law, oblivious of the legal system's function as an RSA. And this RSA, in the form of the assistant commissioner Srivastava, instead convicts Vinod and Sudhir for sabotaging the flyover—an act that led to its collapse—and both are sentenced to a six-month term in prison. Althusser's observation that "what thus seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology" ("Ideology and Ideological" 700) acquires a different resonance here. Vinod and Sudhir divulging the entire truth to the inspector at the theatre reveals their belief that the state, as an entity above and beyond the nodes of the power network like Tarneja and the commissioner, possesses the power to punish them. However, law reveals the "double 'functioning'...by

repression and by ideology” of any State apparatus (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 98) that must only work towards the consolidation and not dissipation of the power structure. Therefore, although seemingly beyond the reach of ideological manipulation, it falls within it—a phenomenon that may also be termed ‘hegemonic closure,’ i.e., the nature of the state as an absolute Subject that functions to preclude a space for counter-voices. Thus, when the escape from ISA leads back to the RSA, as in the case of Vinod and Sudhir, the ineluctability of ideology is revealed.

This ineluctability or ‘hegemonic closure’ is replicated by the cyclical structure³ of the plots of both *Aakrosh* and *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*. The narratives open by displaying an exploitative state of affairs under the prevalent power structure, the protagonist(s) resist the hegemony exercised by the powerful and attempt to bring about a change; however, their rebellion is quelled by the collaborative employment of RSAs and ISAs, and the narratives end with the persistence of effortless domination by the power structure.

III.

Does that entail that standing away from or against the prevalent ideology or discursive formation is a precluded possibility? The answer lies in turning to the form rather than content of cinema.

Rose avers that “[h]uman beings are not the unified subjects of some coherent regime of domination that produces persons in the form in which it dreams. On the contrary, they live their lives in a constant movement across different practices that address them in different ways” (140). The dominant discursive context only offers a “set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised” (Foucault qtd in Moussa and Scapp 101). As pointed out earlier, discourses only channel “the discursive possibilities, facilitating some things being said and others being impeded” (Purvis and Hunt 486). Therefore, discourse cannot “swallow up” counterdiscourse as the latter “is not a *theory* at all,” but the “result of *practical theorizing*” hoping to “to clear a discursive space in which those who were previously silenced might speak up or ...produce their own counterdiscourse” (Moussa and Scapp 90).

Aakrosh and *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* dramatize the functioning of ideology and state dominance within a ‘democracy’ and reiterate its irrefragability, despite attempts by a few to subvert it. Consequently, the very depiction of ideology as ideology, robs it of its obviousness, and becomes the first step towards the subversion of ideology, which constitutes the initial act of counterdiscourse as being “clearing away oppressive discourses” (Moussa and Scapp 93).

Secondly, while the attempts at rebellion by the protagonist(s) in both movies are not successful, the containment of their transgressive activities requires the mobilization of all the agents of power. This has been portrayed quite literally in *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* in the climax

where Srivastava, Tarneja and his aides, Ahuja and Shobha, run after Vinod and Sudhir, who have secured D'Mello's corpse and threaten to expose their literally exhumed secrets. Such large-scale mobilization implies the precarity of discourse. This precarity reveals itself in *Aakrosh* when Bhikhu ultimately gets instigated by Kulkarni's words and relates the truth to him. The elimination of the dread of the ruling class in Bhikhu marks the breakdown of the Repressive State Apparatus. The film also presents a more explicit and intense presence of counterdiscourse in the figure of the Marxist social worker who is trying to organise the tribals for collective protest to revolutionize the existing social hierarchy.

Further, Bhikhu's rigid posture and fixed gaze when Kulkarni is interrogating him can be read as his refusal (or inability) to narrate his truth in the discourse recognized by the ruling class. Discourse has been understood as providing the link "missing from Althusser" of language as a material practice of domination (Purvis and Hunt 482). However, Bhikhu's refusal to engage in any discourse (read: communication) makes him stand outside discourse (read: limited language that "impedes some things from being said"). The severity of his repression is expressed by the extreme character of the silence behind which lies Bhikhu's awareness that, if he reveals the truth about the culpability of the landlord and his men in the murder of his wife, the security of his sister and father would be jeopardized. This 'refusal to comply' is explicitly communicated when Bhikhu kills his own sister with an axe, thereby denying her sexual predators their easily accessible prey. This killing is followed by a loud cry of angst, which, again, is a non-linguistic expression. Interestingly, Bhikhu's positioning in non-language signals his status as a non-subject— one beyond the pale of ideology and the confines of discourse. Thus, silence symbolizes both "the effect of repression," and "an instrument of rebellion," thereby illustrating how "every discursive formation is in some degree open, and is characterised not by unity... but by dispersion, choice, division and opposition" (Purvis and Hunt 492).

Thirdly, the cinematic idiom employed by the two films is equally significant in the constitution of counterdiscourse. *Aakrosh* employs the idiom of realism which functions in sharp contrast with ideology. Ideology consists in the distortion of reality, posturing to be the truth. In other words, it is a reality that deliberately gives itself to be seen. On the contrary, in Christian Metz's words, realism represents "a world that is seen without giving itself to be seen" (qtd. in Prasad 72). Prasad's work on the Hindi film illustrates the strategies through which cinematic apparatus works as ideological apparatus by promoting the state propaganda. The New Cinema, which employed the mode of realism, always posited the feudal society in the past (Prasad 197). In this regard, *Aakrosh* directly challenges the state propaganda by taking a contemporary newspaper report regarding the murder of a tribal woman in Kondachi Wadi area of Maharashtra as the point of departure for the story, and pronouncedly reversing the function of the prevalent mode of realism by employing it to locate the feudal order in the present instead of the past.

On the other hand, *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* uses satire to constitute a counterdiscourse and employs several modes of humour, including slapstick and black comedy, allowing the heightening of reality through exaggeration. One of the most memorable and emblematic sequences of this film is when the characters in hot pursuit of D'Mello's corpse enter a theatre where the scene of "Draupadi's *cheerharan*" ("the disrobing of Draupadi") from the Mahabharata⁴ is being enacted. D'Mello's corpse is sent on the stage dressed as Draupadi and bedlam breaks loose as all characters go onto stage with whatever available costume they can find, in an attempt to get their hands on this 'Draupadi,' while playing the 'role' dictated by the costume. This serves as a striking and quite literal drama'tization of how "[e]ach mass ejected *en route* is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in class society" (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* 105). Further, the caricaturing of one of the most revered political epics of India alludes to how the democratic political organization has been reduced to a laughing stock by the very people who are expected to uphold it. The functioning of ideology is also creatively rendered through a role reversal, where the actual exploiters—Tarneja and Ahuja—enact the role of the exploited Pandavas,⁵ and the actual exploited—Vinod and Sudhir—appear in the role of the exploitative Kauravas⁶. Draupadi, here, symbolizes democracy, which the new Duryodhana (Vinod) refuses to violate, while the Pandavas insist that she be violated, because it is necessary to 'stick to the script'⁷. The script here symbolizes the discursive possibilities within which everybody must act. Vinod refuses to do so and "that is wicked" (Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological" 696); therefore his moral high ground casts him ironically as the 'wicked Duryodhana' in the 'epic battle' of modern Indian democracy.

The organisation of the spectatorial gaze in *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* serves a significant purpose. The relay of the gaze is: spectator → Vinod and Sudhir → agents of the state. This ensures that the spectator identifies with Vinod and Sudhir's position and their fight against corruption. This identification entails that, when the protagonists encounter their unexpected downfall, the spectator also undergoes the feeling of being defeated and coming face-to-face with the unsettling reality. Further, when Vinod and Sudhir mediate the spectatorial relay, their role of spying on the activities of Tarneja and Ahuja offers the viewer the relish of "voyeuristic contemplation" (Prasad 203) of the clandestine world of the ruling class. But later, the frontal representation employed in Tarneja's sinister announcement of Vinod and Sudhir's fate, as well as the last shot, where the duo symbolically slit their throats and look straight into the camera, entails a direct confrontation with the spectator who can no longer relish the convenient role of a bystander or mute spectator to reality but must answer or 'take a stand.'

Both the films begin with close shots of the protagonists to signify that the films bring into focus the reality of the oppressed. The use of the camera as an internal device in *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*—that comes to Vinod and Sudhir's aid in discovering realities invisible to the

naked eye—serves as an indirect comment on how cinema uses the medium of the camera to narrate previously unnoticed realities. The penultimate scene of *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* involves an extreme long shot of Vinod and Sudhir who almost get dissolved in the crowd. This not only signifies their position in the society but also the distance and indifference the audience must adopt towards them, also summed up in the ironic title of the film, which literally translates as “Forget it, folks”. However, indifference is an impossible option after having encountered the oppressive reality.

Conclusion

Cinema is a mode of cultural production with arguably the widest outreach, accommodating the lettered and unlettered masses alike. Consequently, it offers the widest scope for promotion of (state) propaganda. At the same time, the ‘truth-effect’ that a camera produces, turns cinema into an ideal discursive medium. Prasad writes on how the films during the Emergency period employed the developmental aesthetic to promote the Congress program of socialist transformation while “[t]he actual achievements of this program were of course limited and were cancelled out by the atrocities during the Emergency” (210). It is significant to note that both the films analysed here were financed by “the state-sponsored Film Finance Corporation”⁸ leading to a questioning of their counter-discursive potential (Majumdar 763). However, this fact merely intensifies my argument about how the same medium that can act as a ‘mobilizing state apparatus’ can also mobilize the masses against the state. *Aakrosh* and *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* use cinema to achieve “the practical goal of a counterpublic” (Loehwing and Motter 233), which is “to publicize alternative interpretations of identities, interests, and needs” (Asen qtd. in Loehwing and Motter 233).

While democracy is understood to stand for ‘liberty and equality,’ for Althusser it is merely a “political ideological State apparatus” (*Lenin and Philosophy* 103). Post-Emergency India was a nation that had been rudely awoken to the nature of ‘democracy’ as a system constituted with both ideological and repressive state apparatuses. The dominant discourse of democracy had been laid bare, setting the stage for counterdiscourse. I argue that parallel cinema seized this stage, fulfilling the role of counterpublics, both in terms of “challeng[ing] current configurations of political power,” as well as “what Habermas sees as the democratic potential of public spheres—their ability to subvert domination by reinventing publicity and authority” through the use of rhetoric (Loehwing and Motter 229).

Firstly, by unmasking the functioning of discourse, the two films clear up oppressive discourses and open up a space for counterdiscourse. Subsequently, they reverse the modes used to bolster ideology to subvert it. Thus, they employ the outreach and techniques of cinema to dramatize rather than naturalize democracy, and constitute what hooks terms

“talking back” (qtd. in Moussa and Scapp 104), which is “tantamount to counterdiscourse” (Moussa and Scapp 104). The films centre their narratives on the excluded, as well as ‘included, yet invisible’ groups. Yet, they simply relate the stories of these groups rather than offering solutions, and thus constitute not only “talking back” but “speaking *with* others” (rather than *for* others) (Moussa and Scapp 106). They “keep a counterdiscourse ‘counter’” rather than inevitably becoming discourses (Moussa and Scapp 106).

Thus, parallel cinema in the post-Emergency period in India captures the potential of cinema as a dynamic and potent medium for both the proliferation and propagation of counterdiscourse(s).

End Notes

1. For the purpose of simplicity, the dynamics of class and caste interconnections in the Indian society have been left out of the discussion.
2. An upper caste.
3. There is no way out of a circle/cycle, just as there is no way out of discourse/ideology.
4. One of the two oldest literary epics of India, and a pervasive cultural text, prevalent in the masses’ consciousness in varying forms of myth, fable, lore, and history.
5. The morally upright sons of the king Pandu, who represent the good and the just in the epic.
6. The morally degraded sons of Pandu’s brother Dhritarashtra, who represent the bad and the unjust in the epic. The eldest among whom—Duryodhana—often symbolises the quintessential villain in Indian cultural milieu.
7. In the original epic, Draupadi is the wife of the five Pandava brothers (in a polyandrous marriage), and thus they are expected to uphold her dignity and honour, rather than outrage it.
8. Later renamed as the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC).

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