REVISITING *DHVANI* IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AESTHETICS OF EXPERIENCE IN FILM

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In this paper, I explore an approach to cinema through some key ideas in Indian poetics. While there is a recent resurgence in India of films dealing explicitly with ideas from Indian philosophy, here I wish to locate a more implicit relationship between a mode of address in cinema (or aesthetics) and religious thought. When one turns attention to Indian aesthetics, the ideas of *rasa* and *dhvani* dating back to at least the 2nd century BC stand out as arguably the two most influential concepts throughout the centuries. These aesthetic formulations in their most evolved form were informed by insights from religious thought. These formulations I suggest can be located through certain forms of cinematic works and their mode of being in the world. Here I will look at one such example: the recent feature film in Hindi *Khargosh* (2008).

Khargosh, I argue, works towards constructing a narrative *through* experience rather than *of* experience. As I will show, the film reworks cinematically some of the key principles of the *dhvani* theory, originally formulated in the context of poetry. *Khargosh* works towards creating a viewing experience that takes the viewer closer towards *wholeness* rather than the alienated and divided self, often associated with the experience of film viewing, even while telling a more normative story.

The film is a small-budget independent production and it ran the festival circuit, gathered awards, but did not see theatrical release. It is an adaptation of a short story about the coming-of-age of a young boy, Bantu, who lives with his mother in a small town in north India. His only other companion is Avinash, a young man who lives upstairs. We see Bantu lonely and in search of playmates. The puppet-seller is his hope of being able to populate his world with companions. Bantu buys puppets from him with the assurance that they will speak soon. While he waits for this magic to happen, we see Bantu incessantly seeking out his only friend, the much older Avinash. When he does manage to catch up with him, Bantu must work hard at cajoling Avinash to leave his studies and spend time with him in some companionable activities. We see them flying kites or going out to the street corner to have

ice-lollies. As the film progresses this latter activity becomes regular and it finally dawns on Bantu that the lure for Avinash was something quite different from the simple pleasure of an ice-lolly. Avinash fancies a woman and is trying to woo her. Soon Bantu is embroiled in the courtship, carrying love notes back and forth, helping the two to meet. The affair begins to take its toll on Bantu who feels left out from this adult world and soon finds himself obsessed with Avinash's girlfriend, nicknamed Mrityu (death). With this, Bantu becomes sexually aware and moves towards the world of adulthood. The film ends with Bantu having a sexual encounter with Mrityu.

On a casual viewing, the film is a typical coming of age story. Yet there are elements in the film that stick out, refusing to fit neatly into the normative frame of such a story. These unruly elements act as those niggling thoughts at the back of one's head that do not allow one to rest, instigating a refusal to take things at face value, pushing one to take a second look. There is however another possibility of viewing. A viewer who brings her or his full attention and a desire to engage fully with the viewing process is likely to encounter a very different film; rendering the aforementioned review of the first impression of the film unnecessary.

The mode-of-address of the film begins from a slightly alienated tone, something we often identify with art film. It slowly moves towards an increasingly sensuous, embodied mode of address, attempting as it does to etch out the coming of age of a young boy and his waking up to desire, love and competition. The film contains some sections of powerful expressive imagery. Even while at times the frames communicate a sense of self-conscious formal construction and feel a little "wooden." The film is light on the story and dialogue front, but quite elaborate on exploring a "sensory narrative." The film creates a dreamlike texture, a fantasy, rather than a dramatic story within the coordinates of time and space.

I. RASA AND DHVANI

In trying to account for this film in a more holistic manner, I find it useful to turn to the ideas of *rasa* and *dhvani* in the context of Indian poetics. The concept of *rasa* can be traced as far back as at least Bharata's *Natyashastra* (and earlier). The *Natyashastra* is a seminal text on drama in Sanskrit, which among other things explains at some length the concept of *rasa*

(juice, sap, relish, essence). It has been argued that this formulation is extensible from the performing arts to the visual arts.[1]

B. N. Goswamy in the introduction to his book *The Essence of Indian Art* writes that "the word *rasa* is variously rendered."[2] He explains that many of the terms were not used in the same way as in the common manner of speaking, especially as the rhetoricians had expounded in some detail as to the particular meaning/s with which they were employing the terms. Alberuni in his commentary on India, *Ta'riqh al-hind,* based on his 13-year travel in India in the 11th century expressed bewilderment in his encounters with the usage of language in the sub-continent. He complains that the same word refers to different things and different words refer to the same thing![3] A similar phenomenon is at work when we try to locate the ideas of *rasa*[4] and *dhvani*. Yet, translations into other languages have created further resonances. Ironically, these multiple resonances add a certain depth which may perhaps be lost in the context of strict academic discourse that aims at being specific. This multiplicity may also be keeping in line with the thought of Anandavardhana who proposed the *dhvani* theory and held that good poetry (and prose) should offer many possible interpretations.[5]

Dhvani (suggestion, reverberation, sound, resonance) is especially challenging in its multiple usages and contexts. The *dhvani* theory can be traced back to 9th century Kashmir and attributed in its initial formulation to Anandavardhana. The reinterpretation by Anandavardhana of the concept of *rasa* from the *Natyashastra* led to the expansion of the idea of *dhvani* from its more or less literal meaning of sound in the context of the Vedas as well as the arts towards an understanding of it as the heart of poetry. With Abhinavagupta's significant contribution in the 11th century, these ideas were further expanded into a universal concept, lying at the heart of the aesthetic experience. Anandavardhana drew upon the idea of *sphot*, comprehension in a flash, from Bharathari's philosophy of language, to develop his idea of *dhvan*i — suggestion in a flash. One of the key aspects of this aesthetic theory is the way it bridges the dichotomy of subject and object, word and meaning. Prior to Anandvardhan's re-interpretation, the arts and their systemization were diverse and recorded in different *sastras* —– *natya* , *silpa, sangita* as well as *kavya* (dance, craft, music and poetry). While there existed large overriding concepts like *purusartha, pratibha, laksana, rasa*, which were by and large understood as relevant across the arts, "they were not emphasized in their univer-

sality to constitute a general aesthetic."[6] Anandavardhana marked a significant change in the approach to the subject of poetics.

> Anandavardhan turned around and told the traditionalists to their face: You have been analyzing and analyzing, adding to the divisions of *gunas* and *alamkaras*. But I tell you that the essence of poetry is that which baffles analysis in your way. I agree that no one can beat you on your own ground; but the truth about poetry lies another way. You may be good logicians and great grammarians; but you are not *sahrdayas* (sensitive listener) at all. You have been dissecting the body of poetry and missing its soul all the time.[7]

Anandavardhana locates the principle of suggestion as the essential element to create poetry. He argues that even the usage of metaphors would not be enough if a poet is required to follow the dictates of logic in his use of language. The true poet, he believes, uses language creatively. His usage must be necessarily unique in order to create the kind of resonance essential for good poetry. Such usage of language lends itself to creating *dhvani* or suggestiveness. And without the element of suggestion there can be no poetry.

Anandavardhana proposes three levels of poetry in terms of excellence, the highest form of poetry is when the suggested meaning (*vyanjana*) is dominating the expression vis-a vis that of the literal meaning (*abhida*) or the metaphorical meaning (*lakshana*). Second-level poetry is where the suggested meaning is subordinate to the literal meaning and third-rate poetry exists when there is negligible human emotion or evocativeness and is purely a technical exercise in the use of language.

Besides this categorization of the levels of excellence, Anandavardhana also proposed a tripartite structure for the kinds of *dhvani*, *vastu* (object) *dhvani*, *alanakar* (ornamentation) *dhvani* and *rasa dhvani*.[8] It is this last, which is considered the real *dhvani*, hence the most important to creating "true poetry." Here the affective and semantic functions are unified and part of the same articulation. Henceforth, my usage of the term *dhvani* will refer to this *rasa dhvani*. "According to Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, the language of poetry crosses the bounds of empiricism, it crosses the realms of both *abhidha* (literal meaning) and *laksana* (external characteristics of the expression which mean something deeper)."[9]

II. KASHMIR SHAIVISM

The *dhvani* theory is an aesthetic theory with important religious links. Both Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta belonged to the sect of Kashmir Shaivism, a non-dualist religion. Abhinavagupta drew on key ideas of the mystical experiences of this religious sect to expand the *dhvani* theory into a universally applicable one. Yet it was not just mystical ideas that influenced aesthetic formulation. He held that the nature of the aesthetic experience was analogous to the mystical experience, though the aesthetic experience offered only a temporary experience of transcendence, the mystical experience offered a permanent one. He introduced larger, arguably metaphysical, concepts like *alaukika (*otherworldly*), camatakara (*pleasure of wonderment/aesthetic rapture*),* and *ananda* (bliss), specially useful for their universal relevance. *Dhvani* became a universal concept applicable to all forms of art.

The school of Kashmir Shaivism is dated to the 8th century with the revelation of the *sivasutras* to Vasugupta. The school's central belief is that the macrocosm of the universe is echoed in the microcosm of the body and that the two are one and the same. This idea principally informs the non-dualist philosophy of this religious sect. This branch of thought does not negate the world as unreal in the tradition of Shankara who reinterpreted the Upanishads and the Vedas to give shape to what is now know as the *Advaita Vedanta*, another non-dualist philosophy, dating back to 8th century Kashmir. The school of Advaita Vedanta considers the phenomenal world an illusion. On the other hand, there were the Buddhists who believed the phenomenal world was real though it was external and impersonal. They denied the existence of a supreme self, or a universal consciousness. The guiding philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism can be understood as the possibility of achieving bliss in the here and now, from within the world, rather than through a renunciation of it. This philosophy can be seen as a dialectical amalgamation in the manner of Hegel. The philosophy of the Carvaka school (extreme phenomenologists who denied any higher purpose to life except life itself) and the Advaita Vedantins who believed in transcendence, but at the expense of a full engagement with the world around (on a physical embodied level). Extreme opposites clash and bring about a positive synthesis in the form of the Trika school of Kashmir Shaivism.

It is pertinent here to note that Tantra, a part of the earlier Agamic tradition was crucial in the development of the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism specially in its doctrine of affirmation of immanence. The tantra has been called a "spiritual science"; its wide-ranging influence is evident in the similarities between Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism as well as the Bhakti movement, the key being the emphasis on music, rhythm and poetry as a path to awareness or a higher consciousness or a merging with God.

The school of Kashmir Shaivism locates its key mystical experience in echoing the creative principle of the universe, in a ritualized sexual union between woman and man[10]— as representing the union of the active and passive principles in nature or that of *shiva* and *shakti*. This idea is also contained in the image of the seed of a grain, which is made of two parts until it germinates or comes to life. This coming to life is the moment of *sphota.* The contributions of Abhinavagupta in developing the *dhvani* theory emerge from a philosophical understanding of this mystical experience. He understood the central act of salvation, the remembrance of wholeness, or ultimate consciousness, as being a bodily felt process. Thus, Abhinavgupta marked the path to consciousness through *vimarsa*, the boldily felt awareness of the "pulsating heart." The *dhvani* theory grounded in this philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism is an essentially sensuous, and even erotic, phenomenology, which is also based on social relations. The key mystical experience in Kashmir Shaivism focuses on the elucidation of achieving wholeness within and without, i.e., not only in the individual but also in social communion. This is what makes this idea specially transferable to aesthetics, given the social context of theatre, poetry, and finally cinema.

> We see that among the treatises devoted to the four pursuits of human existence (purusarthas), the arts are classified under kamasutra. *Kama* is defined by Vatsayana as the disposition to feel pleasure in the experience of the five senses of hearing, touch, vision, taste and smell.[11]

Instead of asceticism, Kashmir Shaivism arguably proposes an aestheticism based on corporeal sensuousness, which is essentially a dynamic principle from stasis to movement and hence life, from *shiva* to *shakti.*

III. PHENOMENOLOGY

"'Sense experience' has become once more a question for us" writes Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*.[12] The field of phenomenology is vast as well as ancient. Thousands of years ago, when *rishis* reflected on states of consciousness through meditation — they were practicing phenomenology. This approach towards studying first hand experience achieved an academic, methodical articulation with Husserl in Germany to give us what is today understood as classical phenomenology. The *dhvani* theory informed by Kashmir Shaivism can be seen to have close parallels to some key ideas in classical phenomenology in Western philosophy, specially existential phenomenology. The parallels in fact are suggestive of seeing "phenomenology" as a Western engagement with a manner of thinking associated with Eastern religions.[13] This contextualization is useful in moving the ideas of *dhvani* from a sacred space, sometimes reserved for the initiated and highly cultured, to a more profane one where the insights contained within this ancient articulation can become a source of active engagement in the everyday at the present moment.

Classical phenomenology is considered to have started with Husserl's transcendental idealism, where his aim was to study experience towards being able to discover its structures in order to find the essence of consciousness. But towards the end of his life, his position had begun to shift. In his last unpublished work, he can be found to be moving away from his earlier Cartesian approach towards a more existential position in a new approach "via the life world."[14] This is an unfinished work and only fragments are available, but it is arguable that he was moving away from his earlier central idea of "essence."[15] Merleau-Ponty moved further in this direction in showing that consciousness was essentially embodied (incarnated in the "body"). For Merleau-Ponty, the question was not essence, but existence. For him, consciousness lies in the embodied awareness of primal experience.

The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty is marked by a conscious movement away from the Cartesian separation of subject and object, body and mind. He proposes a dialectical conception of consciousness. He locates the idea of an embodied existence, where there is no separation between inside or outside. This is similar to the idea in Kashmir Shaivism that the microcosm of the body resonates identically with the macrocosm of the universe and hence the two are essentially the same. Both are invested in non-duality. For both, the idea of "synthesis" is a central one. For Abhinavgupta, consciousness is the result of communion be-

tween two opposing (dialectical) principles of the active and the passive. For both philosophies, consciousness is the process of embodied awareness.

> We pass from double vision to the single object, not through an inspection of the mind, but when the two eyes cease to function each on its own account and are used as a single organ by one single gaze. It is not the epistemological subject who brings about the synthesis, but the body [...].[16]

A "fundamental amazement"[17] informs Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in its ability to embrace change and variable realities of existence. His phenomenology becomes life affirming in a similar tenor as the *dhvani* theory, which is based in an appreciation of the natural world's incessant movement as the basis for creation. The concept of *camatkara* resonates with this fundamental amazement. Instead of trying to remove this variability, the movement is to be immersed within it, and in this vital relationship find the "truth," transcendence in immanence.

IV. NEW SCHOLARSHIP

It is possible to further contextualise the *dhvani* theory in relation to the relatively recent scholarship informed by Merleu-Ponty' phenomenology. In a new line of scholarship within film studies, there is an approach to studying cinema in the context of "sensuousness," a study of the way the senses engage in different cinematic articulations to make meaning beyond the strictly textual.

The 1985 cinema books by Deleuze, the 1990 thesis by Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* and the 2000 book *Skin of the Film* by Laura Marks have chalked a path to a new approach to studying the phenomenon of film. This phenomenological approach to film studies, sometimes referred to as the "sensuous turn," adds a dimension to the understanding of film that has mostly been absent within academic film discourse. There is a notorious difficulty in articulating that which is almost intangible, the phenomenon of experience, which can be understood as being located primarily in the body's being in the world (the body, itself an irrevocably intertwined conglomeration of the physical and the mental), which

through attempts at articulation is often rendered facile or incomprehensible and sometimes purely trite. Laura Marks writes "Cinema is not fundamentally verbal and thus does not carry out lines of reasoning the way written theory does. Cinema exists on the threshold of language, and language must bring it across in order to have a conversation with it."[18]

The *dhvani* theory, with its emphasis on immanence, synthesis, and the idea of consciousness as a dialectical embodied process belongs, I believe, among these sensuous approaches to studying films. Sobchack describes the film viewing process, or what she calls *cinaesthesia*, this way:

> these bodies also subvert their own fixity from within, commingling flesh and consciousness, reversing the human and technological sensorium, so that meaning, and where it is made, does not have a discrete origin in either spectator's bodies or cinematic representation but emerges in their conjunction.[19]

The *dhvani* theory was able to expand the idea of *rasa* towards a more universal aesthetic ideal applicable to all art forms — dance, drama, poetry, music, sculpture, and painting. Here, I attempt to extend the *dhvani* theory to an understanding that encompasses film, through a more varied cinematic mode of address. A mode of address or "cinematic language" that is suggestive as well as sensuous (*rasa dhvani*).

V. DHVANI IN FILM

While Anandavardhana formulated the idea of *dhvani* in the context of poetry, he agrees that even prose when it is suggestive can be called *dhvani*.[20] *Rasa* can be understood as an affective theory, whereas *dhvani* is primarily semantic in conception. And hence ideas of language, syntax, and meaning, or modes of address within the different arts, require some attention.

To be able to further expand the concept of *dhvani,* so that it may even include cinema, we must attempt to answer the question: what is the "suggestive" or *vyanjana* in the language of cinema? This question poses unique problems given this medium's connection with reality. The nature of "filming" and cinematography is such that all aspects are already captured, and hence given, and so to further create suggestion offers some difficulty. Generally,

the suggestion available in cinema is of the order of Anandavardhana's second-level poetry, where the element of suggestion is secondary to that of the literary meaning and maybe studied under the idea of "metaphor" or "sub-text." Or, at the most, it is of the order of Barthes' third meaning, where the "filmic" always exceeds our ability to comprehend and hence it is only available through the study of the still-image. But what of the highest level of poetry as proposed by Anandavardhana, where, once the implied meaning flashes through, the literal meaning recedes into the background?

VI. THE "SUGGESTIVE"

Laura Marks' development of the idea of haptic visuality in the context of cinema offers one possibility of the suggestive in cinema. These images are so "'thin' and unclichéd that the viewer must bring his or her resources of memory and imagination to complete them. The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into the narrative."[21] The fact that such an image is able to communicate at all is based on the body's synaesthetic mode of perception.[22] The idea of synaesthesia is here a concept informed by gestalt psychology, "the co-operative modalities and commutative system of the bodily senses that structure existential perception are called synaesthesia."[23] This idea is usually thought as something associated with specially "gifted" people, such as the painter Kandinsky, who is believed to have this facility. Synaesthesia is thought of as an anomaly rather than a commonly occurring phenomenon. Sobchack suggests that it is rather that we have become so used to this function of "co-operative modalities" in our perceptual system that it has become transparent to us and only in "extreme occurrences" of it do we notice it.[24]

Describing the function of the haptic image, Laura Marks writes that "fundamentally, haptic images refuse visual plenitude," "when we find there is nothing to see, there may be a lot to feel, or smell. Cinema may not bring forth these missing senses, but it can certainly evoke them."[25] Merleau-Ponty's description of the human perception of sound is also uniquely resonant with Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta's idea of *dhvani:* "when I say that I see a sound, I mean that I echo the vibration of the sound with my whole sensory being — my body is a ready-made system of equivalents and transpositions from one sense to another."[26]

Dhvani seeks precisely to charge the body thus to be able to remember its essential wholeness. Relevant here may also be Walter Benjamin's understanding of language. He argues that language is inseparable from the physical body. It is a form given through the sounds and gestures that the body uses to communicate. Despite the sophistication in language that gives rise to the iconic and symbolic, the indexical remains at the heart of language and its representation is inextricable from its embodiment. He writes, "the coherence of words or sentences is the bearer through which, like a flash, similarity appears for its production by man — like its perception by him — is in many cases, and particularly the most important, limited to flashes. It flits past."[27] His idea of coherence in a flash is deeply resonates with the idea of *sphot* as it is contained in the *dhvani* theory.

This embodied basis of language and perception locates it as being essentially sensuous. Anupa Pande explains how the arts are classified under the *kamasutra* by Vatsayan, but the aesthetic pleasure through sensuous engagement with works of art is detached and free from desire. It is erotic, but not something that titillates the senses and generates desire in the beholder.[28] Similarly, Laura Marks qualifies "haptic visuality" as essentially erotic, when she writes that

> regardless of their content, haptic images are erotic in that they construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image. The viewer is called upon the fill in the gaps in the image, to engage with the traces the image leaves. By interacting up close with an image, close enough that figure and ground commingle, the viewer relinquishes her own sense of separateness from the image — not to know it, but to give herself up to her desire for it.[29]

VII. *KHARGOSH* (RABBIT)

Clearly, then, film viewing is not the process of a disembodied vision, but a synaesthetic and embodied one. The theory of *dhvani* was formulated from a critic's point of view; in drawing out the criteria of identifying excellence in poetry, the *dhvani* theory also suggests approaches towards creative expression that tend towards wholeness rather than fragmentation. This, hence, directs one to cinematic works that approach cinematic language from this point, the

position of consciously addressing, not just the disembodied eye, but the whole sensory being — in other words, films that take their sensuousness seriously.

Khargosh starts with a shot that is very red. This opening frame is occupied completely by six puppets, dangling in close proximity to the lens (a wide shot with the subject placed quite close to the lens, but not enough to create distortions). There is a morbid stillness in the shot; all the puppets are bereft of motion, except for one puppet that is rotating slowly, but regularly, at the corner of the frame. The duration of this shot is significantly long, 25 seconds. It is unusual to begin a film with such stasis. Yet, the strong redness of the frame and the uncanny image of puppets hanging, deathly still, effects the coming to attention of the viewer.

This opening shot cuts to a close-up of a young boy of eight or nine gazing at the puppets with a broad grin of amazement. His buck-teeth are strongly reminiscent of a rabbit (*khargosh*). Then a second shot comes as a bit of a surprise for the viewer, as the still, unreal, close-up first shot does not quite prepare us for another shot equally close and still, but animated and real. The worlds are synoptically connected. One would have expected a wider shot to contextualize the tight shot of the puppets. The second shot provides contextualization, but it is unexpected in moving from a close-up shot to another equally or even tighter close-up shot. This movement from viewing to seeing from another's point of view so quickly and without preparation throws one off a little bit, especially given the extreme tightness of the shot. There is just a touch of claustrophobia. The redness of the frame seems to have lightened with the bright yellow-green shirt of the boy and little bits of white light streaming into the frame. The second shot lifts the films from the somber note that the first shot had created.

The third shot reveals the puppeteer whose voice we hear from off screen. He inquires of the boy:"Child, is there anything you want?" To which the boy asks: "Do they speak?" "They all speak," the puppet-seller replies. Finally the boy asks: "When will they speak?" And he answers: "The maker of these, almighty, is tired and is sleeping. When he awakes, he will put life in them, then all these will speak."

The puppeteer is seen through a cluster of puppets, white hair, white beard, with a streak of white light falling on the right side of his head, contrasting with the otherwise redness of the frame. He seems almost other-worldly. The next shot is a close-up of hands and an exchange of money; clearly, the boy has been satisfied with the promise of the puppets

speaking soon. The lack of conventional continuity in the logic of the shots is apparent in the absence of an establishing shot as well as in the forgoing of the shot/counter-shot protocol or of shots matched on action.

This first sequence is marked with a strong sense of artifice and theatricality. It seems to be "constructed" in order to defy the sense of naturalness that many films strive to achieve. *Dhvani* emphasizes that for poetry to be excellent, the language must be unique to the poet and must not follow the logic of everyday language. Similarly, cinematic language will always be less than natural or realistic in the manner of mainstream or classical narrative feature films. The artifice here is laboured and it is not in order to be stylish, which can be seen in films working to create visual spectacle through unusual angles, colours, and frames.

The next two shots quickly introduce the other key characters of the film: the boy's mother, who we see praying alone before her personal temple, and Avinash, the young man living upstairs. We see Bantu calling out to him, but he does not show up. The door of Avinash's room is deep blue and textured, as seen from the outside, and a little later from the inside, dark, with a deep texture and angular chinks of light. Earlier, the colour *red* had become dominant in the film with the opening scene, from the previously mentioned first shot to the last shot of red chillies drying in the sun as the shadow of the boy, passing by on a bicycle, crosses over it while returning home. In the first sequence, between the mother and the son, Bantu is sitting in the centre of a courtyard eating food and his mother has come in to join him. The top-shot emphases the squareness of the space. Symmetrical in its composition, with multi-coloured pillars of red and blue on either side of the frame, the shot highlights the squares of colourful cement of the courtyard. It is reminiscent of the surface of a child's board game.

The idea of play occupies a central role in the beginning of the film. Board games, puppets, cycles, and kites take up significant space in the narrative. Just as we see Bantu several times throughout the film, running up and down, calling out to his adult playmate, "Avinash Bhai, Avinash Bhai," often to no avail. This theme of play is not without a sense of looming heaviness just beyond the frame, suggested through the slow pace, extreme angles of the shot and highly composed frames — or maybe just the loneliness of the little boy seeking for speaking friends in dead puppets, otherwise caught in a world populated only by his mother and the young man who lives upstairs.

There is a day-night logic to the film. The sensuous shots of the night contrast with the stark blandness of the day. The first time we encounter night, we see the boy creep out of the bed he shares with his mother to play with his little animal toys, after which he steals out of the house and runs into the forest. The forest at night is not a scary place for the young boy. We see him running without restraint through the forest. This shot then cuts unceremoniously to a shot of children playing in the courtyard of a school. The film becomes diurnal, bland and white. While the forest is often associated with sexuality, it is friendly and exciting even at night. It is an adventure: the staircase leads up to Avinash's room (which we do not see until after he is involved with Mrityu) is dark, steep and sharp edged, even during the day. Ascending the staircase is heady and life threatening, akin to the danger of falling off a cliff.

The film is strewn with sensuous images, mostly close-ups, lush with texture and colour. These images appear abruptly, in that they appear isolated, different in tone from the images that follow or came before. These shots are clearly different to the wider shots of white walls and sunlight often seen in the film. While these shots are repeated throughout the film, there is no evident reason for their appearance. They remain a mystery (until much later). As the film progresses, the incidence of these sensuous shots begin to take precedence over the other more objective, mundane, informational shots.

It is possible to see *Khargosh* primarily structured through opposites. Most of the key motifs in the film work between opposites like day/night, colour/monotone, bored/obsessed, play/work, childhood/adulthood. Similarly, the film can also be seen to be working with two registers of visual language: one, more objective, though hardly "natural," where the camera angles are oblique and the framing tends to create a sense of artifice or discomfort, or pure theatricality; the other, using a much more subjective style where the affective is given precedence over objectivity.

In fact, a significant element in the film is the manner in which it builds on the sensuality of images and the sense of a body rising to sensuality through them. We see the boy in deep sleep rubbing one hand over the other. It is an unconscious gesture shown through a close-up. This shot occurs shortly after he has accompanied Avinash a few times to the street corner, waiting for the girl to pass by. The images of the sensuousness of skin against skin resonates further with other sensuous close-ups throughout the film — the shots of cooking *chappatis*, a hot smoking dish, the mother's massages. The film's construction shows a pro-

gression where the film moves from a primarily objective view (even though constructed, unreal, and full of artifice) towards a largely sensuous one. In this process, the film gently leads the viewer towards learning to respond to the sensuous images, in a synaesthetic wholeness, towards reading the resonances within the film based on a bodily response.

This motif of sensuousness begins to take definite form with a sequence that marks the move to the film's denouement. This sequence involves a *tonga*, a horse-pulled carriage, with a red canopy carrying Mrityu and Bantu. Sitting side by side, almost touching but not, until slowly, accidentally but perhaps consciously, the boy's arm brushes against her stomach, and from this point on the film picks up pace. From this moment on, the images are largely of a highly sensuous nature. There is a long scene where we see the two of them running through the forest. This building sensuousness of the images at a fast pace culminate with the last shot. Bantu encounters Mrityu in the dark staircase and, as Bantu reaches for her, she draws him towards her. A spiraling, rising camera in the very dark staircase capture the jagged, textured, shards of blue light sneaking in. Extreme top angle shots highlight the edginess as well as the excitement of the scene. The film ends with this frenzied movement as opposed to the stillness of the first shot. If the opening shot is red, the closing shot is black, blue, dark. Both shots lack white light — but the very last f*rame* is also red.

Towards the end of the film, in the middle of these intensely sensuous scenes, in keeping with the cinematic logic of the film, we cut almost abruptly to an uncanny high-angle shot announcing the death of the puppet seller. We look down from above as the corpse is carried on a bier, sliding through the frame, evoking water flowing. This is followed by shot of puppets burning. The motif of "play" will no longer surface. Bantu no longer believes that the puppets will speak — in fact, he no longer looks to them for companionship. This sequence marks a break in the film, the end of childhood, the loss of innocence, the death of the magical world order and hence the impending adulthood and dawn of sexuality.

The first 20 minutes stand against the final 20 minutes. The red motif at the beginning and end is strewed throughout the film and emphasizes the emotion of passion, even perhaps the erotic in different spaces and times as a continuous thread running through the narrative. The passion for play of a child is transformed into the sexual passion of an adult.

The film, as shown earlier, works through contrasts, the sharp whiteness against the textured colour shots and the dark, blue night shots. White heat and sapping blandness is experienced at school, in the mother's kitchen, courtyard, and **terrace.** With the first sexual expe-

rience of Bantu, the world has been energized and the theme of opposites is dissolved. Correspondingly, the style of the film leads the viewer to experience wholeness via the elimination of duality. Form and content, image and meaning are united in the manner of Walter Benjamin's description of primitive language as essentially mimetic.[30] The meaning and experience coincide. The film tells a story through experience as the viewer is taken through a similar experience as Bantu, in his rising awareness of sensuality and eroticism. The film's suggestiveness lies primarily in the gradual change in the nature of images from the descriptive towards the expressive.

Anandavardhan took from Bharatahari's theory of language the idea of *sphot* or understanding in a flash. According to the theory, only the whole sentence makes sense and it is the last sound of the word in the sentence that gives meaning to the utterance. The words cannot be taken separately in trying to understand the meaning of the sentence. Transposing it to films, the last shot of the film takes on an unusual importance. It is this shot, able to be experienced and not merely seen, that holds the key to making sense of the film on different levels.

The state of loneliness is a metaphor for the feeling of purposelessness. This sense of alienation and disconnection is echoed by the artificial and constructed mode in the beggining of the film. The arrival of the girl, Mrityu, gives the boy a real sense of purpose. He had earlier played with his toys, but was clearly bored with them and was often seen waiting for a chance to "play" with his adult friend. The old puppet seller, quixotic and ethereal, gives significance to the young boy's life and is emblematic of a magical world order. For that reason, he must pass away for the boy to grow up, or more accurately, to achieve consciousness. The puppeteer, I suggest, is the priest who speaks for God and who is tired and asleep. Only when he awakens, does he tell the young boy that the puppets will speak and that things may come to life. When he dies, the boy loses his guide to "salvation" and must find his own path to a meaningful life. In the episode in the stairway, he finally finds it. The viewer is unable to decipher much in this sexual encounter. The image is of the order of the "experiential," of the mode of the "expressive." It is difficult to get a clear sense of what is happening in any objective sense. The viewer can only try to relate to the image through a subjective, synaesthetic engagement, that is, through the body so as to be able to partake of its meaning. The image must be felt in order for us to get at its sense. The subject merges with the object and the duality inherent in language is erased. The final image can be seen as essentially the image of a "sense of movement" and it is both physically and psychically affective. Within Kashmir Shaivism, crea-

tion is a ceaseless movement and the rise of consciousness is a bodily experience, whose image is of a serpent rising up the spine. The "sphot" of understanding of the last utterance turns the meaning of all the things that has preceded into a "flash" that "flits past."

The experience of the image is its meaning. In the *dhvani* theory, it is the last word. Here it is the last image, which enables making sense of the entire utterance given that the images (and the words) cannot be taken separately. Just as this theory contradicts the use of logic in the creation of poetry, *Khargosh* opts for a cinematic address that breaks the logical relationship of shots as exemplified in classical filmmaking and continuity editing.

Dhvani can be understood as a philosophy of transcendence in immanence. The achievement of unity is the moment of transcendence. Unity erases dualities and therefore must not be understood as occurring only in a person, but also in a community, between people. Community-based activities of culture can be understood as emerging from an intuitive understanding of this principle. As a result, the *dhvani* approach to cinema opens up the possibility towards a greater consciousness of living.

Dhvani offers a unique approach to studying films, especially those that use a subjective visual language, as these films evoke in the viewer a rising awareness of the synaesthetic, holistic perceiving self. If this relationship can be found to have a discernible pattern and is able to reveal its larger meanings with a key final image, as in *Khargosh*, the films may offer the possibility of transcendence in accordance with *dhvani* theory, offering wholeness in the face of an essentially fractured human existence in contemporary times. *Dhvani* aids the recovery of the ability to feel and perceive with the body as much as with the mind and to head towards wholeness and pulsating, dynamic life rather than still oneness.[31]

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1. B. N. Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1986), 19-20.

2. Ibid., 21. At one point, Coomaraswamy uses for it the term "ideal beauty". While "tincture" or "essence" are not employed in the context of aesthetic experience, the word commonly favored is "flavour." Manmohan Ghosh, in his translation of the text of Bharata's *Natyashastra*, preferred the term "sentiment." Other writers have used the term "relish" for *rasa*.

3. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī, *Alberuni's India*, vol. I, trans. Edward Sachau (London: Trubner & Co., 1888), 17.

4. K. Krishnamoorthy, *Studies in Indian Aesthetics and Criticism* (Mysore: D.V.K. Murthy, 1979), 126-27.

5. K.M. Tharakan, "Theory of Synaesthesis in the Perspective of Rasa Siddhanta (Synaesthesis and Santa Rasa)" (PhD diss., Mahatma Gandhi University, 1995).

6. Abhinavagupta, *Abhinavabharati* , trans. Anupa Pande (Allahabad: Raka Prakashan, 1997), 15. This was basically because of the fact that the incommensurable diversity of the media for the different arts acts as a limit to those whose perception remains concentrated on the characteristic form and practices of the different arts.

7. Krishnamurti, *Indian Aesthetics and Criticism,* 89.

8. S. S. Toshkhanni, "Kashmir's Contribution to Indian Aesthetics," in *Cultural Heritage of Jammu and Kashmir*, ed. K. Warikoo (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2009), 27: "If an idea or material image — distinct subject — is suggested, then it is is to be called *vastu dhvani.* If the suggested sense is imaginative and relates to a figure of speech, we have *alankar dhvani*. But if a mood or state of mind or feeling is suggested, we have *rasa dhvani* — the highest category which establishes, the supremacy of *Rasa* or feeling on elements of form and structure."

9. Tharakan, "Theory of Synaesthesis in the Perspective of Rasa Siddhanta," 111.

10. The space here does not permit discussing this ritual in its practical conception, which clearly raises ideological as well as ethical issues, especially from a feminist perspective. However, it might be useful here to say that aesthetics informed Abhinavagupta's ideas of religion as much as religion informed aesthetics. In this context the ritual, central as it arguably is, ultimately may be seen as a ritual materialization of a principle that is intuited a priori.

11. Rekha Jhanji, *The Sensuous in Art* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1989), 66.

12. Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, The Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962), 52.

13. It I also possible to draw interesting parallels between transcendental phenomenology and Vedanta.

14. H. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction,* 3rd rev. and enlarged edn. (New York: Springer, 1982), 548.

15. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (1936; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 1970).

16. Merleau-Ponty*, The Phenomenology of Perception*, 208.

17. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 551-52. Eugen fink had spoken of the "awakening of an immense amazement at the mysteriousness of the belief in the world." As the foundation for the operation of suspending it. Merleau-ponty sees in this account of the fundamental amazement (an amazement which is never to be overcome) the "best formula of the reduction" itself. Hence "the great lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of complete reduction." Thus, oddly enough, in Merleau-ponty's hands the phenomenological reduction becomes the means of refuting constitutive or phenomenological idealism.

18. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), xiv.

19. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 67.

20. Krishnamurti, *Studies in Indian Aesthetic and Criticism*, 92. This theory admits that even common ideas of prose become poetry when they get suggested instead of being directly stated.

21. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 163.

22. Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 77.

23. Ibid.

24. "We could add that we are also unaware of synaesthetic perception because it *is* the rule, and we have become so habituated to the constant cross-modal translations of our sensory experience that they are transparent to us except in their most extreme instances." — Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts,* 70.

25. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 177, 231.

26. Merleau-Ponty, 234-35.

27. Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections:* Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Hartcourt, 1968), 333-36.

28. Jhanji, *The Sensuous in Art*, 66.

29. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 183.

30. Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," 336. Nature produces similarities; one need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift for seeing similarity is nothing but a rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically. There is perhaps not a single one of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role (cf. 336).

31. I would like to thank my guide Prof. Raja Mohanty for his comments and suggestions in helping steer my research work through difficult terrain. I would also like to thank my research committee panel in pushing me to put my thoughts on paper cogently. My classmates for their help and advise. IDC and IIT for supporting my work. Besides friends and family, all who have helped in countless ways in supporting my work. Last but not the least, the editor Sérgio Dias Branco who has gone beyond the call of an editor in the patience and perseverance in getting this article fit enough for publishing in this journal.