

Suresh Chabria

## D.G. Phalke and the Méliès Tradition in Early Indian Cinema

1993

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/16050>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version

Sammelbandbeitrag / collection article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Chabria, Suresh: D.G. Phalke and the Méliès Tradition in Early Indian Cinema. In: Frank Kessler, Sabine Lenk, Martin Loiperdinger (Hg.): *Georges Méliès - Magier der Filmkunst*. Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern 1993 (KINtop. Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des frühen Films 2), S. 103–115. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/16050>.

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen 4.0/ Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Share Alike 4.0/ License. For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

## D.G. Phalke and the Méliès Tradition in Early Indian Cinema

The staple genre and mainstay of the Indian silent film industry (1913-1931) was the mythological film which is particular to Indian cinema but has some affinities with the biblical or religious epic film of the West.

Both these genres deal with the great religious narratives of their respective traditions. However, while the biblical film, both in Italy and Hollywood, relied more on the spectacular scale of the sets and mass scenes with hundreds of extras, the Indian mythological evolved into a primarily special effects and magic oriented genre. The major part of a typical mythological film tells in as naturalistic and direct a fashion the religious narratives we call ›mythology‹, but the iconography and magical or miraculous qualities and acts of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are revealed through special effects of a beguiling simplicity, inventive charm and a gradually increasing sophistication. Alongside the more conventional tricks of ›spirits‹ or supernatural presences surrounding a haunted character, the mythologicals are full of events and imagery like gods and demi-gods flying; coiled, many hooded snakes rising from oceans of milk; gods with multiple heads and hands holding formidable weapons which can crack open mountains and tame storms and seas.

Thus, while the Western biblical film easily crosses over into the historical genre, in the Indian mythological film is ever present like an invisible mentor, the great monstrative genius of early film form, Georges Méliès.

There is no concrete evidence to establish that the fabulous or magical elements in the Indian mythological and in particular the films of Dhundiraj Govind Phalke (1870-1944), the first Indian film maker and the man who established the mythological film as a major genre, was directly inspired by Méliès. However, these films consistently draw from and develop Méliès' several discoveries in the areas of special effects and trick film such as stop motion transformations, multiple exposures etc. The mythological films of Phalke could thus be said to constitute an extension of the Méliès tradition in early Indian cinema.

The very first Indian feature film was *RAJA HARISCHANDRA*, a mythological made by Phalke in 1913.<sup>1</sup> Phalke had been educated at two of the major art schools of the colonial period in India – the J.J. School of Arts in Bombay and Kalabhavan in Baroda. Here he learned drawing, photography, lithography,

moulding and even participated in stage dramas as an amateur actor and taught himself magic<sup>2</sup>.

After his studies he worked for a brief period as a draughtsman and photographer with the Government of India's Archaeological Department but soon set up his own engraving and printing works. Thus at the turn of the century, he pioneered with a handful of others the printing of oleographs based on the paintings of mythological subjects by Raja Ravi Varma, the style and content of which profoundly shaped popular taste in India and was directly carried over to Phalke's own films.<sup>3</sup>

The relation between the Indian mythological and biblical film and the Méliès tradition is illustrated in Phalke's off-quoted articles written in 1917 and 1918 about how he started making films and the training needed by film-makers. In 1910, he saw a film entitled *THE LIFE OF CHRIST* and describes its impact on him in the famous passage:

I must have seen films on many occasions before this ... but that day, that Saturday in Christmas, marked the beginning of a revolutionary change in my life. That day also marked the foundation in India of an industry which occupies the fifth place in the myriad of big and small professions that exist ... While the life of Christ was rolling fast before my eyes I was mentally visualising the Gods, Shri Krishna, Shri Ramchandra, their Gokul and Ayodhya ... Could we, the sons of India, ever be able to see Indian images on the screen.<sup>4</sup>

This is the task which Phalke felt could best be achieved by a man with his background. »Fortunately«, he notes, »I was well up in all the arts and crafts which go to make a motion picture such as drawing, painting, architecture, photography, drama, magic etc.«<sup>5</sup>

Over the next few weeks Phalke avidly saw all the films running in Bombay and analysed them shot by shot. He started experimenting with a miniature camera both in order to learn film-making and show some finished work to potential financiers. The result was a time-lapse camera short film called *GROWTH OF A PLANT* which clearly foreshadowed his Mélièsian predilections. Phalke had a genuine curiosity about the filmic and not merely profilmic or reproductive properties of the new medium of motion pictures and an ingrained interest and insight into the relation of photographic realism with imagination.

In February 1912, Phalke raised finance to go to England and got first hand exposure to professional film-making with the help of the editor of the British film weekly *Bioscope*. He purchased film equipment and also met Cecil Hepworth who invited him to visit his studios and see for himself the results of his newly bought equipment. On his return Phalke made *RAJA HARISCHANDRA*. Here and in most of his subsequent films the subject matter or profilmic material was the mythological tale – »the Indian images« of a story from the epic

*Mahabharata* – and the miraculous was achieved within the camera with the tricks of formidable adventure for a person who was pioneering film-making in every sense in India. He was not only the producer and director, but also perforated the imported stock, trained his cameramen, created the special effects, edited the films, processed them etc. It is perhaps no wonder that Phalke has left behind footage of himself making his first film – scripting, supervising the set construction, choosing costumes and properties, rehearsing actors, editing etc. This footage reminds one of Méliès performing as a magician in his own films. And as a record of a film-maker at work in that early period of film history (1912-13), it constitutes a unique self portrait which is probably unparalleled in world cinema.<sup>6</sup>

The first trick effect in what survives of RAJA HARISCHANDRA is a simple stop motion transformation. The great sage Vishwamitra is performing a *yagna* or fire sacrifice to invoke »the help of the 3 Powers against their will« as the preceding title puts it. The exterior shot is taken in depth to represent a typical *ashram* or forest hermitage. Besides the hut and open compound where the fire sacrifice is being performed there are trees and a tethered calf. Then three young girls – the »3 Powers« – appear in a stop motion effect from the fire. Over the stop motion substitution or more accurately the »substitution splice«<sup>7</sup> the position of the calf changes. Its position, which is back to camera looking towards the rear alters to facing the camera looking from right to left. This mismatch in his first feature film does not recur in Phalke's later surviving films. However, from the beginning of his career most scenes incorporate both tableau construction and editing. For instance, this trick shot is cut directly without a title to King Harischandra hearing the cries of the »3 Powers«. Then there is a cut to Vishwamitra and the »3 Powers« under his spell. Shortly, Harischandra enters from foreground left, crosses over to the right (see Plate 1) and shoots an arrow into the fire releasing the »3 Powers«. Finally in another stop motion substitution the »3 Powers« disappear and once again Phalke has problems in maintaining the position of the calf within the shot.

In SHREE KRISHNA JANMA (1918) which was the first film of the Hindustan Film Company – a production concern created around Phalke to exploit the success of his earlier films and provide him with greater resources – the production values are of a much higher order and the special effects more ambitious and meticulously executed. Unfortunately, only a substantial portion of the opening reel seems to have survived. But this fragment contains sequences of amazing virtuosity which every historian and scholar who has seen it immediately compares with the best of Méliès.

The film deals with one of the central themes of Hindu mythology – that Vishnu is the godhead who repeatedly assumes *avatars* or incarnations to free people from *rakshasas* or evil demons bent on aggrandising power and oppressing the people. SHREE KRISHNA JANMA relates the story of the birth and early years of one of his *avatars* as Krishna.



Plate 1

With the title shot itself Phalke dazzles his audience with magical transformations appropriate to the subject of Vishnu's *avatars*. The plain Hindi calligraphy of the film's title transforms to letters written with flowers (the offering of flowers is an essential part of the ritual of worship in India). Superimposed on this floral design appears a circle rotating in a metaphor of ceaseless time and representing the *sudarshana-chakra* or flaming discus which is one of the attributes of Vishnu and Krishna. Within this design a close up of the child Krishna is now seen in full frontality giving a prologue *darshan*<sup>8</sup> to his devotees (see Plate 2). It is as if the temple and the cinema hall are merged. Ashish Rajadhyaksha observes »... the magic really lay in seeing that which was familiar, now move, turn alive, become *real* through exploring a new dimension of fantasy ... In Phalke, perhaps more than at any time in the Indian Cinema since, reality lay within the imaginary.«<sup>9</sup>

The story proper now begins with a shot of a group of people with their backs to the camera and hands outstretched towards heaven and oceanwards



Plate 2

beseeking the gods for succour. After a title – »All human efforts having turned out futile, Almighty God is never at a great distance when prayed for sincerely and whole-heartedly.« – the many hooded serpent god Sheshnag bearing Vishnu and other gods rises from the ocean. The framing of the human figures at foreground bottom of the frame identifies them with the spectator (see Plate 3). The notion of film-making as one of display, of showing or monstrating, and early film's privileging of a »single view point and its posture of displaying something to the audience« that Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault discuss in their seminal essays on early film is fully confirmed in the case of India's first films as well.<sup>10</sup>

Next, with continuous and elaborate multi exposures against a moving sky, Vishnu agrees to assume an *avatar* and transforms himself into the child Krishna playing a flute on the serpent god. Now Phalke cuts to a shot of the supplicants seen from Krishna's point of view, then returns to Krishna, who after some medium shots and another shot of the supplicants, dissolves again into Vishnu

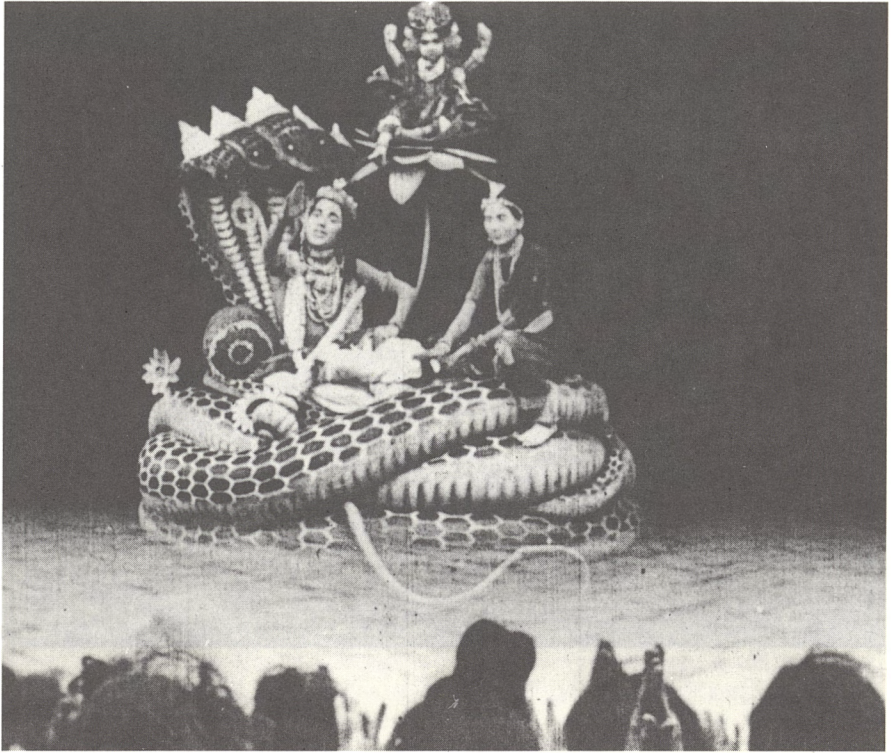


Plate 3

and is faded out. These transformations are simply executed, but their invocatory power achieved through inscribing the emblematic Hindu imagery into a photographic medium, must have been something akin to a divine revelation for the contemporary audiences. This series of religious images is continued with Krishna appearing superimposed and then fading out over the cradle which his foster mother is rocking. She is astonished by this miraculous vision which presages her good fortune as the mother of a god.<sup>11</sup>

Then comes one of Phalke's greatest sequences. The demon Kansa who is destined to be destroyed by the child Krishna has a premonition in his palace – his severed head floats away in a geyser of blood (see Plate 4). It is part of Indian filmlore that the blood in this shot was hand-tinted in red. And several old-timers recall that this effect was often produced on the proscenium stage with skilful use of lighting and behind-the-scene manipulation of an artificial head made mobile with the help of invisible strings<sup>12</sup>.



Plate 4

Kansa then describes his awful vision to his wives. After a title – »Shree Krishna as seen by the villainous Kansa« – follows a series of trick effects in which a) a pillar disappears and the baby Krishna appears at its base, b) the baby Krishna is substituted by the child Krishna with a flute which he uses like a knife to repeatedly stab at Kansa, c) an older Krishna continues the same action, d) an adolescent Krishna appears with the discus in his right hand ready to release it, and e) the pillar reappears and Kansa lies down on a couch in a state of shock. This series is repeated with all the Krishnas (except the baby) superimposed together, and soon more Krishnas appear holding other weapons such as a sword, spear, axe, mace, bow and arrow. Finally, there are as many as seven Krishnas surrounding Kansa, who strikes at them with his sword. As the Krishnas are gradually faded out, Kansa collapses again.

The next sequence in the existing fragment which could be from the end of the film shows the adoration of Krishna by the four castes with *shlokas* or

religious verses fading in and out on his hieratic sculpture – like figure. All these special effects are executed fluently and with a deft ease and flawless technique which makes one all the sadder that only fragments of the film have survived. Had the rest of the film been of the same level of craft and imagination, SHREE KRISHNA JANMA would certainly rank as one of the master works of the entire silent cinema. But even in its present fragmentary form, it is one of the most remarkable passages of film of its era.

The sequence by which Phalke is best known to Indian audiences who recall or have some exposure to early Indian cinema is that of Krishna subjugating the demon snake Kaliya in KALIYA MARDAN (1919). Most of this film has survived making it perhaps the most important reference point for any study of Phalke and the mythological genre today.

KALIYA MARDAN deals with episodes from the *leela* or divine play of the child Krishna. It begins with a marvellous prologue in which the child actress (Phalke's daughter Mandakini) playing Krishna is shown in her everyday clothes and dissolved into the role she is playing. After a title – »study in facial expressions by a little girl of seven« – Mandakini as Krishna acts out emotions such as astonishment, anger, humour etc.<sup>13</sup>

Here again Phalke's work relates to Gunning's conception of the early cinema as »the cinema of attractions« and »an exhibitionist cinema«, an aspect of which was the recurring look at the camera by actors.<sup>14</sup> Phalke invariably allows his actors to look at the camera (and therefore the spectator) and even in the later Indian films of the silent era and early talkies when realistic illusionism is more consciously attempted, this direct address or contact with the spectator is reasserted.<sup>15</sup>

The narrative of Krishna's childhood is then unfolded with Phalke's usual blend of static tableaux and staging from a distance with a multi-shot construction of scenes and alternating from one location, or group of characters, to another. In the great climactic sequences of the film he combines parallel editing in the manner of Griffith 1910 with a full array of Mélièsian trick shots.

A short description of these sequences (comprising the last 38 shots of KALIYA MARDAN) will give an idea of Phalke's characteristic combination of techniques which had earlier been forged by Western film-makers with a distinct Indian character and ethos as distilled by the popular Indian arts of this period.

1. Exterior, extreme long shot (E.L.S.) of a river bank with a tree prominent at the right of centre. Krishna enters from foreground right and moves towards the edge of the river. He scans it and continues to walk towards the tree. Throughout the shot he repeatedly turns his back to look at his followers who are off-frame. Finally, he takes off his footwear and with a last look back starts climbing the tree trunk. Cut to
2. E.L.S., same camera set-up as in shot 1, but a little closer to the tree. Krishna is on a higher branch. Shortly, a group of people consisting of a mustachioed fat man, two other men and some kids enters from foreground right. They beseech Krishna to be cautious. Krishna, who has been climbing further up the tree, reassures them. Cut to

3. Long shot (L.S.) of Krishna sitting on a branch and gesturing to the group below that he is diving into the river to confront Kaliya. Cut to
4. L.S. of Krishna walking on another branch nearer the water to find a vantage point to dive into the river. He continues to gesture to the people below and jumps. Cut to
5. E.L.S. of the group standing at foreground centre near the tree. They watch as Krishna dives into the river at background right. Cut to
6. Underwater, L.S.. Against a sheer black background, Krishna moves downwards and except for his clasped arms and head disappears at bottom of frame. Cut to
7. Underwater, L.S. same camera set-up as in shot 6. Krishna's feet appear at centre top of frame followed by his full figure moving downwards till his feet touch bottom of frame. Cut to
8. Underwater, L.S.. For the first time a large part of Kaliya, the mythical snake, is seen with his thrashing tail and coiled body. Krishna's downward descent shown over shots 6 and 7 ends when he falls among the coils and the impact causes the snake's many headed hood to stand erect. Cut to
9. Underwater, medium shot (M.S.) of Krishna struggling in Kaliya's coils. Cut to
10. Underwater, medium long shot (M.L.S.) of Krishna astride Kaliya. He strikes the snake with his bare hands and pulls Kaliya upwards till he himself almost disappears at top frame. Cut to
11. Exterior, M.L.S. of the mustachioed fat man and the kids framed against the river. They are weeping because they think Krishna has drowned or been killed by Kaliya. Cut to
12. E.L.S. of the same group with the tree framed at right of centre as in shot 1. They continue to lament and start to move homewards crossing from right to centre of frame towards the camera. At the end of the shot, all but three of them have exited at frame right close to camera. Cut to
13. Exterior, L.S. of entrance of Krishna's home. Two men are on guard duty. Shortly, the mourners enter from frame left, give the guards news of Krishna's death and enter the house. Cut to
14. Interior, M.L.S. of Krishna's home framed towards right hand corner of a large room. His mother, seated at frame right on the floor is chatting with some women friends, one of whom is fanning her. Shortly, from the door at rear left Krishna's young friends enter weeping profusely. They give the news to the mother who collapses on the floor after several looks towards the camera. Her friends try to console her and after she revives, accompanied by the others, amidst much wailing and looking over the shoulder towards the camera, they depart through the door.<sup>16</sup> Cut to
15. Exterior, L.S. entrance of Krishna's home, same camera set-up as in shot 13. The entire group (including the mother) passes through the entrance and exits at frame left heading towards the river bank. Cut to
16. Exterior, M.L.S. another location somewhere on the way to the river bank. A few men are chatting. A child enters from foreground right spreading the sad news. He is soon followed by the rest of the procession. The men also decide to join and exit with the rest of the group at frame left. Cut to
17. Exterior, M.L.S.. The mourners led by the mother, at foreground left of centre, stand facing the river (see Plate 5). (The same camera set-up is repeated in shots 19, 24, 26, 28, 30 and 33.) Cut to
18. Underwater, M.L.S. of Krishna on Kaliya's hood, still trying to subjugate him. Cut to
19. M.L.S. of weeping mourners. Cut to



Plate 5



Plate 6

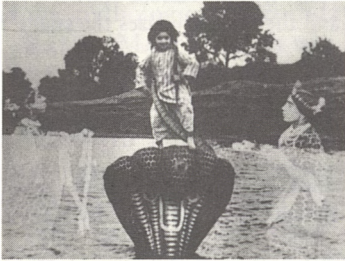


Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 10



Plate 9



Plate 11



Plate 12

20. Underwater, M.L.S. of Kaliya and Krishna locked in battle. Kaliya has wound his coils tighter around Krishna. Cut to
21. Underwater, M.L.S. of Krishna still battling with Kaliya. He has now grasped Kaliya's tail. Cut to
22. Underwater, M.S., same camera set-up as in shot 9. Krishna is struggling in Kaliya's coils (see Plate 6). Cut to
23. Underwater, M.L.S. of Kaliya whose hood is now reined and mounted by Krishna. Krishna holds the reins and is raising Kaliya to the surface. Cut to
24. M.L.S. of the mourners who are incredulous as they witness something miraculous. Cut to
25. Exterior, L.S. of the river. Krishna and Kaliya are seen at foreground centre, just above the water. The reins are gone. Krishna is balanced on the hood and is holding the tip of Kaliya's tail round his neck. Shortly, Kaliya's two wives, respectively holding a garland and a ceremonial plate rise from the waters to pay tribute to Krishna (see Plate 7). They plead with him to spare their husband. In a stop motion substitution the garland disappears from the hands of one and the plate shifts under the elbow of the other, while both are now praying with folded hands. Krishna blesses them and asks them to return underwater, which they do. (The same camera set-up is repeated in shots 27, 29, and 31.) Cut to
26. M.L.S. of the mother and others watching awestruck (see Plate 8). Cut to
27. L.S. of Krishna frolicking on Kaliya's hood. He is now seated and is playing with a garland (see Plate 9). Cut to
28. M.L.S. of the mother and others who are ecstatic as they watch the child god at play (see Plate 10). Cut to
29. L.S. of Krishna continuing to play on Kaliya's hood. Cut to
30. M.L.S. of mother and others breaking into applause. Cut to
31. L.S. of Krishna first kneeling, then standing on Kaliya's hood.<sup>17</sup> Cut to
32. Exterior, M.L.S. of the river bank. In the foreground, the people are seen with their backs to the camera. Ahead the waters of the river Jamuna stretch out before them as they beckon Krishna to come. Cut to
33. M.L.S. of the people still applauding. Cut to
34. Exterior, M.L.S. of the people with their backs to the camera, same camera set-up as in shot 32. Krishna emerges from below off-frame centre and is lifted (from the water) by the man closest to his mother (see Plate 11). He is then transferred to his jubilant mother and the others.

This is followed by three shots in which Krishna is taken home amidst great celebration. Then in the final shot we are shown the interior of Krishna's home in medium long shot with virtually the same camera set-up as in shot 14. The ritual of *aarti* (or adoration of the deity with a plate bearing fire, flowers and other holy items) is performed on Krishna thrice in succession by three different women (see Plate 12). Throughout the shot Krishna is seated on his mother's lap.

Here, I would like to emphasise that for the Indian audience, perhaps even more magical than the preceding sequence of Kaliya's subjugation with its extraordinary trick effects is this static *aarti* and *darshan* sequence. For this *tableau vivant* reproduces the highest point of Hindu temple ritual within the framework of a fiction film. According to the late film historian, B.V. Dharap,

it was the cue for spontaneous chanting of devotional songs and shouting of nationalist slogans by the contemporary audiences. Kaliya came to symbolise not only the traditional concept of evil in Hindu mythology but British rule as well, and thus this sequence represents the total adaptation and indigenisation of the imported medium of cinema to Indian filmic and cultural practice.

It is a great loss to world cinema in general, and the Indian cinema in particular, that so little of Phalke and other silent mythologicals have survived<sup>18</sup>. But this genre continued to thrive well into the talkie era and has enjoyed something like a vogue or revival on television in recent years. But, inevitably there is a diminution of invention and charm and a certain kind of splendour and truth which these films contained is gone. For these are qualities that could only be shared by the greatest of the early film pioneers. For instance, Dadasaheb Méliès and Geo Phalke.

### Notes

1 While there is virtual unanimity among Indian film historians and scholars that RAJA HARISCHANDRA should be reckoned as India's first feature film, at least two earlier attempts have been recorded. One was PUNDALIK, a film stage play, shot by R.G. Torney and Nanasahab Chitre around 1911, and the other was SAVITRI made by Patankar Friends & Co. around 1913. The former was immediately forgotten and the latter was never exhibited as its developing was found defective.

2 All biographical information on D.G. Phalke (also affectionately known as Dadasaheb Phalke) is from B.V. Dharap, »The Phalke Saga«, in: Firoze Rangoonwalla (ed.), *Phalke Centenary Souvenir*, Bombay, 1970, pp. 49-65.

3 For biographical and critical texts on Raja Ravi Varma see R.C. Sharma (ed.), *Raja Ravi Varma: New Perspectives*, New Delhi, National Museum, 1933. Also see Geeta Kapur, »Ravi Varma: Representational Dilemmas of a Nineteenth Century Indian Painter«, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Nos. 17-18, June 1989, pp. 59-80. Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) created the model for a modern Indian identity and imagery within the oil and easel format of European academic painting. He later extended this to the field of mass produced oleographs. His work is thus analogous to that of his contemporary, Lala Deen Dayal, the pioneering stills photographer; the »Parsi theatre« which was the proscenium

style theatre introduced from the West in the latter part of the 19th century; and later, of course, the films of Phalke.

4 *Phalke Centenary Souvenir*, p.88.

5 Ibid, p. 51. Phalke also gave his pioneering work a consciously political dimension as he saw it as a part of the *swadeshi* movement (or the nationalist programme of self reliance). In the same article he proudly states: »This was the period of the *swadeshi* movement and there was profuse thinking and lecturing on the subject. For me, personally, it led to the resignation of my comfortable government job and taking to an independant profession ... Thus I laid the foundation stone of a gigantic profession with very scanty capital, sufficient only for an enterprise like a tea-shop or a barber's shop, because I had an intense love for the job and I had the self-confidence that I would definitely establish this profession at all costs... Cinema theatres are again hopeful about Indian films... This tree, which was drying up for lack of water, has found life again. I am perfectly confident that if this occasion demands, my fellow citizens will have active sympathy for me. This will make this new art prosperous and will enable not only India, but the entire world, to appreciate the skill of Indian film-makers.«

6 I would be grateful if any reader who has seen similar footage of this period from another country could give us information about it. In-

identally, Phalke also later made a short film called PROFESSOR KELPHA'S MAGIC. The film seems to have shown him performing various magic tricks and the name in the title is of course an inversion of his own name.

7 Tom Gunning, »Primitive« Cinema: A Frame-up? Or the Trick's on Us«, in: Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, London, BFI, 1990, pp. 97-99. Gunning borrows the notion of »substitution splice« from the revolutionary work on Méliès by John Frazer and Jacques Malthête.

8 A very difficult word to translate. Roughly it is the look of the icon or god and the icon or god looked at by the devotees during worship in a Hindu temple. Indian film criticism and theory has begun to usefully apply this concept and the related notion of frontality to the study of popular cinema. For references see fn.9.

9 Ashish Rajadhyaksha, »Neo-Traditionalism: Film as Popular Art in India«, *Framework*, Nos. 32/33, 1986, p.38. See also »The Phalke era: conflict of traditional form and modern technology«, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Nos. 14-15, 1987, pp. 47-78; Geeta Kapur, »Mythic material in Indian cinema«, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Nos. 14-15, 1987, pp. 79-107; Ravi Vasudevan, »Indian commercial cinema«, *Screen*, Vol. 31, No.4, Winter, 1990, pp. 446-453; Chidananda Das Gupta, *The Painted Face: Studies in India's Popular Cinema*, New Delhi, Roli Books, 1991, pp. 22-23. Das Gupta's book contains important interpretive essays on the mythological.

10 For detailed discussion of the notion of monstration see the essay by Tom Gunning referred to in fn.7, and André Gaudreault, »Film, Narrative, Narration: The Cinema of the Lumière Brothers«, in: Elsaesser, op. cit., pp. 68-73.

11 Here and in the subsequent analyses of another sequence from SHREE KRISHNA JANMA and the ending of KALIYA MARDAN, it must be remembered that the precise original cutting pattern of Phalke's films cannot be established. These have been reconstructed from highly decomposed fragments without reference to a script or any other authentic source.

12 Gunning also relates Méliès' »concealed substitution splices« with the tradition and methods of 19th century magic theatre.

13 The prologue of KALIYA MARDAN has been discussed in India as belonging to the tradition of the Indian aesthetic theory of *navarasas* or the nine emotional aesthetic moods inscribed in

Indian classical arts. These are: love, pathos, humour, anger, valour, fear, disgust, wonder, tranquility. For a discussion of the *navarasas* see Krishan Chaitanya, *Sanskrit Poetics*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1965.

14 Tom Gunning, »The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde«, in: Elsaesser, op.cit., p. 57.

15 However, this is also an influence of Hindu iconography and temple ritual (as mentioned before in fn.8) and the techniques of acting in Indian classical folk theatres.

16 Note that while the role of Krishna is played by a child actress, the adult female characters are played by men. With a few exceptions, this practice continued in Indian cinema well into the early twenties when courtesans and women of mixed race became movie stars. Women from the more »respectable classes« entered films only at the end of the silent era.

17 This image (which is celebrated in every visual art form in Indian history) is extremely splotchy in the viewing print at the National Film Archive of India (NFAI). The materials used to reconstruct the film were retrieved in bits and in some cases the emulsion had peeled off. There are several other defects in this viewing print and I will be writing elsewhere about NFAI's attempts to rectify these at the time of our proposed retrospective of all the surviving silent Indian films at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in 1994.

18 The other surviving fragments of Phalke's features preserved at the NFAI are mainly from LANKA DAHAN (1917), BHAKTA PRAHLAD (1926) and his first talkie, SETU BANDHAN (1934). The other silent mythological available in the archive's collection is SUKANYA SAVITRI (1922) which too has survived only in a fragmentary form. The director of this film is yet unknown.