



...TO REACH THE STATIC

OF all the avant-garde films that have appeared in the last two years, Mani Kaul's "Uski Roti" is perhaps the only one which could claim to be really experimental. Whatever the fate of the film, it has earned for Mani Kaul a special place in our cinema today.

Rarely has a film or a director been talked about so much. The film has been applauded and criticised, one feels, with excessive enthusiasm. But "Uski Roti" is the kind of film that can liberate a cinema that has been wallowing in "idiot cliches" for ages.

Recognition has not been lacking for "Uski Roti" or Kaul. The Filmfare Critics Award, the Venice Film Festival, a place on the jury for Kaul at the Berlin Festival and the National Award for its phenomenal cameraman K. K. Mahajan. "Ashad Ka Ek Din," Mani Kaul's second film, bagged the Critics Award within a month of its completion. Yet "Uski Roti" is still to see public exhibition in India, thanks to the highly commercialised distribution set-up which considers past taste as the only sure thing in taste.

In the following interview, Mani Kaul talks about his films, his methods and his future projects.

Does the fact that the public has not been able to see "Uski Roti" bother you?

It bothers me. The factors that have acted against me are: the economics of making a feature film, even a low budget one; the fact that there are people in the commercial film industry who would like to repress it; and an audience conditioned to receiving extravaganzas.

People come to watch the kind of film they have been used to. I don't fit into any of these categories. I believe that certain precepts worked out on the basis of communication are the beginning of a film maker's failure: His incapacity to give up the medium and inability to follow his own thinking. If I started simplifying for the audience, it means I am falsifying the progress of life around me. If the battle cannot be fought with cinema, it should be fought with

● Arun Khopkar as Kalidas in Mani Kaul's "Ashad Ka Ek Din" based on a play by Mohan Rakesh.

✓ An Interview
with
Mani Kaul.

By J. S. RAO

some other medium or by life itself. I consider life a medium.

Should not cinema be more dynamic than the slow deliberate texture of your films?

What I am saying is not a rule. However, a higher experience in life, as in cinema, is achieved by beginning to work against the natural tendencies. The high points of any civilisation have been reached, by opposing the natural tendencies to discover the correct relation between what is natural and what is right conduct.

In both "Uski Roti" and "Ashad..." you seem to favour the use of static camera positions and studied definite movements. Is this a sort of self imposed discipline?

My answer in fact precedes the question. Both films were thoroughly planned and organised in detail to counteract all that goes under the name of spontaneity. Because, the discipline and its rigorous implementation go much farther than the spurious naturalness or spontaneity we are used to, it can achieve a

of distinct notes or beats rather than a regular musical composition.

Although your films are different in content despite the waiting woman theme, your method of treatment seems to be more or less the same. Are you developing a personal style in cinema?

No. Maybe it appears that way. But I am certainly not engaged in developing my own style, mainly because I feel that the problem of having a personal style is more of a renaissance problem. It might even be thought decadent to have a style!

Where I have repeated myself, and which I think is not a question of style, is in "neutralising". I make every effort to combine sound and image — moving or static — in such a manner as to reach the static. And this, perhaps I will repeat in almost every film. I will combine the two to make them silent. In fact, very much unlike when I paint: then I combine the two to disturb.

In both your films you have

dubbed the main actor's voice with your own. What is the reason?

Your question is very interesting and very difficult for me to answer. I feel if I speak, my contact will be more direct. It is not the inability of the actor to speak. Still, I feel it will make the text more commentative and less of a dialogue. I don't know. Maybe the reason will become clearer in my third film.

What is your answer to those who have called your films obscure and abstract?

That they are obscure and abstract. However, I have found that women respond very well to my films.

Would you take stars in your films if you found them sufficiently self effacing? Like Belmondo, Soumitra Chatterji or Waheeda Rehman?

I don't know. I want every one with me to be a worker. Most likely, in my third film I will be taking a girl who can be termed a star.

What is your concept of time in cinema?

finite duration and pre-recorded the track. With the result, when I played it back on the location, the images were functioning under the discipline of sounds.

What are your future plans? Are you planning a third film?

I am working on a script and the story is by a man called Vijaydan Detha of Borunda, a village in Rajasthan. Against all odds, he has collected 9000 folklore tales of Rajasthan from farmers and old women. This particular story is a step ahead of my own themes.

Speaking formally, it further articulates my theory of directly narrating a film rather than enacting it out. It is amazing that objections to "Ashad..." are mostly strong from theatre people, whereas in that film, I have abstracted the purer form of theatre.

Would you name some of the film makers around you of whom you have high hopes?

Kumar Shahani, S. N. Dhir, Vishnu Mathur, Vinay Shukla, Vikas Desai and K. M. Shankarappa.



profound simplicity.

There is hardly any background music in "Uski Roti" and "Ashad..." although in the latter you have used sound effects. Do you think music would detract from the seriousness of your films?

Music is very close to me and quite independently of cinema. It pains me therefore even to call it "background score." However, the simple arrangement of notes in "Uski Roti" were put at places where conventionally music is not required. The purpose was to simplify my own structure.

The hymns I have used in "Ashad..." are part of the sound effects, but percussion has been used as music. In both cases I am attracted by the use

Above: "Whatever happens in her mind is not memory..." Garima as Balo in "Uski Roti."

Above right: Mani Kaul briefs Rekha Sabnis for "Ashad Ka Ek Din."

Time in cinema for me must necessarily correspond to time in life. In its juxtaposition of segments however, cinema has a right to shatter our normal perception of time. Which is why I claim that in "Uski Roti" there are no flashbacks or flashforwards.

I was concerned with the actuality of this woman 'Balo' and what we may call her mind life. Whatever happens in her mind is not memory, nor is it anticipation. It is also an actuality.

In "Uski Roti," the whole stylisation emerged from basically, the arrangement of space in images. Whereas in "Ashad..." the space was further controlled by time cycles of sounds. I had divided the text of "Ashad..." into recurrent time circles of de-

These are all from the Film Institute. Any others?

Girish Karnad — even though I have only seen him act. Maybe some others escape my mind. This is not a final list.

What do you think of the future of Indian cinema?

I would like to be very hopeful and I am sure that if the government does not abandon its recently found low budget policy, there is no dearth of talent in this country to make this a memorable period in the history of Indian cinema.

Lastly, don't you have a wish to make a film that will be an immediate hit with the masses?

I have a desire, but no urge. I will be happy if it happens. But nothing will force me to do it.