

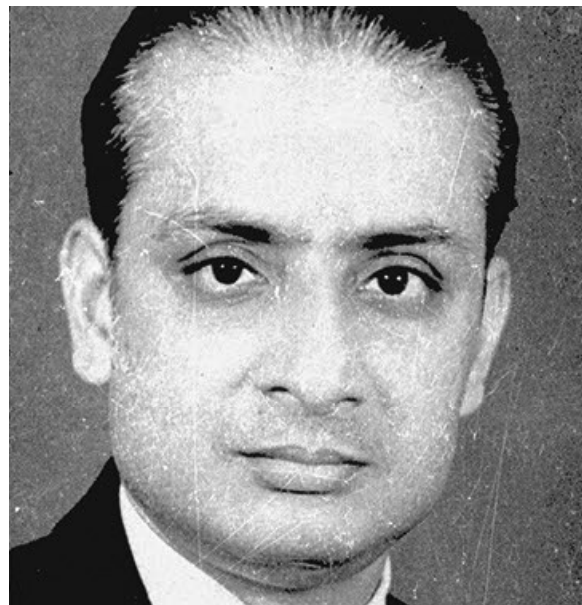
Pramod Pati : Father of Indian New Wave Cinema

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In India, the feature films generally address the entertainment needs, whereas documentary films cater to the information needs of people. As a non-fictional motion-picture, documentary films intended to document reality, primarily for the purposes of instruction, education, or maintaining a historical record. Established in 1948, the Films Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has pioneered the documentary film movement by way of documenting the transformation of India as an independent and developing nation. It was the only national medium for reaching out to the public en-masse, in regard to cultural heritage, information, education, instructional purposes.

Unlike the present form, the early documentary films, originally called “actuality films”, lasted for few minutes, even one minute or less. The films were pretty radical and were shown in the cinema halls, mandatorily before screening of the features films in terms of the Cinematograph Act of 1952. Each film had over 9000 prints and was dubbed into 18 Indian languages and exhibited through compulsory block booking in every permanent cinema halls of the country.

From around the mid-1960s up to the declaration of the Emergency in 1975, the Films



Division went through a spurt of experimentation, that yielded a small but historically significant corpus of films with instructional vision. The robust experimentation got staggered under the imaginative tutelage of visionary Chief Producer of Film Division Mr Jean Bhowmagary. It was under his directives, the constellation of gifted film makers like Pramod Pati, S.N.S. Sastry and S.Sukadev developed many experimental films. With in the various constraints and the-then bureaucratic framework, Pramod Pati emerged as front runner, by taking risk in making many

innovative, experimental films of new order, those hold lasting value.

Son of eminent mathematician Narayan Pati and Kshetramani Pati, Pramod was born on 15th January 1932 at Sambalpur. He studied at Ravenshaw Collegiate School, Ravenshaw College and obtained a degree in Science from Utkal University in 1950. Thereafter he studied Cinematography in the reputed Sri Jayachamarajendra Occupational Institute (SJOI), Bangalore and passed out as a gold medalist in 1952. On acquiring professional qualification he got appointed as the Film Officer of the Government of Orissa with the onerous responsibility to start a film unit for the production of social utility films on Agriculture, Adult Education, Health, Fisheries, Tribal life, visit of dignitaries etc. About fourteen films were made by him during the assignment and with the magnificent output, he got catapulted to capture the attention of the Prime Minister's Office.

Acclaiming and acknowledging his talents, Government of India awarded him with the fellowship to study puppet and animation film making technique for a couple of years, at FAMU in Prague, Czechoslovakia under Jiri Brdecka, Edward Hoffman and Jiri Trnka, the renowned global personalities of the domain. High spirited youngman Pati, full of youthful effusiveness, exuberance had also the opportunity to learn the art of new wave film making from Norman McLaren of the National Film Board of Canada. On returning to India, in 1960, Pati joined Films Division as head of its animation unit, after an high resonance virtual interview of Indian Union Public Service Commission conducted at United Kingdom Embassy at London.

In his films Pati shows the torning of India between past and future, science and religion,

aspirations and achievements. His films basically focused on social and political issues, such as the position of women, caste and poverty, communalism, the young and dissent. His popular films of new wave make touched on these issues presented them with greater directness, complexity and subtlety. He carried out the experimental films with sequential titles, those are eccentric as also intriguing.

Understanding the social need of nurturing film aesthetics, he focused on encouraging the growth of a radically new syntax for ethnographic/documentary films. The titles looked to transcend mythology and folk traditions of India by shifting interests away from illusionism, and presented different, more complex panorama of life of the complex Indian society, especially the distinctive presentation of issues and situations that affect the everyday life of the people.

Exposing ourselves to his films help us to understand various aspects of the society, the complexities, as well as simplicities of life in India and around the world. Though old, the films broaden our imagination and understanding of issues beyond the existing visual boundaries. The movement was more a reaction to the social injustices prevalent in India. He artfully integrated western influences of animation filmmaking to create his own form of films that had social relevance.

His films tracks the changing political environment and several administrative, infrastructural, and policy changes of the time, along with the emerging "experimental" film and interview format films. The views expressed in the film are sometimes bitter, often humorous, at times satirical but seldom complimentary. The socio-economic realities of the characters in his films are realist in nature, the mainstay being human relationship and aspirations.

To exhibit outrage against film censorship, he has courageously placed an elusive placards in his film 'Explorer', disapproving censorship. This speaks of his courage and positive conviction.

If one creative and determined person comes at the top of the organogram, the whole domain changes. So it all happened with the joining of Pramod Pati at Film Division, the scenario and environment got changed. Pati, who took inspirations from the global masters, began to infuse various innovative styles and designs in the Indian animation films. Cut-outs, pixilation, time-lapse techniques kickstarted in India. His films, brilliantly subversive, made use of animation, in-camera effects and inventive sound design to unsettle and provoke the viewer.

He was the first Indian, who made use of the pixilation technique, a stop motion technique where live actors are used as a frame-by-frame subject in an animated film, by repeatedly posing while one or more frame is taken and changing pose slightly before the next frame or frames. The actor becomes a kind of living stop motion puppet. This technique is often used as a way to blend live actors with animated ones, depicting the transitoriness of life. This type of animation also makes use of large props and other found objects.

Pati who headed the animation unit at Film Division for some years, didn't adhere to the contemporary style, rather made films of new order, which gathered huge commendations and international awards. The films directed by him also moved away from traditional story telling structure and created a space outside the narrative filming tradition. Through the use of nonlinearity, special effects and electronic sound, the films both challenge and affirm the ambitions of a postcolonial nation, caught between its past and future. It takes the audience through a mosaic

of random, sequentially rhythmic shots using elemental components of cinema, such as - camera movements, the sounds accompanying every shot and the swift focus shifts dexterously.

He also made use of optical illusions and visual perception in his films, that induced far reaching effect. Even his short films such as Explorer (1968), Claxplosion (1968) and Trip (1970) regarded as proto scientific films in view of formal features, imagery and sound. His great classics, experimental films, including Explorer (7 mins, 35mm), Claxplosion (2 mins, 35mm), Trip (4 mins, 35mm), Abid (5 mins, 35mm), Perspectives, Atom acclaimed various international recognition and honour. He was the fountainhead of realistic human stories of middle-class Bharat, that is India.

His colleagues with profound honour admit that Pati was a man of *Prayog, an innovator, who stuck his own anubhab (experience), svabhav and integrity. Prayoga* is a theory of experimentation that is not just limited to aesthetics but also the illustrative production aspect of cinema, the practice of experiment. Pati says on his own film, Abid (1972)- "Unlike a cartoon film, which is a rapidly moving series of photographed drawings, in pixilation, a moving object is shot frame by frame, and then through clever editing made to appear in motion. By its nature, this movement is agile, energetic and unpredictable just like the pop art movement."

His tenure in Film Division often celebrated as a turning point in the evolution of new wave documentary cinema in India and remembered as the golden period of film division. He brought new grammar and ideology to Indian documentary cinema. His experimental approach and fearlessness with new formats, was much

innovative in style, that engrossed as India's most progressive and aestheticised experimental shorts. His experimental, innovative and new wave pictures gracefully acknowledged as the classics of new wave Indian cinema. His films are representative of a peculiar moment in the history of Indian experimental cinema.

This new wave introduced a different, not existing before kind of cinema, that was highly self-aware and revolutionary to mainstream filmmaking, that captures true human emotion and aspirations. It was characterised by emphasized plot and dialogue, jump cuts rather than continuity editing, location shooting, handheld cameras, long takes, direct sound and available light. Non-linear and fragmented editing became another major and exciting contribution in his films.

His films offer a small window onto India's extensive and eclectic avant-garde cinematic landscape. While his short films have traditionally been categorized as 'experimental' and 'avant-garde', in real term, some are also examples of proto science-fiction cinema, as they provide a flickering glimpse of a newly budding outer space imaginary in seventies.

Deeply introspective and philosophical in nature, Pati's communication to cine world was more spontaneous and informal. People have described him as a man obsessed with work, keeping long hours where even his wife had to visit the sets to have a conversation with him. He was also inviting participation of people in his projects, including that of the office peon.

When the Films Division of India started uploading some of its old titles on to its YouTube channel in January 2013, regular film fans discovered what students of cinema had long known: that Pramod Pati was an avant-garde genius, deserving of the kind of close attention

usually reserved for "serious" auteurs. The commemorative set of DVD, titled *Pramod Pati-FD Master* released recently, contains eleven films, ranging from stop-motion sleight of hand to straightforward docu-shorts. amazingly rearrange the mind of the viewers, after a half century of his craftsmanship.

Pramod Pati is the titanic name, who carved out a niche for himself as the Father of New Wave Indian Cinema. His untimely passing away at the age of 43 brought a close to the great innovative chapter in Indian film history. His funeral procession was attended by many heavyweights of the film industry, politicians and cinegoers. Even Maharashtra Government had declared half-day holiday in the city of Bombay, so as to pay respect to Pati and participation in the funeral of the great luminary.

The Pramod Pati Special Jury Award, one of the most prestigious global award for most innovative cinema was instituted in his honour by the Government of India. Besides Govt. of Odisha also instituted annual Pramod Pati Award for best cine cameraman of Odisha.

He is no more, but his mastercrafted new wave documentary cinemas will be relevant in the years to come. As long as there is cinema, there will be space for innovative and experimental films of Pramod Pati. This remarkable feat had earned Pati a place of pride in the Indian cinema platform. This great son of Odisha, the luminary new order cine craftsman made us proud by giving brand India a global recognition.

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