

VCP 603

Film on the Role of *Rationality & Beliefs*

Portraying the psycho-social reasons
behind beliefs

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Visual Communication

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this written submission submitted to IDC, IIT Bombay, is a record of an original work done by me. This written submission represents my idea in my words, I have adequately cited and referenced the original source. I also declare that i have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misprinted or falsified any Idea/ fact/ source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

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Approval Sheet

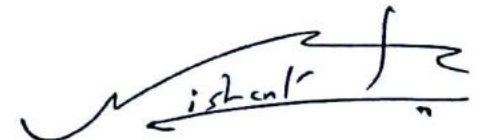
This Visual Communication project report entitled "Film on the role of Rationality & beliefs" by S.Nitin is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Master of Design degree in Visual Communication.

Project Guide:



Chair Person:

Internal Examiner:



EXTERNAL EXAMINER:

Abstract

India today is plagued by superstitious and irrational religious practices. Only three states in India have laws specifically targeting these practices. Over the past four decades there are many rationalists organisations in India which have successfully targeted internationally popular “god men” who boast a following of millions, exposing their activities as nothing but “well-packaged gimmickry”.

In a bid to debunk belief in miracles, palmistry and astrology in the countryside, where the majority of people are illiterate and believe in the supernatural, there are several organisations which hold regular workshops and street plays. These organisations have been trying to pass laws which prohibit godmen from perpetuating these superstitions which hasn’t found a lot of takers. Yet we see religiosity declining in some factions of the society which makes us ask the question about the importance of beliefs and religiosity in today’s day and age.

As much as they are considered foolish, superstitions do affect the society a lot. A large section of our society believes in superstition and blindly follow religious practices and therefore fall prey to conmen and godmen and it hinders social progress. Superstitions should not be confused with tradition and culture. Through this project we aim to look at how various groups in the society look at religions and what their belief systems are. Fiction and films influence public opinion, not by making political statements or attacking certain sections, but by the stories they tell and the way they tell them. I would like to stay away from the documentary format and focus towards a fictional film that addresses or asks these questions instead of a film that takes a stand disseminates information. The larger question of what beliefs are and why they are followed needs to be answered. Through this project I want to address the issues behind religion, belief, religiosity, tradition, culture and rationalism through a film.

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CHAPTER I:

Rationality in Today's *Day* & *Age*

The Indian constitution has built in it the exhortation to promote rational scientific thought (see EXHIBIT A). 'Scientific Temper' was a word that was popularized by Jawaharlal Nehru. He had realized that India needed to catch up to the "technologically developed" western countries lest India was under the risk of being vulnerable to foreign domination.

Introduction

A society where religion is part of daily life

EXHIBIT A

To develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;

Article 51A(h) in The Constitution Of India 1949

EXHIBIT B

We all read about Karna in the Mahabharata. If we think a little more, we realise that the Mahabharata says Karna was not born from his mother's womb. This means that genetic science was present at that time. That is why Karna could be born outside his mother's womb.

We worship Lord Ganesha. There must have been some plastic surgeon at that time who got an elephant's head on the body of a human being and began the practice of plastic surgery.

Narendra Modi at the inauguration of H N Reliance Foundation Hospital.

We live in a country where the Prime Minister of our country defies the constitutional duty to develop scientific temper and asserts the supernatural. (see Exhibit B) ISRO chairman Dr K Radhakrishnan offered special prayers and performed special poojas with the replica of Mars Orbiter Mission at the Lord Venkateshwara temple in Tirupati, a day before the successful launch of the spacecraft from Sriharikota.

Mahatma Gandhi had a famous debate with Rabindranath Tagore on his comments regarding the Bihar Earthquakes of 1934 which Tagore thought strengthened the "elements of unreason". In this example we look at a different side of Gandhi as a conservative. Gandhi called the earthquake a visitation for the sin of untouchability. Call it cognitive dissonance or Gandhi was, maybe, self-aware of his irrationality, but used this argument nonetheless given the potential good it could do. Often, people hold two opposing beliefs,

or they believe one thing but do something that's against that belief this what is called cognitive dissonance. A recent example is when Sakshi Maharaj a BJP MLA accused Rahul Gandhi of being responsible for the Nepal Earthquake. Be it 1934 or 2015, nothing much has changed. Gandhi tried to unify people through superstition while Sakshi Maharaj used superstition for his political interest. (see EXHIBIT C)

There has always been this struggle. The religious idiom is woven into the fabric of the society. Propagation of rationality has been perceived to be woven together with social reform.

The Inter Academy Panel on Ethics in Science (panel which represents India's oldest and the best science academies – the Indian National Science Academy, Indian Academy of Sciences, and National Academy of Sciences) issued a statement¹ in November 2015 emphasising the need for protecting rational thinking and

HARIJAN

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY, 16, 1934.

SUPERSTITION vs. FAITH

The Bard of Santiniketan is Gurudev for me as he is for the inmates of that great institution. I and mine had found our shelter there when we returned from our long self-imposed exile in South Africa. But Gurudev and I early discovered certain differences of outlook between us. Our mutual affection has, however, never suffered by reason of our differences, and it cannot suffer by Gurudev's latest utterance on my linking the Bihar calamity with the sin of untouchability. He had a perfect right to utter his protest when he believed that I was in error. My profound regard for him would make me listen to him more readily than to any other critic. But in spite of my having read the statement three times, I adhere to what I have written in these columns.

When at Tinnevely I first linked the event with untouchability, I spoke with the greatest deliberation and out of the fulness of my heart. I spoke as I believed. I have long believed that physical phenomena produce results both physical and spiritual. The converse I hold to be equally true.

To me the earthquake was no caprice of God nor a result of a meeting of mere blind forces. We do not know all the laws of God nor their working. Knowledge of the tallest scientist or the greatest spiritualist is like a particle of dust. If God is not a personal being for me like my earthly father, He is infinitely more. He rules me in the tiniest detail of my life, I believe literally that not a leaf moves but by His will. Every breath I take depends upon His sufferance.

(The following is the statement issued by Dr. Rabin-drath Tagore referred to in the article—Ed.)

"It has caused me painful surprise to find Mahatma Gandhi accusing those who blindly follow their own social custom of untouchability of having brought down God's vengeance upon certain parts of Bihar, evidently specially selected for His desolating displeasure. It is all the more unfortunate, because this kind of unscientific view of things is too readily accepted by a large section of our countrymen. I keenly feel the indignity of it when I am compelled to utter a truism in asserting that physical catastrophes have their inevitable and exclusive origin in certain combination of physical facts. Unless we believe in the inexorableness of the universal law in the working of which God Himself never interferes, we find it impossible to justify His ways on occasions like the one which has sorely stricken us in an overwhelming manner and scale.

If we associate ethical principles with cosmic phenomena, we shall have to admit that human nature is morally superior to Providence that preaches its lessons in good behaviour in orgies of the worst behaviour possi-

ble. For, we can never imagine any civilized ruler of men making indiscriminate examples of casual victims, including children and members of the untouchable community, in order to impress others dwelling at a safe distance who possibly deserve severer condemnation. Though we cannot point out any period of human history that is free from iniquities of the darkest kind, we still find citadels of malevolence yet remain unshaken, that the factories, that cruelly thrive upon abject poverty and the ignorance of the famished cultivators, or prison-houses in all parts of the world where a penal system is pursued, which, most often, is a special form of licensed criminality, still stand firm. It only shows that the law of gravitation does not in the least respond to the stupendous load of callousness that accumulates till the moral foundation of our society begins to show dangerous cracks and civilisations are undermined. What is truly tragic about it is the fact that the kind of argument that Mahatmaji used by exploiting an event of cosmic disturbance far better suits the psychology of his opponents than his own, and it would not have surprised me at all if they had taken this opportunity of holding him and his followers responsible for the visitation of Divine anger. As for us, we feel perfectly secure in the faith that our own sins and errors, however enormous, have not enough force to drag down the structure of creation to ruins. We can depend upon it, sinners and saints, bigots and breakers of conventions. We, who are immensely grateful to Mahatmaji for inducing, by his wonder-working inspiration, freedom from fear and feebleness in the minds of his countrymen, feel profoundly hurt when any words from his mouth may emphasise the elements of unreason in those very minds—unreason, which is a fundamental source of all the blind powers that drive us against freedom and self-respect."

He and His Law are one. The Law is God. Anything attributed to Him is not a mere attribute. He is the Attribute. He is Truth, Love, Law, and a million things that human ingenuity can name. I do believe with Gurudev 'in the inexorableness of the universal law in the working of which God Himself never interferes.' For God is the Law. But I submit that we do not know the Law or the laws fully, and what appear to us as catastrophes are so only because we do not know the universal laws sufficiently.

Visitations like droughts, floods, earthquakes and the like, though they seem to have only physical origins, are, for me, somehow connected with man's morals. Therefore, I instinctively felt that the earthquake was a visitation for the sin of untouchability. Of course, Sanatanists have a perfect right to say that it was due to my crime of preaching against untouchability. My belief is a call to repentance and self-purification. I admit my utter ignorance of the working of the laws of Nature. But, even as I cannot help believing in God though I am unable to prove His existence to the sceptics, in like manner, I cannot prove the connection of the sin of untouchability with the Bihar visitation even though the connection is instinctively felt by me. If my belief turns out to be ill-founded, it will still have done good to me and those who believe with me. For we shall have been spurred

HARIJAN

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI | MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2015

Quake due to Rahul's Kedar visit: Sakshi

Controversial BJP functionaries Sakshi Maharaj and Sadhvi Prachi have linked the earthquake in Nepal to Rahul Gandhi's Kedarnath visit. "Rahul Gandhi eats beef, and goes to the holy shrine without purifying himself. The earthquake was bound to happen," Sakshi Maharaj said in Haridwar. TNN

EXHIBIT C

A Comparison between February 16 1934 Issue of Harijan and April 17, 2015 Issue of TOI

One's *faith is a personal business* and its might be acceptable until the time the *basic rights of people aren't violated*.

The *religious idiom* is woven into the fabric of the society. Propagation of rationality has been *perceived to be woven together with social reform*.

scientific temper in the country. This comes in light of the recent attacks on rationalists and intellectuals in our country. They highlight that "several statements and actions which run counter to this constitutional requirement of every citizen of India" pointing fingers at the radical groups in India which have constantly suppressed the voices of reason in the country.

There has been a recent bout of killings of rationalists in India. Narendra Dabholkar in Pune, Govind Pansare in Kolhapur and now Kalburgi in Dharwad have had to pay with their lives. These systematic attacks on and elimination of free speech and rational thought was the reason why the Inter Academy Panel released the statement.

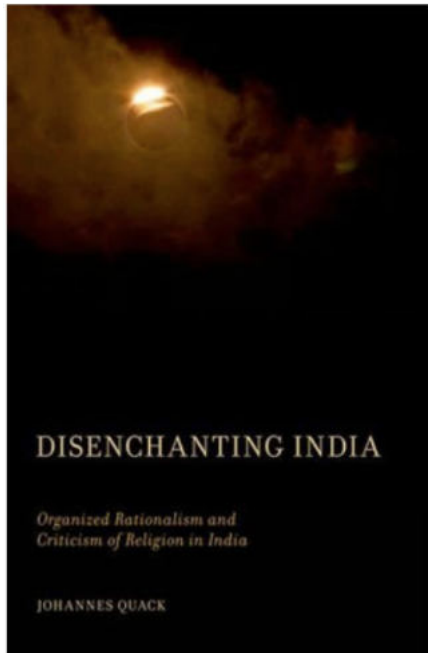
Nehru agreed that life does not consist entirely of what we see and hear and no thinking person can ignore the visible world, Nehru opted for the method of science in his effort to understand all aspects of life and reality. Nehru's rationalism eventually led India towards democracy and socialism.

One's faith is a personal business and its might be acceptable until the time the basic rights of people aren't violated. There has been a constant attack on the democratic right of freedom of expression and culture of secularism in recent times.

In the last year and a half, this has become a question we can't ignore. Many writers have returned their awards in protest to the events happening in the country. These events do not seem isolated and in many ways seem a direct attack on our right to dissent and one might also say it's an attack on Indianness.

Secondary Research

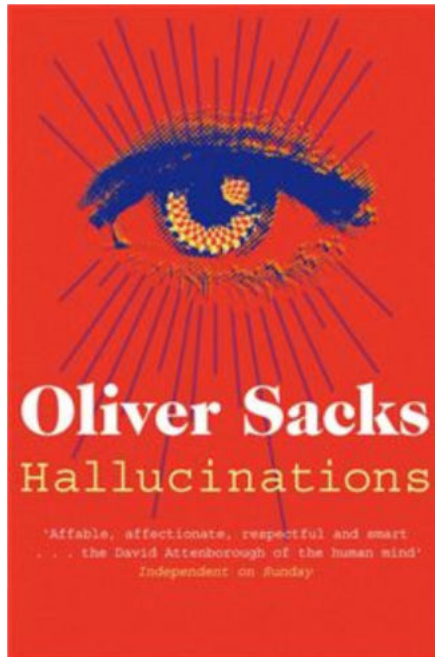
Literature review, books and films used as references for the project.



In order to further immerse myself in the length and breadth of the subject that I was dealing with I referred to these set of books. Disenchanted India, Hallucinations and Religion for Atheists each gave a perspective on different belief systems. While 'Disenchanted India' gives an idea of the rationalist perspective, 'Religion for Atheists' talks from the perspective of religion and 'Hallucinations' gives an idea of the medical perspective behind beliefs.

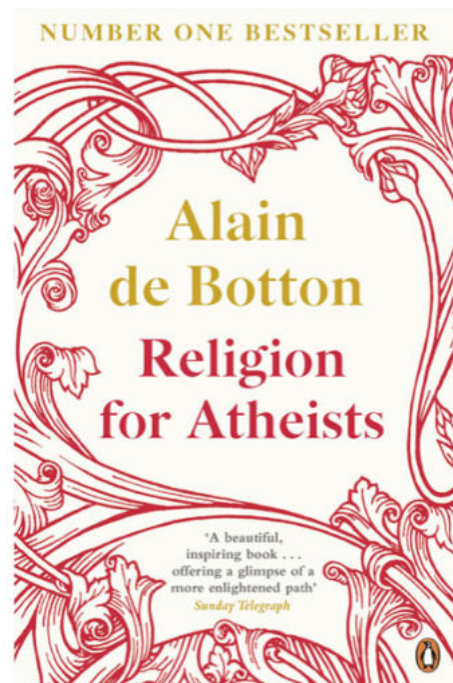
Disenchanted India by Johannes Quack

Quack tries to break away from the stereotype of India being an entirely religious state and highlights a history of rationalism. Quack shows the importance of Rationalism in an Ancient India and how Indian intellectuals were tied to the strong intellectual currents in Europe. At the core, the book is an ethnographic study of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti describing their efforts to encourage a scientific temper and combat beliefs and practices they regard as "superstitious". Quack shows an insider's perspective of the day-to-day lives of rationalists and their controversial position in our society. This is the book that taught me a lot about ideas of Rationality.



Hallucinations by Oliver Sacks

This book is a comprehensive review of all types of hallucinations. It is packed with case histories of people with a relatively common condition called the Charles Bonnet Syndrome, as well as hallucinations induced by Parkinson's, migraines, deliriums, narcolepsy, sensory deprivation, and hauntings. Oliver Sacks rescues hallucinatory experience from the narrow realm of psychiatric illness and psychedelic adventure and places it in a larger cultural context; he brings it into the mainstream and shows us how common hallucinatory experiences are.



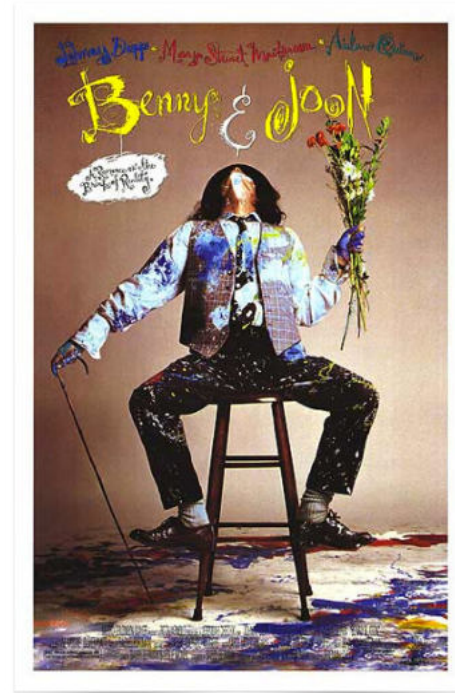
Religion for Atheists by Alain de Botton

There are many things to like about Botton's book, for both religious and irreligious readers. He has a beautiful way of noticing and explaining the value of religion, and why it is a great loss to humanity to toss out the wisdom and traditions of the Church, along with beliefs in the Divine. De Botton in his book envisions a world both free from religion's superstitions and open to the needs of humans for community and inspiration. He suggests that if you are an atheist with an open mind, you may still see some benefits of religion.



Melancholia by Lars Von Trier

Melancholia is about the nature of depression and how two sisters go through it. It is designed to make you think about us humans and our behaviours toward each other. It is at once a beautiful movie, while at the same time focusing on the absence of real love between the characters – and in the world. The movie hints at a correlation between the lack of love, and the threat of impending doom that's present throughout.



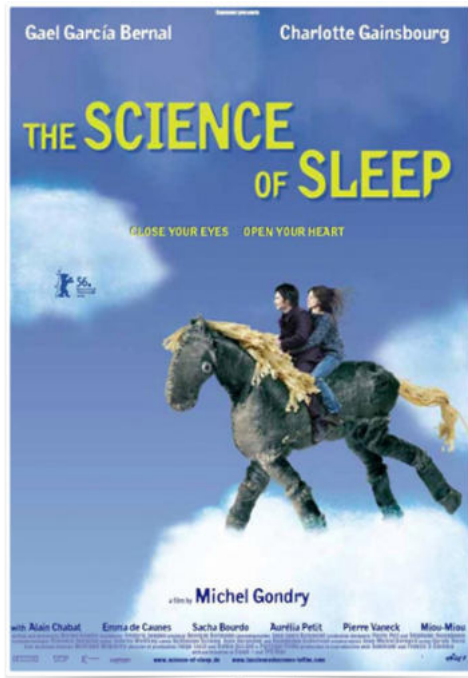
Benny & Joon by Jeremiah S. Chechik

This is not the first dramatic comedy themed around mental illness, but it is almost certainly one of the funniest and most touching. The story unfolds in an emotive and colourful fashion. The amazing thing about this film is the way it shows heartbreaking scenes such as the death of Benny and Joon's parents and Joon's mental instability, but also manages to be heart-lifting and comedic and leaves the audience with such a sweet taste afterwards.



Me, Myself & Irene by Farrelly Brothers

The movie is about a cop who is always nice to everybody. When everyone keeps disrespecting him he eventually loses it and gets his tasteful revenge. He is later revealed to be a schizophrenic who has a split-personality disorder so basically he thinks he's a bad-ass rebel with no rules every 6 hours and then he thinks his Charlie to the point where he alternates between them; he's in a state of confusion to who he really is.



Science of Sleep by Michelle Gondry

It is outlandish, beautiful, and unrestrained. The unclear divide for the schizophrenic protagonist between reality and delusion depicted is absolutely spot on. At first the film may seem a bit too childish and superfluous. But once you start thinking hard about the concepts explored in the movie, you see the beauty of what a schizophrenic sees.

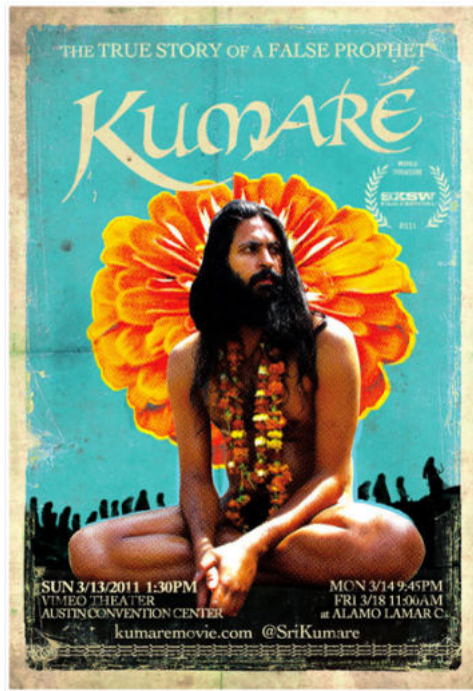
The voices in his head, the visual delusions, the wild mood swings, the violent outbursts,

harming himself, his alternate realities, his stalking behaviours, his idiosyncratic use of language, his distorted perceptions of his own body, his relationship with his parents and coworkers, his inability to “fit in,” his megalomania, his fractured ego, his inability to distinguish dreams from reality—it’s all there.

Many high functioning schizophrenics, such as Vincent van Gogh, have made enormous contributions to humanity’s cultural treasure

trove but for most it’s another story like our protagonist whose “triumphs” is only in his mind. This is probably why the ending of the movie seems heart wrenching even though nothing really bad has happened.

I have watched this movie over five times, there is something new to discover each time in the film.



Kumare by Vikram Gandhi

Kumare is a film that falls somewhere between a documentary and a reality TV show. In the film Director Vikram Gandhi moves to Phoenix, AZ where he pretends to be a wise Indian guru and begins to recruit followers to his yoga sessions. Even though he is making it up, he finds that there are many people desperation for spiritual guidance that are easily convinced and willing to follow him. The film raises lots of questions about spirituality, human gullibility, and the role of spiritual leaders.



One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest by Miloš Forman

Based on the novel by Ken Kesey, the story follows Randle Patrick McMurphy (Jack Nicholson), who, in an attempt to get out of spending more time in prison, pleads insanity for his crime, and is therefore sentenced to time in a mental institution. This was McMurphy's intention, as he believes the conditions in a "crazy house" will be significantly easier to contend with than another harsh stay in prison. The film portrays the horrible truth about how patients were treated in mental

institutions back then, and tells the story of someone who desperately wanted to break out, to rebel, to change things, for himself and for the others. The movie exists to show not only how corrupt and poorly-constructed society's approach to the "mentally unstable" is, but it creates characters that we have all met in life and shows how the McMurphy-like figure that we all wish we had fights for freedom of choice and basic human rights.

Rationalism in India

The beginnings of rationalism in India

rationalism

1. Reliance on reason as the best guide for belief and action.
2. Philosophy The theory that the exercise of reason, rather than experience, authority, or spiritual revelation, provides the primary basis for knowledge.

Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged, 12th Edition 2014

It's important to understand the history of organized rationalism in India to look at the motives. Rationalism in India was spearheaded by Jotiba Phule, G.G. Agarkar, Shahu Maharaj, Annie Besant, Ramaswami Naicker, Jawaharlal Nehru, B.R. Ambedkar, M.N. Roy, Goparaju Rao 'Gora', Annadurai and a host of others. Organised Rationalism has always seen social injustice as an important dimension while addressing the issues of rationality.

VEDIC AGE:

7th Century BC saw the rise of rationalism in India just before the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. Vedic and Upanishadic reformers in India were both materialists and rationalists. Charvak and Lokayata are considered by rationalists as their earliest ancestors. It is believed that the literature of much of the earliest Indian rationalists were destroyed by the priestly class. Because the literature is lost the assumptions of those schools and the modern day anti-religious movements sharing ideologies can't be made. Rationalists today try to emphasize through these findings that rationality has its origins in India as well

as opposed to idea that rationality is a western idea.

BHAKTI MOVEMENT:

Bhakti as a term refers to religious devotion and refers to the religious movement in the 7th Century BC. Bhakti movement opposed all the Brahminical rituals and all the defined religious structures of that era. With respect to the Vedic era rationalism the sources available for the Bhakti movement are far greater. A.K. Ramanujan put the Bhakti movement this way.

“Bhakti defies all contextual structures: every pigeonhole of caste, ritual, gender, appropriate clothing and custom, stage of life, the whole system of homo hierarchicus (‘everything in its place’) is the target of its irony”²

Bhakti movement rejected the claims of priestly classes of their religious authority and authoritative knowledge. Bhakti saints are often found to be important religious figures in many religious groups. Rationalists tend to look at these saints as secular reformers and often refer to their criticism of social injustice and Brahminical rituals.

Rationalism entered the upper class and an Indian middle class was born with the introduction of modern English education.

RATIONALISM IN COLONIAL INDIA

While the Bhakti movement can be attributed to the beginnings of Rationalist movement in India, it is also important to notice what the British Raj brought along with it to India. British Raj brought along with it the British education system, the idea of “colonial modernity” and changes in the socio cultural environment of India. Rationalism entered the upper class and an Indian middle class was born with the introduction of modern English education.

With this a number of influential rationalist came into the scene. Raja Ram Mohan Roy established the Brahmo Samaj and Dayanand Saraswati established the Arya Samaj representing the reformist and revivalist traditions of rationality. It is important to notice here the formation of a more radical and less influential Young Bengal Group in Bengal known as the Derozio. Derozios flaunted their hatred of Hinduism and all Hindu religious and social ideas. While they managed to inform the

masses about their rationalist temper, a spirit of questioning and rejection of tradition, their excesses managed to equate rationalism to westernism and an attitude of wild living.

There were diverse intellectual currents such as the Bengal Renaissance and the religious and social reform movements of Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Maharashtra. The idea that rationalism was a product of western thinking is extremely relevant but it goes along with the developments that were happening.

Role of Rationalists in the Indian Society

Propagation of rationality has been perceived to be woven together with social reform.

In a society where religion dominates every walk of life, where it is difficult to distinguish between religious and social customs, a religious reformer becomes inter-alia a social reformer as well.

Kulkarnee
Institute of Historical Studies
Kolkata

The importance of rationalism can be understood better by its comparison with what can be called superstition which is, for the lack of better word, called the embodiment of irrationalism. In India rationalism has always been involved with social change. As Kulkarnee says, it becomes immensely difficult to separate religious and social customs.

Widows in India are considered to bring bad luck. At one point in India, widows couldn't get shelter and received harsh treatment. A widow was considered an inauspicious being whose sins in a previous life had deprived her of her husband, and her parents-in-law of their son, in this one. She was doomed to a life of prayer, fasting, and drudgery, unwelcome at the celebrations and auspicious occasions that are so much a part of Hindu family and community life, her lot was scarcely to be envied. Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar campaigned against this practice and was successful in getting the Widow Remarriage act of 1856 passed.

Although rationalists in India are working for the betterment of the society, their approach of looking at the core reasons behind the strong belief systems is in my opinion short sighted. The rationalist movement and its efforts to eliminate superstition have come under scrutiny a number of times. There are two opposing camps, one being the Hindu nationalist groups who have attacked them for undermining Hindu culture and hurting Hindu sentiments. The other camp criticises the anti-superstition Bill for aiming to deny a rich source of traditional healing practices. There is another qualm that I have with the rationalist groups which I have discussed in the next section.

12

CHAPTER II:

Rationality vs. Superstition

In India the struggle between religion and rationalism took place primarily between justice and injustice and not, as in the West, between science and organised religion. People take a clear stand and simplify the problem which is divorced from the reality of the situation. Fundamentally a simple answer can't solve the complete problem. When UN charter of human rights is violated then it becomes a problem. When people's basic rights are challenged then it becomes a problem. We tend to quantify issues and look at it from a perspective of Right vs Wrong. From my study I have come to the point where certain situations are ambiguous morally. What is the right way? What is the wrong way? These divides do not work.

Conflict Between Rationality & Superstition

When a person considers his handcuffs to be circlets of flowers, who can exhort him, “get up you fool, smash those handcuffs and set yourself free!” What happens in the case of women is going one step further. They are exploited in many ways by the superstitions they have. They are proud of keeping those harmful traditions and customs alive, unmindful of being exploited. Instead of opposing such superstitious traditions, they propagate them with devotion and derive happiness from doing so. The enslavement of mind in this manner is a serious problem to be tackled in the war on superstition. (n.d.-h: I)

Narendra Dabholkar’s “Women and Eradication of Superstition” opens with this paragraph

This is my qualm with rationalist societies. Statements like these show that, in the stance taken by ANiS toward women, women’s agency is reduced to that of being “enslaved” and therefore they must be liberated from this “helpless” situation by male-dominated organizations like ANiS. This underlying logic of benevolent paternalism is the same with respect to the Ajnani Khedut (ignorant villager) who has to be liberated by the rationalists from his backward and irrational state of affairs.

While this aspect pervades ANiS’ general worldview as well as their activities, it becomes most obvious in their programs and their debates about possession and mental illness. Much more could be said about the issue of gender in particular and paternalism more generally with respect to the rationalist movement.

Not all rationalists deny completely the efficacy of treatments that are based on the

assumption of affliction by ghosts. While some activists oppose all such practices as extremely dangerous, the psychiatrists who consult ANiS in such matters as part of their contribution to the organization had more differentiated opinions. There is a sense of entitlement that comes with being on the side of science from what I have read and understood about the rationalists.

The benevolent paternalism that comes from being on the side of rationality has in my opinion stopped the rationalists from looking at the support mechanisms which belief systems have produced over the centuries. Rationality in the bigger picture should be seen from the perspective of mental health. There is dire need of educating people about mental health issues.

Rationality as a part of Mental Health

With a population of 1.2 billion people, India has 4,000 psychiatrists, compared with 50,000 in the U.S., about 4,500 in California alone. In rural areas of India, many villagers still believe mental illness is caused by evil spirits angry that the sick person had killed a cow during a past life. So-called therapy, conducted by witch doctors or family members, can include chaining up the mentally ill, chanting spells, poking them with pins, or beating them “to force the spirits out.”

Mental health is treated almost like an afterthought. In India, people with severe mental illnesses often turn to temples and shrines, not to doctors. Going to such a shrine is culturally accepted than going to a psychiatrist. The prevalence of mental illness in the community (both rural and urban), in rate per thousand shows higher prevalence among women across studies done in different parts of the country.

Mental illnesses in India are often attributed to supernatural phenomena, and many who suffer from them are subjected to various kinds of ‘magical-religious treatments’. This is because of prevailing local systems of belief wherein many patients’ relatives, even from urban backgrounds, stick to prayers or religious rituals instead of availing psychiatric treatment or psychotherapy.

Psychiatrists claim that they compete against the “traditional healers” over the patients,

that is, over the money they pay. Psychiatrists further suggest that 90 to 95% of patients first go to faith healers and add that this is true even for the urban population. The few available statistics point in a similar direction. The former head of the Psychiatry Department at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi and WHO consultant Professor Neki estimated that in 1973 around 80% of the Indian population approached traditional healers for mental health treatment.

Though laws can change quickly, shifts in the culture could take more time. Most people think it’s all a figment of your imagination. There’s still a very deep stigma. Mental disorders continue to be viewed as “non-medical diseases” that were believed to be caused by invisible and abstract elements in many cultures. Women tend to seek healing in mystical-spiritual traditions to a far greater extent than men. In contrast, psychiatric

In order to formulate policies that can *effectively address women's mental health concerns*, the reasons behind their help-seeking strategies need to be better understood.

epidemiological data reveals low attendance by women in public health psychiatric facilities India's current mental health policies are detrimental to women's mental health needs. In order to formulate policies that can effectively address women's mental health concerns, the reasons behind their help-seeking strategies need to be better understood.

Indian women's preference for traditional healing systems over psychiatry. For instance, a number of scholars have emphasised the empowering potential of possession-trance states for women in patriarchal settings. In India, families exercise a great degree of control over critical aspects of the psychiatric process including defining the illness and treatment decisions.

Looking at this from a rationalist perspective we can observe that belief systems have a much deeper cultural root in India. Rationality comes from a deeper source - one's inner

self. Rationality should be seen from the perspective of mental health and this is why I thought my project should explore belief systems from a psychological perspective. There have been instances where people's strong belief in traditional healing systems have led to physical injuries and even loss of life. Thus it is imperative to look at what can be done to educate and make people aware about the possible evils of superstition and traditional healing too. The Indian Laws regarding the same are as good as non-existent.

16

Laws related to superstition in India

In India, superstition is part of the traditional fabric; hence tougher laws are considered contradictory to our cultural ethos. Any opposition to superstition or black magic should not be perceived as anti-religion or against the freedom to practice one's own religion which is provided as a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution.

It has been ignored the fact that the freedom of religion, guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution, is not an unrestricted freedom and is subjected to exceptions like public order, morality and health. Though there are these existing legislations to eradicate this evil, they have had very limited success in curbing baseless beliefs and practices. The States of Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are the only states which have enacted laws to restrict witchcraft.

In 2010 a petition claimed that more than 2,500 Indian women have been killed in the

name of witchcraft in 15 years. The Supreme Court, however, rejected the petition. The existing laws in the three states have failed to achieve their goal that includes protection of women. These laws provide for imprisonment up to three months and Rs 1,000 as penalty. But this is not enough to deter people from engaging in the evil practice of witchcraft and witch hunting.

Odisha

The Odisha Assembly in December, 2013 passed the Odisha Prevention of Witch Hunting Bill, 2013 which provides effective measures to tackle the menace of witch-hunting and prevent practice of witchcraft with evil intention to harm others. The proposed legislation states that whoever commits witch hunting or abets or provokes for witchcraft shall be punished with imprisonment up to three years above and beyond fine of not less than Rupees 1000. If a person commits

such an offence again, the punishment can be imprisonment for three years which may be extended up to seven years besides a fine of not less than Rupees 10,000.

Assam

The Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi in September, 2013 announced that the state government of Assam was contemplating to enact a law to put an end to the practice of witchcraft by bringing in an anti-superstition bill in the next session of the state assembly because a noticeable rise has been observed in the instances of witchcraft in Kokrajhar and Jorhat districts of Assam. In addition to the above legislation against the evil of witch hunting, other superstitions and black magic and the like are also being prohibited by way of stringent legislation on the subject matter by various State legislations and Central Acts.

We already have the Drugs and Magic

Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954, under which claiming or advertising a magical remedy is a crime. It is a Central legislation applicable to the whole of India but it is outdated and has loopholes, yet it serves as a legal tool available in the hands of the people.

Maharashtra

The state of Maharashtra has pioneered in passing the first ever legislation on black magic and superstition. It approved a bill to curb superstitious practices, 4 months after the anti superstition activist Dr. Narendra Dhabolkar who led a campaign for about 25 years for the law, was killed in the city of Pune in Maharashtra, after receiving threats because of his persistent efforts to encourage people to be rational and secular.

The Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013 is a criminal law legislation for

the state of Maharashtra, originally drafted by anti-superstition activist and the founder of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti(MANS), Narendra Dabholkar (1945–2013) in 2003. The legislation aims to criminalize performance of black magic, human sacrifices and the use of magic remedies and cures which tend to exploit people's faith.

The above legislation was subject to a lot of criticism. The proposed legislation has been accused of being anti-Hindu and anti-religion. Dr. Dabholkar had very positively and rationally responded to the above criticism by stating that the bill did not mention god or religion, but it targeted only fraudulent and deceptive practices. The Wakari sect was provided assurance that they will not find the bill objectionable. It has further been clarified that the law does not prohibit a person from performing a miracle, but if a person cheats someone on the pretext of performing a miracle. There is a need of a national-level Act

like the one enacted in Maharashtra. The issue should be raised in Parliament, and reference should be made to the atrocities and frauds committed by various individuals under the name of god and religion.

Our country lacks adequate legislation as not even 25% of the total number of states has legislations dealing with this issue. But law is only a partial answer to the problem. In order to make the law effective we need the necessary will and machinery in place since society does not change just by passing legislations.

Also proper awareness campaign about the existence of legislation on this issue is necessary. Like most laws that exist in the country these laws also just exist on papers. There seems to be a bigger problem of social conditioning where people have a tendency to get influenced by the society at large. It is thus important to educate people at a much deeper level.

Social Conditioning

a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call into question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing the life of that man is one long sin against mankind. (1877, 1999: 77)^[2]

Indian culture has never put a lot of emphasis on questioning. From our childhood, in schools, our teachers have told us to put our “finger on the lips”, in other words to keep quiet and not ask any questions. Science insists on asking questions and encourages us to not believe anything blindly. This does not mean that only Science is right, there are a lot of things that lie beyond the comprehension of human knowledge that can’t be understood with our current understanding.

This is where the idea for the central conflict of the film comes from – the moral dilemma of leaving what you have always believed in and questioning one’s own belief system. The tantrik’s son in the movie is a representation of that moral dilemma. Will he question his own belief system at home where he has been moulded and brought up in a certain way. Will he examine, observe, rationalise and draw conclusions what he sees in his daily surroundings. When we start believing because

our parents or grandparents or some other senior has told us, or because it is written in pothi (holy scriptures), it is called blind faith. According to the rationalists, traditional Hindu culture prohibits children from assessing critically what they are taught during their childhoods and prevents a diagnostic attitude of analysing critically.

William Clifford argues, and many ANiS activists agree with him, that all beliefs should also be judged against the harmful consequences they might have for the larger society. The real cruelty behind the superstitions or blind faith is that, it creates the mental slavery, person stops thinking and opens the doors for the exploitation. Women are the victims of all the exploitation and harassment arising through these superstitions and still they don’t take any objections against that. They believe that, these are not superstitions but the beliefs or customs which gives meaning to their life.

19

Women as Primary Victims of Superstition

In the first 18 months since the Maharashtra Black Magic Act was passed majority of the cases are reported to be of women.

In 18 mths, 150 cases filed under anti-superstition Act; most victims women

Radheshyam Jadhav
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Pune: It took the murder of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar for Maharashtra's anti-superstition Act to finally see the light of day in December 2013. Dabholkar had drafted the original bill in 2003 and since then fought relentlessly for its passage in the face of stiff opposition.

Two years after Dabholkar's death, the Act has encouraged people who have suffered exploitation in the name of religion and rituals, particularly women, to register cases against those involved in such practices. More than 150 cases have been filed till date under the Act, officially known as the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013.

The only conviction in all these cases happened early this year. Bhandara's chief judicial magistrate convicted an "exorcist" along with two others under the Act for trying to cure a 29-year-old woman through black magic. Investigations and trials in the remaining cases are on.

In one particularly hair-raising incident, the police arrested some members of a family in Nashik while they were preparing to sacrifice children after being told that the act would bestow upon them the

powers of a mantra. The family had dug a pit and was ready to put the children in it when the police raided the spot following a complaint.

The first case under the Act was registered in Pune in December 2013 while the Act was still an ordinance. The Vishrantwadi police then arrested a maulana, Sayed Alam (36), of Shantinagar in Yerawada, for allegedly inducing a 25-year-old married woman to sit naked with him to perform a black magic ritual to cure her husband of his tuberculosis. The maulana had also told the woman that a lot of money would be generated automatically during the ritual, of which he would give her Rs 3 lakh.

In fact, the fake assurance of curing people or their relatives of diseases figures in several of the cases filed under the Act. One of the first such cases was reported from Bhayanganagar (Nanded) where two tantriks were arrested for advertising that they could treat incurable diseases with their supernatural powers. In another case, a baba sexually assaulted a young girl in Nagpur while promising a cure.

Many cases relate to people being fooled with the lure of having their money multiplied. In one incident, eight people, including one Rajandre Pagare alias Anandgiri Maharaj, duped a Nandurbar woman, Nila Mehta (49), and others of Rs 12.85 lakh while promising to

multiply the money by performing some rituals. In another case, a baba from Malegaon in Nashik district took Rs 3 lakh from a Jalgaon woman while promising that she would reap a windfall soon. He also sexually exploited the woman. In Wadgaon (Nashik), a case was registered against two babas from Rajasthan who extracted money from people with the assurance of finding hidden wealth for them.

"People who suffer at hands of these babas and sadhus are coming forward with their complaints. The Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti (MANS) is training its workers to assist the police and people to register cases under the Act," said Nandini Jadhav, MANS executive president (Pune unit).

Dabholkar's son Hamid said MANS is also planning to help victims of black magic and witchcraft in other states. "Five women accused of practicing witchcraft were lynched in a tribal-dominated village in Ranchi district. We are considering how to help the people there," he said.

Activist and eminent scholar Vidya Bai said that women were the main victims of such evil superstitious practices. "Women and the poor suffer at the hands of those who use religion and rituals. It has been a long struggle to imbibe rationality in the minds of people. But we have made a start, thanks to the sacrifice of Narendra Dabholkar," she told a convention of MANS workers recently.



2 YEARS AFTER

Newspaper article from the Mumbai edition of Times of India dated 21st August 2016.

Two years after Dabholkar's death, the Act has encouraged people who have suffered exploitation in the name of religion and rituals, particularly women, to register cases against those involved in such practices. More than 150 cases have been filed till date under the Act, officially known as the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013.

In fact, the fake assurance of curing people or their relatives of diseases figures in several of the cases filed under the Act. Under the act tantriks are being arrested for advertising that they could treat incurable diseases, cases of babas sexually assaulting young women have also come up.

If one has to respect human rights then equality of all human beings regardless of their nationality, language, color, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation should be

Six 'tantriks' held for killing 58-yr-old woman

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 22

BANKURA district police on Sunday arrested six persons — identifying themselves as 'tantriks' — for allegedly killing a woman during their 'treatment' toward off the evil spirit which they claimed had possessed the 58-year-old.

A resident of Galia village, Shivani Biswas, according to her son Sanjay, was unwell for the past few days. Suspecting her of being "possessed by an evil spirit", the woman's husband, Bibhuti Biswas, called the 'tantriks' to carry out the "treatment".

On Saturday, the six men arrived at the residence and began their "treatment", which involved beating Shivani with shoes and umbrellas. The woman reportedly fell

unconscious when administered fire burns and had to be taken to Bishnupur sub-divisional hospital where doctors declared her brought dead.

Sanjay later filed a complaint at the Joypur police station, naming his father Bibhuti who he alleged had called the tantriks, and the six men who have been identified as Dinobandhu Kotal, Banamali Gayen, Uttam Santra, Prodyut Digar, Saroj Jha and Jhanhabai Bairag.

"The six 'tantriks' have been arrested while Bibhuti is absconding. A case under sections 394 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common interest) of the IPC has been registered," J Mercy, SDPO, Bishnupur, said, adding that those arrested did not have any criminal antecedent.

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considered, which none of the religious dogmas agree with. That all humans are equal has been accepted in the declaration of human rights, but this is not respected by superstition based religions.

The rights of women are always infringed upon by the superstitious practices followed

by perpetrators of atrocities in the name of religion. Mental illness is a major cause of human rights violation connected to superstitions. In the primitive societies the mentally ill are said to be possessed by demons and spirits and their human rights are violated under the pretext that whatever abuse that is being done is to the spirit possessing the patient

40-year-old Nalasopara resident loses eyesight because of malnutrition for past one year; activists rescue her with police help

Locked in, 'possessed' woman starves

Imran Fazal @punomian

A 40-year-old woman was rescued on Wednesday from a Nalasopara flat after being locked in there for the past one year. She was confined allegedly by her husband and kind as they suspected her to be possessed. During the course of her confinement, she lost her eyes due to malnutrition. When the doctors rushed to help her, she kept asking for water to drink and was unable to even stand.

Durgavati Mishra, 40, was kept locked in the first floor flat of the Sai Deep Apartment in the Gali Nagar area of Nalasopara East, while her husband Jayprakash

resided on the second floor flat of the same building with his sister-in-law Indira.

The unbearable stench coming from the flat alerted the neighbours to the fact that something was amiss. When social workers from the locality learnt about the incident, they rescued

Durgavati with the help of Tuling police.

"She was normal and has two minor sons. But she used to remain inside the apartment which was locked from outside. Her husband suspected that she was possessed by a ghost, and he never visited the first floor flat. He lived with his sister-in-law," said Neha Tiwari, neighbor.



Durgavati Mishra being taken to hospital after her rescue

"For the past year, the family neglected her. She was often assaulted by her husband. He never bothered to give food her. She remained inside, and she would urinate and excrete in her clothes,

as she lost the strength to walk due to weakness," said Tiwari.

"When we entered the flat to rescue her, she could not respond and was unable to even walk. A foul smell was emanating from

Man burns stepson with cigarette butts

A Vikhroli resident has been booked for repeatedly assaulting his 4-year-old stepson and branding him with cigarette butts. Neighbours alerted the police about the crime committed by accused Satish Kottan, 32. The boy's mother had got separated from her husband and married a couple of years ago. The family resides at a chawl in Tagore Nagar, Vikhroli East.

the house. Her sister-in-law gave vague answers to our questions, so we informed the police, broke open the lock. Doctors rushed her to the hospital for treatment," said Alpesh Rupani, a lo-

cal social worker.

"The woman has become weak, and she has lost her eyes due to loss of water. The retinas in her eyes have been completely damaged. If the woman had not been rescued, she would have died in the next few days. She is in this condition because of her family. We have found assault marks on her body, and are rushing her to JJ hospital for treatment," said Dr Sarveshwar Dubey, who works with the 101 Emergency Helpline.

Assistant Inspector Dilip Landge from Tuling police station said, "The husband is working in Andheri. We have asked him to come to the police station. We will take legal action against him," said Landge.

Hapless Dalit girl child a victim of superstition

Woman murdered on suspicion of practising witchcraft in Chhattisgarh

and not the patient

Most women are under continuous mental strain for various reasons. Torture by in laws, ignorance of husband, lack of recognition and prestige in family, household (homely) conflicts, sexual dissatisfaction etc. shatters her personality. Sometimes she sits sullenly, suffers

In India, often psychiatrists directly compete with faith healers over their patients.

One such form of suppression often mentioned by the rationalists is that *women in India do not have the possibility of externalising their feelings* or to “let off steam’

from palpitation, shivering and twitching of the body, feeling of being choked or of chest being compressed. All these are mental disorder called Hysteria. Sometimes this is taken as she is possessed by ghost; and for that some horrible & monstrous measures are taken.

One such form of suppression often mentioned by the rationalists is that women in India do not have the possibility of externalising their feelings or to “let off steam’.[3] Bhargavi Davar, an activist in women’s movement analyses possession and trance practices as ‘symbolic gestures’ that provide some degree of negotiability for women who have few realistic options for empowerment.

Dr. Pradeep Joshi, Vice President, ANiS believes that such rituals might also have an “influence by triggering a cathartic process.’ Joshi added an explanation highlighting the role of “tension in the family” connected to the “possession syndrome”.

In India, often psychiatrists directly compete with faith healers over their patients. Psychiatrists often acknowledge that a traditional healer might be successful in curing one or two patients. However, this will only happen if the patient “whole-heartedly accepts the therapy and responds well to it” and if he suffers a malady that “can possibly be cured by just accepting suggestions”.

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Dava aur Dua Program in Mira Datar Dargah Gujarat

Even the Indian Government understood that people's belief systems and preferred treatment modalities should be understood within their cultural context. They piloted an initiative that recognised the need to combine both beliefs and psychiatric treatment and piloted the Dava aur Dua program in the Mira Datar Dargah, a sufi shrine in Gujarat.

The role of traditional healers were not neglected in this process. In fact, they were trained to help mental health professionals. They could advise patients to continue their medical treatment and follow up while keeping religious faith intact. Co-operation between traditional healers and professionals may increase patients' compliance for medical treatment.

Thus, healers and healing shrines are being framed as community mental health resources. It gives rise to a moral ambiguity about using traditional healing methods over using

psychiatric treatment. Even the Government recognises the importance of respecting traditional methods while using modern science.

Here's where I saw the connection between the state of mental health among women and the role of beliefs and social conditioning. The state of trance is something that experts have constantly debated on as it being a result of psychosocial stress.

I had certain questions in my mind -

What would lead a woman to get into a state of trance?

The community uses belief to get positive results but, is it right or is it wrong?

Is the state wrong in setting up an initiative like Dava aur Dua?

There is a moral ambiguity of using these

measures (belief tools) to get the same result which a scientific methodology can also lead to. Which brings me back to my earlier question of the role of rationality and beliefs. Does the method matter?

CHAPTER III:

Primary Research

Since the very beginning I was clear on the idea that I wanted to use film as a medium, throughout the research I was looking for narratives that would be exciting to translate into a film. There were numerous stories that came out during the literature review from the research papers of Vieda Skultans, Shubha Ranganathan and Bhargavi Davar. I saw the opportunity of finding more about the narratives and translate them into a film. I have always felt that film as a visual medium is excellent in communicating complex ideas quite easily.

Possible Project Directions

Feature films takes care in introducing complex characters who have layers to their character.

Documentaries often take longer to research and shoot and requires multiple perspectives.

Now there were two genres of films that I could make out of it.

Fiction Film

A fiction film has the capacity to hold the audience because of it's entertainment value. Fiction according to me gives you the ability to develop a nuanced look at different characters, often small gestures can say so much in a fiction which gives one the space to develop characters in detail. My subject matter on hallucinations and possession syndrome also called for creative ways of showing a person's mental state. Feature films takes care in introducing complex characters who have layers to their character. The storyline is structured with mini-climaxes and dramatic highlights often leading up to a final climax. There is a sense of beginning, middle and a dramatic ending.

Documentary

In documentaries, often action leads the

way. Nothing is scripted and nothing can be planned in advance. Even the director hardly has any idea what's going to happen next. Documentaries often take longer to research and shoot and requires multiple perspectives. Shooting a documentary on possession syndrome or traditional healing would have required shadowing patients, tantriks, psychiatrists and rationalists over a period of time. Considering the depth of the subject matter It seemed difficult to do justice to the subject matter in a period of 2 months.

It became evident that a documentary would have lacked the depth if done in a period of 2 months. A fiction film offered a better opportunity to explore characters and their thinking at length. Fiction film presents its own challenges in terms of arranging complex productions, hiring actors, etc. This was a challenge that I really wanted to take up. Nevertheless, I would definitely want to take up a documentary on this topic in the future.

Mahanubhav Shrine

Phalton, Satara district

During my study I came across the Mahanubhav Shrines where Shubha Ranganathan and before her Vieda Skultans had done extensive studies regarding the interpretations of trance and affliction which were found to be held by the different temple inhabitants.

The studies of women residing in Mahanubhav temples to critically evaluate both the rationalist and public mental health framing of healing shrines. These cases demonstrate at once women's agency and resilience in dealing with distress, as well as the importance of temples as sites of refuge.

The temple stay thus becomes a culturally mediated means of processing psychosocial stress in a socially sanctioned manner. Mahanubhav temples have a long tradition of being visited by people suffering from various kinds of afflictions, particularly magical afflictions. Afflicted pilgrims stay in the temple

for a specified ritual period, typically ten or forty days, and participate in the temple worship activities. The arati is expected to induce the afflicted persons to go into a trance, which will draw out the ghost. Thus, the trance is a central part of the healing process.

Bhargavi Davar and Madhura Lohokare's extensive survey of healing shrines in Maharashtra found that women resorted to shrines not only to cure afflictions, but also in order to access a safe haven during crisis periods.

For women undergoing family crises and unbearable social situations, the temple provides a refuge which in some cases becomes a permanent home. For 'mad patients', whose behaviour had become unmanageable for their families, she argued that the temple essentially provided custodial care.

Rationalist perspectives would argue that

women 'use' possession strategically and instrumentally to resist patriarchal hegemony.

Johannes Quack in his book *Disenchanted India* found that rationalists from ANiS regard women exhibiting trances as either mentally ill or deliberately faking possession in order to gain some advantage.

Feminists like Bhargavi Davar analyse possession and trance practices as 'symbolic gestures' that provide some degree of negotiability for women who have few realistic options for empowerment. The temple stay thus becomes a culturally mediated means of processing psychosocial stress in a socially sanctioned manner because it is interwoven with religion.

In these given cases the women's actions were guided not by the logic of resistance, but by attempts at survival. What is most striking is that Archana's statement about 'feeling like beating people at home' is smoothly woven into her illness narrative so as to sound like another 'symptom'.

The first time I had a trance was when I went to a Mahanubhav temple in 1996. I had gone there just to worship but during the arati I had a trance. Then I stayed there for three months with my mother. After that, I had trances every day. I went home after the treatment (temple stay) but had a lot of difficulty at home. I used to feel like beating people at home. Then I went to another Mahanubhav temple and stayed there for three to four months with my mother. Then I had a dream that I should go home. I then went home and was well.

Archana, 34

There is a lot of tension. There is tension about my illness, my children, the loans I have taken from relatives. I have to repay the loans. Sometimes, I cry a lot and feel like killing myself. Then I think of my children – if I die, will they get another mother? No. So I tell myself I have to live. I tell myself that things will become all right.

Mainabai

My problems began about 6 to 7 years after marriage. I was about 17 when I got married. At that time, I started having all sorts of symptoms – hand and leg aches, vomiting and fever. I did not get any relief from doctors' treatments. Then, after a couple of years, I stayed in the temple on the suggestion of a neighbour. After coming to the temple I started having possession trances. I felt better, became a follower and I have been coming regularly since then.

Sunita, 46

After I started coming to the temple, I have been frequently ill. I get trances at home too, on new moon and full moon days. I have very severe trances. Once this affliction is there in one's body, it does not go easily. It is like a tree that is eaten by an insect. This dukkha is very bad!

Vimla, 42

My Personal Experience at the Mahanubhav Shrine

Based on my literature review I decided to go there and see the situation for myself. I undertook a 250 Km bus journey to the Phaltan in Satara district. I reached there early in the morning at 5 AM. The people at the shrine were courteous enough to let me sleep for a while before I took some interviews. The shrine is a temple complex spread around a considerably large area. They have facilities for the pilgrims/patients to stay within the temple complex. The pilgrims usually take part in the daily temple rituals and also take part in doing the chores in the complex. The Mahanubhav Sect has its origins during the Bhakti movement where people moved away from the rut of Brahminical rituals. The movement's major achievement was its abolition of idol worship.

Now, contrary to the beginnings of the Mahanubhav Sect, they have turned back towards traditional archaic rituals. The ota



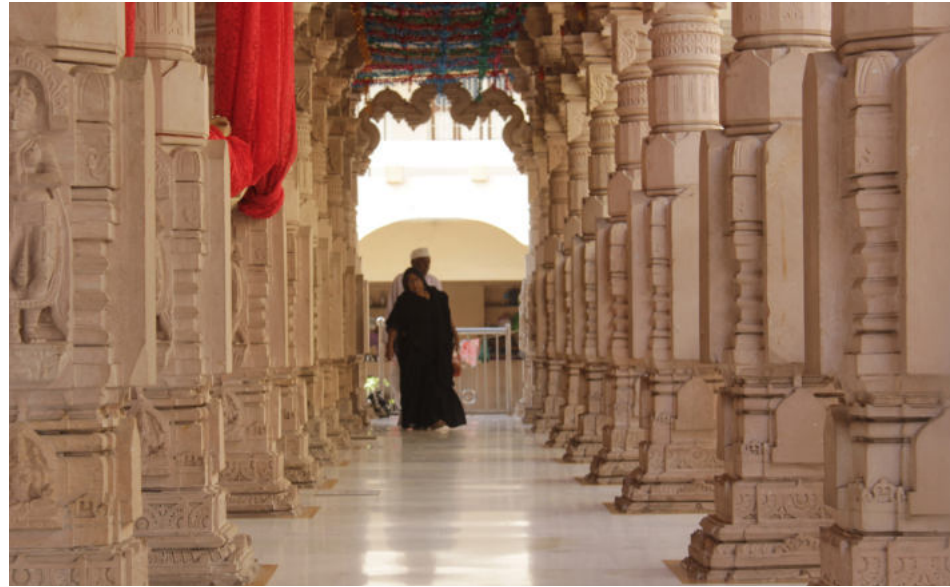
A lady prays on the Ota a religious symbol for the Mahanubhavs

which is a pedestal kept in the middle of the temple is supposed to act as a reminder of god and it's something not to be revered. My first 15 minutes at the shrine proved to me the change that had occurred in their ritualistic practices. In a case of absent mindedness, I had slept with my feet pointing towards the Ota and one of pilgrims at the shrine corrected the way I was sleeping. I observed that the women were devotedly walking around the Ota almost as if it was an idol. It became clear that the rationalist beginnings of the sect took a turn for

a system that mimics the old Hindu ways. This got me thinking if the things we believe to be superstitious started off with some logic and the society was the one responsible for twisting and re interpreting the meanings behind those superstitions.

Dressed in black from head to toe the women at the Mahanubhav shrine were extremely courteous. Eventually I got to interview the head Pujari at the shrine. One of the first ideas that I got from the interview was that the sect was largely based on teaching good moral values to people. He claimed that they treated ailments that were not detectable by modern medicine and the pujari ensured that he reviewed each of the medical cases before admitting them in the shrine. Now I did not have a way of ensuring if really took these precautions. He also added that they have a strict policy of not admitting people who according to them have vices such as smoking, drinking or eating non-vegetarian.

In my observation, the people at the Mahanubhav shrine were extremely self aware of their treatment method to the point that they know the ritualistic practices are aids in making the pilgrims/patients believe that there is an actual supernatural force that is curing them of their ailments, while all the cure that is happening is internal. During the interview the pujari was liberal enough to point out that the most of the possession or trance episodes are psychosomatic and it's induced because of the music, dance and the general ritualistic actions performed during the arati. During my whole conversation with the pujari I had a growing feeling that all this had got to do more with philosophy than superstition or rationality. He



A resident pilgrim dressed in complete black



The head baba at the Mahanubhav Shrine who heals the patients/pilgrims who come to the shrine.

claimed that when the smartest people in the world can't control their primal desires, religion and belief gives a moral code of conduct to ply on.

At the shrine the method of treatment is where the pujari based on the case he is dealing with recommends a specific set of aratis to perform in order to cure the ailment. When I was at the temple I saw a live case where a nurse working in Mumbai had developed some ailments that were not getting cured through modern medicine had come along with her mother. I was surprised to see a nurse who was exposed to modern medicine and technologies being influenced by what we perceive as traditional or superstitious. The nurse's mother was extremely concerned for her daughter and was listening ardently to the pujari suggesting aratis for her daughter. Towards the end when I was leaving I saw the mother praying intently alone in the temple and I could sense a certain sense of desperation in her for her daughter to get cured. That one image told me that beliefs are nothing but an expression of hope.

Now based on my experiences it was time to formulate stories around the ideas that I had explored.



The woman in the picture is the mother of a nurse who seems to be desperately praying for her daughter to get cured. Usually the afflicted women/men stay in the temple for 40 days to get themselves cured.



The men wear a head wear and a kurta and dhoti while the women are dressed from head to toe either in black or in pink. There is a hierarchy to the way the men and women dress up in the Mahanubhav sect.

Generating Initial Story Ideas

A story might be small, but the ideas contained within should be large, or at least clear.

I believe research is an essential part of the writing stories, especially when we are writing about a world and/or characters that we know from personal experience. When the possibility of writing from first hand experience seems slim, it becomes important to become a mini authority on the subject to do justice to the story.

The visit to the Mahanubhav Temple in Phaltan was one such experience where I had read about it from research papers but the visit helped me further understand the condition of women at the healing shrine.

The image of a mother desperately praying for her daughter to get cured was something that was extremely powerful. The image became a driving force in coming up with story ideas.

Because the very nature of short film limits complex character and plot development, you must explore theme. A story might be small, but the ideas contained within should be large, or at least clear. Thus I set out to define the major themes of that needed to be explored through the film.

1. Trance as a result of psychosocial stress
2. Exploring trance from both the perspective of superstition and rationality.
3. State of mental health in India.
4. The relationship between the society and an individual undergoing psychosocial stress.
5. Trance/possession as a result of social conditioning
6. Trance syndrome
7. Social stigma
8. Awareness about psychological treatment
9. Morality
10. Family dynamics

The following page has an outline of four concepts for the film. Out of the 4 ideas I had an inclination towards shooting the third idea. Now it was important actually do a fact check on the availability of resources and choosing a story that is practical.

IDEA 1

A married woman with dissociative disorder undergoes through a lot of stress at home. She doesn't have a support system or any outlet. The condition keeps deteriorating at home until she starts going into trance. The film would explore the associated stigma and the woman finally coming in terms with her psychological problems.

IDEA 3

The story would be about the turmoil between a daughter and her step mother where the daughter is extremely unhappy about her father bringing someone else into their life. Her step mother constantly tries to connect with the daughter but to no avail. The daughter terribly misses her mother and has episodes of trance. Her father gets extremely scared and calls in a tantrik. A parallel story would be about the friendship between the tantrik's kid and the girl. Towards the end, the girl is being beaten up by the tantrik and the tantrik's kid would be

IDEA 2

A fiction about the relationship between a psychiatrist who poses as a guru. He cures his disciples through what he claims is magic but in reality he cures them through psychiatric methods.

IDEA 4

A documentary observing the pilgrims at various Mahanubhav Shrines in Maharashtra. We would also look at the state of public mental health facilities in Maharashtra. Through this documentary we would look at the role of beliefs and importance of mental health. We would try to accomplish this by taking interviews with mental health experts, pilgrims at the shrine, rationalists, etc. to get their perspectives on the issue.

Unless stories are written from one's own perspective and experience, it will feel fake. During the initial study, many of the news reports regarding superstitious beliefs, godmen and quacks came from Chhattisgarh region. Initial Literature review also threw up a lot of stories pertaining to the area and it looked like going there would help in adding rich details to the story. Finding out about godmen, interviewing the patients and interviewing the godmen in Chhattisgarh seemed like the next logical step.

Chattisgarh

Looking at real case studies from the field

Doing the ground work in Chhattisgarh had another motivation behind it. Logistically it would be a nightmare to shoot in any place which we were not familiar with. The budget would have sky rocketed if we hired a home, arranged transportation and local actors without having a fixer or any support. Quite serendipitously Nielmani Kumar a batchmate of mine had to shoot a documentary in Chhattisgarh as a part of his graduation project. His involvement in the project meant that my logistical woes would be eased. Shooting the film Chhattisgarh also meant that the language of the film would be Chhattisgarhi. In hindsight it was an extremely wise decision to shoot in Chhattisgarh with Niel's paternal home at our disposal. More on that later.

Now with all the logistics set in place, it was time to get on the ground and document genuine first hand experience with traditional healing. On inquiring around we found two

tantrik's who were ready to interview with us. Now tantriks in Chhattisgarh are locally called Baiga Guniya or simply Baiga. Baigas are immensely popular in Chhattisgarh, where patients flock to them like it was any other clinic. I would be addressing tantriks as Baiga further in the document.



Biharilal Baiga

One of the challenges we faced while interviewing Biharilal Baiga was making him comfortable. After a lot of negotiations he agreed to an audio interview and was very particular about not shooting anything. He operated out of his house which to be honest made us extremely nervous while conducting the interview. We were taken to an inner room covered with idols and photos of gods and goddesses, where we conducted our interview. Biharilal's interview gave us a lot of fodder that we could incorporate in the film. We asked him about his history, childhood, process, his guru and his opinions on the efficacy of his trade. We also came to know that he was a convicted felon who was out on bail, which I presume was the reason for him not allowing us to shoot anything. One of the memorable things we got out of the interview was when he told us about his childhood. He told

us that like how most children would play with toys or dolls in their childhood, his upbringing was such that he used to play with idols and would make up his own rituals. As written earlier a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind. Biharilal wholeheartedly trusted the efficacy of his trade since he was conditioned from a very early age to believe in his trade. Social conditioning became one of the themes that we tried to portray in the film. Towards the end of interview he was kind enough to let us shoot one photograph of his. It was really important for us to get as many visual references as possible to be able to add authenticity to the actor playing the Baiga.



Ratan Baiga

Compared to Biharilal Baiga who we interviewed earlier Ratan Baiga had a bigger thriving setup. His whole campus was setup over a one acre land. He was extremely courteous thinking that we were journalists even after our repeated clarification. Ratan Baiga unlike Biharilal let us shoot him and his process intact he was forthcoming and told us to record the process where he was treating people. His family has been in the trade for six generations now with his son going to be the 7th generation. He has a considerable following in the area, in fact there is a song dedicated to Ratan Baiga's father Chandva Baiga. We were lucky enough to interview a few patients/followers of his who had undying faith in his treatment process. The one thing that we heard from all the patients we interviewed was that they had undergone medical treatment and turned to alternate healing only when it wasn't working.

You can find the video documentation of Ratan Baiga and the audio interview with Biharilal Baiga in the accompanying DVD.



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From top left

1. *There is a considerably good amount of crowd even on a weekday. His clientele usually includes people from nearby villages*
2. *He generally primes his patients on how he is going to treat them so they are mentally prepared*
3. *The Baiga often announces the ailments in front of the crowd as he cures them*
4. *There is often 'magic' involved in his treatment, here he cuts a lemon in half in his hand without any instrument. People who go to him often believe what they see.*

CHAPTER IV:

Pre - Production

Since I had decided I wanted to make a film in a Chhattisgarh. It was important to explore the place and get a deep understanding of the place and its culture, and the story would happen organically out of that exploration. This is an idea that I borrowed from director Raam Reddy's Tithi where the director and his cowriter generated a script from the location.



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Generating Story Ideas in Chhattisgarh

The story cropped up from the locations.

This process gives an added advantage of thinking about the film practically based on the resources you have at your disposal. Many of the ideas tossed around for the film originated from the resources we had. Of course there was a rough storyline that we were working with, but there was so much that was added based on the field study, interviews and location recce we had conducted.



Locations

Since we already had an idea of location requirements. We set out looking for a house and a temple where we would be able to manage a 3-5 days of shoot. We were looking at a house which worked with the characters. It couldn't have been too village like or it couldn't have been too upscale. It had to look like a house where people would have belief in both traditional and modern healing methods based on the characters we had thought of. We also had to look out for a temple where the protagonist would go to as she would have memories of her mother attached to the place. We found a beautiful, run down 100 year old temple with a pond near it. I had a good feeling that the temple would add character to the film and give a sense of the space our characters live in.



Girdhari Yadav – Lata’s Father



Dhaniram Lathare – Baiga



Sadhna – Lata (Recasted later)



Prerit – Baiga’s Son

Actors

After a long search we contacted a local theatre group who performed plays at a national level. We gave them a brief on the characters that we required for the film. After the first set of auditions we found actors to play the role of the daughter, father and the baiga. We still had to find an actor to play the mother and look at other options for the rest of the characters. It was extremely important for the protagonist to be able to pull off a crucial scene where she goes into a trance and so we kept our options open for the daughter’s role.

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Folk Songs

We also had the idea of using Chhattisgarhi folk songs to add a local flavour to the film. Subhash Yadav of the local theatre group we had approached gave an impromptu performance which we recorded as reference for our music director to improvise on in the film. Chhattisgarhi folk songs have different types Karma, Damariya, Bharthari, Pandwani, Panthi to name a few.

Script Structure

The first trip to Chhattisgarh was extremely fruitful in terms of the material we got to add detail to the existing story idea. We got a rough idea of what the locations were, the actors we had to do the roles and even what the music would sound like. Based on these inputs a final script had to be written and locked down. Main themes in the script The primary and secondary research on the subject highlighted the main themes that needed to be explored in the story. This is where the script was clinically dissected and the themes decided earlier were put into the story structure. The following is a walk through of how these themes are explored through the script's narrative.

1. *Trance as a result of psychosocial stress.*

Lata the protagonist of the story undergoes psychosocial stress due to the death of her mother and her father remarrying. Lata reacts to these circumstances with a flood of strong emotions and a sense of uncertainty. Lata going into trance in the story is because of her rebellious nature and her not accepting her step mother.

2. *Exploring trance from both the perspective of superstition and rationality.*

It was important that a neutral perspective towards trance and possession syndrome was put forward where neither methods seems right. In the story the Tantrik's son acts as the moral compass who is put in a spot when he sees Lata being beaten up

by his father and he has to decide whether violence is something acceptable when it comes to treating someone. The tantrik's son here would act as a representation of the audience looking at the whole matter from the perspective of both rationality and superstition.

3. *State of mental health in India.*

Lata's father in the beginning of the movie believes that a baiga could cure her daughter's illness. It's never revealed what her illness is but her father's decision shows the general perception towards medical science. There is lack of awareness about mental health issues in most parts of the country. Lata's illness is a result of her mental state and even though she is under medication, her father seems to think that traditional healing is more effective.

4. ***The relationship between the society and an individual undergoing psychosocial stress.***

Towards the middle of script when Lata undergoes her first trance, the society understands the episode as possession by her mother's spirit. The society has a great part in making Lata behave in the way she does.

5. ***Trance/possession as a result of social conditioning***

In the beginning of the film a younger Lata is looking at a woman undergoing trance which is the first representation of social conditioning. Lata in the story has been brought up in a society where trance is a socially accepted phenomenon and it is associated with possession by spirits or ghosts. Later in the story the idea that Lata's

trance is due to her mother's spirit is planted into her by the society after her first episode. Social conditioning is also shown through the Baiga's son who is someone who is also conditioned to believe in traditional healing methods.

6. ***Morality***

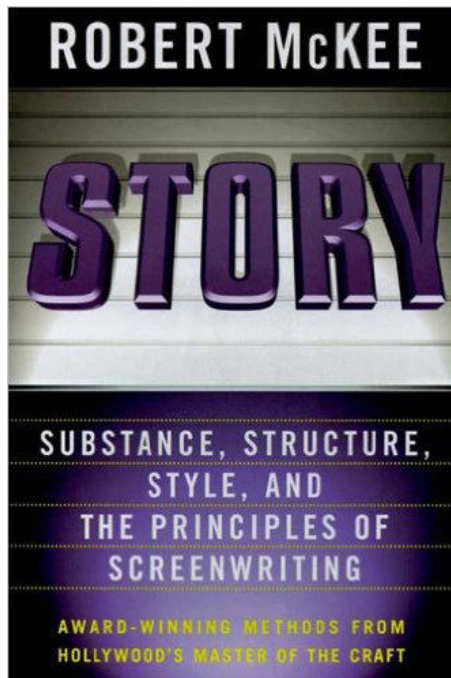
Towards the end of the movie the Baiga's son has the decision to make whether his father beating his friend up in the name of healing is acceptable or not.

7. ***Family dynamics***

The film explores the family dynamics between Lata, her father and her step mother. Lata's relationship with her step mother is strained even though she tries to fill her mother's void. The situation is such that everyone in the family has accepted

the state of affairs and it seems hard to make amends. Lata is resilient to the idea of accepting her step mother (Archana) into the family.

References

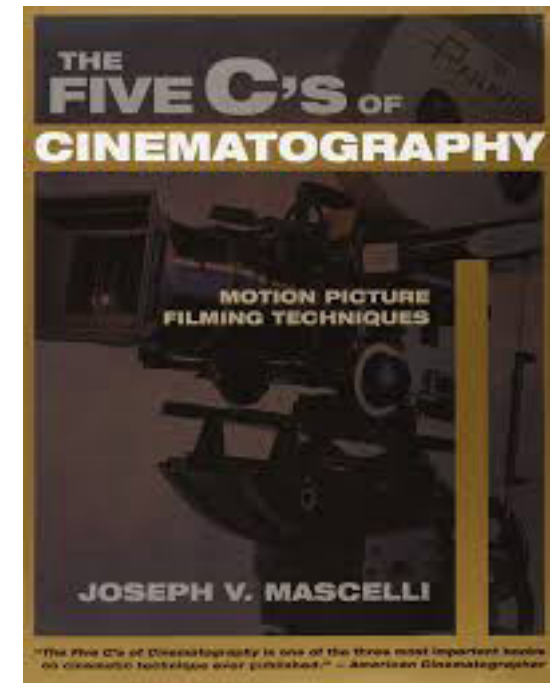


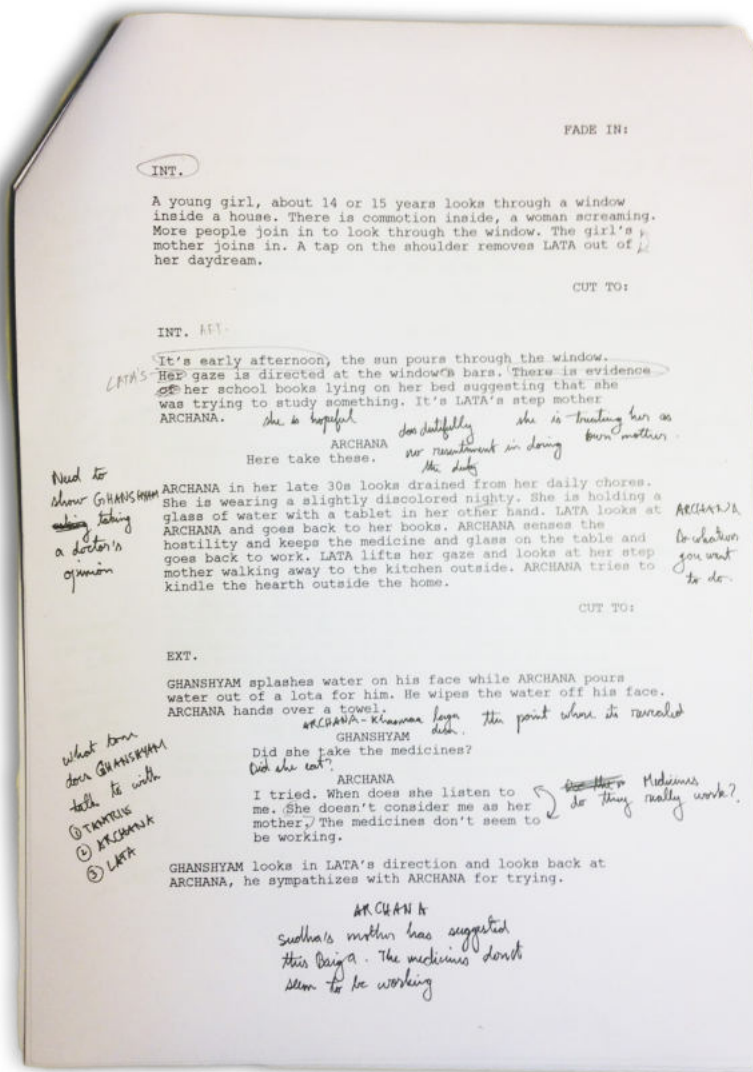
Robert McKee - Story - Audio book

Although some may accuse Robert McKee of teaching formula storytelling, this book is about how good stories transcend formula to become great art. McKee educates us as to why some stories grip us to our toes while others leave us yawning within the first few minutes. There is a lot to be learnt from reading this book. It dissects and analyses how stories are built, it provides sort of a map that guides us and teaches the clues and the structures necessary to write an amazing and enjoyable story.

The Five Cs of Cinematography

The complexities of Visual Style is presented in the simplest of terms. It breaks down the entire process of cinematic structure and teaches you everything you need to know about cinematography. The two sections that helped me the most were continuity and composition. It highlights how relationships can be established on screen between characters and how do you create the illusion of three dimensional space within a two dimensional frame.





Writing and finishing the script

It may seem that writing the first draft of the script is the hardest part where you want everything to work in the story. The hardest part is writing a script and then improving ideas and not holding anything dear. With this story as well there were at least 5 drafts that were made before locking the script. Characters were added or subtracted based on the themes that needed to be highlighted through the story. Script writing involves a lot of visual descriptions that enhance the story. Often in script writing it is advised to show and not tell. The entire process of script writing and arriving at a final draft took a month.

You can read the entire script in Appendix A.

Pre - Production

Making the film before making the film.

With a script in hand the next important step was at hand – Pre production. The more planning you can do in advance, the better shape you'll be in when you begin to shoot. Quite understandably pre – production lacks the glamour of production but this is where the real magic happens. This is when not only each and every detail of the production process is finalised but there are creative decisions taken regarding the look and feel of the film. This is where problems are anticipated and contingency plans are made. In short, pre production is the where, what and when of your entire shoot. With only a few weeks to go before the final shoot there were a few things left on the checklist.

Auditions

There were last minute changes in the casting when two of the actors playing the step mother and daughter backed out at the last moment. In order to keep our options open we had auditioned an actor from the Antraal theatre group in Delhi, so we called her in to do Lata's character five days before the shoot was supposed to begin. Similarly we didn't have an actor for the step mother's role, so based on a lead we went to Raipur to audition actors for the step mother's role three days before the shoot. The final casting ended only a day before the shoot was supposed to commence.

Logistics

Before shooting the film, we needed to have the logistics set out and ready to go in terms of how and where we were going to fit all our time and money into our 5 day shooting schedule. If there's one thing that can quickly turn your well-intentioned film shoot into a chaotic

mess at your location, it's poorly planned shoot logistics. The script demanded that the scenes required certain factors like the time of day or night, availability of crowd and travel time. In order to maintain continuity and shoot in the shortest time possible we had to shoot the film non-chronologically. We ordered the scenes based on the time of the day. Logistics also involved arranging the travel for the actors, crew members and travel to the location during the shoot. We also had to arrange pickup for the talent and crew members and often we had to combine pickups to reduce the costs involved.



The four locations we shot in

Locations

Although the locations were one of the first things that was finalised it was important to secure proper consent and permissions. It was also important to conduct a recce before the shoot to address any issues that might come during the shoot. We negotiated with Ratan Baiga to let us shoot certain sequences in the temple itself. The sequence near the old temple posed a problem as there was a carnival going on nearby. This meant that we had to shoot during off peak hours when the area in and around the temple seemed empty. Since most of the scenes were supposed to be shot in the house we arranged for the actors and the crew members to stay on location.

Shot Division

Since the project was being done on an extremely tight schedule there was no time to do a detailed storyboard. Instead we relied on a detailed shot division to do the job. Once the script is ready, we have to finally go through this exercise, of dividing each scene into shots. Shot division can be considered as a pre visualisation exercise of the entire film before it is made. It is important to understand the emotional driver of the scene content to decide the breakdown. With the shot division for this project I tried envisioned the flow of the scenes and then added some extra shots in the breakdown just to be sure.

The shot division for this film is detailed out here.

The first number is the scene number, the second is the setup where the actors and lights and the props are set in a location and the third number is the shot variant within the same setup

Equipment or props required in the scene															
Spatial position of the camera															
Coverage of the subject in the frame															
X	SHOT # SCENE SETUP SHOT	I/E D/N	DISTANCE	SUBJECT	ANGLE	LENS	EQUIPMENT	MOVEMENT	COVERAGE	NOTES	SCRIPT TIME	SETUP TIME	PREDIC # OF TAKES	SHOOT TIME	TAKE # (circle best)
SCENE 1										INT. A HOUSE IN THE VILLAGE - EVENING					
	1.1.1	I/D	Full Shot	Window, Younger Lata, Crowd	Low Angle	18-55mm	Softbox, Slider	Slow Dolly In	Whole Scene	Soft box to neutralise EXT. and INT. Block sunlight	0.30	20	6	46	
NOTES:									TOTAL MINUTES FOR SCENE 1 46 0.77						
SCENE 2										INT. GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE - DAY					
	2.1.1	I/D	Closeup	Lata through the window	Eye Level			N.M		Behind the shoulder as Lata looks through the window					
	2.2.1	I/D	Medium Shot	Archana & Lata	Lata's Eye Level			N.M		Archana stands with medicines as Lata looks at her.					
	2.2.2	I/D	Closeup	Lata	Lata's Eye Level			N.M		Lata stares at Archana and ignores her					
	2.2.3	I/D	Mid Shot	Archana	Low Angle			N.M		Archana waits for a while with medicine in her hand					
	2.2.4	I/D	Mid Shot	Lata, Archana's Hands Table	Lata's Eye Level			N.M		Archana keeps the medicine and glass on the table and goes out.					
	2.2.5	I/D	OTS	Lata Archana	Lata's Eye Level			N.M		Lata watches as Archana walks out of the room and					
	2.2.6	I/D	Medium Shot	Lata, Table	Lata's Eye Level			N.M		Lata reaches for and has the medicine					
	2.2.7	I/D	Full Shot	Lata & Archana	Master Shot			N.M		Whole scene					
NOTES:									TOTAL MINUTES FOR 0 0 0						
SCENE 3										EXT. GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE - DAY					
	3.1.1	E/D	Medium CU	A pot boiling, Archana, Hearth	Archana's Eye Level			N.M		The boiling pot and fire is supposed to make the audience uncomfortable in a way					
	3.2.1	I/D	Long Shot	Ghanshyam, Archana	Archana's Eye Level			N.M		Ghanshyam enters the house from work. Archana					
NOTES:									TOTAL MINUTES FOR 0 0 0						
SCENE 4										EXT. GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE - DAY					
	4.1.1	E/D	Closeup	Ghanshyam,	Low Angle			N.M		Ghanshyam washes his face					
	4.1.2	E/D	Full Shot	Ghanshyam, Archana	Eye Level, Master Shot			N.M		Ghanshyam splashes water on his face, as Lata pours water out of a lot					
	4.1.3	E/D	Closeup	Archana	Eye Level			N.M		Archana tries to start a conversation					
	4.1.4	E/D	OTS	Ghanshyam, Archana	Archana's Eye Level			N.M		Ghanshyam starts the conversation					
	4.1.5	E/D	OTS	Archana, Ghanshyam	Ghanshyam's Eye Level			N.M		Archana answers with her eyes on the hearth.					
	4.1.6	E/D	Full Shot	Archana, Hearth	Archana's Eye Level			N.M		Archana gets back to the hearth as Ghanshyam					
NOTES:									TOTAL MINUTES FOR 0 0 0						
SCENE 5										INT. GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE - DAY					
	5.1.1	I/D	Master Shot	Ghanshyam, Archana	Ghanshyam's Eye Level			N.M		Ghanshyam is eating as Archana looks at him.					

Interior, Exterior, Day or Night

Subjects in the particular shot

Camera movement. Eg; Dolly in, Pan, etc

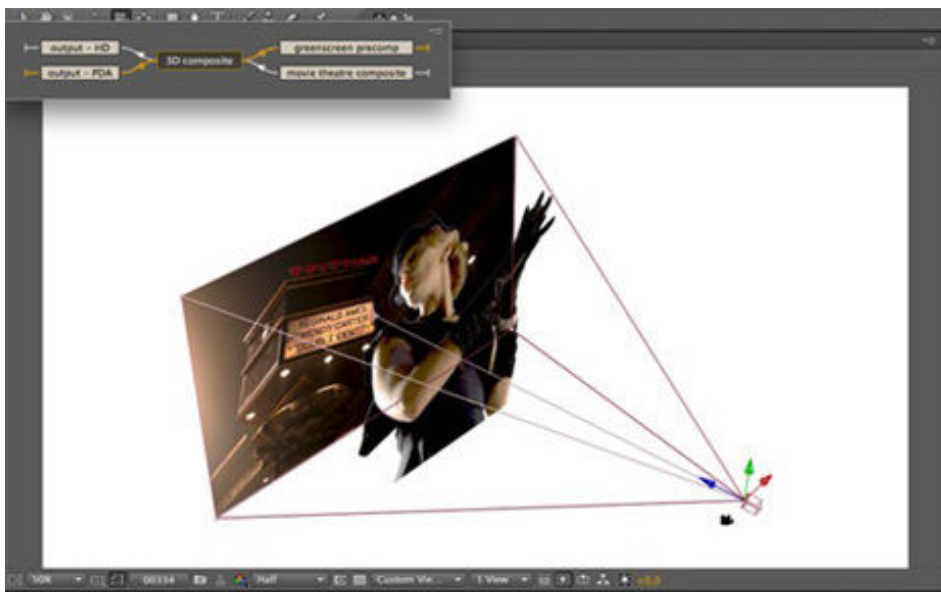
Action in the shot

Interior, Exterior, Day or Night

Subjects in the particular shot

Camera movement. Eg; Dolly in, Pan, etc

Action in the shot



2.5D photos involve splitting a single photograph into multiple layer and arranging them in a 3D space to give a perception of depth.

2.5 D Shots

During the script writing stage I was looking for ways to represent Lata's hallucinations in a visually odd way. I decided on using a technique called 2.5D where a photograph is made to look like video footage by separating and cleaning up the layers and putting them back together. As I imagined Lata's memories of her mother had frozen in time, with Lata unable to come out of the grief. Thus it made sense to represent her hallucinations as something that looks frozen in time and the 2.5D technique fit in really well.

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Equipment Rentals

Equipments take up a major chunk of budget when it comes to indie film making and therefore it was important to plan ahead. We made a list of requirements consulting with the sound designer (Sam Santosh) and then went on to negotiate with the equipment rental agency. The only catch was that we had to pickup and drop the equipment from Raipur (which is around 250 Kms from where we were shooting). But the good thing was that we would have assistants to help us with the equipments. They arranged for us 3 crew members to help us throughout the five day shoot.

CHAPTER V:

Production

The production was one of the most fun aspects of doing this project. There is an immense amount of pressure to get the job done on time. Added to that working in 45 degrees celsius just upped the level of hard work required to pull the shoot off.

Production

Getting our hands dirty



Scheduling

At the time of going to production we had 25 scenes to shoot in 5 days. Using the shot division we chunked the scenes into 4 groups - morning, afternoon, evening and night. This gave us the liberty to shoot the scenes out of order. Since most of the scenes were going to be situated in the house we planned 2 days of shoot in the house which ended up being 4 days of shoot. The Baiga's temple and the old temple shot were chunked together into a day's schedule.

Crowd Sequences

These scenes were especially tricky since the crowd was untrained and unpaid we had to keep in check whether they were looking into the camera or emoting something that doesn't go with the scene. Since the crowd we were shooting were used to easily get impatient we had to plan the shots ahead of the shoot and call in the crowd and quickly get the shoot done.

Baiga's Temple

In order to shoot the actors within the crowd we scheduled the shoot on a Sunday. It was important for us not to come in the way of their normal functioning. We arranged for Ratan Baiga to sit in one corner of the room carrying out his business while we arranged the shots in such a way that only the actor playing the Baiga was visible in the frame.

Production

Getting our hands dirty

Working with the crew

It was an extremely enriching experience working with the crew. Three of the crew members who had come from Odisha as equipment handlers made the whole shooting process smooth. They had around 15 – 20 years of experience shooting Chhattisgarhi and Oriya films. We worked with a single soft box when it was required and often relied on reflectors and natural light to light the scene. Crew members in most occasions understood the requirement of the scene and efficiently set up the lights. They were also responsible for handling the equipments and setting it up when required.

We had a Canon 5D Mark III with 24–70mm and a 70–200mm lens, which the camera assistant would set up before each of the shots. We also used a Canon 550D and a 70D to do take fillers where a multi-camera setup was required. We used the 550 D on a FlyCam sta-

biliser since we forgot to carry enough weights to handle a Canon 5D Mark III. Often our camera assistant (Sanjay Kumar Das) or associate director (Nielmani) would also assume the role of shooting when we had to manage the shots in single takes.

The sound was entirely handled by Sam Santosh with a Rode boom mic, H5N and a Tascam recorder. I was extremely careful to loop in Sam before planning and blocking out every shot to help him set up his equipment better, so that it does not interfere with the performance while it was being shot.

Managing Continuity

One thing we missed out in the preproduction was deciding the costumes. We chunked the scenes into four parts (A,B,C,D) and assigned each chunk a particular costume. In this way whenever we were shooting a scene even if it

was out of chronology we would know whether the actor has to wear costume A or B or C. There was one particular sequence where the father's character had grown a stubble on the 5th day of the shoot and there was no time for him to shave, so we placed the actor in a shadowy region of the frame to hide his stubble.

Data Handling

Since we used three cameras and two audio recording devices it was extremely important to backup the data correctly. All the footages were copied at the end of day into two hard drives and arranged day wise.









Production Problems

Like any other short film this film was also filled with a lot of problems. On the very first day of the shoot, when we had planned to shoot morning and afternoon sequences we had an overcast sky to deal with. We couldn't even manage to re create the settings since there was no electricity to run the soft boxes. We managed to shoot only two scenes on the first day of the schedule. Now in order to make up for the loss of a day, we calculated the number of we had to compensate in the coming days to finish the shoot on time.

The next day we had the sun on our side but we had a different situation to deal with. There was a event going on nearby where they were

blaring out songs on speakers which made us question our decision of doing sync sound. Since the event was for celebrating the birth of a son in the family, it was not possible for us to ask them to totally cut the music off. So we negotiated with them to pause the music whenever we were shooting a scene. So what ensued was, we would set up a scene, then call the family up and ask them to stop the music for 15 minutes, then we would finish the shoot and call them up to resume the music. This went on for two days of the shoot.

During the third day of shoot Girdhari Yadav's (The actor playing the father) son fell ill and he had to take off from the shoot early. Due to

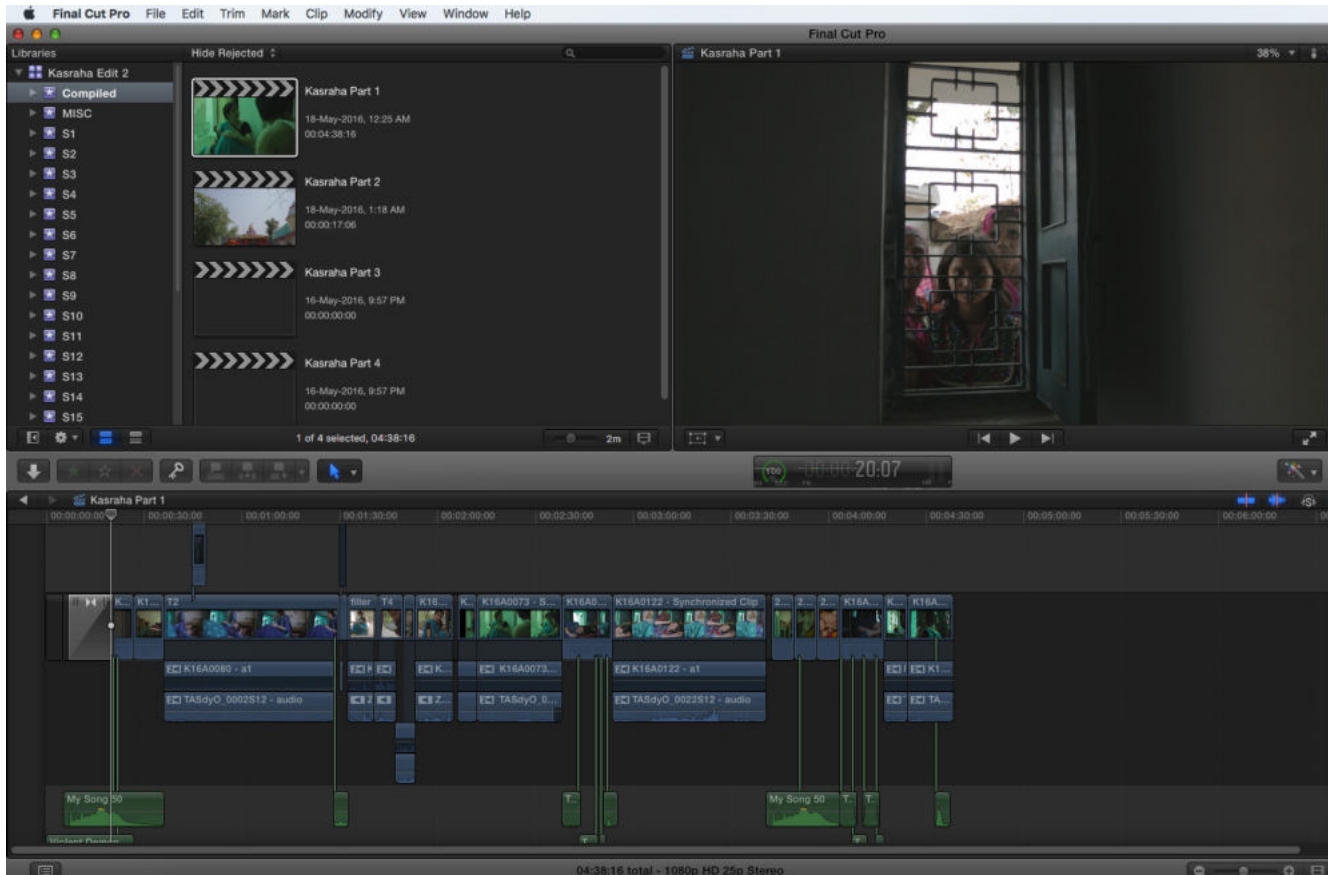
his son's health condition he couldn't devote the time we had stipulated while planning the schedule. So we had to improvise and shoot scenes out of chronology to make up for lost time. We also had to rush through some of the scenes without taking a lot of takes to ensure that we get all the scenes done on time.

There is a rush in this film making process where things seem to be going all wrong, but with the help of the entire crew working dedicatedly, you are able to pull it off at the end.

CHAPTER VI:

Post - Production

Once the shoot was complete it was now time to get on with the post-production.



Editing

For the editing process we first divided the footages, both audio and video into folders labelled with scene numbers. These footages were then brought into Final Cut Pro X and arranged into events based on the scene number and synchronised. Once this process is completed the editing process can begin. The editing more or less followed the shot divisions and script we had, with minor deviations in choosing the shots. With this project, we did not want to play with the chronology while editing. Editing is the phase where you learn a lot about the decisions you took during the shoot and learn a lot in the process. It is also important to progress slowly with the edit process for me, since you can see your progress after a day of work and understand the shortcomings the next day.

Sound

The sound for the film was going to be worked on once the second cut of the film was ready. At the time of writing this report the second cut is still being edited and readied for the sound design.

Music

While we did try to make certain scratch music before we went for the shoot. Karthik and I quickly understood that the visuals would greatly affect the tone of the music. So once the first cut of the film was ready, since he is based in Chennai we coordinated over Skype calls. During the numerous Skype calls we would go through the entire film and spot areas where music would be able to alleviate the emotion further. We finalised about 8-10 situations where we would be using his music in the film.

2.5 D Shots Layer Division

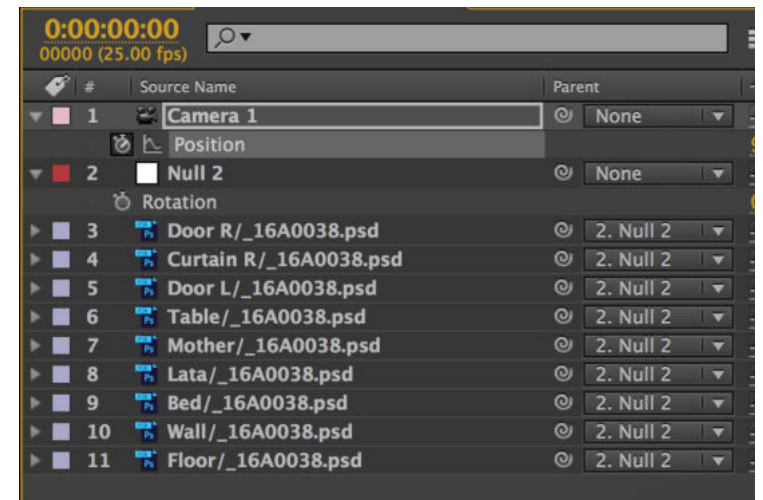
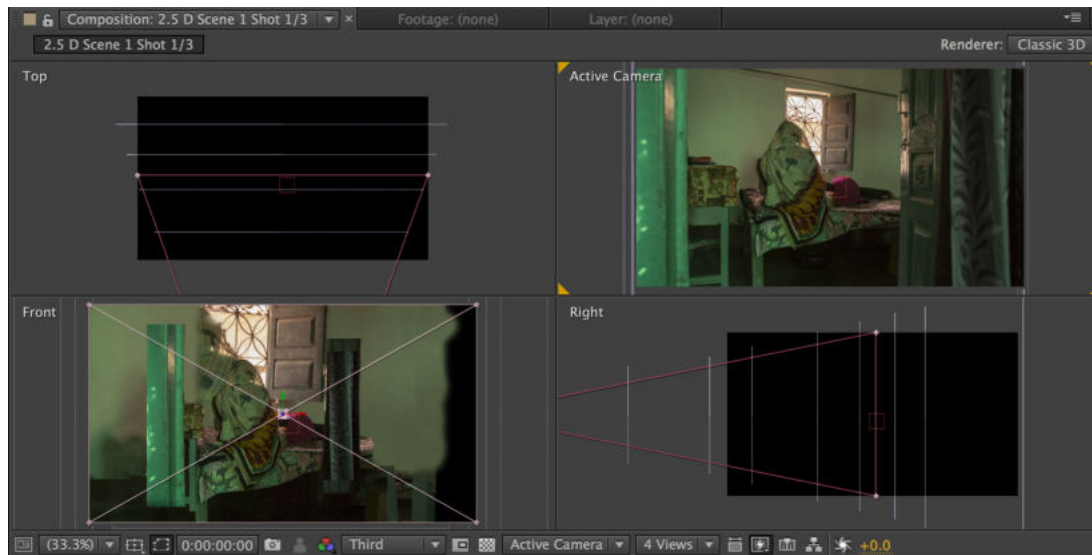
During the production of the film we managed to shoot the photographs for the 2.5 D shots as well. We planned a total of four 2.5 D shots in the film. In order to make the shots work we have to separate the layers into different parts based on the distance of the objects in the photographs from the camera. Then we clean up the layers individually to remove elements from other layers and create individual layers for each object.

Once these layers are brought into After Effects they are spatially arranged in the same location as seen in the photograph, the only difference being their distance related to each other in the Z axis. This is done in order to exaggerate the false three dimensionality of the space. The 2.5 D sequences gave two advantages, one is the seemingly impossible dolly moves that we achieved with the shots and the other is the manipulation with the depth of the space rendering a surreal look.



2.5 D Shots Work flow

The first image on the left shows the separated layers brought into After Effects from Photoshop. The layers are placed carefully using the different views. The layers are then scaled up or down depending on the requirement.



CHAPTER VII:

Conclusion

This project started out with a single journey of gaining knowledge about superstitious and irrational religious practices that are so ingrained in our society. As my perspective grew larger about the subject, the project also grew bigger in scope. I even had to narrow down my project to the area of superstition in women and the possession syndrome only in the interest of time. This project holds a lot more scope in terms of understanding and documenting different perspectives, most probably through the medium of documentary films. The journey eventually led to two crossroads of learning that I simultaneously took through the project – one was of film making and the other about the subject. Here I'll describe my learnings from each of those routes.

Film Making

From the very beginning even before choosing the subject for my Project 3, I was clear about doing the final deliverable in the form of a film. I was always under the opinion that films are an excellent visual medium to express one's thought on cinema. I decided to take up film because I wanted to experience the process of filmmaking. The basic steps of filmmaking are almost similar for any branch of filmmaking regardless of the length, format or content. So I thought I would only learn more about film making by trying to make a short film.

One of the most difficult things about making a film is getting the right people to do the right job. Through this process of film making I have gathered enough collaborators who I would work with on future projects. Most of the crew members were working on a project of this nature for the first time. I along with my associate director were trying out a production

of this scale for the first time, where we were shooting in an entirely different state. It took a lot of time to understand and build a workflow with different people involved in the project. One of the major hurdles in making film with a crew is keeping them charged up and excited about the project than myself. The thing with long development time is that I started second guessing myself about the decisions, but it was important to stay and finish the film.

Going into this project I was aware of the old trope that "everyone's first film sucks". This realisation dawns on you at every stage of production, when you are three weeks into pre production, you are suddenly aware that the script sucks and when you are in production, you realise that the pre production was insufficient and probably you could have casted better. Now that I am putting an edit together, its pretty clear to me that the short film has

turned out to be awful even though showing it to a few people has only brought in good comments about the film. I feel that it is most important that we develop an ability to look at your own work with a critical eye and say it stinks, it's then that you can actually make your next step a better one.

Mistakes aren't bad as long as you learn from them. I tried my best to do as much pre production as possible before the shoot and I tried to consciously shoot according to what I had planned, but in the end it didn't help that much. The biggest learning happens in undergoing through the entire process because that's when you get an overview of your flaws and then there is the added perk of having your own short film to show around. There's always something special about your own movies.

In the end, I think it was an extremely good

decision to take up short film as my project. I realised how draining the film making process is and have found a newfound respect for any and every film that comes out (no matter how bad they seem, there is a lot of man hours involved in making something decent enough for the screen). One needs to be really committed to the film that they are making. It doesn't matter if the film is good or bad, every film maker has to go through this process.

Rationality as an Idea

It is not surprising that religion and spirituality remain important to the vast majority of individuals in a society such as ours. As highlighted in the beginning, there are factions of the society that see benefits in the idea of superstition. Whether it was Mahatma Gandhi's attempts at controlling mass behaviour through freedom or ISRO chief's visit to Tirupati for a special arati for the PSLV satellite it is clear that the positive effects of superstitious behaviour

won't address the larger problem. This brings up the question whether in terms of practicality, does it seem worthwhile to encourage false beliefs in exchange for a small return. It should be also noted that there are cases where people holding superstitious beliefs have actually made their lives worse.

I would not be wrong at all in saying that we are all superstitious, to a degree. All of us have our own little belief systems. We all engage in building narratives about our lives, to the point we begin rationalising the stories we build. These narratives can take a variety of forms, some of which rely on our superstitious beliefs. Superstitions are cultural artefacts of the way mankind has rationalised its hopes and inner desires. This particular definition of superstition points to the idea that superstition is something that needs to be understood through a study of human behaviour and psychology. There is a possibility of rationalising and educating

people about the superstitions so ingrained in the Indian society today. This does not mean that modern science with its origins in the west has answers for everything, it means that there is a greater need to look at the workings of the human brain from an Indian perspective. The reason why a large part of the Indian population still stays away from the psychiatric treatment is because there is a stigma around the way mental health patients are perceived in the society, which is an entirely western establishment of psychiatric treatment.

Since the very beginning, ancient Indian civilisation has tried to understand the workings of the human brain. Indian psychology has a profound underlying philosophy. Patanjali's Yogasutra and verses from the Bhagawat Gita contain specific instructions on taking control of the mind and developing a deeper understanding of our psyche. Through years of western dominance,



we have been heavily influenced by the west even when it comes to the area of psychology. Of course the breakthroughs in western medicine stand on their own merit and have made immense efforts to delve deeper into the human psyche. However the real requirement is to update Indian psychological traditions with western methodologies. We need to address Indian psychological traditions with the same importance as mainstream western psychology. This maybe the reason why psychiatric treatment is something that is not availed in India because it is based on western methodologies which doesn't take Indian psyche and culture into account.

There is also a need for widespread education

regarding superstitious malpractices across the length and breadth of India. We all are superstitious in our own ways, even I was during the production of the film when things went wrong. Before the production began two of the actors backed out five days before the shoot. During the production there was no electricity or sunlight on the first day when we had shoot afternoon sequences, there were speaker blaring out songs near where we were shooting, one of the actors didn't turn up on time on two days of the shoot, one of the child actors got motion sick during the travel to one of the locations and puked the entire way, the list went on and on. We had no respite even after the production finished, on the way to return the equipments, the tyre of the vehicle we were

travelling in blew up because of the intense heat wave, the accident could have turned out to be major if the driver hadn't been careful. I really began questioning my luck and was being extremely superstitious through out these episodes. The happenings didn't stop even as recently as May when the hard drive on which the movie was being edited on crashed and we lost half of the edited film. I guess it is human nature to construct stories around everything. The problem is when these stories are used to misguide or cheat people. This is where the change should come and people should realise when their beliefs start bringing harm to them instead of hope.

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Appendix A

66

FADE IN:

INT.

A HOUSE IN A VILLAGE, EVENING

A young LATA, about 10 years old looks through a window inside a house. There is commotion inside, a woman screaming. More people join in to look through the window. A woman has her hands kept on young LATA's shoulder. It's her mother. A tap on the shoulder removes LATA out of her daydream.

CUT TO:

INT.

GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE, EARLY AFTERNOON

The sun pours through the window. LATA's gaze is directed at the window bars. Her school books lie on her bed suggesting that she was trying to study something. ARCHANA in her late 30s looks drained from her daily chores. She is wearing a slightly discolored nighty. She is holding a glass of water with a tablet in her other hand. After all these days she is still hopeful that LATA would pay heed to her words. It's LATA's step mother ARCHANA.

ARCHANA
Here take these.

LATA looks at ARCHANA and goes back to her books. ARCHANA senses the hostility and keeps the medicine and glass on the table and goes back to work. LATA lifts her gaze and looks at her step mother walking away to the kitchen outside. She reaches out to the table kept before her and takes the medicine. ARCHANA tries to kindle the hearth outside the home.

CUT TO:

EXT.

GHANSHYAM splashes water on his face while ARCHANA pours water out of a lota for him. A pot boils on the hearth, steam coming out of it. He wipes the water off his face. ARCHANA hands over a towel.

ARCHANA
I'll put out the lunch for you.

GHANSHYAM
Did she eat?

ARCHANA
I tried. When does she listen to
me. She doesn't consider me as her
mother.

ARCHANA hands over a towel to GHANSHYAM and keeps the lota
back in its place and goes back to the boiling pot.

CUT TO:

INT.

GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE, COURTYARD

GHANSHYAM is eating, seated on a straw mattress. ARCHANA is
seated by his side, her gaze shifting between GHANSHYAM's and
his plate. LATA's coughs inside her room. GHANSHYAM pauses
eating for a second.

ARCHANA
The medicines don't seem to be
working. Sudha's mother mentioned
this Baiga. Can we try him?

GHANSHYAM looks in LATA's direction and looks back at
ARCHANA, he sympathizes with ARCHANA for trying.

GHANSHYAM
Can you quickly put out the lunch.

INT.

LATA'S ROOM, SAME AFTERNOON

GHANSHYAM wipes his wet hands on his pants and puts his palm
on her forehead. He is tensed now. He goes outside the room.
The camera is fixed on LATA right now.

GHANSHYAM
(Calls out to ARCHANA) Give me that
Baiga's number.

Talks to the Baiga about LATA's illness. We can hear bits and
pieces of GHANSHYAM's conversation. He talks about how it's
been nearly a month and a half.

GHANSHYAM (CONT'D)
Ji... Ji... Ji... Yes, just a
second.

GHANSHYAM is right outside the door. He steps in.

GHANSHYAM (CONT'D)

LATA wake up.

GHANSHYAM puts the phone on LATA's ears. LATA barely managing to wake up from her sleep dutifully holds the phone on her ears. He puts the phone on her ear and we can hear the Baiga's voice leaking through the phone chanting mantras. He finally says that she'll get fine.

INT.

GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE, DREAM

[2.5 D footages used here] Dolly in on LATA sleeping as her mother stands behind her. Cut to her mother smiling from LATA's POV (Lower Angle). Closeup of LATA's face, Her mother's hand rest on LATA's forehead.

CUT TO:

INT.

LATA'S ROOM, SAME EVENING

GHANSHYAM puts his hand on her forehead. It's normal now. He lets out a sigh of relief and leaves the room

GHANSHYAM

Her temperature has come down.

ARCHANA seems relieved and looks in her direction.

GHANSHYAM (CONT'D)

Baiga has asked us to come on Saturday to perform a pooja on her.

INT.

BAIGA'S TEMPLE (MORNING)

A speaker unapologetically plays bhajans loudly. People have come with their families to the temple. They are all sitting down facing an inner room where a huge idol of Kali is kept. They are chanting bhajans. GHANSHYAM and ARCHANA are in the crowd. GHANSHYAM gently taps his hands as bhajans are sung. ARCHANA looks much more religious as she mouths the bhajans.

LATA is looking elsewhere, she looks at a child playing with some idols, he is making up his own rituals.

The BAIGA says some mantras and the child mimics his mantras while he plays with the idols. LATA looks at him and smiles. The child also smiles back. Her thoughts are suddenly cut off.

BAIGA
Come here

LATA walks up to the inner room where the Baiga is sitting. She asked to stand with her back facing the Tantrik.

BAIGA (CONT'D)
Tell him your name

LATA
Lata

BAIGA
Tell us your parent's name.

LATA
GHANSHYAM

She deliberately doesn't say her mother's name. ARCHANA looks at GHANSHYAM. There is a man noting down the details in a book.

BAIGA
And your village...

LATA
Salkhan

CUT TO:

The BAIGA asks for a lemon, he places it on her head and says some mantra. The camera is fixed on LATA, the BAIGA's voice is in the background. The BAIGA then in his hands cuts the lemon into two halves. His audience is baffled by the magic.

BAIGA
There is influence of Shani on her.
Keep her in the house for 10 days.

GHANSHYAM and ARCHANA nod in agreement. LATA just looks away not liking this new imposition. LATA looks at the kid

INT.

GHANSHYAM and LATA are having lunch. They are seated on straw mats with utensils around. It's silent to the point where they can hear each other chewing.

GHANSHYAM washes his hands over the plate and stands up, LATA looks at her father and even though she has some food left on her plate she stands up and leaves with him. She doesn't want her step mother's presence around her.

CUT TO:

I/E.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

GHANSHYAM is at the door leaving for work.

GHANSHYAM
I'll be back by evening. Lock all
the doors properly.

GHANSHYAM looks back as his wife closes the door shut. He starts his bike and leaves.

CUT TO:

INT.

HOUSE

The house seems really quite now. ARCHANA sleeps as the harsh sunlight is blocked by the curtains. LATA stands outside her room to check if she's fast asleep.

CUT TO:

EXT.

STREET

LATA is walking down the narrow streets. She is careful enough not to be seen by her neighbors. She walks through spaces that gradually open up and she slowly lets her guard down.

A wide shot of her walking towards an old run down temple.

She sits on the stairs near the temple. She is lost in her thoughts. Her eyes fixed on the ripples forming in the pond. The temple bell rings.

[2.5 D Shot]

A younger LATA and her mother are praying inside the temple before a Shiva idol. LATA smiles at her mother.

Her mother puts tilak on her forehead. LATA stares at the waves longingly.

LATA's thoughts are broken as a stone is thrown into the lake. She turns around, it's the kid, he laughs, he even teases her a bit. LATA gets up and starts running behind him.

CUT TO:

INT

TEMPLE

The kid plays behind the pillars of the temple as LATA tries to catch up to him. Both of them run out of the temple.

CUT TO:

EXT.

LATA is walking back home trying to avoid people. She walks through the same narrow by lane behind her house. It's her usual entry point to sneak into the house. As she turns at the end of the by lane, a bike passes and she tries to duck and take cover. The bike comes to a screeching halt. It's GHANSHYAM on the bike.

CUT TO:

INT.

HOUSE

LATA is sitting near a pillar inside the house. GHANSHYAM and ARCHANA are standing next to her.

GHANSHYAM

How did she get out of the house?
Didn't you listen to the BAIGA?

ARCHANA

I had closed all the doors. I don't understand how this happened.

GHANSHYAM

(looking at LATA) I told you not to go out alone.

GHANSHYAM (CONT'D)
 (looking at ARCHANA) Lock her in
 the room once I leave. I don't want
 this happening again.

GHANSHYAM walks off from the room. Closeup of LATA as her
 eyes follow GHANSHYAM as he leaves the room.

CUT TO:

INT.

GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE, NEXT DAY, EARLY AFTERNOON

LATA is looking through the bars of the window. She is locked
 inside the room. GHANSHYAM shouts from the other room.

GHANSHYAM
 Beta, come and see what ARCHANA has
 prepared for you...

GHANSHYAM and LATA are having lunch. GHANSHYAM glances at
 LATA as she doesn't seem to be enjoying the food.

GHANSHYAM (CONT'D)
 What happened? Isn't it just like
 the way you like it.

LATA slowly stops chewing.

LATA
 (Almost inaudibly) It's nothing
 like what mother used to make.

GHANSHYAM stares at her.

GHANSHYAM
 What did you say?

LATA
 (Screams this time as she throws
 the plate away) It's nothing like
 what mother used to make.

CUT TO:

CLOSEUP OF LATA

She is expecting to be scolded, she is breathing furiously. The camera pans slowly towards her. GHANSHYAM begins shouting and his voice begins becoming muffled.

CUT TO:

INT

GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE, SAME DAY, EVENING

LATA has collapsed. GHANSHYAM holds her in her arms. There is a crowd gathered in the house. Lunch is strewn around on the side. LATA looks around frightened. She knows that they are talking about her.

CROWD PERSON 1

It's her mother's spirit. She is still here.

CROWD PERSON 2

Her mother hasn't got salvation.

CROWD PERSON 3

She often visits the temple where her mother used to go. That's where she might have gotten possessed.

CROWD PERSON 4

Is there something in the house that her mother used to own?

GHANSHYAM is sitting next to her hugging her as she feebly starts crying. He looks around absorbing all the opinions.

A top shot of her being surrounded by people.

FADE TO:

INT

LATA'S ROOM

GHANSHYAM puts a blanket over LATA, switches off the light and leaves the room.

INT

NEAR THE KITCHEN

GHANSHYAM goes and sits near ARCHANA who is on a grindstone. It's a telephoto shot of them as if they are being looked at from a distance. GHANSHYAM is pensive and ARCHANA goes about her business. ARCHANA looks at GHANSHYAM and asks him something, they seem to be discussing about what had happened.

CUT TO:

There is a window outside LATA's room. The lights are out, LATA looks at them through the window. Her eyes glimmering in the dim light. LATA looks at their shadows as they talk, ARCHANA is not visible in them (LATA's reality)

CUT TO:

GHANSHYAM falls silent, ARCHANA stops working and turns towards him. She consoles him and places her hand over his hands. GHANSHYAM looks at ARCHANA.

LATA retreats into the darkness.

CUT TO:

MID SHOT OF ARCHANA AND GHANSHYAM

ARCHANA

Maybe you were a bit hard on her.
She has been through a lot.

GHANSHYAM

I'll talk to her.

INT

GHANSHYAM'S HOUSE, NEXT DAY MORNING

GHANSHYAM gets ready for office. He is weighed down by LATA's condition which shows in his movements as he reluctantly gets ready to leave the house. He passes by LATA's room. She is fast asleep.

CUT TO:

INT.

LATA'S ROOM

LATA is sleeping. GHANSHYAM goes and sits next to her. He is looking for a way to start talking to her. He looks uncomfortable. He looks at her and puts his hand on her head.

She opens her eyes and looks at him. She changes her position and rests her head on his lap. GHANSHYAM starts stroking her hair. He hums a lullaby tune to her. LATA joins in.

LATA
Have you forgotten me GHANSHYAM?

GHANSHYAM freezes. He moves her head away from his lap. He leaves the house.

CUT TO:

ARCHANA
Sadhna's son was also afflicted by seizures. The BAIGA performed and exorcism on him to ward off evil spirits. He helps his father on the farm now. He is about to get married as well.

GHANSHYAM is thinking hard about what he should do.

Shot of LATA fast asleep.

Fade TO:

EXT

HOUSE

LATA is screaming inside the house. Tantrik is muttering his lines. There is a crowd outside trying to know what is happening. People are pouring out of the door. Some people are trying to see through the crack of the window.

The 9 year old child looking at the crowd.

Cut TO:

Inside the house

LATA is being beaten up. She tries to crawl away from the Tantrik but he keeps beating her up while chanting mantras. BAIGA asks GHANSHYAM to hold her down. GHANSHYAM does as told. The BAIGA gets hold of a bamboo kept nearby and starts beating her up.

LATA
(She tries to make eye contact with him and shouts)

Make him stop GHANSHYAM

11.

The BAIGA continues to beat her up. LATA tries to let wriggle out, she is trying to revolt and moves about vigorously. One of the blows lands on her head, GHANSHYAM also gets a blow on his shoulders. She stops moving. BAIGA stops. The crowd goes silent.

Camera pans slowly into the window where people are trying to look through. The 9 year old kid looks mortified as he looks at what has happened.