Satish Alekar: Remembering Dilip Kumar

Dilip Kumar used to speak Marathi fluently. He had seen many popular Marathi Sangeet Natak’s. Sometime at his home he will take out harmonium and sing old Marathi theatre song made popular by Bal Gandharva. Dilip Kumarji and Saira ji used to visit Pune during weekends

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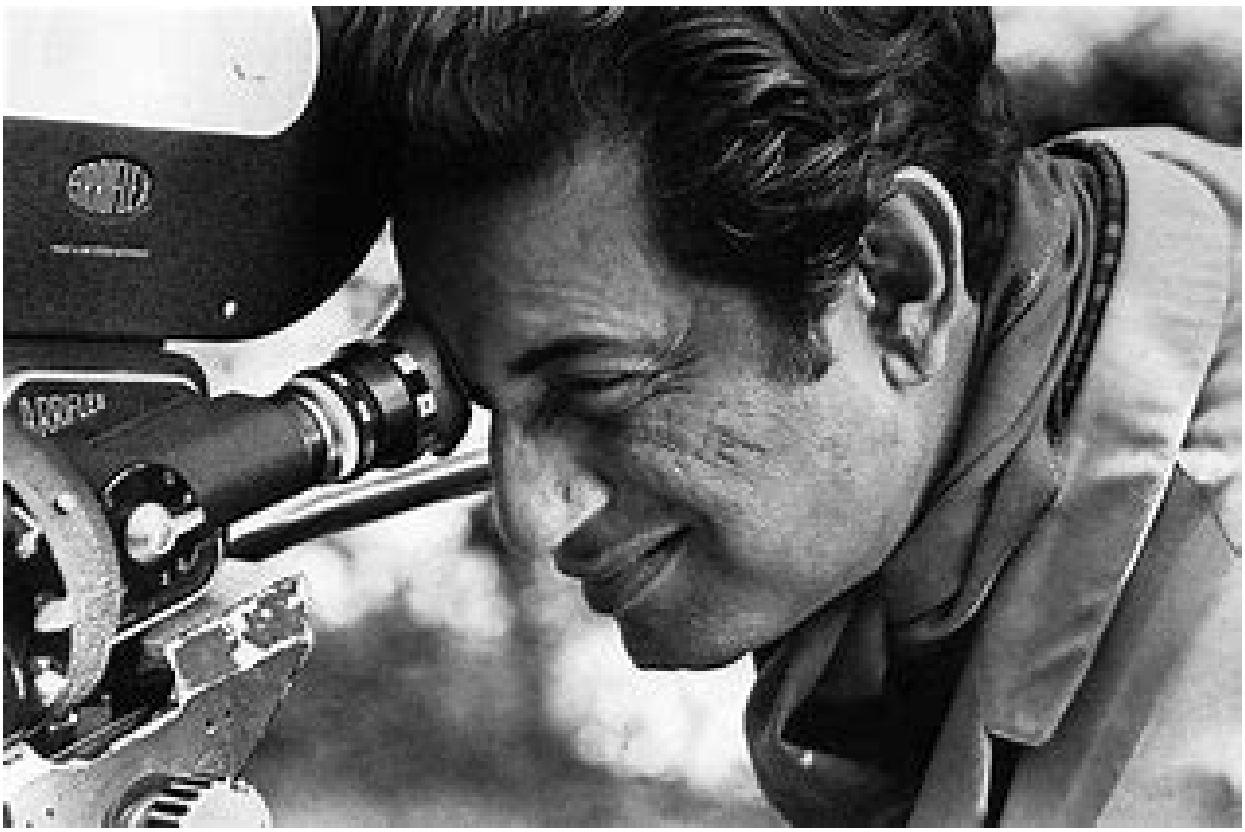
Chronicle of my Curious Corona Case / Susmita Mukherjee

So for 21 days after possible infection I was sustaining without any medicine, only on fruits and coconut water. Suddenly on 30th morning, I woke up with a panic attack and called my doctor in Mumbai who immediately prescribed some pills and asked me to take the RTPCR test. Now this test had been the bone of contention for a while. My younger son who is studying to be a scientist in New Zealand, along with his school classmate, My doctor,, who is in the frontline of Covid treatment in India, had been pleading with me to get a test done. I had dismissed it as medical haranguing.I had first heard the term from my very concerned older sister, and ofcourse I was determined not to go to any hospitals for testing (Pateli) But my Mumbai doctor was not going to listen to this insane patient in Orchha. A conversation happened between him and my husband and I was bundled off to to our small but clean hospital in the village where they stuffed

some cotton up my nostrils and the dreaded RTPCR test seemed like child’s play.

Remembering Ray | Kanika Aurora



Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem in the autograph book of young Satyajit whom he met in idyllic Shantiniketan.

The poem, translated in English, reads: ‘Too long I’ve wandered from place to place/Seen mountains and seas at vast expense/Why haven’t I stepped two yards from my house/Opened my eyes and gazed very close/At a glistening drop of dew on a piece of paddy grain?’

Years later, Satyajit Ray the celebrated Renaissance Man, captured this beauty, which is just two steps away from our

homes but which we fail to appreciate on our own in many of his masterpieces stunning the audience with his gritty, neo realistic films in which he wore several hats- writing all his screenplays with finely detailed sketches of shot sequences and experimenting in lighting, music, editing and incorporating unusual camera angles. Several of his films were based on his own stories and his appreciation of classical music is fairly apparent in his music compositions resulting in some rather distinctive signature Ray tunes collaborating with renowned classical musicians such as Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar and Vilayat Khan.

No surprises there. Born a hundred years ago in 1921 in an extraordinarily talented Bengali Brahmo family, Satyajit Ray carried forward his illustrious legacy with astonishing ease and finesse.

Both his grandfather Upendra Kishore RayChaudhuri and his father Sukumar RayChaudhuri are extremely well known children's writers. It is said that there is hardly any Bengali child who has not grown up listening to or reading Upendra Kishore's stories about the feisty little bird Tuntuni or the musicians Goopy Gyne and Bagha Byne. He also launched Sandesh, perhaps the first children's magazine in India. Satyajit revived it in 1961 and it is currently available online as well.

He also established the Calcutta Film Society in 1947 with some like mind friends and film enthusiasts; the first film club of its kind in India, dedicated to watching and discussing the best of world cinema.

Pather Panchali (The Song of the Road), directed by Satyajit Ray is rightly considered as one of the greatest landmarks in Indian film history, placing our country firmly on the world's cinematic map inspiring several generations of film directors.

After watching Vittorio De Sica's Bicycle Thieves, he recalled

his emotions in a lecture in 1984. The film had “gored” him. “I came out of the theatre with my mind firmly made up. I would become a filmmaker. The prospect of giving up a job didn’t daunt me any more. I would make my film exactly as De Sica had made his: working with non-professional actors, using modest resources, and shooting on actual locations.”

“I was familiar with the camera, possessing a second-hand Leica. And paying homage to a photographer I considered to be the greatest of all—Henri Cartier-Bresson—I wanted my film to look as if it was shot with available light a la Cartier-Bresson… I had absolutely no doubt in my mind that I would become a filmmaker, starting my career with Pather Panchali. If it didn’t work out, I would be back at my desk at Keymer’s, tail between my legs. But if it did work, there would be no stopping me.” (My Years with Apu.)

But there was no money to make the film. After failing to procure the bare minimum amount required to even contemplate filming, Ray decided to ask some of his friends to contribute a thousand rupees each. The budget of the film had been fixed at ₹ 70,000. He collected ₹ 17,000, and started filming in the October of 1952. The very first sequence that was shot is perhaps the most iconic of the film: Apu and his elder sister Durga running through a field of kaash flowers to see a train for the first time in their lives.

Pandit Ravi Shankar would provide the music and Subrata Mitra was the 21-year-old cinematographer who had never operated a motion picture camera before this. Today he is acknowledged in the cinema world as one of the finest ever to operate a movie camera.

The rest as they say is history.

Pather Panchali went to the Cannes Film Festival and there is a popular anecdote about how initially it was exhibited late at night at a small theatre with less than a dozen people

watching including Francois Truffaut, then a critic who would eventually go one to become a great film director, leaving the hall within 10 minutes, bored by the slow pace of the film. Truffaut later apologized several times and Ray and he became good friends.

Lotte Eisner, who would go on to become the chief curator of the Cinematheque Francaise, as Providence would have it decided that the film deserved a second screening. She lobbied and campaigned for it, resulting in a second show which was well attended and Pather Panchali won the special jury prize for the 'Best Human Document'.

Ray could now become a full-time film director. He started work on Pather Panchali's sequel Aparajito (The Unvanquished), which depicts Apu's teenage years is arguably the finest and most touching film of the Apu trilogy.

Although the first film he wanted to make was Ghare Baire, the one that got made was of course, Pather Panchali. An adaptation of Tagore's 1916 novel, Ghare Baire (The Home and the World) eventually did get made in 1984 and got nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival that year.

In 1982, delivering a lecture, Ray spoke about his work.

"There is a special problem that faces one who must talk about films. Lectures on art should ideally be illustrated. One who talks on paintings usually comes armed with slides and a projector. This solves the difficulty of having to describe in words, what must be seen with the eyes. The lecturer on music must bless the silicon revolution, which enables him to cram all his examples into a cassette no bigger than a small bar of chocolate. But the lecturer on cinema has no such advantage—at least not in the present state of technology in our country. If he wishes to cite an example, he can do no more than give a barely adequate description in words, of what is usually perceived with all one's senses. A film is pictures, a film is

words, a film is movement, a film is drama, a film is music, a film is a story, a film is a thousand expressive aural and visual details. These days one must also add that film is colour. Even a segment of film that lasts barely a minute can display all these aspects simultaneously. You will realize what a hopeless task it is to describe a scene from a film in words. They can't even begin to do justice to a language which is so complex."

Ray thought of cinema as a language. "Cinema is images and sound," he said.

"The problem," he wrote, "was over the word 'art'. If the word 'language' was used instead, I think the true nature of cinema will become clearer and there will be no need for debate." Cinema was a language defined by fade-ins, and fade-outs, camera angles, clever editing and quick cuts complemented by classical music.

Composing music for his films was essential to him too. "How interesting to know… that film and music had so much in common!" he wrote (Speaking of Films). "Both unfold over a period of time; both are concerned with pace and rhythm and contrast; both can be described in terms of mood—sad, cheerful, pensive, boisterous, tragic, jubilant."

Ray had mastered the art of conveying the message without actually making it explicitly obvious. In Apur Sansar, for instance, the audience gets a sense of the intimacy and comfort that Apu (the incredibly gifted Soumitra Chatterjee, who passed away recently and worked with Ray in fourteen films) and his wife Aparna (Sharmila Tagore in her first film role, who was apparently expelled from her convent school for appearing in a film) enjoy from the little sequences like Apu waking up in the morning, looking decidedly happy and satiated, opening his packet of cigarettes and finding a note by Aparna inside, asking him not to smoke too much.

Ray also ensures that women in his movies exhibit dignity and courage in the face of adversities.

Charulata, based on a Tagore novella called Nashtaneer, whose literal translation is The Ruined Nest (home in this instance) with the English title, The Lonely Wife is a masterpiece by any standards.

The opening sequence which establishes her soul destroying loneliness with no dialogues is fascinating and portrays her unique disposition in seven minutes of near silent shots.

In Ray's own words the seven minutes were about (from Speaking Of Films) attempting to use a language entirely free from literary and theatrical influences. Except for one line of dialogue in its seven minutes, the scene says what it has to say in terms that speak to the eye and the ear.

Madhabi Mukherjee, his rumoured muse and more accomplished the job with practiced ease in the scene which is still etched in his fans' collective memory; the embroidery, the chiming of the grandfather clock, casual lifting of the piano lid and striking a note; the monkey man, the palki, lorgnette and all.

Another personal favourite is her swinging gaily with fairly unusual camera angles and positioning perhaps influence by his mentor Renoir's A Day in the Country. So is the brilliant montage announcing the arrival of rains in Pather Panchali.

Everyone has a list of their cherished sequence, I daresay from scores of profound, layered and thematically rich Ray films, such as Jalsaghar, Devi or The Calcutta Trilogy: Pratidwandi, Seemabaddha & Jana Aranya.

One is spoilt for choice out of his 28 films which he directed in over four decades.

Most of these are based on classic Bengali literary works, and two; Shatranj Ke Khilari and the telefilm Sadgati on stories

written by Munshi Premchand. Others are based on contemporary novels and short stories, and some, like Kanchanjungha and Nayak are original scripts written by Ray himself. One of his last films, Ganashatru was inspired by Ibsen's play, An Enemy of The People.

A few of his films like Parash Pathar (The Philosopher's Stone), and the two Feluda detective novels of his which he made into film—Sonar Kella (The Golden Fortress) and Joi Baba Felunath (The Elephant God) are breezy and immensely entertaining. His two Goopy-Bagha films, Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne and Hirak Rajar Deshe (The Kingdom of Diamonds) delighted the children as musicals.

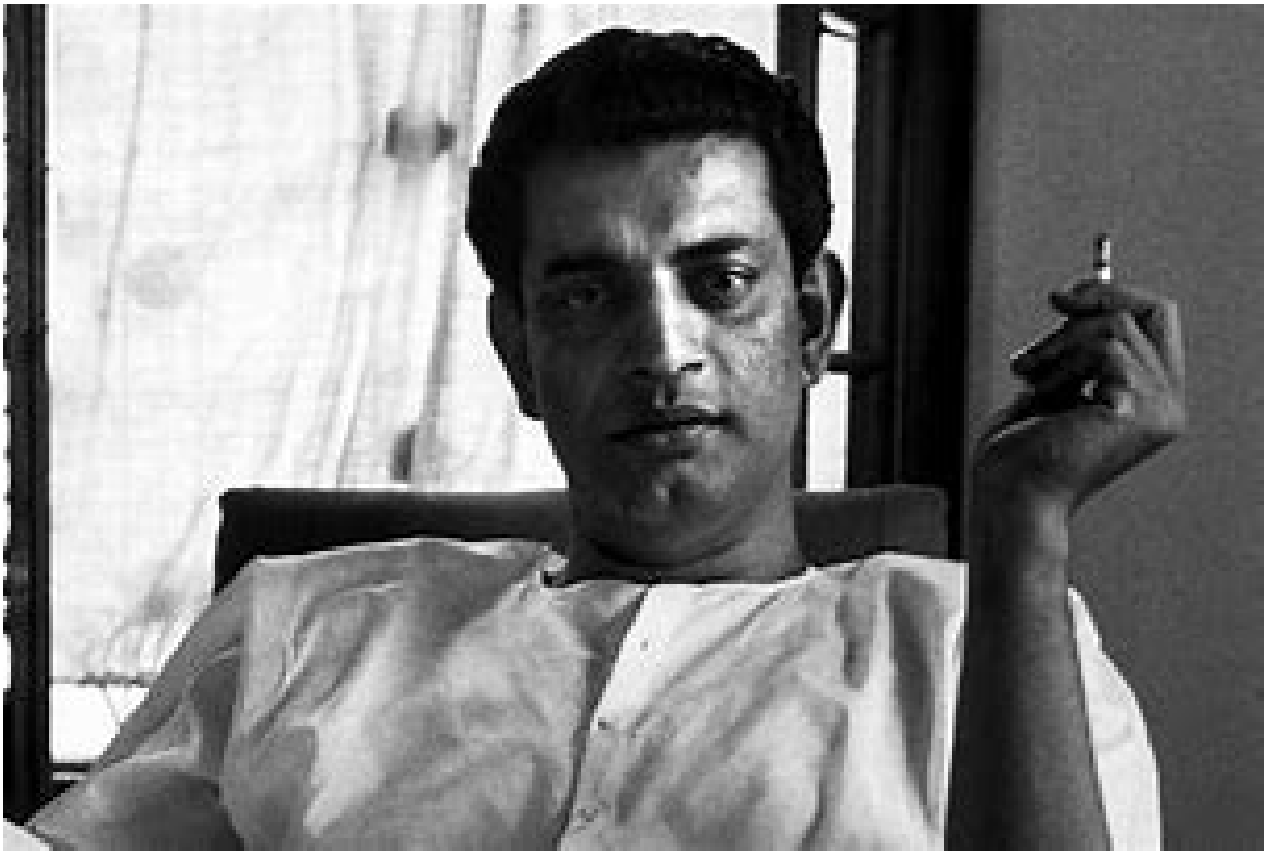
A little known fact about Ray is that without knowing it, he was indeed the first "graphic designer" in India. He even designed two English typefaces -Ray Roman and Ray Bizarre.

One of the most influential, multi-faceted and greatest filmmakers of all times, Satyajit Ray mastered the art of telling intimate human stories, the journey, the trials and tribulations of the ordinary men and women with extraordinary expertise embodying and showcasing the magic of cinema at its very best.

To recognize his enormous contributions to cinema, he was awarded the Academy Honorary Award days before his death. He was also awarded India's highest civilian honour Bharat Ratna by the Government of India

The legendary Japanese auteur Akira Kurosawa one famously remarked about Ray, "Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon."

Satyajit Ray shall forever continue to illuminate and inspire.



Pagglait; a film with a different streak / Sanjiva Sahai

The ensemble cast empowers the film with authenticity and some memorable moments. The patriarchy, the inner wranglings, the greed, the romance – it’s all there in this saga featuring three generations. Sanya Malhotra shines gloriously in an understated performance.

Celebrating 150 years of the Mahatma | Manohar Khushalani

Gandhi Ki Dilli at IIC, featured plays films and the festival was also replete with discussions on topics and ideas ranging from Sustainable Living, Sparrows to Gandhi's favourite Bhajans and
even his nutritional philosophy expressed through a lunch curated by Pushpesh Pant, with unfamiliar cuisine, like Bajre ki Khichri, Methi ke Theple and many such minimalistic gourmet items

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Film Review: Good Newwz / Neelam Jain

Good Newwz is a light-hearted comic escapade with Akshay Kumar- Kareena Kapoor and Diljit Dosanjh-Kiara Advani as two sets of married couples trying to have a baby through IVF (in vitro-fertilization). The two couples, from opposite ends of the cultural spectrum, have their fates entangled through the ovaries of two wannabe-moms and their shared family name: Batra. Though simplistic, the film's quota of things between human forte and foible makes it relatable in places.

Akshay and Kareena as Varun and Dipti Batra, are a high-flying swish couple in Mumbai, who after failed attempts at parenthood are advised by family to visit an expensive fertility clinic. Enter Honey (Diljit Dosanjh) and Monika (Kiara Advani) from Chandigarh. After some mis-conceptions, and literal ones, they too land up in Mumbai in the same IVF centre, hoping to go back with **Good Newwz**. They bring with them their clichéd, but endearing Punjabi earthiness from the land of "pinnies made by mom."

The fertility clinic is run by another doctor- couple, ably played by Adil Hussian and Tisca Chopra, who claim a high rate of **Good Newwz** emanating from their centre. Voila! Both the women are successfully impregnated at the IVF clinic. But their joy has a short run as they are informed by the poker-faced doctor that the sperms of the two males got exchanged with the wrong wives. The goof-up is because of their shared family name. Now begins the rollicking comedy of errors.

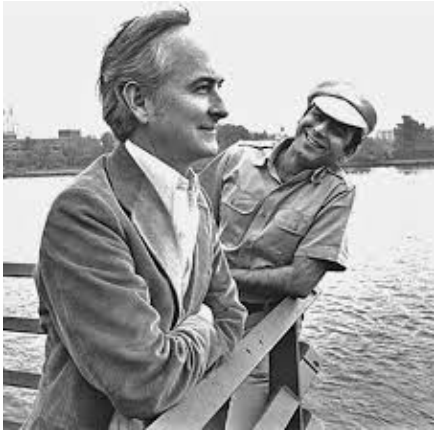
Akshay Kumar is refreshing in this comedy after a spate of social-messaging roles. His comedy timing is spot on. Middle-aged executive in a car selling company, Akshay as Varun Batra has a trying time when his journalist wife Dipti is crazy to catch her ovulating time to conceive. He comes across as a caring, sometimes detached husband who is baffled at the need to have a baby to perpetuate genes.

The film deals with a topical issue of IVF babies, though it is only secondary to the story. At one point Akshay even comments that it is an interesting time when parents can just sit back at home and get a baby from an IVF centre. Debutante director Raj Mehta and co-writer Jyoti Kapoor have come up with racy humor, it being best as a comedy without getting pedantic about any issue. While grazing on the bigger issue of stressful lifestyle being a hurdle in normal conception, as also the social pressure to produce babies, the film keeps you engaged in the confusion of the two couples with exchanged sperms, or 'spams' as referred to by the simple Honey from

Chandigarh. You wonder along with them how the conundrum will be resolved.

The content of the film is not as vital as the way it is narrated that makes **Good Newwz** eminently watchable. A laughter-riot, the film is risqué but never teeters on the offensive. The pace is maintained till the end, as is expected from a film co-produced by Karan Johar. I would certainly recommend it to all looking for some good humour – a rarity in Bollywood films. **Good Newwz**, the last Bollywood film to be released in 2019, was a befitting au revoir to the last year and continued laughter in the new.

Ismail Merchant: Film Producer Extraordinary / Partha Chatterjee



Ismail Merchant with James Ivory

Ismail Merchant's passing away on May 25, 2005 marked the end

of a
certain kind of cinema. He was the last of the maverick film producers with
taste who made without any compromise, films with a strong literary bias
which were partial to actors and had fine production values. It is sad that he
died at sixty eight of bleeding ulcers unable to any longer work his
legendary charm on venal German financiers who were supposed to finance
his last production, The White Countess, which was to have been directed by
his long-time partner James Ivory.

Merchant-Ivory productions came into being in 1961 when, Ismail
Merchant, a Bohra Muslim student on a scholarship in America met James
Ivory, an Ivy-leaguer with art and cinema on his mind, quite by accident in a
New York coffee shop. The rest as they say is history. Together they made
over forty films in a relationship that lasted all of forty-four years. A record
in the annals of independent filmmaking anywhere in the world.
Ivory's gentle, inward looking vision may never have found expression on
the scale that it did but for Merchant's amazing resourcefulness that included
coaxing, cajoling, bullying and charming all those associated, directly and
indirectly with the making of his films.

Merchant-Ivory productions' first venture was a documentary, The Delhi
Way back in 1962. The next year they made a feature length

fiction film The
Householder in Black and White. It was about a young college lecturer,
tentative and clumsy trying to find happiness with his wife from a sheltered
background. Ironically the script was written by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, a
Jewess from Poland married to a Parsee Indian architect. James Ivory who
knew nothing about the subject did a fine job of directing his first real film.
He had made a couple of pleasant documentaries earlier.
The crew was basically Satyajit Ray's, a director who was already being
acknowledged the world over as a Master and whose Apu trilogy, Jalsa
Ghar (The Music Room) and other films had made a lasting impression on
international audiences and critics. His cameraman Subrata Mitra, also
lionized, photographed The Householder which was designed by Bansi
Chandragupta, the most resourceful art director in India, trained by Eugene

Lourie, who created most evocative sets for Jean Renoir's The River, shot in
Barrackpore, near Calcutta in 1950.
The success of the Householder in the West was largely due to the efforts of
Merchant's energy and drive. He wooed the Press which responded warmly
almost to a man. His film went to those distributors who could give it
maximum exposure and a decent royalty. His task was made easier by the
rousing reception accorded to Satyajit Ray's lyrical cinema to

which
Merchant Ivory’s maiden effort owed clear allegiance.

Their second film Shakespearewallah (1965) had an elegiac tone which
added poignance to its lyricism. It was a fictionalized account of a true story.
A well-known English theatre couple Jeffrey and Laura Kendall who play
people like themselves in the film actually ran a peripatetic theatre company
in the British India of the 1930s, and 40s. The troupe got into grave financial
difficulties when their audience endowed anglicized Public schools and
Country Clubs whose members belonged to flourishing British owned
mercantile establishments suddenly lost interest in all things English. The
purple patches from Shakespeare done by the company, which also had
some Indian actors in real life, as in the film, no longer interested people,
whose enthusiasm for culture could best be described as ephemeral.
Only the romance between the young daughter of the English couple and an
Indian rake was fiction. The performances were first-rate and Felicity
Kendall as the daughter was moving. Beautifully photographed in B/W by
Subrata Mitra and scored by Satyajit Ray, whose music sold half-a- million
long-playing records, Shakespearewallah was a huge success in America
and Europe. Ismail was only twenty-eight years old when he produced his

second feature film. He proved himself to be a man of fine taste, possessing
the ability to grasp an opportunity when it presented itself.

In retrospect, one can say he best illustrated the idea that artistes are a
product of history. They reflect a certain spirit of their times—so too with
Ismail Merchant and his alter ego, the director James Ivory. They came at a
turbulent moment in Western politics, culture and cinema. The French New
Wave was about to peak and had already revealed the staggering
possibilities of film narration. Filmmakers as disparate in temperament as
Alain Resnais, Jacques Tati, Robert Bresson, Jean Luc Goddard, Eric
Rohmer and Francois Truffaut had enriched film language and proudly
declared it an art form to be taken as seriously as literature, music, theatre or

the plastic arts. In the Anglo-Saxon world classical cinema was in its last
throes, and its greatest master John Ford was unemployed, ignored by know
all young men running Hollywood. There was a niche for a different, gentler
kind of storytelling and Merchant-Ivory films filled it.
Their early productions were devoted to selling exotic India abroad and who
could do it better than Ismail? The third film that Ismail and James did
together was set in Benares. The Guru (1968) had the contretemps of a
famous classical sitarist with his two wives—one traditional, the younger

one modern, as its focal point. Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation
had swept across America promising deliverance from the ravages of greed
and avarice brought by relentless capitalism. Recognizing this phenomenon,
the story included as a catalyst an English pop star and his girlfriend. India
and its contradictions, the musician attracted to modernity but comfortable
only when maintaining status quo, his celebrity English disciple and his girl
both hoping to find peace in the holy city where the ustad lives, all this
constituted a visually interesting but not witty or incisive narrative.
Energetic promotion prevented the film from being a dead loss. While it did
not make a reasonable profit, it made money—only some.

Bombay Talkie (1970) the fourth Merchant-Ivory offering was about an
ageing male star, who was unable to cope with his own life, fame that was
soon going to elude him, and the unreal world of Hindi cinema. Apart from
Zia Mohyeddin's powerful performance as an ignored lyricist, and Subrata
Mitra's camerawork, including a long bravura sequence at the beginning,
there was little to recommend about the film. Utpal Dutt, whose dynamic
presence held The Guru together, was just about adequate as a harried film
producer. Shashi Kapoor who was so good in the first two films, looked tired
here.

Bombay Talkie did nothing for Ismail Merchant or James Ivory. Two films in a row that barely made money, put the company under financial strain.

For the first time in his life, Ismail was forced to deal with the unyielding Jewish moneymen of New York on less than equal terms. The experience marked him for life and made him a skinflint. His old friend and colleague Shashi Kapoor, remarked on television that Ismail did not like paying any of his actors and technicians anymore than he absolutely had to.

The Savages (1973) was made in the U.S. in an old colonial Restoration mansion, in Scarborough, forty minutes away from New York. The old place

and the jungle nearby gave Ivory the idea of bringing in jungle dwellers from Stone Age into the twentieth century. An object the “Savages” had never seen before, a coloured ball, suddenly descends in their midst. The retrieval of it by people from the modern era provides material for a potentially hilarious and wise film. The script based on an idea by Ivory and not written by Jhabvala, lacked subtlety and humour. Although the director saw it as a “Hudson River Last Day in Marienbad”, his film had all of Alain Resnais’s intellectual tomfoolery but none of his poetic intensity. Merchant understood right away that original material was not the duo’s cup of tea, and thereafter relied, exclusively on literature to provide

the ballast for their
films.

After The Wild Party (1975), a sincere but inept attempt to recreate the
excesses of the Jazz age in sinful old Hollywood, an undertaking the
inspiration for which may well have been the jewelled prose of F. Scott
Fitzgerald, Merchant Ivory production was again in dire straits. Certain
critics including Pauline Kael of the New Yorker even called Ismail and
James a pair of amateurs. The energy that drove their first two films seemed
to have deserted them.

Merchant would have to turn things around speedily before America wrote
them off. Roseland (1977) set in a real ballroom of that name in New York
where people come to shed their loneliness was too civilized, too tentative to
move viewers. Although it had a solid cast led by old-timer Teresa Wright
with Lou Jacobi, Geraldine Chaplin and Christopher Walken who featured in
the three inter-connected episodes, it was lacking in drive. Ivory seemed to
have found a cinematic language that was true to his temperament, but it still
needed polishing. The opportunity came with an adaptation by Ruth Prawer
Jhabwala, who else, of Henry James's The Europeans (1979). The
interiorized pre-modern drama was just what Merchant Ivory productions
needed. Accolades followed and actress Lee Remick's

performance in a
pivotal role was greatly appreciated. It was more than a success d’esteeme.
People in large numbers bought tickets to see it. Ismail and James had
finally made it to the front rank of American and European filmmakers.
They were still in their late thirties.

The following year in 1980, they tried their hand at an experimental musical
Jane Austen in Manhattan about various troupes wanting to perform a 19 th
century manuscript by Jane Austen written in her childhood that was
recently discovered. It starred Anne Baxter, who shot to fame thirty years

earlier as Eve Harrington in Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s All about Eve and
Robert Powell, also a contemporary of hers. Made on a shoestring budget of
450, 000 dollars, it was like the proverbial curate’s cake, good in parts.
Quartet (1981) based on Jean Rhys’s despairing existentialist novel about
bohemian Paris in the late 1920s starring Isabelle Adjani, Maggie Smith,
Alan Bates and photographed in luminous low-key by Pierre L’Homme,
cinematographer to Jean Pierre Melville, father of the French new wave, was
a feather in James Ivory’s cap. It was possible only because of Merchant’s
exceptional organizing skills and uncanny judgment of the artistic and
commercial climate of Europe and America.

There was indeed room then for a quieter, more reflective kind of cinema in the English-speaking world, especially after Hollywood had expended its energies on mainly violent moralistic dramas and thrillers. The ‘serious’ French cinema, thanks or no thanks to the brilliant cinematic combustions of Jean Luc Godard, Alain Resnais, Jacques Rivette and Chris Marker had been forced to virtually abandon the linear narrative, with the notable exception of Francois Truffaut and, more so, Jean Pierre Rappeneau. It secretly welcomed well-told stories from any part of the world. Satyajit Ray’s films and those of Merchant Ivory found favour with discerning French audiences, principally in Paris.

Ismail and James returned to the twilight world of Maharajas and ‘illicit’ love; the consequences of one is probed by a young Englishwoman in Heat and Dust (1983). Julie Christie is the woman who comes to India to understand her late grandaunt’s affair with a Maharaja (Shashi Kapoor) and falls in love with a handsome youth (Zakir Husain) and gets impregnated by him. It was a big hit. Though Merchant-Ivory had to take a lot of flak from the critics. Ismail’s logic was clear. Someone had to pay for the homes and offices in London, New York and Bombay (now Mumbai).
The next year it was time to regain critical acclaim and the affections of a

loyal audience. Once again it was Henry James to the rescue and his Bostonians was Merchant Ivory's key to success. It restored their prestige and gave them an unspoken right to adapt works of 'difficult' writers for the screen.

E.M. Forster, a great but not popular English writer was next on their agenda. A Room With a View (1986) featuring Daniel Day Lewis, son of

poet C. Day Lewis, Helena Bonham Carter, Judi Dench and Maggie Smith, was the first attempt to find a cinematic equivalent to Forster's prose which was at first glance unsuitable for an audio-visual interpretation. There was too little physical action in his writing—A Passage to India and Where Angels Fear toTread have short bursts of it—most of what occurs was in the minds of his characters. Merchant and Ivory won a fair bit of critical acclaim, and made decent amounts of money on it.

Their films were always about people, trying to find themselves—deliberately or not. The price they pay to arrive at an understanding with life is usually heavy. Most often they are aware of their dilemma; however, there are exceptions. Does Stephen, the faithful old butler in Lord Darlington's household really comprehend what an unfair hand he has been dealt by his former employers in Remains of the Day

(1993)? Only Miss Kenton, the housekeeper, who like Stephens is now without a job, seems to know despite a stoic acceptance of her fate.

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel helps Ivory make perhaps his finest film: a quiet, understated, but never the less powerful depiction of class and privilege in pre-war England. The same pair of actors Anthony Hopkins, and Emma Thompson from their Forster triumph of a year earlier Howards End were repeated to great effect in Remains of the Day.

Howards End (1992) was set during the economic depression that swept Europe and America in the late 1920s through the mid-1930s. It was about naked abuse of power and ruthless assertion of privilege. Anthony Hopkins as an aristocrat with a roving eye is riveting but it is the women who elicit both respect and sympathy. Emma Thompson and Helena Bonham Carter as sisters from the middle-class whose trust is betrayed heartlessly by the aristocrat, culminating in the murder of a male friend of the younger sister, with their accurate reading of social situations, throw the film into a political perspective which needs no polemics to comprehend.

If this article is as much about Ivory as it is about Merchant then there is a reason for it. They were joined artistically at the hip. One was at his best only when complementing the other. It was Ismail who encouraged, even

inspired James, to stretch himself to discover his true métier; to take risks with complex literary texts that were difficult to film but could be immensely rewarding once an effective method was discovered.

Who for instance had dared to film primarily uncinematic authors like Forster and James in an Anglo-Saxon cinema? Who dared to gamble and win but Ivory egged on by Merchant. To make meaningful cinema out of texts with sub-terrainean relationships hidden under a patina of good manners, where what was being said and done often meant the opposite, was no mean achievement.

This kind of interiorized drama was also the highlight of Mr and Mrs Bridge (1990) with Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward playing the eponymous couple. Set in Kansas City during the Depression, it travels over two generations to Paris. The inclusion of the Louvre as a location was a masterstroke, made possible through Ismail's penchant for legerdemain. Apart from Newman and Woodward's stand out performances as a rich couple stultified by time unable to understand the changing world around them, there was the elegant presentation of a difficult idea. Adapted from two novels by Evans Connell, Mr. and Mrs. Bridge was a critical as well as a commercial triumph.

Ismail had once said in an interview that he had brought in Jefferson in Paris (1995) for five million dollars; a feat beyond any producer, independent or backed by a Hollywood studio. To make a period piece about the second president of the United States and him courting his future French wife, for such a sum was a well nigh impossible task. The film was panned despite Nick Nolte's caring performance and Pierre L'Homme's telling photography.

It was only a year earlier in 1994 that Ismail had made his own debut as a director in feature films. It is not that he had never been behind the camera before. His short The Creation of Women (1960) had been nominated for an Oscar in its category and later Mahatma and The Mad Boy (1974) of twenty-seven minutes duration was highly acclaimed. It is quite possible that he had grown tired of fundraising for large projects that had to be reasonably budgeted to be commercially viable. He wanted to do a small, intimate film he could call his own. He chose Anita Desai's novel In Custody to do as Muhafiz in Urdu. He got Desai and Shahrukh Husain to write the screenplay, which was set in contemporary Bhopal. Noor, a huge, custardy man, a once important Urdu poet is on his last legs, dying of adulation heaped on him by sycophants much like the rich food he so enjoys. He lives with his two

wives, one like him old but unlike him reliable and the other a young,

opportunistic tart rescued from a local brothel and the mother of his son.
Devan, a young Hindu lecturer devoted to the Urdu language is asked by his
publisher friend to do an interview with Noor for his journal. What follows,
is in turn, comic and sad. Noor's interview is botched by a novice sound
recordist. He dies suddenly, but Devan somehow manages to bring out a
collection of Noor's poems.

Muhafiz is also about a highly expressive language that is being allowed to
die out in independent India for exclusively political reasons. All official
work in courts and police stations was done in Urdu before the partition of
India in 1947. Immediately after, Hindi became the official language of the
State. All avenues of Government employment suddenly closed for Urdu
students. Noor a poet of sensitivity and discernment became a victim of
capricious politics. To add insult to injury, his second wife sang his ghazals
and passed them off as her own.

Ismail chose the more difficult intimist mode for his film. Rarely did the
cinema go out of the poet's house. There were precisely five other locations,
namely Devan's home and his college; his colleague Siddiqui's home and
the office of the Urdu weekly which has commissioned Devan to

do Noor’s
interview and the visit by boat to Sufi Saints’ Mazar on an island in a lake.
The last scene of Noor’s funeral procession is seen mostly from a distance,
mainly to create scale.

Too many things went wrong for intention to match achievement. For one,
Ismail had been away from home for much too long; true he did come back
periodically to make films, but these were not connected closely with the
imperceptibly changing social scene. He did not really have the time to study
India for he was far too busy administering to the needs of the film at hand.
His knowledge of Urdu, for all his enthusiasm, was at best sketchy.
Choosing the poetry of a revolutionary poet like Faiz Ahmed Faiz to do duty
for most of Noor’s was a mistake. Anyone familiar with Faiz’s oeuvre will
immediately realize that it does not sit well on the lips of a bacchante like
Noor. Perhaps Josh Malihabadi’s poetry would have been more apt, for it
would have been closer to Noor’s spirit. More attention should have been
paid to his ghazals especially those picturised on his second wife. They are
sung in a lackluster manner by Kavita Krishnamurthy. Even the one
rendered by Hariharan lacks conviction. They should have had more

melody, more raga content. This was all the more surprising

because Ustad
Zakir Husain was the composer.
Ismail was in much greater control doing his second film Cotton Mary
(2000) in English, with a script by Alexandra Viets adapted from her own
play. It was about an Anglo-Indian Ayah who decides to make herself
indispensable to her English mistress whose baby she helps to nurse. Mary,
though, a servant uses her dominant position over her employer suffering
from post-natal depression, to push her own case to go to England—home
country for the Eurasian. As expected all her schemes fall apart and she is
finally taken in by her relatives who she had till recently despised. Mary
never really comes to terms with her own identity.

This problem of identity forms the core of A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries
(1998) directed by James Ivory and based on an autobiographical novel by
Kaylie Jones, daughter of James Jones, author of From Here to Eternity, Go
to the Widow Maker and The Thin Red Line. The fundamental question of
recognizing oneself is raised once again in The Mystic Masseur (2002) the
last film that Merchant directed. V.S. Naipaul's comic novel about an Indian
from Trinidad trying to discover himself in London allowed for a mixture of
wit and seriousness.

Ismail and James worked together for the last time together in

2003 on
L’Divorce, a farce set in contemporary Paris in which doltish Americans and
French do not know what to do with themselves. An American young
woman, pregnant with her first child, is abandoned by her upper class
French husband for another woman. The hapless mother-to-be is joined by
her younger sister newly arrived from the U.S. only to be seduced by her
estranged brother-in-law’s rake of an uncle! The absconding young husband
dies a gratuitous death; a sweet, chubby baby is born to his wife. Nobody
learns anything from what life has to offer.

Ismail Merchant’s life had a lot to offer. In middle age he had become a
gourmet and gourmand, a television celebrity and a writer of popular
cookbooks. He had proved his worth and durability as a producer of quality
cinema whose foundation lay in good writing and had gifted the world an
unusual and talented filmmaker in James Ivory. He had also paved the way
for those independent producers and directors, not necessarily from India,
who were to follow after him. Last but not least he had proved that if there

was a will to make a really fine film then the means to make it could also be
found. He was a man of rare qualities.

Jodha Akbar – The Film / Seema Bawa

Seema Bawa analyses this highly controversial film with a historical perspective

Actors: Aishwarya Rai and Hrithik Roshan

The historian in me could not resist having a *dekko* at a historical romance based on a character such as Akbar, who indeed is a larger than life figure of world history. A man of vision, statesmanship and great depth Akbar was the *Insaan-e-Kamaal* of his era. Hrithik Roshan as the young Akbar indeed does not disappoint even though in terms of physique he does not match the descriptions of the historical Akbar. The scenes depicting his valour, strength and prowess in battle, though competently performed are not exceptional. It is the sheer regalness of his bearing and the small details such as the fluid and effortless movements with which he sits on the throne, an act which requires immense theatrical perfection, that help him make the character his own. The scene showing Akbar getting into a trance while listening to mystical music of Sufi dervishes is authentic to the sources and enacted with

great felicity. Aishwarya Rai as Jodhaa is right out of Mughal-Rajput miniatures paintings in her stance, apparel, ornaments and indeed her entire external persona.

The character of Akbar is better delineated because of the wealth of source material available, much of which is hagiographic in nature. That is not to say that the counterview was not available as is seen from the killing of Adham Khan Akbar's foster brother. Other aspects of Akbar's prowess such as his exceptional skill as a bare-hand fighter, his dueling an elephant, his consulting philosophers of other faiths; all having basis in historical sources ring quite true in the film.

Jodhaa, on the other hand, being largely a figment of the writer-director's imagination, has been conceptualized with less depth. The single character trait that has been reiterated is her spirit, and her spirited resistance to patriarchal values which while anachronistic to the period depicted, is also quite tedious. Her depiction as a Rajput woman of honour and integrity is overstressed.

As for the characterization of secondary characters, unlike Lagaan, in Jodhaa Akbar this aspect has been largely ignored. Instead we have stereotypes paraded as Rajput Ranas, and good and faithful courtiers such as the *Khan-i-khanan* and Todar Mal versus fanatical *ulema* and scheming relatives. The entire structure of Mughal aristocracy, the *mansabdars*, so significant for the actual and visual construction of the Mughal era, is overlooked.

The film succeeds in reconstructing the sense of architectural spaces of the grand Mughal era, especially the *Diwan-i-Aam*. The battles and the epic scale are well done even though the armies rush towards each other rather than in formation.

The music of AR Rahman goes well with the film but does not stand out. The background score though is excellent.

The film is at one level an elaborate seduction of the spirited though mono-dimensional Jodhaa by a rather desirable Akbar. The plot is entirely based on coitus-interuptus, which is interrupted ad-nauseum where the consummation is heartily to be wished for so that one can finally go home. The sexual tension is very well structured and indeed works very well but for the length it has been stretched out. The political intrigues and the romance appear to be yoked together by violence and are not linked organically. Indeed they should have been two separate films.

Perhaps the entire relationship of Jodhaa and Akbar should have been read within the context of sexual politics that underlay the harem of the Mughals, which could have served as an interesting back drop to the delineation of Emperor Akbar, arguably the greatest monarch and statesman this land has seen. We know that Akbar had at least two wives (besides many concubines) before he married the Rajput princess. The Rajput princess, whatever her real name may have been, would have been competing with them for her Emperor’s favours and allusions to the same may have made interesting viewing. Instead the harem intrigues center around her conflict with Maham Anaga Akbar’s foster mother whose importance had waned by the time Akbar attained adulthood.

The film is largely didactic in that it addresses issues of shared cultural heritage and communal harmony without appearing to preach. The historicity of Jodhaa/ Harka or Jia Bai is irrelevant to the film.

The film ‘Manto’—A Review by Raj Ayyar

‘I am a walking, talking Bombay.’
‘Saadat Hasan Manto, RIP. He lies in that grave, wondering: Who is the greater storyteller? God or Manto?’
—Saadat Hasan Manto.
I enjoyed watching the biopic ‘Manto’, A great Indo-Pakistani genius comes alive in this film. A man whose life-world is torn apart by the brutal Partition, one whose life thereafter would always bear the scars of that trauma.
Manto’s intense, and yet funny Urdu storytelling elan comes to life, as does his quirky humor, his roving gaze that took in details of street life with merciless precision (always privileging the marginalized street person, sex worker or insane victim of the India-Pakistan partition), and stitched them into narratives.
It is a measure of Nandita Das’ skill as a director, that five Manto stories are woven into the fabric of the film, one each for his five most creative and tormented years—often, the film slips from a ‘realistic’ biographical description into the heart of a Manto story. Only later does the viewer come to realize that s/he is now out of the story, and back to Manto’s life.
Hats off to Nawazuddin Siddiqui for pulling off such a complex role with elan—he captures the humor and dark irony of Manto’s personal conversations, as also of his stories with a

seemingly effortless ease.
Rasika Dugal has a sidekick role—as Manto's wife Safia, she is reduced to the role of a codependent, mothering wife, who takes care of him in his darkest moments.
I loved Rajshri Deshpande as Ismat Chughtai—she looks a bit like the young Ismat and portrays her love-hate for Manto well ('Manto my friend, Manto my enemy').
The film reminded me of a forgotten Bollywood matinee idol—Shyam Chadha. He was Manto's closest friend and might have broken the rule of the filmic triumvirate—Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, and Dev Anand, had his life and career not ended tragically in an accident on the sets.
Tahir Bhasin is adequate to the role but lacks Shyam's extreme good looks, and his flashy personality.
The film relives two of Manto's best stories—'Thanda Gosht' (Cold Meat), and 'Toba Tek Singh'. The former about a man stabbed to death by a jealous sweetheart confessing that he had an extra-marital quickie with a corpse, and the latter the ultimate Indo-Pakistani story about the horrors of Partition, seen through the eyes of a madman.
One wishes that the film had spent more time re-creating 'Toba Tek Singh', and less on Manto's rehab and therapy. It does capture Manto's depressive alcoholism after his move from his beloved Bombay to Lahore, but those scenes could have been shortened without losing the overall effect.
—Raj Ayyar

Doordarshan Schedule July 2018

PRASAR BHARATI
(India’s Public Service Broadcaster)
Directorate General: Doordarshan
Copernicus Marg: New Delhi-110001
Films Division

File No-26/1/2017-P-6. Film Dated: 12.06.2018

Subject: Schedule of Hindi Feature Films to be telecast from 01.07.2018 to 31.07.2018 on DD-NATIONAL Network.
(Shahrukh Khan Special movies will be telecast from 01st July’18 to 10th July’18)

S.NO
DATE AND TIME OF T/C
NAME OF THE FILM
STAR-CAST

01.07.2018

Sunday Retro At 12:00 Noon
(Guru Dutt Special)
KAAGAZ KE PHOOL
Guru Dutt,
Waheeda Rehman
Mehmood

01.07.2018
Sunday Blockbuster at 09:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
MAIN HOON NAA
Shahrukh Khan,
Sunil Shetty, Zayed Khan

02.07.2018
Monday-Funday at 07:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
PHIR BHI DIL HAI HINDUSTANI
Shahrukh Khan, Juhi Chawla,
Paresh Rawal

03.07.2018
Tuesday Action at 07:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
ASHOKA
Shahrukh KhanKareena Kapoor Danny

04.07.2018
Wednesday Romance at 07:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
DIL TO PAGAL HAI
Shahrukh Khan, Madhuri DixitKarishma KapoorAkshay Kumar

05.07.2018
Thursday Drama at 07:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
DEVDAS
Shahrukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai, Madhuri Dixit

06.07.2018
Friday Houseful At 09:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
FAN
Shahrukh Khan

07.07.2018
Saturday Jubilee At 09:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
OM SHANTI OM
Shahrukh Khan,
Deepika Padukone, Arjun Rampal

08.07.2018
Sunday Retro At 12:00 Noon
(Guru Dutt Special)
CHAUDHHVIN KA CHAND
Guru Dutt, Waheeda Rehman

08.07.2018
Sunday Blockbuster at 09:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
CHALTE CHALTE
Shahrukh Khan, Rani Mukherjee, Satish Shah

09.07.2018
Monday-Funday at 07:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
BILLU
Shahrukh Khan, Irfan KhaLara Dutta

10.07.2018
Tuesday Action at 07:00 PM
Shahrukh Khan Special
HUM TUMHARE HAI SANAM
Shahrukh Khan, Salman Khan, Madhuri Dixit

11.07.2018
Wednesday Romance at 07:00 PM

TEEN PATTI
Amitabh BachchanR.Madhavan, Ben KingslaySiddharth Kher
Abhay Deol
Preeti Desai

12.07.2018
Thursday Drama at 07:00 PM
CHOR MACHAYE SHOR
Shashi KapoorMumtaz, Asrani

13.07.2018
Friday Houseful At 09:00 PM
TUMHARI SULU
Vidya Balan, Neha Dhupiya,
Manav Kunal

14.07.2018
Saturday- ‘Divanjali’ At 12:00 Noon
(Sh. Jagannath Rath Yatra will be held on 14.07.2018)
JAI JAGANNATH
Sarat PurariSadhu MeherSritam Das

14.07.2018
Saturday Jubilee At 09:00 PM
BUDHIA SINGH- BORN TO RUN
Manoj Bajpai,Mayur Patole

15.07.2018
Sunday Retro At 12:00 Noon
(Guru Dutt Special)
SAHIB BIBI AUR GHULAM
Guru Dutt, Meena Kumari, Waheeda Rehman

15.07.2018
Sunday Blockbuster at 09:00 PM
BOMBAY VELVET
Ranbir KapoorAnushka Sharma

16.07.2018

Monday-Funday at 07:00 PM
BUDHA MAR GAYA
Paresh Rawal,Om Puri

17.07.2018
Tuesday Action at 07:00 PM
OMKARA
Ajay Devgan,
Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor

18.07.2018
Wednesday Romance at 07:00 PM
DESI BOYZ
Akshay Kumar,John Abraham, Deepika Padukone

19.07.2018
Thursday Drama at 07:00 PM
CHUPKE CHUPKE
Dharmendra, Amitabh BachchanSharmila Tagore, Jaya Bhaduri

20.07.2018
Friday Houseful At 09:00 PM
MOM
Sridevi, NawazuddinSiddiqi, Akshay Khanna

21.07.2018
Saturday Jubilee At 09:00 PM
HUMSHAKALS
Saif Ali KhanRitesh DeshmukhTamannaah Bhatia

22.07.2018
Sunday Retro At 12:00 Noon
DEVAR
Dharmender,Sharmila Tagore, Shashikala

22.07.2018
Sunday Blockbuster at 09:00 PM
HEROPANTI
Tiger ShroffKriti Sanon, Prakash Raj

23.07.2018
Monday-Funday at 07:00 PM
CHINTU JI
Rishi Kapoor,Priyanshu Chaterjee

24.07.2018
Tuesday Action at 07:00 PM
GHAJINI
Aamir Khan,Asin

25.07.2018
Wednesday Romance at 07:00 PM
LOVE AAJ KAL
Saif Ali Khan,
Deepika Padukone

26.07.2018
Thursday Drama at 07:00 PM
THAKSHAK
Ajay DevganManoj Bajpai, Tabu

27.07.2018
Friday Houseful At 09:00 PM
PYAAR KA PUNCHNAMA-2
Kartik Aaryan,Nushuat Bharucha, Sonnalli Seygall

28.07.2018
Saturday Jubilee At 09:00 PM
ROY
Ranbir KapoorJacqueline Fernandez, Arjun Rampal

29.07.2018
Sunday Retro At 12:00 Noon
HAATHI MERE SATHI
Rajesh Khanna, Tanuja

29.07.2018
Sunday Blockbuster at 09:00 PM
JOLLY LLB

Arshad WarsiAmrita Rao, Boman Irani

30.07.2018
Monday-Funday at 07:00 PM
TOM DICK AND HARRY
Dino Morea, Jimmy ShergillAnuj Sawhney, Kim Sharma

31.07.2018
Tuesday Action at 07:00 PM
RAAVAN
Abhishek Bachchan, VikramAishwarya Rai, Govinda