The Malay cinema, 1948-1989 early history and development in the making of a national cinema

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The collapse of the studios gave rise to independent film producers who worked individually on small budget productions. They were soon faced with problems of distribution and exhibition. As a consequence, the Malaysian National Film Development Corporation was established in 1981. This marked the beginning of the third era in the production of Malay films. The granting of subsidies to get film projects off the ground and the facilitating of distribution and exhibition was seen as beginning of a truly indigenous film industry.

Chapters III and VII of the thesis is concerned with the relationship between the Malaysian film industry and film industries in other Southest Asian countries, particularly in Indonesia and the Philippines, both on an artistic and economic level. Of particular relevance are the arrangement entered into by Malaysia and Indonesia between 1984 and 1988 which should have enabled a proper exchange of films to take place but which did not live up to expectations.

Throughout the thesis, the concept of National Cinema is highlighted. In the concluding chapter this concept is studied in detail when being applied to Malaysian films. Questions are raised as to the feasibility of a truly national Malaysian cinema at a time when the pressure of imported films from the United States and Hong Kong is ever growing.

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THE MALAY CINEMA (1948 - 1989)
Early History and Development in The Making of a National Cinema

A Dissertation submitted to
The School of Theatre and Film Studies
The University of New South Wales
as a Fulfilment for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Mohamad Hatta Azad Khan
February, 1994

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Mohamad Hatta Azad Khan

Kota Samarahan

February 1994

CONTENTS

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List of Abbreviations

AFM	-	*Akademi Filem Malaysia* (Malaysian Film Academy)
AMPA	-	Asian Motion Picture Association.
ASAS 50	-	*Angkatan Sasterawan 50* (The 1950 Literary Generation)
ASEAN	-	Association of South East Asain Nations.
BFO	-	Borneo Film Organisation.
BMA	-	British Millitary Administration.
BMF	-	Bumiputera Malaysia Finance.
DFI	-	*Dewan Filem Indonesia* (Indonesian Film Council).
EJA	-	Entertainment Journalist Association of Malaysia (*Persatuan Wartawan Hiburan Malaysia*)
FINAS	-	*Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional.*
FMPPA	-	Federation of Motion Picture Producers Asia-Pasific.
FMS	-	Federated Malay States.
GAFICO	-	*Gabungan Artis Filem* (Association of Film Artiste Company.
GAFIM	-	*Gabungan Karyawan Filem Malaysia* (Federation of Malaysian Film Enterpreneurs)
IPTAR	-	*Institut Penyiaran Tuan Abdul Razak* (Tuan Abdul Razak Broadcasting Institute)
PERFIMA	-	*Perusahaan Filem Malaysia* (Malaysian Film Industry)
PKMM	-	*Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (The Malay National Party of Malaya)
MARA	-	*Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (Council of Trust for Indigenous People)
MCP	-	Malayan Communist Party (*Parti Komunis Malaya*).
MFP	-	Malay Film Production.

MNP	-	Malay Nationalist Party (*Parti Nasionalis Malaya*).
NFDC	-	National Film Development Corporation.
NEP	-	New Economic Policy (*Dasar Ekonomi Baru*).
PAKAR	-	*Persatuan Artis dan Karyawan Filem* (National Movement of Artiste and Film Writers)
PERFIN	-	*Persatuan Pengedar Filem Indonesia* (Association of Indonesian Film Distributors).
PPFI	-	*Persatuan Penerbit Filem Indonesia* (Association of Indonesian Film Producers). Artiste and Writers)
PPFM	-	*Persatuan Pengeluar Filem Malaysia* (Association of Malaysian Film Producers)
RTM	-	Radio Television Malaysia.
SB	-	Shaw Brothers.
SEDC	-	State Economic Developmnet Corporation.
SRM	-	Survey Research Malaysia.
UDA	-	Urban Development Authority.
UMNO	-	United Malays National Organisation (*Persekutuan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu*)

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an historic study of the origin and early development of Malay cinema as it grew in Singapore and in Malaya. It traces the attempts by Chinese film technicians from Shanghai and businessmen and film directors from India to make Malay films in Malaya and Singapore. Later, Chinese producers employed Indian film directors to direct remakes of successful Chinese and Indian films using Malay and Indonesian actors. Thus early Malay films made in Singapore were basically Indian in style and technique.

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The collapse of the studios gave rise to independent film producers who worked individually on small budget productions. They were soon faced with problems of distribution and exhibition. As a consequence, the Malaysian National Film Development Corporation was established in 1981. This marked the beginning of the third era in the production of Malay films. The granting of subsidies to get film projects off the ground and the facilitating of

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Chapters III and VII of the thesis is concerned with the relationship between the Malaysian film industry and film industries in other Southeast Asian countries, particularly in Indonesia and the Philippines, both on an artistic and economic level. Of particular relevance are the arrangement entered into by Malaysia and Indonesia between 1984 and 1988 which should have enabled a proper exchange of films to take place but which did not live up to expectations.

Throughout the thesis, the concept of National Cinema is highlighted. In the concluding chapter this concept is studied in detail when being applied to Malaysian films. Questions are raised as to the feasibility of a truly national Malaysian cinema at a time when the pressure of imported films from the United States and Hong Kong is ever growing.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an exploration of the Malay cinema as an example of "National Cinema" examined within the Southeast Asian context. It also tries to theorise the early and existing notions of national cinema by looking at the various phenomena in other small nations of Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. The basic theory is that National Cinema is a cinema of small nations and is of recent emergence. It grew under the influence of the Hollywood film culture and tradition which had forced on many film-making countries an imitative sub-culture. As such these national film industries of small nations need protection and support in order to survive. This introduction begins with a survey of literature following which the theme of each chapter is discussed and commented upon.

There is a general lack of relevant literature on Asian cinema, let alone National Cinema. This is presently being addressed, but the main focus has always been on the cinema of major Asian countries such as Japan and India. Little has been written on the Southeast Asian cinema of the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. Roy Armes (1987; 135) pointed out that though some fairly detailed research has been published on the cinemas of China and Hong Kong, the national film industries of most of the countries of East and Southeast Asia are virtually unknown in the West.

Other researchers who have occasionally published literature on Asian cinema with some in-depth study on works by Southeast Asian film-makers include John A. Lent and Karl G. Heider. Lent published his book *The Asian Film Industry* in 1990, focusing on the historical and contemporary perspective of the East, Southeast and South Asian film industries. Heider, an anthropologist, published his *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen* in 1991. The book takes an anthropological view of Indonesian cinema using culture as the basic embodying frame depicting Indonesian behavior patterns (1991; 10).

Roy Armes who published his *Third World Film Making and the West* in 1987, summarises the East and Southeast Asian national film industries in a chapter of only twenty-six pages focusing on the history and development of films in China, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and then outlines some basic information on film industries in the Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia. But Armes' statements are rather shallow and out-dated. In the paragraph on Malaysian cinema, for example, he quotes Jins Shamsuddin who was said to have made two popular hits after his return from the London International Film School in 1973, **Menanti Hari Esuk** / Waiting for Tomorrow (1987) and **Bulit Kepong** (1981). Jins in fact had made two more films in between those years (1979 - 1980) and his historical epic is **Bukit Kepong** (not Bulit Kepong). Armes also quotes Finas as a *Malay Film Development Corporation* instead of the *National Film Development Corporation* of Malaysia.

Because of the limited amount of published material on Asian and Southeast Asian cinema, one has to look somewhere else, and this means that journals, popular magazines and newspapers have to be considered as useful sources, especially on the roles and contributions of contemporary film-makers. Writers such as Krishna Sen, Tony Ryans, David Hannan and Harry Rolnick have provided some historical surveys and production statistics as well as some comments on recent films from Southeast Asia in journals like the *Australian Journal of Screen Theory*, *East-West Journal*, *Sight and Sound, Framework* and *Asia Magazine*. Fred Marshall, Baharuddin Latiff and Agustin Soto provide a yearly survey of the film industries of Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in Peter Cowie's *International Film Guide*. Another important source is the "Asian Mass Communication and Information Centre" in Singapore where a seminar on "Asian Cinema: Survival or Revival" was held in November 1987; a collection of working papers presented were published in the Centre's quarterly publication *Media Asia* (Volume 15, 1988).

The first chapter of the thesis examines what is being termed as "National Cinema". As there is no clear cut definition of what is National Cinema, the study tries to explain the various phenomena which trigger the birth of film industries trying to establish not only films with local form and content but also to develop a style and idioms different from that of mainstream Hollywood. The majority of the countries cited in this chapter are part of the Third World and most of their ideas about developing National Cinemas centre around the issues of socio-cultural consciousness. This chapter also examines an earlier attempt to revolt against Hollywood by the European film-makers, especially the French New Wave and the Italian Neo-Realists. These movements had some influence on the

establishment of National Cinemas in African, Latin American and Asian countries. Chapter I also includes a discussion of the Asian new waves as another example of National Cinema coming from Southeast Asia. Thus the idea of National Cinema as discussed in this chapter is not merely to be considered in terms of its characteristics but also as the motivation of film-makers who were trying to break free from the domination of Hollywood's styles and idioms which had been firmly established in their countries.

The idea of National Cinema is then narrowed down in Chapter II to early Malay cinema starting with the introduction of Western film culture to both Singapore and Malaya by the British administrators. This analysis is made in comparison to early film cultures as they developed in the neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. The relationship between early Malay cinema developed in Singapore studios and Indonesian and Philippines' cultures through exchange of both artistes and films was especially strong.

Chapter III elaborates on the studio system of the early Malay film industry which was based on the Hollywood model. This model also dominated the industries in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. Southeast Asian cinema has always been modelled along a Hollywood infrastructure. The establishment of production studios, the star system, the narrative structure of films, the distribution and exhibition systems were all adopted from Hollywood. With a Hollywood-type infrastructure these small nations according to Armes (1987; 38) managed to produce a commercial cinema destined only for the local populace (and for a few neighbouring countries sharing the same language), a product designed for

immediate consumption and an industry with no aspirations beyond that of entertaining its limited audience.

National cinema is closely related to national culture and national culture includes behavior patterns as well as the social, political and historical preoccupations of a nation and its people. Usmar Ismail (1976; 141), the founder of modern Indonesian cinema declared as early as 1956, that the aim of Indonesian film-makers was to build up the Indonesian film industry on a foundation of national cultural ideals. What Usmar stated has been a life-long inspiration of film-makers in small nations all over the world who are conscious of their own national identity and the social issues related to their own national identity and the social issues related to their own country and people. But it was only in the last thirty years or so that these small nations upon achieving independence and maturity in the socio-political, cultural and artistic expression began to question the very premise of films as entertainment by reacting to the domination of Hollywood cinema. This idea is elaborated with examples of new cinema in the Asian, African and Latin American countries.

For a national cinema to exist and flourish in each small nation there should first of all exist what could be called a national film culture. According to Heider (1991; 1), movies are intricately concerned with culture. They are cultural texts, embodying within their frames the entire range of cultural behavior from artifacts to motivation. Culture in a national context includes all things national, and one of the most important things is education. A national policy on education plays an integral part in establishing a country's national film culture. Films that speak a country's own language form the basis in establishing its national cinema. Armes

(1987; 135) says that elsewhere in the non-Western world, the coming of sound gave a fresh impetus for the establishment of production that was "national", in the sense that it received local capital and treated local subject matter in local languages. And on language, Heider (1991; 1) also agrees that films are cultural carriers, bringing messages to a nation or language area or even the world, although different audiences may read different messages from the same statement. The role of language is further elaborated by Armes when he says that it was the ability to offer films in local languages, and particularly with local songs and dances that allowed Asian, Latin Americans, and Egyptian producers to capture the attention of local audience (1987; 38).

Chapters II and III discuss the history and the development of regional cinema being shaped first by Hollywood film culture and structure but later developing into original ideas and content. This is how the Malayan national cinema in its own form and content begins to take shape. Chapter III discusses not only the influence of Hollywood brought by the Chinese, Indian and the Filipinos but also the early unrealised revolt emerging with Malay film directors who begin to take control of the artistic aspect of movie-making during the studio days. This change of form and content for Malay cinema is illustrated with selected examples of films from those period.

Chapters IV and V give an historical survey of the Malay cinema from its humble beginnings in Singapore in the early 40s and its development in Singapore and later Kuala Lumpur in the 60s and 70s. The early history and development of Malay cinema was greatly influenced by a foreign film culture. The Hollywood tradition formed the basic structure which had

already influenced both Indian and the Chinese cinemas. The narrative structure was further strengthened with the coming of Chinese technicians and Indian creative personnel who then tried to shape the beginning of a Malay cinema using Malay *bangsawan* actors. From then on Malay cinema established itself following Hollywood's methods of production, distribution and exhibition. This early development is detailed in Chapter IV giving a thorough picture of how the Malay film artistes survived the studio era in Singapore and later in Kuala Lumpur.

The early history reveals the connections and cross-cultural influences among neighbouring countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines. Early successes in those countries culminated in each having its own golden age of local cinema, in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. Local audiences took great pride in their local heroes singing and dancing in films which are basically wrapped in Hollywood-style presentation and entertaining cliches. The Malays of the 40s and 50s admired and worshipped the talent of P. Ramlee, the Thais had their Sombat Metanee who appeared in 80 per cent of all movies made in the 60s and 70s and the Filipinos had Gloria Romero and Nida Blanca on the movie throne.

The studio era collapsed and Malay cinema was left in limbo. The industry then began to follow a different approach. A few Malay entrepreneurs started to form companies and tried to produce films on their own. Thus began the era of independence of the Malay cinema in Malaysia which is analysed in Chapter V and labelled as The Independent Era (1976 - 1986). This era proved to be the most difficult time for independent Malay film producers. Their films had to be distributed and exhibited through cinema chains which were still owned by the two giant companies who once

controlled film production. Independent Malay film producers had to abide by unfavourable agreements with the exhibitors.

Eventually the government realised that it had to play its role in saving the industry from another disaster. Thus began the era of government subsidisation which later developed an industry not strong enough to compete with the notions of cinema as entertainment as produced by the Americans. As Hinde once put it "national cinema is like a state railway, it needs state support" in order to survive. While state railway faces competition from other means of modern transportation which are faster and more comfortable, the national film industry is hard-pressed by the abundant presence of foreign films in local theatres. The more polished and sophisticated high-technological films from America and Hong Kong have always been a major threat to local films which are normally produced on a shoe-string budget. While the subsidised state railway survives as the cheapest mean of public transport, national films fail miserably at the local theatres when compared to the imported films. In this aspect Hinde's comparison is only half-way true; national film industry needs the support but has to struggle to stay alive.

John Hinde (1981; 106) also argues that it is important for a country to have a film industry with some sort of State support so that it can build up a body of work - build up its tradition - and give proper employment to the people who work in it. Film industries in small nations like those in Southeast Asia are hard pressed for support not only from the government or local authorities but also from the local market. And there is always a conflict between authorities and capitalists. The latter's main motive is profit-making. But a film industry in a small nation normally has only a

limited marketing scope therefore it can never be financially attractive enough to the capitalist. The subsidisation effort by the government is often seen as being in direct opposition to the entertainment industry which always depends on imported films. According to Armes (1987; 37) a local distributor able to operate profitably with imported films is likely to be hostile to local film production, since a change in audience tastes would disturb the profitability of his operation.

Chapter VI of the thesis deals with government support or subsidy through the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) or Finas. The subsidisation schemes to support part of the film production budget include the supply of film equipment at a reduced rate, raw stock and processing and post-production facilities for film producers whose scripts have been given approval by a committee appointed by Finas. In 1988 a total of M$887,589.39 was given to nine producers producing ten films (Finas Annual Report; 5). In 1989 twelve film producers received a total of M$470,330.00 to produce thirteen films (Finas Annual Report; 7). In addition, Finas also paved the way for the return of a 25% entertainment tax levied by various state or city councils to the producers. In 1989 twelve film companies producing nineteen films received a total of M$602,918.02 from the return of the entertainment tax. But can the structure of this subsidisation and the effectiveness of its various schemes be the determinant factor to say that the new, subsidised, Malay cinema has really achieved a desired standard. The function of Finas itself in implementing the subsidisation schemes remains unclear; is it to keep the industry going or rather to help establish a true Malaysian national cinema. A number of films have been made with subsidies from Finas which can in no way be regarded as Malaysian national cinema. Finas itself has not

been able to define clearly the difference between a National Cinema and national film industry. A film industry may not necessarily give rise to National Cinema, and the type of films fit to be categorised under the term National Cinema may not be the kind of product that can keep the industry alive.

Armes regards the government subsidisation of film industries in small nations as 'steps to nationalise the local film industry', that is, to take over production facilities and film theatres, and then finds that nationalisation is meaningless if power over distribution lies in other, foreign (or foreign-controlled) hands. This is actually not true in the case of Southeast Asian countries especially Malaysia. The government subsidisation programme in Malaysia is not a nationalisation scheme for the industry but an attempt to help local film productions gain recognition in the major exhibition circuits and at the same time win back the confidence of the local film audience. Distributors and exhibitors have considerable freedom of choice in selecting and screening films. They have to screen national films during one week per month. And in the case of Indonesia even the one week compulsory screening of national films has not been successfully implemented.

Chapter V elaborates on the idea of a National Cinema in terms of economic and artistic control. The emergence of independent Bumiputera (indigenous) film companies resulted in problems that could not be solved independently. As a collective voice film associations were established. This chapter together with part of Chapter III (The Emergence of Malay Directors) summarises the notions that film-makers of the same nationality create motion pictures in ways which differ from those of other nationalities. In other words, one has to belong to a specific nation and

nationality in order to understand the socio-political and economic conditions of the country and its people about which one wants to make films. This in fact is an ideal situation. Most of the time a small nation film producer may have to sacrifice form and content for profit and make a film along the popular or commercial formula to ensure a quick success. Malaysian serious films that deal with socio-political and economics conditions like **Matinya Seorang Patriot** (Death of a Patriot), **Puteri** (Princess) and **Tsu-Feh Sofiah** have been box-office flops, while light-hearted and shallow slapstick comedies have been box-office hits.

The situation discussed in Chapter V of the influence and the flow of films and artists between Malaya (Singapore), Indonesia and the Philippines is further elaborated in Chapter VII. The once Golden Era of the made-in Singapore Malay films spoken in Malay with an Indonesian accent which were screened not only in Singapore, but also in Southern Thailand and Indonesia is now repeated with the help of film authorities in both Malaysia and Indonesia. Films in Malay produced by independent producers in Kuala Lumpur began to penetrate the Indonesian market yet again despite some difficulties imposed by the Indonesian Film Producers Association and their local distributors and exhibitors who were very protective of their own markets. It was through the help of the Malaysian National Film Development Corporation (Finas) and a similar government organisation, *Dewan Filem Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Film Council) that this programme became feasible.

With government support the industry needs to justify its worth. The market and strategies for the local films are being questioned. There were attempts at tying up the national cinemas of Malaysia and Indonesia as

discussed in Chapter VII. But both countries were at the same time suffering from a national identity crisis as far as cinema is concerned. Indonesian distributors and exhibitors began to exercise their rights of protecting their own industry. This formed the major obstacle to further development of an 'expanded' national cinema.

Another obstacle which needed to be readdressed was the absence of full-grown home support for the local products. The main problem in promoting National Cinema with the Malaysian film audience is that too many of them speak English and Chinese. This situation automatically supports the screening of more American and Hong Kong films. The problem of American and Hong Kong films dominating the market and influencing the people with more entertaining products resulted in the national films facing stiff competition. A comparative study of local films and the imported products is outlined in part of Chapter V which also shows that national films have to conform to the popular sub-culture of the young people as the main substance to keep in competition with the popular cinemas of Hong Kong and America. Films like **Azura** and **Ali Setan** are two very good examples.

The domination of foreign films over local products has resulted in a synthesis which is basically a compromise whereby the local film industry has to take into consideration the audience support for popular elements in film entertainment. This is a middle line which could assure that the industry would stay alive while at the same time trying to steer the movie-going public into accepting some artistic and nationalistic elements in order to establish a national cinema. This argument focuses on the domination

of foreign film cultures especially those from America and Hong Kong despite efforts by the government to popularise local drama.

In Chapter VIII the question is asked whether a truly Malaysian cinema could be established and sustained in a nation with a small domestic market facing the problem of competition with high-technological films from more advanced countries. Selected films with a serious inclination towards historical, social and cultural content are discussed as National Cinema which have been acclaimed as nationally representative but yet face failure in the eyes of the local audience.

Chapter IX presents a comparison between Malaysian national cinema and Southeast Asian cinema. This chapter tries to measure the successes and failures faced by Malaysian film-makers in trying to establish a Malaysian national cinema within the Southeast Asian context. It concludes that true National Cinema can never ignore film as popular entertainment. The problem of National Cinema is thus: in many small nations there exists a split between film-makers who want to make serious films and local film audiences who refuse to patronise them. Neither is at fault and the problem can never be solved. A thorough look at the Hong Kong national film industry serves as the basic premise of tackling the problem by putting together art and commercialism in the form of a National Cinema.

CHAPTER I

THE NOTIONS OF NATIONAL CINEMA

What is a National Cinema? The simplest definition would be a cinema which is the product of a particular nation, portraying the life and conflicts of its people, speaking in their own language and using their own country as the background. By this simplest of definitions, we would have national cinemas from all countries of the world. However, this definition is far from valid when we realise that a majority of the smaller nations do not create their own cinema with their own people and cultural settings. What they do create are imitations of the products of the major film-producing countries of the world. Thus the question of originality will have to be considered in defining the term National Cinema.

This chapter will analyse how cinema, which started as a form of entertainment for the public, was later given an alternative aspect by becoming the subject of social and political criticism within a certain milieu. Cinema, thus, became a medium with different values. It became a tool for the spreading of national culture presenting ideas and information which educate, challenge and question the existing conditions and which at the same time, tries to reach a broader dimension by formulating new concepts.

The success of the Hollywood film industry as 'first cinema' and its dominance over most countries resulted in each of these countries parroting Hollywood's concepts and propositions thus establishing an imitative product or 'second cinema'. Later this bred an opposing notion, a counter-Hollywood movement, in which Hollywood was accused of

producing the cinema of colonialism. The anti-Hollywood movement later bred 'third cinema' which originally referred to a special kind of Latin American film, but later included all films with a social and political purpose. Examples of this cinema and the countries in which it became a major activity will be examined in detail, especially as it appeared in Africa, Latin America and Asia. New-wave film-makers are those who dare to open up new areas and include new substance in their films, creating films which have more national character when compared to films of first and second generation framework of film-makers. The works of these film-makers cinema will be studied within the National Cinema.

1.1 Ideas of National Cinama

John Hinde (1981: 9) gives a very interesting comparison between what he terms film industries and national cinema. Film industries are chancy and often not very interesting affairs, to be launched almost anywhere, by anyone, with money. Whereas a national cinema is a vastly interesting social structure that begins only in response to specific social conditions which cannot be bought or artificially reproduced. This difference outlined by Hinde is obviously relevant in all major countries of the world where film-making is part of the people's activities. A film industry may not give rise to a National Cinema. As an industry, the main purpose is to get the best response from the public, i.e. to entertain, and to entertain here means that you cannot force them to accept any kind of film content such as a social uprising or other conditions which are at a remove from the entertainment aspects. Therefore, film industries anywhere are bound to produce films without any social significance to the people in that particular

country or anywhere else. This type of film hardly qualifies to be considered as a National Cinema.

The early ideas of a National Cinema were actually reactions to both the success and the failure of the Hollywood system. The overwhelming dominance of Hollywood films as a form of mass entertainment has had a profound effect in the world market, not only in the major film-producing countries but also in countries that only consume the Hollywood products. According to Monaco:

> ...For the New Wave in France in the early 1960s, the phenomenon of American filmic cultural imperialism was an important subject of study. As recently as 1976, for example, a full forty percent of West German box office receipts was garnered by American films. American cinema is even more dominant in England, Italy, and France....In smaller countries in Europe, and especially in the Third World, the situation is even more unbalanced. In 1975, for example, only 18 percent of Dutch film income went to native producers (Monaco, 1977: 231-232).

The reactions have been formulated in many different ways and methods, some being established by the film-makers themselves and some with the help of the authorities connected with the art of the film industry. Some countries have instituted a national body and a form of subvention to film producers; others have imposed a quota system on the import of foreign films which is mainly aimed at the American products. Third World film-makers for example are known to have worked '...to counteract Hollywood myths with their own, and a number of film-makers have attempted a more

radical approach, questioning the very premise of the Hollywood film: entertainment' (Monaco, 1977: 232).

All these reactions and efforts are aimed at establishing a National Cinema. Their difference in approach has resulted in cinemas of different inclination: some are dialectical, others political, but the majority of them are aesthetically-inclined with socio-cultural consciousness. It is also interesting to examine the various stages in the development of these non-American National Cinemas which in the beginning adopted an imitative liking of Hollywood. Later, however, they acted in opposition by seriously challenging Hollywood's concepts and began to create a new and different notion altogether. In the end, they realised the significance of the medium as both an art and industry, and began to make adjustments or compromises for yet another kind of cinema. All these stages shall be examined in detail. But, whatever approach a national film-maker decides to adopt, the social and cultural environment of the medium will always be closely-related to the real life situation of his people and country of origin. This cinematic realism forms the core element of National Cinema with various other elements taken into consideration to establish its concept and characteristics. Factors like geographical location, national film culture, economic realities, national identity, truth and crisis are considered to be part and parcel of a National Cinema.

1.2 First, Second and Third Cinemas

Teshome H. Gabriel (1979: 1) used the term "First Cinema" to refer to those films which follow the production and distribution models of Hollywood. However, for Dermody and Jacka (1988: 24) 'first cinema'

refers to that of Hollywood; they argue that a 'second cinema' offers some resistance but it still primarily accommodates the 'dominant stylistic paradigm' of Hollywood films. Then there is also what Dermody and Jacka (1988: 23) referred to as the neo-colonial 'second cinema' that consciously and unconsciously strives to reproduce the Hollywood models of production and circulation, counterfeiting the local sense of historical reality. These are the cinemas of the English-speaking countries of Australia and Britain whose main aim is to penetrate the U.S. market. The non-English cinemas of this kind include those from Hong Kong and India. Although the main aim is seldom achieved, this 'second cinema' prevails in its native country and offers the local audience a second taste of an American product. Sometimes makers of this 'second cinema' have got no choice other than to cater for a public which had earlier been exposed to the 'first cinema'. National conciousness is not being given priority in an industry which is not yet stable and not generating a steady income.

Subsequently, in the early 1960's what had been termed as 'Third Cinema' made its debut in the Third World countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia. Gabriel as well as Dermody and Jacka all agree to the main aim of 'third cinema'. Gabriel (1979: 2) says that the Third Cinema was built on the rejection of the concepts and propositions of traditional cinema, as represented by Hollywood, while Dermody and Jacka (1988: 23) call for 'third cinema' in opposition to the internalised 'first cinema' of Hollywood. Peter Steven (1985: 15) regards the emergence of radical film-makers of the Third World as one of the cinematic movements that challenges Hollywood and the dominant media. Third cinema is National Cinema: it is pure and original, concerned with a particular national issue, a certain class or a specific culture.

1.3 Early Ideas of National Cinema

In a sense, it was Hollywood that gave birth to the notion of National Cinema. Hollywood gave the world various film genres: comedies, musicals, melodramas, spectacles, gangsters and Westerns. The spread of Hollywood films to almost every part of the world established the notion of cinema as entertainment, which was later refuted by European directors who began to explore new dimensions. The question of nationality and its association with cinematic art began to take shape outside the Hollywood domain. It was the comedies of the silent film era that gave the world Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and Harry Langdon whose names became household terms in almost every country screening such films. These silent comedies 'translated a basically political problem - how can the individual cope with industrial civilization and power politics?' (Monaco, 1977:238). However they had more success as entertainment pieces than as platforms for political or social debate, even though it was said that Chaplin, 'who is not only the ragged vagabond but he is the destitute person shown in the perspective of the wealthy' (Arnheim, 1958: 123) was the most human and political character. But it was still too early for films to carry across a serious debate on basic human problems: social, political or economic. Films were then just mere entertainment and Chaplin with his comic sketches provided just that.

According to Monaco (1977: 238), '...apart from the comic tradition, the most interesting aesthetic force operating in American cinema in the twenties was the exploration of the possibilities of film realism'. Williams (1980: 29) also agreed that realism in film had already formed the basis of a

national cinema as early as the 1920s. To Williams,'...National Cinema is a national movement' and realism was the basis:

> After the Russian movement of the 1920s and the British documentary school of the 1930s, the next national movement to base itself on the primary notion of realism is the Italian neo-realism school of 1940-1955.

Williams however does not consider the early Hollywood realist film-makers as the exponents of a national movement. The Americans realist film-makers during that period were actually working against the structure of the Hollywood system with its developing commercial trend. So realism in films, as suggested by Williams, was taking much better shape outside America. Monaco also admits that '...while in America in the twenties film was rapidly industrializing, in Europe it was a business that was also seen as art' (1977: 239). Not that American directors were reluctant to be artistic or failed to realise social realism in their films, but their works were being overshadowed by the factory-made commercial films of Hollywood. Hitchcock, Ford, Hawks, von Sternberg, Wellman, Milestone, McCarey, and John Huston may have been able to maintain a recognizable personal signature or style from film to film during the great age of Hollywood, yet the structure of the Hollywood system was such that '...even powerful directorial personalities were more often than not submerged in a sea of studio styles, actors' styles, producers' requirements, and writers' idiosyncracies' (Monaco, 1977: 245-246).

Hollywood has had the right film-makers working to determine a certain nationalistic movement and also the right ingredients for a socially and

politically conscious National Cinema. John Ford, for example, has covered in his films almost all the crises in American history: the Civil War, the Revolutionary War and the great depression period. According to Finler (1985: 42) Ford's *oeuvre* provides a remarkable panorama of almost 200 years of American history on the screen. What more can we ask of from a director who has tried to establish authentic realism by shooting on location for most of his productions? But the power invested in the Hollywood studio executives was so great that they determined the presentational styles and trade-marks for all films. Social realism was definitely not on their agenda. Films that entertain and melodramas with happy endings and comedies ruled the day.

Earlier than Italian *neo-realism*, the French impressionists had already been conscious of their national identity. Social and cultural elements became the major concern of film-makers outside Hollywood. In fact, '...From the mid-1920s, when film first began to be seen as an art form, a number of countries set up systems of subvention and support designed to ensure that national audiences could be supplied with films that spoke the country's language and reflected the country's social and cultural concerns' (Auty and Roddick, 1985: 4). Monaco (1976: 68) recognises this phenomenon and regards the 1920s as the epoch of national films. Cultural realities then became the main issue in the national construct. During that decade the most successful of commercial film directors in France - Jacques Baroncelli, Louis Feuillade, and Henri Diamant-Berger, for example - all expressed themselves in favour of national, French cinema (Monaco, 1976: 68). French impressionist film-makers of the period also agreed that '...their films should be thoroughly French in style and spirit,

and their slogan demanded: "French cinema should be cinema, and French cinema should be French." (Monaco, 1976: 69)

The 1920s European consciousness of films with national identity had not yet launched a direct counter-attack to the Hollywood genres. It was more of an exercise of the film-makers' self-expression. But during the 1930s when Hollywood entertainment films had achieved a position of dominance on world screens, the reaction to counter the trend with alternative national cinemas began to be more aggressive. The dominance of the Hollywood products was felt strongly not only in Europe but also throughout Asia. Even in Francophone Vietnam between 1938 and 1940, local film companies were '...confronted with enormous difficulties due in part to lack of funds, technicians, venues, but most of all due to the impossibility of competing with French and American films, which had invaded the market and which were shown in the most prestigious cinemas controlled by French capital' (Pham Ngoc Truong, 1984: 68-69). The Vietnam case is just one remote example of how Hollywood even managed to dominate a country colonized by a non-English speaking political power. It is not surprising, then, that Hollywood had no problem in spreading its influence to other Asian countries, especially those colonized by the British.

But the early revolt against Hollywood was manifested by European film-makers especially in France. The French New Wave group of film-makers like Claude Chabrol, Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Eric Rohmer were making films with a different attitude and a sense of film culture and heritage. They were definitely challenging Hollywood's continued dominance with its genres such as the Western, horror, gangster, musical and science fiction films. The notion of film as entertainment began to face a serious

set-back when the new notion of European national cinema began to take shape. At the same time, 'despite those interesting currents and eddies in the flow of Hollywood product, American film declined slowly throughout the fifties' (Monaco, 1977: 254).

John Schultheiss (1971: 1) wrote about the Hollywood system as an environment which contributed to many of the failures. He then quotes Budd Schulberg who further elaborated the Hollywood failure and told about a special aspect of the syndrome:

> If mediocrity seemed to be the major muse of the movies, if most pictures were turned out as mechanically as newspapers were rolled off their presses, and as quickly tossed aside and forgotten, it was not to be blamed on the shortcomings of the medium, as many of the middlebrows and even some of the highbrows claimed. The fault lay in a system of production that was the logical expression of American commerce in a period when the average family went to the movies (any movies) two or three times a week, and each of the seven major studios was grinding out fifty to sixty pictures a year...Inevitably some 375 of the 400 films a year would be standard product, slick, smooth, polished to a high professional gloss, and about as full of real life as the box of popcorn sold with the show. (Shulberg, 1959: 135)

Countries in Europe and Asia, after learning from Hollywood's failures with its 'confusing sea of genres, styles, auteurs, and stars' (Monaco, 1977: 247)

began to reorganize their cinema into a more mature and powerful art form. Monaco (1977: 249) admits:

> ...Hollywood had to contend aesthetically with a worldwide flowering of new talent during the late forties, fifties and sixties....in Europe and Asia a new type of cinema was coming to the fore: personal, nongeneric, related directly to the contemporary historical situation.

Those were the characteristics of the new European and Asian National Cinema which remain true today. The works of the French new wave film-makers may not have had a great influence on Asian film-makers who were looking for a non-Hollywood model, but the Italian *neo-realism* movement was always considered to be the most realistic and became the first model of a national cinema for early Asian film-makers especially in India, Japan and the Philippines. The neo-realists were working for a cinema intimately connected with the experience of living: non-professional actors, rough technique, political points, ideas rather than entertainment - all these elements went directly counter to the Hollywood aesthetic of smooth, seamless professionalism (Monaco, 1977: 250). Roberto Rossellini's **Rome, Open City** remains one of the major landmarks of film history. The film is marked by an urgency and intensity that are directly related to the time and place in which it was filmed, and in Monaco's (1977: 250) opinion:

> The result was an authenticity of performance that is rivalled only in true documentaries. The style of the film was highly influential. Ever since, the elements of Realist film technique have been an integral part of world film aesthetics. (Monaco, 1977: 250)

The aesthetical effects of Rossellini's **Rome, Open City**, Vittorio De Sica's **Bicycle Thief** (1948) and other Italian Neo-Realist film-makers have been a great force behind the creation of national cinemas by young film-makers in Japan, India and other parts of Asia. In fact, Zavattini, Rossellini, De Sica, and Visconti defined the ground rules that would operate for the next thirty years (Monaco, 1977: 251).

1.4 Third Cinema

We have seen how 'first cinema' bred 'second cinema' which is actually an imitation cinema. Learning by imitation was later changed into an opposition that gave birth to a free cinema called 'third cinema'. While 'second cinema' had its association with the Hollywood tradition, 'third cinema' of a political inclination is 'most often associated with the great European directors such as Jean-Luc Godard, Bernardo Bertolucci, Andrzej Wajda and Margarethe von Trotta' (Steven, 1985: 16). Those with issues on social realism have their roots mainly in the Italian neo-realism. The socio-economic and political content of 'third cinema' is summarised by Gabriel in his description of what constitutes Third Cinema. It also applies to a national cinema. The descriptors are:

i) cinema which stands opposed to imperialism and class oppression in all their ramifications and manifestations;

ii) cinema that includes an infinite variety of subjects and styles, as varied as the lives of the people it portrays;

iii) cinema that identifies the masses as the true hero and the only existing force capable of defeating the class enemies in their home fronts; and

iv) cinema that portrays the oppression and plight of the masses and the distortion of their culture and arts.

It would seem rather ambitious to expect these descriptors to be put into practice by radical film-makers who want to get their films established as national cinemas, especially in Asian countries where the dominance of Hollywood cinema has been very strong.

Andres R. Hernandes (1974: 383) in an article "Film-making and Politics" outlines four objectives for film in a Third World context: to decolonize minds, to contribute to the development of a radical consciousness, to lead to a revolutionary transformation of society, and to develop a new film language with which to accomplish these tasks. All four objectives concern people and society at large and when applied to films made by Third World film-makers in Africa and Latin America, and the works of new wave directors in Asia, they constitute the characteristics of these various national cinemas. And Gabriel suggests that 'the principal characteristic of Third Cinema is really not so much where it is made, or even who makes it, but, rather, the ideology it espouses and the consciousness it displays'. (Gabriel, 1979: 2). So the ideology reflected by certain film-makers through their films is actually the major characteristic or the determining factor in classifying a film as national cinema.

Not all films from the Third World qualify as national cinema as Clyde Taylor in (Steven, 1985: 331) says:

> '...a film is obviously not Third World merely because it was made in Africa, Asia or Latin America by indigenous people. The mini-film industries of Hong Kong, India, Egypt and North Africa, Manila and Mexico are as devoted to commercial pleasure, in their own anawakened manner, as any disco flick.'

Countries like India, Japan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia adopted the Hollywood model and established smaller versions of the film industry by setting up studios. Thus we had mini-Hollywoods in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Jakarta, Manila, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur. They parroted the concepts and propositions of the Hollywood studio system in which a studio is the nucleus of all film production activities and where all management and production personnel are salaried. The artistes were bound by contract to appear in a certain number of productions within a stipulated number of years. This concept and system of film-making, where studios play the role of a factory manufacturing films to be consumed by the audience, has influenced all parts of the world including the colonized countries of Asia.

A great majority of Third World film-makers are thus still working within the concepts and propositions of Hollywood and, thereby, producing 'second cinema'. Only a limited few are worthy of being considered as Third World National Cinema. This situation is best explained by the fact that medium-sized film industries, such as those of Hong Kong, India and the Philippines, are large enough to cater to the stereotypic domestic market and at the same time to a large number of their own nationals living abroad. In the case of Hong Kong, gigantic joint-venture productions with American

companies constitute a large enough investment for a multi-million dollar profit. In both cases a National Cinema heavily loaded with national issues or crises reflecting the social reality of the countries may not be in the producers' or the big studios' interests. The best way for them is to ignore the socio-economic and political issues and leave those to the independent small-time producers or the individual directors laden with social ideas or certain political ideologies about the life and struggle of the common people. It is normally this handful of directors or film-makers that get together and make films and establish themselves as a new wave movement. They are the actual exponents of National Cinema.

The dominance of American films in Asia and Africa has resulted in the superimposition of a foreign film culture on the life of the local people, so much so that the national cinemas of these nations occupy a marginal place in the countries' cultural and entertainment sectors. In Africa and Asia, American films have become a kind of drug for young cinema-goers, although the countries have been trying very hard to establish their own culture, values and aspirations among the young generations. It has become a kind of a temporary escape, a dosage that will transport them into a colourful world of special effects in the forms of sexual fantasies, crime and violence, greed and hatred. For a little while, the young audience is immersed in this world and then comes out of the theatres with nothing practical or useful to face the real world around them.

Hollywood films have had great influence on other major film producing countries, such as India. The notion of films as mass entertainment gained nation-wide recognition in India. The glamorous film world of happy ending musicals has definitely found itself slightly altered in the Indian version of a

musical melodrama of song and dance. Gabriel regards the Indian example as one of '...those which adhere to the mainstream of Hollywood cinema and have acquired names which link them with their mentors: The Indian cinema of marble staircases and Victorian villas where song, dance and sacred cows abound. This he refers to as "The Third World's Hollywood". Another example is the Egyptian cinema of belly dancers and beautiful people who celebrate their lofty exclusiveness which is classified as "Hollywood on the Nile" or the "Arab World of Hollywood" (1979: 2).

Since cinema is a Western concept which later developed as a social and artistic institution in both America and Europe, 'the image that cinema has traditionally projected to the world has been one that reflects these Western cultures' (Gabriel, 1979: 1). The dominance of Western, especially Hollywood cinema, has had a great influence on the indigenous cultures of the people in Africa, Latin America and Asia. This phenomenon has resulted in what is usually termed as cultural imperialism. According to Gabriel, (1979: 16) 'Wherever imperialist culture penetrates, it attempts to destroy national culture and substitute foreign culture'. It is this fear that has driven the Third World film-makers to 'preserve the cultural make-up of a society...they realized the importance of incorporating traditional art forms to retain the distinctive flavour of popular mass culture' (Gabriel, 1979: 16).

A National Cinema is an alternative art form differing from what already exists and is popular with the mass audience. Different cinemas are born because some quarters of a society become exhausted with a popular film culture which is basically a copy of the traditional cinema of Hollywood. This is what happened to Latin American films, especially those of Brazil.

Georgakas and Rubenstein (1984: 10) noted that '...in 1959 a group of young film critics registered their disgust with the seemingly endless series of Brazil's cheap imitation-Hollywood *chanchadas* (musical comedies) by organising an independent production group. They aimed at making films that would deal with the authentic history, mythology, and legends of their own country'. This is basically the ideal starting point for a national cinema. Only with this realization can a true picture of a particular people and their culture be told to the outside world. It was in the works of this Brazilian Cinema Novo that '...uniquely Brazilian elements became part of motion pictures: the sertao, the arid, sparsely populated plains region of the north east and its inhabitants; the *cangaceiros* (rebel-bandits) and *retirantes* (migrant workers); Rio de Janeiro's *favelados* (hill dwellers), the peasants inhabiting the shanty towns on the metropolitan hillsides; the influence of mysticism on the populace; and so on' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 10). These are the true ingredients for a Brazilian National Cinema. If cinema fails to portray the bitter truth about the conditions of the country and the majority of its people, no one would realise that they exist and need attention.

The most prolific film-maker of the Brazilian *cinema novo* and also regarded as its major ideological spokesperson is Glauber Rocha. Rocha articulates the ideas or concepts of the movement, refering to what he and his friends produce as new cinema rather than as Brazilian national cinema. He says that one will find the living spirit of the new cinema: '...Wherever one finds a director willing to film reality and ready to oppose the hypocrisy and repression of intellectual censorship, ready to stand up against commercialism, exploitation, pornography and technicality, willing to place his art and work at the service of the mighty causes of his day' (Georgakas

and Rubenstein, 1984: 11). Rocha also regarded commercial cinematography as an industry which is committed to untruth and exploitation.

Even though the new Brazilian films under the authorship and direction of the *cinema novo* group are politically inclined, they are representative of the people of Brazil and they tell the truth about their living conditions and aspirations. The group has managed to overcome cultural colonialism and to expose to the world a kind of film worth watching as Brazilian national cinema. Although its films have faced a very powerful and oppressive censorship in Brazil, the group somehow has managed to obtain releases due to the international reputation which the *cinema novo* has gained through film festivals abroad. According to Rocha, films by the Cinema Novo film-makers have gained recognition and a good response in France and Italy (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 11). In 1962 when the group was started there were only eleven directors; by 1984 there were thirty and they share the same political objectives despite a great diversity of styles.

Rocha and his friends may have political objectives in mind when they make their films. Teshome Gabriel refers to these political films from Latin America as "Third Cinema" and according to him this cinema encompasses all films with social and political purpose. Gabriel elaborates that '...the concept is referred to as "New Wave" or "Left Cinema" in India; "Cinema Shebab" in the Arab world; "Parallel Cinema" in Sri Lanka; and "Cinema de Conscience" or "Engaged Cinema" in Senegal. In general, all share in the "politicization of cinema": a cinema for the decolonization of culture and total liberation (1979: 2). But Rocha himself refuses to accept that his films are political propaganda:

> ...all my films basically are made for popular consumption. My films are made for, and from, a popular culture. They are very popular in Brazil, Africa and the Third World in general; if bourgeois audiences find them difficult it is because of their lack of understanding of the popular culture. I think I make my films for every type of audience...My films are not specifically propagandist. I try to reveal the political problems of the underdeveloped world but I refuse to call this political propaganda. I make political films but not as propaganda. (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 113)

A National Cinema is indeed a cinema completely in opposition to Hollywood cinema. As Rocha argued, '...it is a cinema against Hollywood because Hollywood produces a colonizing cinema and a National Cinema is against colonization (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 13). It has to be a film opposed to the aesthetic principles of the cinema of domination. According to Rocha, Brazilian film-makers (or for that matter all film-makers outside America) '...have to wage a very determined battle against the Hollywood influence - we have to develop a national cinema which will be able to combat the colonizing cinema' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 14).

African countries serve as another good example of how difficult it is to combat the 'first cinema' of Hollywood. At a film forum held in Zimbabwe in the Summer of 1990 and attended by 160 delegates and guests from more than 30 countries from Western and Southern Africa, a debate over what should be splashed across African screens was getting heated. "Africans

want kung fu, Terminator - hit, bash and crash movies. What they don't want is the stark sordid reality of Africa rammed down their throat," said Ian Hoskins, promotions director of Monte Carlo Theatre, the main cinema company in Zimbabwe (New Straits Times, 1990: 26).

This apparent truth about Zimbabwe's film-goers seems applicable to other countries in Asia and Latin America. Statistics show that American films dominate major cinema chains in Brazil, Argentina, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia. But there is also another perspective to this situation. Those hit, bash and crash movies are the ones which are being rammed down the throats of Asian, African and American Latin movie-goers through clever advertising campaigns. They usually go down well with the lesser-educated or the highly western-educated Africans, Asians and Latin Americans. These are the people who either have no cultural direction at all or whose life-styles have been very much influenced by Western standards achieved through education abroad. These two groups form the majority of patrons for imported American films. The only difference between them is that one group watches the films for mere entertainment by buying cheaper tickets in sub-standard theatres while the other patronises the films in expensive theatres with much higher ticket prices to appreciate the special effects in both sound and visuals. The former group watches the films because they have nothing else to do while the latter watches the films for a night out with friends so that they can talk about them later and at the same time recall their experiences when they lived abroad, especially in the countries where the films were made.

The real truth is that a great number of African, Asian and South American film-makers are very conscious about their own culture and people and that they have been working against American cultural imperialism to establish their own National Cinema. There might have been a large number of followers in each country had it not been for the unlimited or rather unrestricted importation of American films into these countries. National film-makers have to work against the corrupted majority and sooner or later they will have to establish their own truth.

Souleyman Cisse, a film-maker from Mali, whose **Yeelen** won the jury's prize at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival and received critical acclaim at the New York Film Festival, said that films for, by and about Africa could heighten awareness of the continent's problems. Africans are not really interested in kung fu, but films about their lives. They learn to know about themselves and see the misery that has been imposed on them by war, poverty and colonialism (New Straits Times, 1990: 26). This kind of realization is very important not only for film-makers but for the majority audience for other national cinemas. It is imperative that cinema be treated as a vehicle for problem solving, a form of re-thinking or rather self-discovering and not a stage for clones killing one another.

1.5 New Waves as National Cinema

Factors leading to the birth of a 'new cinema' in Asian countries have shown some similarities. New film-makers who had some exposure to the classical works of Bergman, Fellini, Truffaut, Godard and some earlier works by Italian new-realism directors began to explore the possibilities of incorporating their own countries' social and political situations within the

same narrative structure of such works as **The Bicycle Thief, Wild Strawberries** and many more. These new groups of young film-makers were also frustrated with the films of their own countries made by earlier film-makers who tended to follow the narrative structure of Hollywood and the notion of film as entertainment. They therefore tried to explore new structures, presenting as far as possible the actual life of their own audiences. They tried to separate dreams from realities by presenting film characters who could easily be identified with because they were ordinary people and not some exaggerated clones created to amuse the audience so that they could forget their worries for a while.

A good example of successful new cinema can be found in India. According to Lent (1990: 248) '...The dominant trend in India in the last 20 years has been the dichotomy between the commercial and the new cinema, the roots of which lie in Italian neo-realism. The new cinema is usually credited with social responsibility, because it attempts to call the viewers' attention to the nation's economic-social-political problems'. In this respect, the Indian new cinema is actually India's National Cinema because it tells the truth about the country and the people as opposed to the commercial or formula films by the major studios, motivated by profits, which are exaggerated and meant to exploit the masses.

Indian new cinema is powerful in the sense that quite a large group of young, talented and well-educated film-makers has successfully groomed a new batch of talented players who portray film characters realistically. Mrinal Sen, Syam Benegal, Aparna Sen, Mira Nair, Ketan Mehta and Govind Nihilani are but a few of this new-breed of film directors, who have successfully brought talented actors like Nasaruddin Shah, Om Puri and

actresses like the late Smita Patil and Shabana Azmi to the Indian new film screen.

The early National Cinema of India was regional in nature. Regionality breeds originality and being original is an extra point that could command universal appeal. This is what happened to the films of Satyajit Ray who tried to set universal themes by being regionalistic and concentrating his attention and energy on depicting rural poverty in the Bengali state of India. With **Pather Panchali,** Ray proved that the traditional economics of film-making could be completely altered. Great films could be made without studio patronage. But Ray also proved that one must understand the medium in order to present a different perspective and master certain cinematic styles and techniques. Ray agreed that '...film, as a purely technological medium of expression, developed in the West, and the concept of an art form existing in time is a Western concept. So, in order to understand cinema as a medium, it helps if one is familiar with the West and Western art forms...Someone who has had a Western education is definitely at an advantage' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 381). This is particularly true if film-makers are to be able to portray universal feelings, universal relations, emotions, and characters in their films in order to cross certain barriers and reach out to a wider foreign audience.

What is, then, the status of a National Cinema? This is a question often asked and debated at film festivals where the main concern is the artistic form and content and not the commercial aspect of films. Films which have good track records at foreign festivals are aften box-office failures at home. They are usually of the non-commercial genre, hardly entertaining but surprisingly realistic and socially conscious and conform to the need that

'...film must be socially useful'. At least that was the slogan put forward by a number of Polish film-makers and critics since 1929 (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 314). Film is a powerful medium in getting messages across to people. But faithfully realistic and socially conscious films heavy with messages can also bore the audience, unless some social or political unrest is taking place and people need to be guided to support certain groups fighting for a new order or change. In normal situations, people need films which entertain as well as develop their insight.

Andrzej Wajda, one of the founders of Polish cinema, whose **Man of Marble** (1977) was regarded as 'the most socially challenging film ever made in the postwar Eastern Europe' agrees that:

> ...his task as director is not just to provide a nice evening's entertainment. The most important thing is to tell the audience something, to make people think, to initiate a dialogue. (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 317)

Monaco (1977: 232) calls the kind of film referred to by Wajda as 'dialectical film' and regards this '...new approach which involved reconceiving the entertaining consumer commodity as an intellectual tool, a forum for examination and discussion'. But how many members of a film audience care to get involved intellectually when watching films? A small select group of audiences in the art house circuit may stay and participate in discussion, but not the mainstream audience. The majority of the audience who normally goes into the theatre is 'waiting for film to do all the work, to envelop them in the expected heady fantasies' (Monaco,1977: 232). They may find that a dialectical film that challenges their minds is asking

too much when they need to do some re-thinking about certain issues. A few might participate, but most will find it boring. Yet this approach, when properly understood, offers one of the most exciting possibilities for the future development of cinema.

Monaco and Wajda are both looking at film as a medium to construct new ideas and possibilities. What Wajda was saying, when he was interviewed at the Berlin Film Festival in February, 1980, is of course being practiced by new wave directors all over the world. By wanting to tell something, to make people think and to initiate dialogue, they must all agree that something is not correct and, therefore, needs to be redressed. This is when politically and socially conscious ideas are incorporated into films. This idea started as far back as 1960 when Third World cinema made its debut. In the beginning, the cinema was built on the rejection of the concepts and propositions of traditional, or 'first cinema' as represented by Hollywood. But the main aim of Third Cinema is also to '...immerse itself in the life struggles of the people...who should not continue to dissipate its culture and national identity' (Gabriel, 1979: 1); thus Third Cinema is a National Cinema of the Third World. The aim of immersion for cultural consolidation noted above is that of young new wave Asian film-makers. In Hong Kong, for example, the works of the new wave directors of the late 70's and early 80's were considered, '...refreshingly realistic and socially conscious, held a mirror to aspects of Hong Kong...They revealed the myth of urban prosperity, the dissatisfaction of youth, the uncertainty about Hong Kong's future and identity, and the myriad problems and societal changes of the Crown Colony' (Lent, 1990: 111).

Allen Fong (Fong Yuk-Ping) one of Hong Kong's 'new wave' directors in an interview with John A. Lent (1990: 113), said that his films '...deal with realism and humanism, no glamorous stars, no sweeping drama - the people play themselves'. This is the situation in the works of the Philippines 'new wave' directors who have contributed a great deal towards establishing the Philippines National Cinema abroad. Prominent directors of the Philippines 'new wave' are Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal. Brocka made more than seventy films starting in 1970 and some of his works have won awards at the Cannes and other international festivals. Roy Armes (1987: 153) says that Brocka offered a 'cleaned-up version of poverty' and maintained 'complicity with the worlds the films ostensibly denounce', while Francia (Downing, 1987: 213) said Brocka's camera, in films such as **Jaguar** (1979), **Insiang** (1976), **Manila in the Claws of Neon** (1975) and **Bona** (1980), gave a view from below, warts and all.

Brocka's films deal with the negative aspects of society especially with the poverty of the slum-dwellers of Manila. Bernal, who also made films of social relevance, likes to concentrate on 'the underground, subterranean, marginal people of Manila; on modern Filipinos in the city' (Lent, 1990: 168). In other words, these young directors of the new wave are giving a true picture of their own countrymen living in the modern city. Brocka's films have suffered from government scissors and proclamations (Lent, 1990: 166). The government disavowed his film **Ang Bayan Ko** (My Own Country) as the Philippine entry in the Cannes Film Festival in 1984, unless Brocka excised scenes of protest rallies and labelled the movie 'for adults only'. Brocka and his colleagues, like Behn Cervantes, had always been fighting for freedom of expression in Philippines cinema. He led the Free-the-Artist Movement and Concerned Artist of the Philippines and was

appointed delegate to the Constitutional Commission, from which he resigned in protest after helping to secure some freedom for the arts.

New National Cinema is a directors' cinema. But directors are always fighting losing battles against producers, studio executives or even those trying to market the finish products: the distributors and the exhibitors. No one in the Hollywood-style industry has ever thought about culture, history, ideology or identity associated with the establishment of a National Cinema. It has always been the artists, writers, actors and directors who have tried to create something out of the basic situations, problems, and crises as experienced by their fellow human beings around them. Urban Gad, the famous Danish film producer, wrote a book on film as far back as 1918. According to him, every film should be placed in some specific natural environment which must affect the human beings living in it and play a part in directing their lives and destinies (Balazs: 1970: 24). Balazs (1970: 17) believes that 'film art has a greater influence on the minds of the general public than any other art.' On the influence and the relationship of film to the audience, Balazs (1970: 17) wrote:

> No one would deny to-day that the art of the motion picture is the popular art of our century - unfortunately not in the sense that it is the product of the popular spirit but the other way round, in the sense that the mentality of the people, and particularly of the urban population, is to a great extent the product of this art, an art that is at the same time a vast industry. Thus the question of the films is a question of the mental health of the nations.

Good writers and directors always try to create a film from a significant substance and do it artistically. They try to inform, to educate, and, at the same time, to entertain. But they also have to consider the market demand and have to bear in mind that not all audiences are artistically inclined. According to Arnheim (1958: 38):

> A film art developed only gradually when the movie makers began consciously or unconsciously to cultivate the peculiar possibilities of cinematographic technique and to apply them toward the creation of artistic productions. To what extent the use of these means of expression affects the large audiences remains a moot question. Certainly box-office success depends even now much more on what is shown than on whether it is shown artistically.

Cinema is mass art. The audience is always large. Even though good screen writers and directors have always believed that '...Art educated the taste of the public, and the better taste of the public demanded and rendered possible the development of art to higher levels' (Balazs,1970: 19), they must remember that attaining a high level of art is a slow process and the situation described by Ballazs does not hold true in every part of the world. Other factors have to be considered in judging the audience's receptive capabilities. And since film art as industry is never in the sole hands of writers and directors, the direction, the levels and the aesthetic quality of films are always in the hands of the industrialists. Because of this, the director can never decide what he wants the public to watch and neither can he control 'what the public wants'. Rather he is always being controlled 'by what the public is thought to want' (Perkins, 1972: 164).

Herbert Marshall writing the preface for Balazs's book from Bombay, India, wrote in July 1952:

> (Film) is an art that could only have been born in an industrial civilization and the universality of the film is primarily due to economic causes. The making of a film is so expensive that only very few nations have a home market sufficient for their productions.

Perkins (1972: 160) agrees with this notion and says, 'The cost of movie production is so high that only a millionaire could afford to make pictures (other than home movies) simply for his own pleasure. Having done so, he would not long retain his wealth without persuading a huge number of people to share (and pay for sharing) his enjoyment'. Now how many good, socially or politically conscious directors are millionaires? Teshome H. Gabriel (1979: 58) may argue that it is possible to make films cheaply and this has been proven by Third World film-makers like Glauber Rocha from Brazil and Ousmane Sembene from Senegal. Rocha confirms in an interview that '...it is a principle of his *Cinema Novo*'s organisation that they (the film-makers) must work with a very low budget...and his film would cost around 40,000 *cruzeiros* (US $120,000)' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 17). Perhaps this is only possible in the Third World countries of Latin America, Africa and South East Asia. In Thailand, for example, an average budget for a feature film is between US $40,000 to $120,000 (Suwunpukdee: 1988: 166). The same amount applies to Malaysian feature films, although one or two have been made with a high budget of about US $480,000. In Indonesia, the *Pusat Produksi Filem Negara* produced four features in 1979, at an average cost of US $41,667, while Ali Hassan of Inem Films makes 10 - 12 features a year at a cost of

US $100,000 to 125,000 (Lent, 1990: 207-208). Higher budgeted films were Teguh Karya's **November 1828** (1979) at US $480,000 and Eros Djarot's **Tjoet Nya' Dhien** (1989) at US $800,000. The average budget for a feature film in the Philippines is 'more than US $50,000 to make a quality picture', and a 'typical formula film' will cost US $150,000 (Lent, 1990: 160).

Of course, every director would agree with what Jane Fonda said, '...I think it's important to do a picture that is going to be seen by a lot of people' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 110). Films are made not for a handful of people. The main aim of a national cinema is to get the message across to the people, especially when the film-maker is trying to portray truthfully some events or situations or what is now being termed as social realism. Even though Perkins (1972: 61) regards the photographic narrative film as a compromise position where a fictional 'reality' is created in order to be recorded, the 'fictional reality' in a National Cinema is created based on the reality that exists or existed in actual time and space. The themes, the issues, the characters and the locality or background for the films have been studied in detail by the film-maker. The 'cinematic truth' that he creates is based on the actual truth. What is being done for filming purposes is the fictionalisation of the truth. This is what Perkins (1972: 61) argues: '...The fiction movie exploits the possibilities of synthesis between photographic realism and dramatic illusion'. But Wajda (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 324) added that in order for a film-maker to create a 'cinematic truth' with his material he must know what he is talking about.

1.6 National Film Culture

Culture is always part of the life of a society, whether open or closed, more or less as a conscious result of the economic and political activities of that society, the more or less dynamic expression of the kinds of relationship which prevail in that society, on the one hand between man (considered individually or collectively) and nature, and, on the other hand, among individuals, groups of individuals, social strata or classes (Cabral: 1973: 112). According to David Hannan (1988: 25), National Cinema is closely tied to a national culture and in some countries the cultural aspect includes recognition of the diversity, specificity and complexity of the many cultures as faithfully as possible and the portrayal of the traits and characteristics of these cultures (Hannan:1988: 25).

Cultural development must precede National Cinema because '...in all revolutions the cultural development is as important as the economic development' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 14). An economic development without emphasis on the development of a national culture would only result in a free economic system whereby the focus or attention on culture would either be nobody's business or everybody's business and become so industrialised that the national characteristics would no longer be recognisable. The film industry would become part and parcel of a multi-level industry which emphasises only profit, therefore the attention would be on high budget and high-technology films from the West. This is actually the prevailing condition in Latin America, Africa and Asia. This is one reason why the 'Third world artists are always struggling against the political oppression and also against existing cultural conditions - a political as well as a cultural struggle' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 14).

Glauber Rocha would not use the word "artistic," but rather the word "cultural," because to him,'...in a much broader sense it encompasses the political, economic and artistic' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 14).

Film-makers all over the world have tried to make films about their own people and culture. Hannan (1988: 25), writing on one of Teguh Karya's films, **November 1828**, noted that '...even in the silent period of the cinema there were film-makers in many societies who, in different ways, were concerned to represent their "peoples" in a way that was true to their cultures, or reflected national ethos or national character'. A film-maker lives within his society's cultural and aesthetical codes. He has to have a certain stand regarding the values, customs and traditions of his people in contrast to foreign or imported culture. As an individual, a film-maker may not realise that his idea for a certain representation is also in line with those in authority controlling the film industry. Hannan (1988: 25) adds that, '...in many cases, the discourse of "representing one's own culture" is linked to attempts to build a national film industry, one that was free from foreign economic domination, and in opposition to cultural domination by imported product...', but at the same time '...associated with quite particular interest groups in those societies'. This is particularly true if we go through the development of such groups as the Italian *neo-realism*, the Brazilian *cinema novo*, the French *auteurs* and the most recent one, the Fifth Generation from mainland China. These groups may or may not realise the objective of their working together to establish their own national cinema, but the styles of their works show similarities peculiar to the setting up of their own National Cinema.

National Cinema often portrays regional societies in culturally specific terms. This is the true task of a national cinema. National Cinema must be healthy, said Teguh Karya (Interview, 1987), the well-known Indonesian film and theatre director. 'Healthy' is difficult to define when associated with film- making. Karya was referring to a truthful regional culture which is free from the depiction of any foreign domination or influence in films. But, on a larger scale, a healthy film is also one which has a unique and universal theme in the sense that it is not just a narrow or artificial manifestation of one's own culture and outlook. Can a National Cinema be defined and determined by its country of origin? According to Nick Rodick (1985: 80), "A French film, a Swedish film or a Japanese film is easy enough to spot...With a British film, however, it is not quite so straight-forward". An English-language film is likely, nine times out of ten, to be American. And the country of origin test is not always reliable either. This is rather an inaccurate determinant simply because '...in the final analysis, nationality tests on films are as meaningless, if not quite as odious, as tests for racial characteristics on people; ...The truth is, of course, that a healthy national cinema can afford to incorporate stories from abroad. Britain's national cinema, however, has never been that healthy; and it has, as a result, tended to be swamped by its overseas visitors (Roddick: 1985: 83).

Mick Eaton and Paul Kerr (1983; 2) in a *Screen* editorial wrote that the national culture out of which a National Cinema must necessarily emerge is itself an ideological construct. A film takes its form and content within a particular culture or ideology; either it touches certain aspects or all the aspects through the social context of society, politics or certain trends within a popular or sub-culture that either conform to or are in opposition to an ideology. And, according to Turner (1988: 131) '...although ideology itself

has no material form, we can see its material effects in all social and political formations, from class structure to gender relations to our idea of what constitutes an individual'. The ideological power of film and its cultural functions have helped countries to establish their own cinemas that could '...at least break the silence often maintained about their own culture within American cinema' (Turner, 1988: 136).

Film culture is closely associated with film-makers and a film audience, but the emphasis on film form is entirely a film-maker's concern. And like any form of culture, film culture, if it is to grow and develop, relies on the artist having a burning need for expression and a fairly clear cultural tradition with which to interact (Roddick and Adair, 1985: 78). In this case Britain and Australia have problems in defining their cultural tradition on films, and a common language becomes a barrier rather than an advantage. In 1981, Brian Winstton, Head of Studies at the British National Film School, talked to John Hinde about the British film industry and said that, '...The major problem with the British film industry - and it's an obvious thing to say, but it's something that you Australians are going to have to confront too - is that we all speak American' (Hinde; 1981: 62). The problems with both British and Australian films are not just the language used but also the cultural and social linkage. The Anglo-Saxons who earlier settled in America were from England and American culture in some ways has roots within the English homeland. The Japanese, the Indians, and the other Asian countries have a totally different culture, cultures which have some links between each other but yet still retain their originality. This makes Asian National Cinema different and more interesting.

However, the concept and characteristics of films produced in these countries still to some extent fail to exclude the Hollywood mass entertainment cliches or the artistic influence of the European products. Cinemas from small nations tend to follow the American or the European formulas depending on the cultural and historical linkage that each particular country underwent in the past. But on the whole it was the Hollywood tradition that dominated the film industry of small nations and their cinema is often regarded as 'second cinema'. A second cinema may be expected to present some evidence of resistance, but primarily it will accommodate the dominant stylistic paradigm of Hollywood film (Dermody & Jacka, 1988: 24). Asian countries, for example, were colonized by such powers as the United States, Britain, Spain and Holland. British heritage is left in countries like India and Malaysia, while the Dutch ruled Indonesia for hundreds of years and the Spanish and Americans were consecutively the colonial powers in the Philippines.

In the beginning, the colonial masters may have introduced the film cultures of their home countries to their colonies but it was the American film culture that later overruled the earlier situation and dominated the scenes in Asian countries. This domination remains true until today resulting in these small countries struggling to germinate and nurture their own National Cinemas. The influence has been tremendous and has become a sort of blockade for filmmakers in these regions preventing the formulation of their own cinema concepts and definitions, free from the dominant Hollywood image and influence. In other words, as long as Hollywood continues to homogenise world cinema, both economically and stylistically, indigenous cinemas will be 'second', secondary, and, therefore, will speak only their specific relationship to Hollywood.

Hollywood's mechanism of publicity and distribution dominates not only America and Europe but also Africa, Latin America and Asia. The public seldom has the chance to choose the films that they would like to see because the American distribution system is far from being democratic. The distribution networks more often than not decide what films the people may see in each country. Glauber Rocha, the Brazilian film director once remarked that '...the public in Latin America is very colonized by Hollywood. The penetration of Hollywood in Latin America is significant because it is not only an aesthetics education but also, since it is a psychological conditioning, a colonial education' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 13). Rocha adds, that '...it is very hard to fight American cinema because it dominates our markets and has colonized our intellectual sensibilities' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 14).

Cinema industries in small countries may not exist along a definite concept and regulation. When freedom is left to be interpreted by the industrialist, the main objective is, of course, profit, therefore the question of national culture or identity is put aside. What is more important is to gain public patronage. And the public will generally go for cheap tricks and shallow imitation. So in the long run cinemas in smaller nations become imitations of those western films that try to dehumanise people with special effects, fast action and the sexual exploitation of women. Human development, emotion and aspirations are no longer of importance.

1.7 National Identity

National identity is based on the premise that film-makers of the same nationality create motion pictures in ways that differ from those of other nationalities (DeNitto, 1985: 94). This notion is only true for those small nations creating their own National Cinema or art films which 'are often identified, for example at film festivals, by their display of signs of national differences, country of origin, geographical and cultural 'sights' (Dermody and Jacka, 1987: 31). It can offer insights into movements that originate in specific countries, as Siegfried Kracauer demonstrates in his analysis of Expressionism in *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film.* It may be possible to go beyond the matrix from which a film emerges to generalizations about the relationship between a filmmaker's oeuvre and his nationality, as Vernon Young suggests in *Cinema Borealis: Ingmar Bergman and the Swedish Ethos* (DeNitto, 1985: 94). However, in a large scale film industry like Hollywood, the relationship between a filmmaker and his nationality is not an important factor. Any interesting subject from anywhere in the world could be turned into a film without the filmmaker himself having a complete understanding of its identity or characteristics. Generalisations rule the day.

Ever since the Lumiere brothers started showing their little films to a paying audience all over the world from 1895 to 1905, the idea of gathering more materials from foreign countries which would then be shown again had already started. Representatives were sent to the major cities of Europe and to some Eastern countries to arrange showings of the Lumiere programmes and also to send back to Paris shots of typical scenes (Armes, 1974: 24). This stock footage of various human activities

included those taken in Asian cities. Lumiere was said to have built up a catalogue of well over a thousand items, with subjects ranging from bull-fighters entering the arena in Spain to Black dancers entertaining the crowds in London, from coolies toiling in Saigon to processions in Rome or Stockholm (Armes, 1974: 24).

But national identity does not concern only characterisation. Geographical location is also another factor that gives a film its identity. Film festivals always refer films to the country of origin and the audience is supposed to identify those films not only by the differences in the physical appearance of their characters but also by their environment or the background in which certain actions or scenes are taking place. Most national film-makers are very concerned about their choice of locations in order to depict something peculiar to their own countries.

What is French about a French film is the look or the background. Being sited in a specific location is necessary in determining the geographic origin of a film, even though in some cases the actual location need not be used if a similar one can be substituted from elsewhere. But with the authentic background of a particular country, a film would definitely hold more authority and provide much easier reference. The first half of Australia's **Crocodile Dundee,** for example, provides a distinct view of the country's outback with bright, light, rugged landscape and scarce vegetation. In this case, the approach of the film camera is functional rather than expressive. This approach of providing information on geographical location is rather significant. According to Dermody and Jacka (1988: 34);

> The closest thing to mise en scene are lyrical pans across picturesque landscape or beautifully dressed interiors, giving brief, rapturous play to cinematography's recognition of what is our own. This includes not only a distinct beautiful place, but space, history and cultural traditions.

Geographical location not only provides natural landscape but also urban settings of historical buildings with certain architectural designs that will provide an insight into a country's cultural heritage and traditions. It is unavoidable that this will then lead to the development of the national origin of a particular film. Michael Balcon (Brown and Kardish, 1984: 43), the central and outstanding figure in the creation of the British film industry, once said:

> In discussing films, sooner or later we all refer to national origin. We cannot easily get away from the idea of national characteristics and ascribe them as readily to the works of art and industry, as most films are, as we do to individuals. Why we persist in this discourse suggests that the imprint of national bias runs deep, and that characterisation by nationality somehow "works."

But Balcon also tried giving the idea of a National Cinema some meaning beyond geography (Brown and Kardish, 1984: 43). He referred the idea of a National Cinema to "native simplicity and sincerity" (Balcon, 1931; 10). Simplicity perhaps referred to the modest circumstances of film-making in Britain (Balcon, 1931: 45), and sincerity to what we will later term as 'truth', which includes '... restricting of topics to native subject'

(Balcon, 1931: 45) Native subjects do not only mean the socio-cultural problems of the British people but also the 'idioms' and the context in which those problems were put across. In 1935 Balcon observed that "Americans...have a warm and somewhat sentimental feeling towards Britain... our city scenes and countryside fascinate them, our accent, if not affected, pleases them" (Brown and Kardish, 1984: 55) What Americans don't like, Balcon argued, were "poor imitations" of their own idiom, films of "hard technical perfection." Balcon, therefore, tried to establish a British style of filmmaking also as an idea of a National Cinema. (Brown and Kardish, 1984: 55).

1.8 The Truth and Social Reality

Cinema should be a vehicle of truth. This notion was elaborated by Mateus Xavier of Mozambique, as '...the truth of our empty stomachs. We are analysing what we have been and what will be. Our hands have not stopped moving to the rhythm of Africa' (New Straits Times, Oct.25, 1990: 26). Foreign films, which give a distorted portrayal of people in Africa, Asia or Latin America by depicting them in a subservient or primitive role, just reinforce the racist attitudes that were born during the colonial era and which still have a strong impact even today. That kind of films should be done away with. It is the responsibility of each country's film-makers to present the correct portrayal of their own country, the people and their problems as seen through their own eyes. Otherwise the world at large will remain at the level of stereotyping which was established earlier by the West.

But, according to M. Ali Issari and Doris A.Paul (1979: 5), to photograph "truth" is an illusive goal. Mario Raspoli (1964: 14), a French film-maker and a pioneer in the cinema verite style of film-making, wrote:

> The word 'truth' is in itself so vast and complex, so full of inner and sometimes secret contradictions and represents so fluid and yet so indivisible a concept, that it can only be compared, by analogy, to a movement of thought: when given expression at the level of speech, through the sheer impossibility of saying several things at once....it loses part of its substance. If we split the word 'truth' in order to obtain 'truths,' it loses its simultaneity. It can only be given concrete form in a broad, social and collective sense, at the level of a group, a community or a nation.

What Issari, Doris and Ruspoli are talking about are the techniques of approaching truth in filming. Does filming 'reality' guarantee the presentation of truth? The use of a portable lightweight hand-held camera to capture some real happening is basically a newsreel technique. Similarly, the use of non-professional actors is a matter of choice by a director. The effect produced may or may not resemble the actual truth of what happens in the street. To capture a policeman by the road-side accepting a bribe from a motorist can be done with a hidden camera as evidence but the same scene could also be staged with actors and a camera set-up. The newsreel technique, in fact, may give the impression that the whole scene is being filmed by a film crew on the move and may not be real. **Salaam Bombay** and **Bicycle Thief** may be good examples because non-professional actors were first given training or explanation of what they

were supposed to do within a natural environment of real people. The camera technique in both films is also spontaneous in the sense that it records the various scenes from ordinary angles, giving the impression that everything takes place in front of a passer-by.

Cinema has been the basis for argument and presenting new ideas about people and their problems. Film-makers have worked within their own national culture to present ideas and problems for further discussion not only by their own younger generation but also by foreigners who try to take a look at their world. There have been cases in which Asian film-makers imitated the West by making films which did not concern the life, the dreams and aspirations of their people by presenting themes, plot-lines, characterisations and treatments which were rather unfamiliar to their own culture, idioms and world view. This is a waste because 'truth must be defined by each individual within himself as well as within the context of his culture and experience' (Issari and Paul, 1979: 5).

When we examine themes and contents for a National Cinema, we have to relate this to realism in order to establish truth. This may arise because many problems faced by a film-maker about truth and realism might not be in line with the authority or the policy of the government. The **Pather Panchali** case is a good example. While the central government officially rejoiced over the success of the film, some highly placed officials appear to have frowned on the film and especially its distribution abroad. The objection was that it pictured India in terms of poverty and that this damaged India's international image (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, 1963: 232). Slamet Rahardjo, the Indonesian director faced the same problem when he completed **My Sky, My Home** in 1989; some officials were not

happy with Rahardjo's portrayal of Jakarta's slum areas. But Rahardjo's stand is that he has to show the reality of life or the truth about the ugly side of Jakarta for everyone to realise the need for change. The situation is always complex. Lucian Goldman, cited in Issari and Paul (1979: 6), confronted the complexity of "truth" when he wrote;

> The understanding of truth, realism, coherence and aesthetic unity today is not a simple matter of good faith, talent, or even individual genius. It is primarily a problem of the difficulties and the limits that a cultural sphere imposes on the understanding of the mind.

Cinema, as one of the most influential and popular arts, has always helped to create as well as to reflect the cultural attitude it serves. Italian *neo-realism* was a good example of a cinema serving the cultural attitude of the Italian masses in the slum post-war period. Issari and Paul (1979:41-42) also agree with the fact that Italian *neo-realism* emerges as a great revolution towards truthfulness in cinema.

But there is always a tendency by film-makers operating within commercial cinema of the Hollywood tradition to exaggerate or glamourise reality in order to satisfy the average-educated film-goer. Truth and reality therefore, are, distorted for commercial gain, leaving a gap between what actually happened and what is depicted on the screen. Only those film-makers who are conscious about the problems and crises of their people and country would try to put into practice what was suggested by such renowned film thinker as Cesare Zavattini when he said:

> The cinema should never turn back. It should accept, unconditionally what is contemporary. Today, today, today. It must tell reality as if it were a story; there must be no gap between life and what is on the screen (William, 1980; 29).

Perhaps the most vocal about truth in cinema are the Polish film-makers. Andrej Wajda, the well-known Polish film director, while addressing a forum of the Polish Filmmakers' Association in Gdansk in 1980, said, '...if we ask ourselves what is the fundamental obligation of the artist towards the contemporary Polish experience we can only arrive at one answer: it is to speak the truth' (Paul, 1983: 294).

Truth is something that can be very bitter for those in authority to swallow. If truth were to be hidden by superficial and shallow intepretations of the socio-economic problems in films, nothing will change the situation for the better. We have to know the ugly truth if we are sincere about making things better for everyone. Problems like poverty, corruption, money politics and prostitution are abundant. Wajda agrees that though his answer may seem a platitude, it remains an unshakable fact that only the truth can lead us out of the present crisis, restore confidence between people, and also between society and government, and liberate the creative energies of our nations (Paul, 1983: 294).

1.9 The Economic Realities

Cinema as industry needs all the protection and support it can get, otherwise it will die a slow death. This is especially true in countries facing

stiff competition from the American commercial cinemas. We have seen earlier that American films have collected a major portion of the money earned by the industry in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. The economic realities are frustrating and frightening in terms of the survival or revival of various non-American national cinemas.

The situation is more frustrating in English-speaking countries such as Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Politically, Australia, Canada and New Zealand share a similar history as self-governing white dominions within the British Empire (Dermody and Jacka, 1988: 18). All these countries speak English which is also the language spoken in American films. So American films find an easily captive market in these countries and put local productions into a state of distress. Dermody and Jacka (1988: 20) describe the Australian experience as being 'fixed in a series of positions of radically unequal economic and cultural exchange with Britain and the United States which we cannot afford to change for something else'. And the Canadian situation is worse due to its closeness to America. The country 'concentrated on developing Hollywood North, fearful that it has no special 'otherness' to sell...and the worst effects of 'Canadianisation', or the process by which a revived Canadian National Cinema became, with the exception of the French-Canadian preserve, an appendage of Hollywood, providing profitable financial deals and snow scenes' (Dermody and Jacka, 1988: 37).

What binds the British, Australian, Canadian and, to some extent, New Zealand film industries to that of America is not just the language. The economic domination of American film distribution and exhibition outlets has become a major issue and a stumbling block for the development of

their own national cinemas. The similarity of language used in their films does not mean an easy access to the American market; in fact, for them to capture their own market is already a tough battle with distributors and exhibitors who favour the imported American products. In 1979, for example, several Australian films were released together in the middle of the year; all sank without trace. This led to renewed bitterness from producers against distributors and exhibitors, who were accused of dumping Australian films at the lowest point of the cinema-going year (Dermody and Jacka, 1987: 180-181).

Comparatively, in economic and industrial terms, the Australian, British and Canadian film industries are small, and the same applies to Asian countries, except Japan, India and Hong Kong. The film industry in Australia and South East Asian countries is not only small, but, in Dermody and Jacka's terms (1987: 23), it is also uncertain, insecure, seasonal, fragmented, artisanal, and entrepreneurial. Australia, for example, has a population size of about 17 million, which is similar to Malaysia's. In Australia there are 35 million cinema admissions each year and the annual box office is $100 million (Dermody and Jacka, 1987: 161). The Australian home market is definitely much bigger than the Malaysian cinema attendance of only one million in the 1980s (Lent, 1990: 195). Australian film budgets are five to ten times higher than an average Malaysian feature film budget of only M$350,000. But Australia being an English-speaking country was and is an extremely significant market for foreign, especially American films. Ninety percent of the annual box office is American market share. Barrett Hodsdon (1983: 295, 300) reported that:

> Australia was the eighth largest source of revenue to the United States in absolute terms, and the highest in per capita terms. In the year 1979/80 the annual Australian box office was $247 million, of which 92% went to films from the United States.

This is yet another example of the American control of the movie money in foreign countries. Earlier, we saw how American films dominated France, Germany, Holland and Asian countries. It is, therefore, difficult for a non-American national cinema to compete economically for both the home and foreign markets. It would be necessary to spend large sums of money in order to attract American distributors and exhibitors so that they themselves could earn a huge profit. Only Hong Kong and Japan could compete on an equal footing with the American film industry. Others need help even to survive locally. Hong Kong and Japan managed to compete with the Hollywood tradition of film-making by joining forces with the American production and distribution companies. Hong Kong invested large sums of money in the joint production of martial arts films in the seventies and eighties. Films, like **Enter the Dragon** with the late Bruce Lee in the lead role, were made with Warner Brothers. Other successful Hong Kong's co-productions with America were **Battle Creek Brawl** (1980) and **Cannonball Run** (1981). The two Hong Kong's movie tycoons, Sir Run Run Shaw of the Shaw Brothers and Raymond Chow of Golden Harvest must have found it hard to compete directly with American producers so they both decided to join them and share the profit and fame together.

In the case of Japan, the competition worked on a slightly different level. Exhausted American film-producing companies in need of financial help got

backing from Japan. Japan began to increase its stake in the American recession-troubled companies and thereby controlled the distribution and exhibition rights of the film products. Japan also began to take control of artistic rights slowly but steadily in American, Canadian and German productions. **Iron Maze,** (1990) a film about the Japan-US economic dispute with a story set in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was directed by a Japanese director, Hiroaki Yoshida. **The Pianist** a Canadian production directed by Claude Gagnon, had a Japanese actor, Eiji Okuda in the lead role, while **Until the End of the World**, the latest film by German director Wim Wenders, was largely financed by Sony Corporation of Japan.

Japan and Hong Kong have the money not only to support their own national film industry but also to control other people's production and distribution rights. But countries, regardless of where they are in the world, which only have a small film industry need state support. Brian Winston once talked to John Hinde (1981: 106) in London and said:

> It is important for Britain, Holland, Australia, whatever, to have a film industry; and it's important that some sort of State support be given to that film industry, so that it can build up a body of work - build up its traditions - give proper employment to the people...We have to do it because the film industry in a small nation now is really like the State Railways. Today you've got to take over the Railways - capitalists don't want to run them any more.

Winston's comparison of a small nation's film industry to that of the state railway is interesting; National Cinema produced by film-makers from a

small nation is not a profitable venture. But a National Cinema that can only come out through a heavily-subsidised film industry is important in fulfilling the critical cultural role. John Hinde (1981: 26-27) elaborates that film has, or can have, an essential relation to national culture and history. Hinde also maintains a powerful sense of the specificity of audiences, and the crucial role of the domestic audience as a 'feedback loop' that nourishes and gives life to a National Cinema. He calls the domestic audience (in the rare instance of a genuine National Cinema) a 'seminal audience'. Dermody and Jacka (1987, 34) further elaborate Hinde's propositions:

> From his observations, the classical seminal audience is drawn from a population which has been culturally or economically displaced, and which needs mediating fictions to help recover lost or alienated traditions, social equilibrium, histories of its own. The true national cinema prospers in a feedback loop with its loyal, sustaining audience; a loop so strong that audience and cinema 'seem to have been waiting for each other'. Possible past and present national cinemas, in these terms, would include the American cinema in its early and classical phases, the present-day cinema of Hong Kong, the Hindi cinema, perhaps Italian cinema in its post-war, neo-realist phase.

A loyal and sustaining audience is hard to come by. An audience's receptive capacity has been distorted with time and technology. The culturally or economically displaced audience has little time to recover its lost traditions, history, self-pride or even national identity in today's fast and technologically-aided life style. Film audiences everywhere in the world are the same. except in some remote parts of the Third World. There exist two

notions about the receptive capacity of film audiences world-wide and film audiences in the Third world. Producers, distributors and exhibitors believe that the majority of film audiences want to be entertained with American films of the popular type, while some film directors or the exponents of national cinema believe that socially and politically conscious films are gaining support from audiences. Wajda, for example, believes that, 'In Poland, every truthful political film is also commercially successful' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 316). Wajda also believes that, '...if you wish to say something political, film is the best means of doing so' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 317). The situation in Brazil is also encouraging. Rocha says that reactionary films made by his group of *Cinema Novo* film-makers 'are very popular in Brazil, Africa and in the third world in general' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 12).

What Wajda and Rocha say about the success story of national cinema in Poland and Brazil is, of course, very encouraging to other film-makers who prefer to tell the truth about the political and social problems in their countries through films. But the same situation may not exist in their countries due to the different educational and social backgrounds of the film audiences. A succesful Polish political film may not be the same in its content, approach or style as those in Thailand or Indonesia. Therefore, the success story will have to be examined individually according to the political climate and social conditions of a particular country. Apart from this, the degree of American film dominance will also have to be considered.

Jane Fonda, who has always been critical of American foreign policy, refused to believe that this kind of easy living exists. She once spoke against Hollywood's policy, '...I disagree with the thinking in Hollywood on

the part of producers that people don't want to think, that they only want to be entertained. People want to be led out of the morass or at least to have a little help in clearing away the confusion...People who have a social vision haven't found a way to express it in a mass language. There's so much rhetoric and so much sectarianism. It gets manifested in the cultural field and I think that's why culture gets left in the hands of the entertainers' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 111). Film as a cultural manifestation of the people has to be taken seriously and not just left in the hands of entertainers to be exploited in various imported sub-culture types to attract the young and easy-going film-goers to enjoy what are termed as popular entertainments, which include the formula-type films.

While cinema is an art, it is also an industry. As an industry, large-scale corporations manufacture films as a popular form of entertainment. But V.F. Perkins (1972: 161) makes a distinction between 'popular' cinema and 'minority' movie. He says, 'The most popular film reaches only a minority of the public; the specialized picture requires a very large audience...The difference between the popular and the specialized audiences is the difference between a huge minority and a large one'. What is a specialized picture? Are they the various Hollywood genres like the Biblical spectacles or the epics, horror, science fiction, gangsters and the Western? Cinema audiences in the early days loved film 'for itself and what it meant to them...In the place of the old film-goer there arose a new type of audience, a vacant-minded, empty-headed public, who flocked to sensations, who thrilled to sexual vulgarity, and who would go anywhere and pay anything to see indecent situations riskily handled on the screen' (Rotha, 1949: 129). It was the Hollywood cinema that created this category of audience world-wide. Asian cinema in the beginning was never polluted with such

indecency, even though genres like the musicals, melodramas and comedies did influence the local productions. But presently the same American-style audience exists in Asian countries. As for South East Asian countries, the Hollywood influence not only comes directly, but also through films from India and Hong Kong, which at first were modelled on Hollywood indecency. According to Perkins (1972: 162), the various Hollywood genres '...survives, particularly, in the notion that the cinema offers two distinct phenomena, one, important, called art, and the other, trivial, known as entertainment. In its crudest form it amounts to the belief that the quality of a film is inversely proportional to the size of its audience'.

Roger Manvell (1948: 121) says, 'The creative cinema of America was destroyed by the need to please continuously the demands of an international audience of a low quality of emotional understanding'. This is hardly true. Blaming the audience should be the last thing a creative film-maker would do. It was actually Hollywood which destroyed international audience demand for good creative cinema. It is Hollywood that tries very hard to capture the world market with films that have very little creativity from the aspect of a human development towards a healthy mind and an objective way of thinking.

The film industry is just like any other business venture. In order to capture the market and make a profit, the people involved will have to think of marketing strategies and promotion gimmicks; they will need to succumb to the needs of the common people and not the select group. To this group of people films are meant to entertain and to make the cost worthwhile for the paying crowds. Since America started to develop the industry, turning it into giant organisations and corporations, profit-making

has always been the main motive and priority. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that people in the business care about the business; people outside care about films (Kirschner, 1971: 248). Along the way there have been a number of film-makers who managed to balance the artistic and the commercial appeal of their films. Today Western countries produce about 70 per cent of all the films and television programmes shown in Africa, Latin America and Asia. And Hollywood follows the mass audience and the mass audience follows Hollywood; there is no leader, and when the bad is followed by the worst, even the bad seems good (Kirschner, 1971: 215).

Public demand and consumption is determined by economic factors. Cinemas screening imported foreign films which have been crowd-pullers will definitely not stop for the sake of a locally produced film, unless there is a regulation forbidding them to prolong the screening of imported products or a ruling that local films have to be screened for certain number of days in a month. Indonesia has successfully exercised a quota restriction on foreign films in order to protect its own film industry. In 1969, for example, a US $540 fee was levied on each imported film, and in 1973, a quota restriction on foreign films was 700 titles, followed by 500 in 1974 and lowered by 100 each year until 1978, after which the Government would allow in only selected films (Lent, 1990: 206). Only by such a ruling, can a local National Cinema be established and supported by a local audience. Local film-makers will also have come out with films of a substantial standard to satisfy the demand of the local audience. This means not ignoring the commercial aspects and entertainment values altogether. Some kind of a compromise is necessary. Fact and fiction as film substance can be blended together in order for truth not to be too ugly or too bitter to swallow. A kind of a middle cinema is necessary as a trademark

for a local National Cinema. And in this case a National Cinema needs to consider certain characteristics of a popular cinema. To be popular means to appeal to a mass, national audience. In order to do so, Monaco (1976: 74-75) suggests that film-makers of a particular country develop standardized, national types of films, hence, the advent of one genre of film in a particular country that found no counterpart in another.

In establishing a National Cinema a film-maker will have to ask himself several questions such as what is the relationship between cinema and national identity? Certain social aspects of a country and its people need to be clearly identified so that the issues and characterisation will be in line with the country's identity. Another simple yet complex question is to ask what role cinema plays in the construction of nationhood. This is most important for a country with a multi-racial population like Malaysia. Cinema will have to give a true picture of the various ethnic groups, while at the same time maintaining a balance so as not to offend sensitivities about differing customs and religions. Sensitive issues will have to be examined in a positive manner in order to contribute towards national integrity and solidarity.

Directors seldom spend money to make films. No matter how beautiful his film idea is, he still needs the support of a producer, and no producer would want to spend money without first weighing the idea to see if the film could be profitable. Given a choice, directors of the 'new wave' era in Asia would love to work on the projects closest to their hearts. But money, time and energy would have to be sacrificed if directors were to have the freedom to choose the subject-matter or film materials which they preferred. Since film-making is not just an expensive hobby of the rich, the poor director will

have to reach some compromise in order to be able to do his job. A kind of a middle cinema is necessary to keep both parties happy. Middle cinema is a marriage of art and commercial cinema; at its best it could certainly be regarded as National Cinema. This has happened in India. New wave directors working on a more realistic subject-matter with well-trained actors have come out with superb cinema that blends the two extremes of art and commercialism. The help and understanding of the Indian National Film Develoment Corporation has made this kind of venture possible, achieving great success, both locally and abroad.

The National Film Development Corporation of India is a good example of how a government can help film-makers in establishing national cinema. The corporation was organised in 1980, amalgamating two earlier institutions - the Film Finance Corporation and the Film Export Corporation. According to Lent (1990: 237), the Indian government initially set up the NFDC as a tool to develop 'good cinema' as opposed to commercial fare. A corporation such as this needs careful planning and total involvement. The Indian NFDC accomplishes just that. It encourages good scriptwriting by holding national competitions and helps produce the chosen few films, either by co-financing or fully financing them. In the less than nine years since its inception, NFDC has co-financed more than 200 feature films and some documentaries. Its productions include Satyajit Ray's **Ghare Bhaire** (1985) and **Ganashatru** (1989), and many other award winners, such as Ketan Mehta's **Mirch Masala** (1988) and Utpalendu Chakravorty's **Debshishu** produced in 1987 (Lent, 1990; 237).

India's NFDC has also become involved in the international co-production of features and television programmes, most notably **Ghandi** (1984) and

Salaam Bombay (1988), both of which brought many prestigious awards. **Salaam Bombay** directed by Mira Nair, won the famed *Camera d'Or* at Cannes in 1988. The film is a good example of an open and truthful work by an inspiring new wave director. It was Nair's debut film about street kids in Bombay, where social problems concerning child labour and prostitution have become a major national crisis.

1.10 National Cinema and its limit

According to Dickinson and Street (1985: 1), Film is today one of the most widely used means for the amusement of the public at large. It is also undoubtedly a most important factor in the education of all classes of the community, in the spread of national culture and in presenting ideas and customs to the world. Its potential, moreover, in shaping the ideas of the very large number of people to whom it appeals are almost unlimited. The propaganda value of film cannot be over-emphasised.

This fact sums up both notions of film as entertainment and film as a national forum. But, as we have seen in this discussion, it is impossible to gear all film production into a healthy culture by incorporating national issues and crises as the main substance. While film is an art, its commercial characteristic as a commodity is always being exploited to the fullest.

We have discussed how a National Cinema can develop into an industry which, when it is capable of supporting itself and becoming a big business able to compete with the multi-national companies of the industrialised country, then no longer cares about its identity as a national product. A

national cinema is only of great concern to small nations which are hard-pressed by cultural imperialism and first world domination. Once in a while, we come across a national cinema like Ray's **Pather Panchali** or de Sica's **Bicycle Thief** and the world applauds their success at film festivals or in the art cinema circuit, but the focus of attention soon changes to such flicks as **Saturday Night Fever**, **Close Encounter** or **Rambo: First Blood**. So, it is always a struggle between entertainment and education. Film, which has long been established as a medium of entertainment, would not yield easily to the needs of a handful socially-concious film-makers trying to reach the majority audience with national cinema which tries to discuss the realities of life.

It was the success of a few Asian films from India and Japan at foreign film festivals in the late 50s and early 60s that established the kind of cinema called National Cinema. Today Japan has gone multi-national in its film production and distributions, and India has all the while been comfortable with her own large domestic market. It is now left to the smaller countries of Africa, Latin America and South East Asia to go on with the struggle of establishing their national cinemas that need not only wider exposure but also the support and protection of their nation states in order to survive. National cinemas may not be successful as an export commodity but on the aesthetic level they are certainly a major means of inter-cultural discussion that can establish models for forms, content, relations with audiences, the nature of popular culture, and the social and political role of cinema.

No matter what names are given to the works of young film-makers who make films about the life and struggle of their people, a work could be

termed as 'National Cinema' as long as it stays away from the old stereotype and cliches of the Hollywood traditions. Whatever name is given, National Cinema is a phenomeneon in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The most important thing is to be truthful to everyone concerned and not to leap on to popular or trendy platforms just to capitalise on them to create something which is untrue and artificial. To be realistic may not necessarily be political or radical in nature. A cinema of opposition may not fit into certain standards to qualify as a cinema that could appeal to majority audience. Asia's audiences in the 80s are no longer stupid and they no longer take things for granted. The Malaysian audience, for example, is more sensitive to good films with identifiable characters and believable story-lines.

CHAPTER II

EARLY FILM CULTURE IN MALAYA AND SINGAPORE

2.1 A Historical Account

The era of western colonialism and the influence of western civilisation began with the Portuguese who split the Malay feudal political system in Malacca in 1511. However, in spite of its domination of more than one hundred years, Portuguese influence on Malay society and its culture was minimal. When the Portuguese were replaced by the Dutch in 1641, the former had left only a few new words in the Malay vocabulary and a small Portuguese community in Malacca (Syed Husin Ali, 1981; 12). The Dutch likewise did not leave behind many traces. Historically, the main area of Dutch influence was in Indonesia; in the Malay Peninsula the strongest influence came from the British.

The initial forward movement of the British in Malaya resulted in the acquisition of Penang in 1786 (Comber, 1983; 8). The island together with what became known as Province Wellesley was sold by the Sultan of Kedah to the East India Company for only $10,000! (Syed Husin Ali, 1983; 8). The British occupied Singapore in 1819 and took over Malacca from the Dutch in 1824. Penang and Malacca together with Singapore formed what was known as the Straits Settlements. This territory comprised the British colony in Malaya until the 1870s when further large-scale

advances were made (Comber, 1983; 8). By 1896 the British had established the Residential system in the states of Perak, Selangor, Sungai Ujong, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang which were then known as the Federated Malay States. Not long afterwards, the five remaining states of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, Trengganu and Johore were induced to accept British Advisers and became known as the Unfederated Malay States. The FMS, UMS and the Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Malacca made up what was known as British Malaya (Comber, 1983; 10).[2]

The first cinema, the *Alhambra*, was built in Singapore in 1907 and was owned by an Englishman by the name of Willis (Utusan Melayu; August 5, 1908). The cinema began to screen silent movies, most of which came from America. According to George Bilainkin, (1932; 61) quite a number of Hollywood films were brought to Malaya and Singapore first before they were released in London. (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 144). One of the advertisements which appeared in *Utusan Melayu* on August 5, 1908 reads '...Live movies with funny pictures which is better and clearest in the world. Two shows every night '.

Wayang gelap or 'dark theatre' was a common name given to film shows during the 20s, and it was the most popular entertainment for the urban community in the 20s (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 146). Philip C. Coote, (1923; 24) described it as "...an entertainment popular both with Europeans and Orientals. Every town and villages possess at least one picture place, which is generally crowded. The orientals literally shriek with delight at the pictures and both comedy and tragedy appeal to their taste."

What Coote meant by villages were probably small towns. Because the movies were only popular with urban communities, it is most unlikely that rural villages or *kampungs* in Malaya had what he called 'picture places'. The Malays in the rural areas during the 20s were farmers and fishermen and their only forms of entertainment were the folk or traditional theatres such as **Wayang Kulit, Mak Yong, Menora,** and **Rodat.**[1]

Alongside the silent films of the 20s the people in Malaya were also entertained by various *bangsawan* or Malay opera troupes which were either stationed in big towns or toured the country. Bangsawan was popular especially with the Malays, whereas the urban Chinese during the period patronised the Chinese Opera. In fact, silent films of the 20's were not patronised by the Malays; it was the Europeans and the rich urban Chinese who usually came in groups for a night out. Chin Kee Onn described the days of the silent black and white films in one of the cinemas in Ipoh: "...the total number of people in the hall was easily about a thousand, seventy percent of them Chinese, the rest Europeans, Malays, Indians, Eurasians and others"(1984; 23). The Europeans and the English-educated urban Chinese and Eurasians could understand the English captions that came on the screen but definitely not the Malays. But usually there were synopses printed in various languages (Malay, Chinese and Indian) distributed before the show. That could have been a tactic employed by the movie houses to attract more people to watch the films.

The film audience during this era consisted of people from different social standings. The cinema seats were divided into fourth, third and second class on the ground floor and first and reserved class on the

upstairs gallery and the exclusive boxes at the back of the hall. Chin Kee Onn (1984; 21) described the various social groups and their seating arrangements as follows:

> ..the Europeans, the tuans and the mems, trickling in by twos, to take up the reserved seats. Most of the Europeans wore dark suits and black or white bow-ties, while their ladies wore gowns that almost trailed the floor and they had on their hands white or black gloves, some short, some reaching up to their forearms. Asians with their wives and children also came in, some taking the reserved seats and some the first-class seats and they were all smartly dressed. The wives and daughters of the wealthy Chinese, most of them from rich nyonya families, wore diamond earrings, and many had diamond bracelets and necklaces too... There were also the Malay rajas and their wives and the upper-class Indians and Ceylonese going into the reserved and first-class stalls. The exclusive boxes were slowly filled up by wealthy people and Government VIPs.

People from the upper strata of the society filled up the seats upstairs. Those occupying the ground floor of the cinema were ordinary people from all walks of life. They were the women and children from the *kampungs*, the mining coolies and rubber-tappers from mines and estates within a radius of twelve miles from the town, the petty traders and market-stall holders, and those from the squatters' farms (Chin, 1984; 29).

The great majority of the wealthy people and the high-level government officers came to the movies for various reasons in addition to seeking entertainment for the night. One of the obvious reasons was, of course, to be seen by others in the same stratum of the society or to be seen and get acquainted with people from the higher strata. Others came to meet and talk during the interval, while having a drink together. They were all dressed up for the night and by their choice of clothes wanted to be seen and associated with their equals in the society. On the other hand, the majority of the ordinary lower class people came purely for entertainment. They wanted to be entertained without having to abide by a formal dressing code and without having to pay much money for a seat. From the description of their response to the films, one can conclude that it was this group of people who enjoyed the show most. Kee Onn described the atmosphere in the cinema when the lights were dimmed and the orchestra ended its signature tune, "...the street boys and the scallywags in the fourth class clapped and shouted with glee and filled the air with piercing whistle notes, eloquent expressions of their impatience" (1984; 25). And as the response to a comedy parts starring Harold Lloyd, "...thunderous clapping broke out in the third and fourth class sections to greet the popular comedian, and the same thing happened whenever gags, tomfoolery, stupid situations and humorous incidents came on the screen" (1984; 25).

The atmosphere in the cinemas during screenings was always chaotic. Patrons came not just to watch movies but also to buy food especially during the interval. Chin Kee Onn (1984; 27) gives a description of the Oriental Star cinema in Ipoh during the 20s:

> On the groundfloor, the scene was more animated as there was a ceaseless coming and going of people. While streams of adults and boys and children went to the latrines, others rushed outside the hall to patronise the hawkers of all sorts of foodstuffs, who had set up their stalls in the lane and on the roadsides near the theatre. There were vendors of iced-water sweetened with red syrup; sweet-meats and preserved fruit, all skewered on short lengths of coconut frond ribs; ice-cream, *satay* (sliced marinated meat skewered on tiny sticks, grilled and served with thick pungent curry, raw onions and cucumber); India *popia,* a hotly-spiced flour and vegetable roll; Indian mee (macaroni with bean sprouts fried or boiled and served with curried gravy); *kacang putih* (round yellow beans roasted in sand); *agar-agar,* a cooked seaweed; fried bananas, yams, and sweet potatoes; boiled or roasted groundnuts; almond tea, noodles and *pakor-chock* (a light broth) and other varieties of snacks. Each item was cheap and tasty, and business was brisk and hectic, too brief for the hawkers' liking.

The atmosphere changed as time went by. Today modern cinemas in Malaysian towns have candy bars selling canned drink, ice-creams, well-packed peanuts, sweets and chocolates and popcorn. Hawkers selling similar foodstuffs are still around especially in cinema halls specialising in screening Chinese films in Chinese dominated areas or townships. The Malaysian cinema-goers still keep the habit of watching films and eating at the same time. That is one reason why most

cinemas are filthy. Cinemas in Malaysia are similar to those in Hong Kong and Taipei. In Hong Kong the cinema is a favourite public site for a picnic. You get to participate in an event that's meant for the great outdoors but done indoors '...there's spitting and patrons put their feet up on the seats and rustle paper bags and munch audibly their hamburgers, chicken legs and assorted confectionery. There's also the chatter ' (Tobias, 1982; 7).

Cinemas in the 20s were normally equipped with a single projector which means that after every reel there was a break of a minute or so when the dim lights came on and the operator and his assistants in the projection room worked hurriedly to remove the spent spool and to put on the next one. They had to be quick at the job, for if they fumbled beyond a minute and a half, protests would break out from the lower class crowd in the form of rude shouts, catcalls and sharp whistling (Chin, 1984; 26). This particular group really wanted their money's worth whenever they were in the cinemas. Their applause and bursts of laughter proved that they immensely enjoyed both the humorous and the fighting sequences in the films.

According to Wan Abdul Kadir, (1988; 148) even though films or movies were popular with the urban community, the question of morals was always being considered. Asian women, especially, found that the shameless hugging and kissing scenes were completely immoral and demoralising (Chin, 1984; 20). Even at an early stage there was a consciousness of the influence of western culture through films; the permissive life style of the western people as depicted through films was often discussed at length within certain sectors of Malayan society.

Specifically their influence on the Malays was commented on in local newspaper, for example:

> Young girls under parental care are advised not to watch movies because in American films western girls act beside men - it is best that the parents watch the movie first before allowing their daughters to watch them (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 148).

The influence of American films upon the young people of Malaya during the early twenties was fast becoming a trend. They not only followed the life styles but also the fashion, music, dance, behavior, etc. (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 149). The Malays generally were very reserved, shy and quite conservative in their thinking and social outlook. Early American movies however managed to change their life styles especially those of the young generation which 'tends to copy the negative aspects of western civilisation while positive ones are ignored' (Sharuddin Maaruf, 1984; 116). The older generation was worried about the growing influence of western life styles on their children. There were a great number of articles written in periodicals concerning western influence especially on the Malays who were then regarded as being easily-influenced (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 149).

The Straits Settlements were under the direct control of the British and were soon developed into multi-racial commercial centres. It was in these three states that the life styles of the British and the immigrants (Chinese, Indians and Arabs) became more modern than the life style of Malays in other states. Later, Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh developed into commercial centres due to large-scale mining activities. Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Singapore became the centres of business

activities. Entertainment in the forms of *bangsawan* and cinemas began to develop. In the 20s there were already a few cinema halls in Penang. In 1921 there were seven theatres in Penang. In the 30s there were three large cinema halls built in Penang for a population of 300,000 including about 2,000 Europeans (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 147).

In 1936 two new and beautiful cinema halls each with a capacity of about 1,200 were opened in Kuala Lumpur. In Ipoh two popular cinema halls in the late 20's were the Oriental Star and Harima Hall. According to an estimate by Rex Stenvenson, based on the figures after World War I given by Norten Ginsberg and Chester F. Roberts, there were at least 30 to 40 permanent cinema halls and the equivalent number of temporary halls at the end of 1930s (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 144).

Large cinemas operated on average seven days a week or 48 shows in a month. Films were screened only at night until the 1940s. There were two shows nightly, at 7.30 and 9.30 p.m. During the era of silent black and white movies tickets were sold according to class: fourth class was 5 cents and the reserved class 40 cents. When sound movies were introduced, cinemas began screening in the afternoon and the ticket price went up, according to Bilainkin,to $1.50 and $2.00 (1932; 61). Bilainkin may not be right in citing ticket prices during the pre-independance years, for $1.50 to $2.00 is much too expensive for the period when a high school teacher was only paid $70.00 a month and a clerk got $55.00. In 1965 cinema tickets in Ipoh cost 65 cents, $1.00 and $1.40. Ten years later, ticket prices in Penang were 85 cents, $1.50 and $2.00. Ticket prices in the 40s and 50s could have been from 40 cents to $1.00.

Straits Settlement township that grew into a busy port and business district during the 30s was Malacca. Besides being another port and a busy business and administrative centre for the British, Malacca also served as another entertainment centre. During the 20s and 30s there were already four cinema halls in Malacca town. The first to be built was the *Rialto* Cinema in Laksmana Street. Next came the *Capitol*, also on the same street, the *Lido* in Kee Ann Street and the *Oriental* in Tengkerah Road. The exact years in which those cinemas were built are unknown. All four theatres were screening silent black and white American films in the 30s. Ticket prices were said to be from 20 to 80 cents and the majority of the audience were Chinese who lived in and around Malacca town. The Malays from the rural areas around Malacca came occasionally during the festive seasons like *Hari Raya*.

The early silent films in Malacca may not have been as popular as in Singapore. Moreover, the transportation system in Malacca was not as good. People moved about in horse or bullock-drawn carts, rickshaws, or bicycles. Only the rich travelled in private cars of which they were very few during the period.

It was the *Capitol* cinema which became the first to screen sound films in Malacca in the 30s. Soon after, the other halls started to be equipped with sound systems and began to screen sound films. The *Rialto* cinema then changed its name to *Savoy*.

2.2 The Hollywood Film Culture:

Most of the early films brought to and screened in Malaya and Singapore were from Hollywood. Black and white silent movies starring Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin were the most popular with local audiences. With the introduction of sound more dramatic films were brought in and Hollywood stars like James Harlo, Clark Gable, Carol Lombart and others became household names. The influence brought about by the Hollywood star system became obvious when film and entertainment magazines of that period published photographs of Hollywood stars. Some even published them as front and back covers. News about Hollywood as the centre of the film industry, life styles of Hollywood stars, and the migration of Hollywood photographers and stars to Europe were published in local magazines (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 165).

Warta Jenaka, a local Malay daily published in Singapore in the late 30's, provided a special column called "Cinema World" in every issue focusing on the western films and stars (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 166). Another newspaper, *Warta Penang* also provided a column called "Dunia Wayang" (Film World). According to Jamil Sulong almost all newspapers published cinema advertisements in the 30s.

Even though the majority of the early film-goers in Malaya and Singapore were Chinese and European, the Malays were also becoming more interested. Most cinema advertising began to appear in Malay dailies and film titles were translated into Malay. The lower class Malays who could not understand English normally read the synopsies in Malay provided in the newspaper or the cinema programme. The silent films during the early

period were very simple in their narrative structure and one could easily follow the story-line by looking at the action of the characters. This was certainly true with Charlie Chaplin comedies. In Penang the cinema advertisements appeared in *Dewasa, Bumiputera, Bahtera, Sahabat* and *Saudara.* While in Kuala Lumpur, the Malay dailies that publicised films screened in local cinemas were *Majlis, Lembaga Melayu* and *Warta Jenaka.*

The early American and English films from Hollywood and Britain established a foreign film culture not only in Singapore and Malaya but also other Southeast Asian countries. Historically all four countries, Malaya, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines became acquainted with the early films of the west in more or less the same period. Thailand began screening Hollywood silent films in 1927 and the first talkies were screened in 1931 (Ryans, 1988; 192). Philippines came into contact with early films much earlier. The Lumiere cinematograph was first introduced in Manila in 1897 (Vertido, 1988; 128). As for Indonesia we do not exactly know about the introduction of the Lumiere brothers little films or the beginning of Hollywood's early silent films and the early talkies. Both Misbach Y. Biran and Salim Said, two Indonesian film historians do not mention the Lumiere or the Hollywood silent film era. But the talkies were said to have been screened in Indonesia in 1929. Misbach mentioned two titles, **Fox Follies** and **Rainbow Man** (1988; 22).

In Malaya, films were first shown by the British as early as 1898. The first film was actually a newsreel of the **Diamond Anniversary Celebration of Queen Victoria** (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 1). The screening is believed to have been only for British officers because another screening by a

Japanese Cinematography company in 1905 at the Selangor Club was also meant only for members of the club and invited guests, presumably high level British officers, wealthy Chinese merchants and members of the Malay royalty. The films were about the Japanese army in the Chinese war, dancing geisha girls, and the life of the Japanese Emperor; also on the list was **The Great Train Robbery** (Jamil Sulong, 1990: 5). But it was only after the First World War that cinemas began to be built and Hollywood talkies began to dominate the scene. Films brought into the country and screened to the public included **The Reign of Terror, The Girl From Bohemia, Lone Luke, The Exploit of a German from the Deck of U 35** and also Charlie Chaplin's comedies (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 5).

Local film production also started in more or less the same decade in the South East Asian countries of Thailand, Malaya (Singapore), Indonesia and the Phillipines. The first silent Thai film was made in 1927 and the first local talkie was made in 1931 (Ryans, 1988; 193). The film was called **Long Tang** (Going Astray) and was made by the *Taking Motion Picture Co.* It was shown to the public on April 1, 1932 (Ngamsnit, 1993;4). Indonesia's first feature film was made in 1926 (Misbach Y. Biran, 1988; 17). Singapore (at the time part of Malaya) made the first Malay feature film in 1934. The first Tagalog feature film shot entirely with sound was made in 1932 by Nepomuceno called **Punyal Na Ginto,** based on a novel by Antonio Sempio (Guerrero, 1983; 17). [3]

In 1929 there were ten registered companies distributing films from America and Europe, and four Chinese companies which introduced Chinese films (Wan Abdul Kadir, 1988; 169). In addition, a few independent distributors were also buying and importing films (Santokh, 1975; 4).

During that time, there were about 35 permanent theatres in 16 big towns with a total seating capacity of 21,000. Meanwhile there were between 10 and 20 small theatres in smaller towns screening films at certain times of the month according to the economic situation of the local community. Penang and Kuala Lumpur each had four theatres with total seatings of 2,840 and 2,600 respectively; Ipoh and Taiping each had two cinemas.

Singapore became the centre for all kinds of entertainment as well as a business centre in all aspects including those related to show business. Film distributors in Singapore were agents for film production and distribution companies abroad. In 1930 there were five companies or agencies distributing films in Singapore. The Australasian Film (East) Ltd. was an agent for Warner Bros., Tiffany, Columbia, Rayart and Independent Open Market Production. Famous Lasky Film Service Ltd. was the agent for Paramount Pictures. Three more distributing companies in Singapore were Metro-Godwyn Meyer Oriental Ind., Pathe (Malaya) Ltd., and Universal Pictures Corporation (The Singapore and Malayan Directory , 1930).

Singapore became the major film centre. Films imported by major distribution companies were exhibited at the local theatres and later sent to various towns in Malaya. Distribution and exhibition of American and British films in the region became a big success, so much so that more cinemas were built. Some of the major distribution companies built their own cinemas and began to screen their imported films on their own. Australasian Film (East) Ltd., for example, began to build their own chain of cinemas in Singapore and other major towns in Malaya; all their cinemas were called Majestic. Then the Chinese National Film Company

in Penang built cinemas which they called King. By 1932 the number of film distribution companies in Singapore rose to nine. New was Nanking Film Co. which began importing and distributing Chinese films in Singapore. Two years later, three more new companies were established in Singapore, the British Empire (East.) Ltd., Kodak Ltd., and United Artist Corporation. After this, a few more branches of these distribution companies began to open their offices in Kuala Lumpur, Klang and Ipoh.

By 1941, the number of film distribution companies in Singapore alone had doubled compared to that of 1934. Newcomers were the Shaw Brothers Ltd., and three newly established companies importing and distributing Indian films. By then almost all major towns in Singapore and Malaya had at least one cinema hall. Companies distributing American, British and European films now had competition from those importing and distributing Chinese and Indian films. Theatres that belonged to Chinese and Indian distribution companies began to screen their own films and, soon after, film exhibition began to organise itself along ethnic lines. The percentage of films imported and distributed in the region were 5 or 6 percent British, 20 to 30 percent Chinese, and about 60 percent American.

With the introduction of sound films movie houses began to attract bigger audiences. Beside products from Hollywood, there were also films from the Middle East, China and India being brought in and screened in Singapore and Malaya. While the Chinese patronised products from China and Hollywood, the Malays began to develop a special liking for films from the Middle East and India (Hindi). This phenomenon helped to establish the foundation for the Indian-made Malay films of the fifties. The Malay audience during the period readily accepted films with Malay actors made

using the Indian formula by Indian directors. That was how locally produced films of the fifties became merely a direct copy from the Arabian and Indian tales.

The Malays were never involved in the early years of film distribution and exhibition. But local Malay newspapers helped to sell these products to the Malay patrons by publishing articles on films and stars. The Malays were involved in other forms of entertainment but not the film industry. Later on it was also the non-Malays who saw the opportunity of producing Malay films solely for the consumption of the Malay patrons.

Notes:

. *Wayang Kulit* is the Malay shadow play and *Mak Yong* is a drama with song, dance movement and dialogues. Both are popular in the east coast states of Kelantan and Trengganu. *Manora* is another dance-drama which originated from Thailand but is also popular in Kelantan and Kedah, two states bordering Thailand. *Rodat* is song and simple dance movement popular only in Trengganu. Other states in Malaysia are popular with regional performing arts like *Dondang Sayang* in Malacca, *Kuda Kepang* in Johore, *Terinai* and *Gendang Keling* in Perlis and *Boria* in Penang.

2 For a complete history of Malaya during the British administration, see Emerson, 1966; 118 and Ryan, 1971; 136.

3 According to Lent (1990; 152) it was George P. Musser, proprietor of Manila Talkatone, who produced the first 'talkie', **Ang Aswang**, in 1932, but its sound was very poor. Nepomuceno's 1933 movie was technically more advanced.

CHAPTER III

MALAY CINEMA:
HISTORY AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

It is not exactly known when the first Malay film was produced. There has never been a comprehensive study of the local film industry's early history. A few publications date the early thirties as the beginning of Malay cinema in Singapore, but the actual date of the first film production is uncertain. Jamil Sulong, a veteran Malay film director talks about a group of film people from India who came down to Singapore to explore the possibility of producing Malay films around the years 1933-34 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 8). The group was headed by B.S. Rajhans who managed to convince an Indian businessman named S.M. Chisty to produce a film called **Laila Majnun**. The year was 1933.[1]

Laila Majnun was directed by B.S. Rajhans and produced by S.M. Chisty. The production crew was formed by the Indian group brought by Rajhans and probably financed by Chisty who was said to be very interested in performing arts and who maintained a good rapport with actors involved in two popular performing art forms of that era, **Bangsawan**[2] and **Opera**[3], both from Malaya and Indonesia. The idea of filming **Laila Majnun** could have been triggered through his association with some famous stars from

Bangsawan and **Opera** because the film was made with his actor friends playing the lead roles. Pak Suki or Marzuki Nordin[4] (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 8) played the leading role as **Majnun** with Fatimah Jasmin as the leading lady while Tijah, Syed Ali Al-Atass, Shariff Medan, Yem and Saad[5] played supporting roles.

The directorial credit went to B.S. Rajhans, because he had had some film directing experience in India. With **Laila Majnun** Rajhans became the first person to direct a Malay film in Singapore. The film was in fact a remake of an Indian film which was originally taken from a popular love-story of the Arabian tales.[6] Rajhans could have brought the whole idea of the film, indeed the whole script, to Singapore and simply transferred the substance into a film with a Malay cast speaking the Malay language. The script and the film could have been a direct frame by frame translation of Tamil into old bazar Malay with its mixture of Chinese, Indian and Indonesian dialects.

Thus, it is debatable whether **Laila Majnun** was a Malay film at all.[7] The economic, social and ideological aspects of the film were Indian. Only the players were Malay. Thus the product was Malay only in name. In fact it would be true to say that with Rajhans's **Laila Majnun** the Indian cinema, then speaking in about twelve different languages, found another tongue and created yet another group of its movie fans in another country. **Laila Majnun** was very well received by the Malay audience who were fascinated with the appearance of their favourite *bangsawan* stars on celluloid, a new form of entertainment altogether. They were excited to see M. Suki and Fatimah Yasmin dressed in Arabic costumes playing *orang muda* [8] or hero and *seri panggung* [9] or heroine. The fact that the

film was directed, produced and executed by Indians and the story-line copied directly from a foreign source was none of their concern.

Laila Majnun was not the only early film made by foreign experts using Malay *Bangsawan* artistes. **Nelayan**[10] (Fisherman) was made almost at the same time, but there is no information available about the production. According to Zulkifli Ahmad (1973; 4) the film was a tragedy featuring the Malay actor Khairuddin. But other sources state that it was more of a documentary using a Malay fishing village as the background (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 239). Another film shot against the background of Malay society was **Booloo** which according to Zulkifli (1973; 13) was directed by an American. Like **Nelayan**, **Booloo** was also not considered a Malay film even though names like Ratna Asmara and Fred Polin appeared among the cast (Zulkifli Ahmad,1973;13). The substance and presentation were foreign to Malay customs, values and life-style.

The Chisty and Rajhans team established a company called Malay Art Film Production (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14) after the success of **Laila Majnun.** The company's office was situated along Kandahar Street and Chisty's other partners were a Chinese called Chia and an Indian known as Sammy (Salleh Ghani, 1989; 2). Their efforts did not last long. The company and their film-making equipment were later sold to a Chinese businessman who showed his serious approach towards establishing a film-making industry by venturing into the three tiers of operation: production, distribution and exhibition.

The Malay cinema industry became more organised in the hands of the Chinese who further developed it along the Hollywood style of studio-

system. The Indians then became the creative team working as directors, art directors and film editors, while the Chinese took control of the production and post production work handling cameras, lighting equipment, sound recorders as well as film processing, dubbing and mixing. The Malays remained as actors and a few got involved in the production crew.

3.1 The Shaw Brothers

The Shaw family moved to Singapore from Shanghai. Runme Shaw and his younger brother, Run Run Shaw, started a company with an office on Robinson Road, Singapore in the late 20s (Utusan Malaysia, March 5, 1985; 10). The company began to screen Chinese films by renting available community halls before building their own theatres (Utusan Malaysia, March 5, 1985; 10). In 1932 the Shaw Brothers built one cinema in Singapore and one in Kuala Lumpur. It was from Singapore that they spread their wings to major towns in peninsular Malaya, building movie houses in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang. By 1939 the company was already operating a chain of 139 cinema halls in Singapore, Malaya, Java (Indonesia) and Indo-China (Utusan Malaysia, March 5, 1985; 10). During this period the Shaw Brothers began importing Indian and Western films to be screened in their own theatres.

Before becoming engaged in the local production of Malay films, the Shaw Brothers brought films from Indonesia for the Malay movie-goers. Some of the titles best remembered by the old generation interviewed are **Terang Boelan** (Moonlight), **Srigala Item** (The Black Wolf) and **Terpaksa Menikah** (Forced To Marry). **Terang Boelan,** made in 1936, had already achieved extra-ordinary success in Indonesia and later became the first

Indonesian film to become popular with audiences in Singapore and Malaya (Salim Said, 1991; 26). Raden Mokhtar and Roekiah, the male and female leads in **Terang Boelan** were already popular with the Indonesian audience. To the Indonesians, Mokhtar, a man with an ideal physique and taller than the average Indonesian, (Misbach Y.Biran, 1988, 23) was the perfect model for a film actor. And Roekiah, a singer and stage actress, was the most suitable partner in a musical film that used *keroncong* music, a musical form popular among the common folk of that period. **Terang Boelan,** made in 1937, was directed by Albert Balink, who was of Dutch-Indonesian descent (Salim Said, 1989; 186).

The success of **Terang Boelan** and **Alang-Alang** in 1938 (Salim Said, 1982; 43) in Singapore and Malaya gave the Shaw Brothers the idea of producing their own films with Malay actors to cater to the Malay audience. They were very optimistic that with a little extra money and close supervision they could strike the right commercial formula for the Malay cinemas that in return would generate a handsome profit. The equipment they purchased from the Malay Art Film Productions company which was once used by Rajhans and Chisty to make **Laila Majnun** were soon put to good use. The Shaw Brothers also brought additional equipment and technicians from Shanghai. An old warehouse in Singapore's quiet and no-through route, Ampas Road, was turned into a film production studio by the company. Their first production was **Ibu Tiri** (Step-mother), followed by **Mutiara** (Pearls), **Bermadu** (Bigamy) and **Tiga Kekasih** (Three Lovers). All of the films were made in the late thirties and early forties. The studio was in the middle of producing its fifth film **Topeng Shaitan** (The Devil's Mask) when the Second World War broke out and

Malaya was invaded by the Japanese in late 1941. Later both Malaya and Singapore fell under Japanese occupation until 1945.

3.2 Loke Wan Tho and Ho Ah Loke

Loke Wan Tho, a wealthy Chinese, entered the big screen entertainment business as a cinema owner. He started in 1926 by building cinema halls in Ipoh, Perak. Two of his early cinemas were called the Union and the Oriental (New Straits Times, July 17, 1986; 6). In 1935 he built the Cathay cinema in Singapore and two cinemas in Kuala Lumpur called the Pavillion and the Odeon. He later bought some independent cinemas and by 1957 he already had control over 39 cinema halls in Singapore and Malaya (New Straits Times, July 17, 1986; 6).

The company that was established by Loke Wan Tho was called Associated Theatres. During those early years there were two other companies which owned cinemas: one was an independent chain owned by Ong Keng Huat of Penang; and the other was owned by Ho Ah Loke. Loke Wan Tho bought Ong's chain of cinemas and formed another company called International Theatre Limited (New Straits Times, July 17, 1986; 6). Ho Ah Loke sold his cinemas and joined Loke Wan Tho. They formed a company called Loke Theatres Limited and extended their chain of cinemas and bought over those in North Borneo (Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei).

3.3 Tan & Wong Film Company

Besides Chisty, Rajhans and the Shaw brothers, an Indonesian company was also interested in film production in Singapore during the early period. The success of Indonesian films in Singapore could have been the factor that encouraged companies like Tan and Wong to set up their film units there. Indonesian stars were also in great demand by local producers. The early films produced in Singapore were dominated by such stars as Ratna Asmara, Roekiah, Raden Mochtar, Juriah and Mochtar Wijaya. This could have been yet another factor that worked to the advantage of such companies as Tan and Wong.

Tan and Wong Film Company had already established a studio in Java as early as 1928. Tan, whose real name was Tan Koen Yauw established his own company called Tan's Film in 1929 (Salim Said, 1989; 30). Tan's Film brought their film unit to Singapore in the late 30s and made a film called **Menantu Durhaka** (The Rebel Son-in-law). B.S. Rajhans, the pioneer film director who first delivered **Laila Majnun** was given the job of directing the Tan and Wong Film Company's first effort in Singapore. However, the involvement of Tan and Wong in film production in Singapore did not last long. **Menantu Durhaka** was their first and also the last effort, after which they concentrated their film venture back in Indonesia.

3.4 The Japanese Occupation (1942-45)

Topeng Shaitan marked the temporary closure of the Shaw studio in Ampas Road. The Japanese occupied Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia

for a period of more than three years (1942-1945). No Malay film was produced during that period. As well, there were no Indonesian films screened at the local theatres. The Japanese who took over Indonesia from the Dutch in March 1942 also stopped all local film production activities. They then made use of the Dutch studio ANIF or *Algameene Nederlands Indische Film* (Misbach Y. Biran, 1988; 23) and started their own film industry, the *Nippon Eigasha* and held the monopoly. All film studios owned by the Chinese were closed. The Japanese needed help from local talents, so a few Indonesians were called to work in their film production unit. According to Salim Said (1989; 47), among those called to work were Inoe Perbatasari, Raden Arifin and Roestan Soelan Palindih.

The Shaw studio in Singapore was taken over by the Japanese who then formed an organisation under its government propaganda machinery. The organisation brought actors and technicians from Japan and together with local supporting actors and the British prisoners of war, they managed to make two propaganda films, **March to Singapore** and **Marat No Tora.** In Indonesia they made two narrative feature films which were also geared towards propaganda. The films were **Keseberang Berdjoeng** (Fighting Abroad) and **Amat Heiho di Desa** (Amat the Village Heiho) with Indonesian artistes Roekiah, Chatir Harro and Wolly Soetinah (Salim Said, 1989; 47).

The films made at the Singapore studio were shot on location in Malaya. Jamil Sulong remembers that a few scenes in **Marat No Tora** were filmed in Batu Pahat and he witnessed some British prisoners of war working for the Japanese during the shoot (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 9).

A similar situation occurred in the Philippines during the World War II. Film activities were dormant. Exhibition was limited to newsreels, partly because the Japanese believed that '...Philippines movies were too attached to the United States' (Lent, 1990; 154). Actors and technicians were out of a job when local film productions studios were shut down. But according to Lent (1990; 155), many actors and technicians joined the underground movement or turned to the stage.

3.5 The Post-War Period

It took two years after the Japanese left Singapore and Malaya in 1945 for the film business to get re-started. This time it was Chisty and B.S. Rajhans who again teamed up for another venture into film-making. Under the banner of a newly established company called Malayan Arts Production, (Salleh Ghani, 1989; 2) they produced **Seruan Merdeka** (Cry for Independence). Rajhans directed the film with Salleh Ghani as the male lead and Rokiah Hanafi played the female lead. Others in the cast were Syed Ali Al-Attas, Suhara Affandi and Johar Yahya (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14).

Seruan Merdeka was shot in 35mm black and white. The cameraman was Tsing Ming Chin. It took the team more than three months to shoot the film beginning on 15 February 1947 and ending on 23 May 1947 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14). Outdoor scenes were shot all over Singapore and the interiors were shot at Kampung Gelam palace (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14). The film was processed in Singapore and was dubbed into Hindi and sold to a distributor in India (Jamil Sulong, Interview; August 18, 1986). Chisty

and Rajhans must have made the arrangement through their contacts in India to have the film distributed and exhibited there. But the outcome of their effort is not known. No records are available to evaluate the success or failure of the film in India.

Seruan Merdeka could be regarded as the first attempt to inculcate nationalistic elements through cinema. The years after the Japanese occupation were regarded as the early beginnings of Malay nationalism. The British army which took back the administration of the country from the Japanese were not favoured by Malay activist groups who then started calling for the country's independence. Chisty and Rajhans took advantage of the atmosphere and tried to win back the support of the Malay filmgoers by depicting some aspects of life that were close to their aspirations.

The effort was, however, not well received and rewarded. Perhaps the film was too laden with propaganda and the Malay film audience was not ready for such heavy substance discussed in film, which was at the time was seen merely as a form of entertainment. Malayan Arts Production also had problems in exhibiting the film to the general public (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14). Chisty gave up the whole idea of film production and left for India. Rajhans then joined the Shaw Brothers studio as a full-time film director.

The Shaw Brothers studio in Ampas Road started production soon after **Seruan Merdeka** was produced. Rajhans was assigned to direct **Singapura di Waktu Malam** (Singapore by Night) with Chow Chan Kok as the cameraman. The cast included Siput Sarawak, Bachtiar Effendi and Jaafar Wariyo. Most of them were Malay *bangsawan* actors but some

of them were Indonesian (Salim Said, 1989; 185).[11] With the production of **Singapura Di Waktu Malam** the Shaw Brothers established their Ampas Road studio as a company called Malay Film Productions or MFP.

In the same year (1947) Rajhans directed **Cempaka** which was a box-office hit. **Cempaka**'s cast included Salleh Ghani, Kasma Booty, Yem, Maroeti, Suhara Effendi and Jaafar Wariyo (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14). The success of the film was not only due to a good story line but also to the beauty of Kasma Booty in her first appearance as a female lead. The Malay press described her as an actress with a soft and beautiful voice that appealed to whoever saw her in the movie (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14). Kasma was originally an Indonesian born in Medan, Sumatra in 1933. At the age of fourteen she left her village to be in the *sandiwara* troupe called **Rayuan Asmara** led by Jacob Booty and Ahmad C.B (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14). Kasma played the role of a young maiden named Cempaka who became the centre of attraction to young men in her village. Following her successful effort in **Cempaka,** Kasma was given more lead roles in the Shaw Brothers MFP's films directed not only by Rajhans but also by other Indian directors brought in by the studio. The Malay press and entertainment magazines of the period regarded her as the first 'star' in the Malay film world (Jamil Sulong, Interview; August 18, 1986).

Rajhans ended his carrier with the Shaw Brothers MFP studio in 1952 after having directed 18 films, among them **Cinta** (Love), **Pisau Beracun** (Poisonous Knife). **Pisau Beracun** was also well received by the audience due to the presence of Kasma Booty even though the story-line was uninteresting (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14). Rajhans last film was **Yatim**

Piatu (An Orphan) produced in 1952, a tear-jerker with Rokiah, Yusoff Latiff, Saadiah and Harun Omar in the cast.

As well as Rajhans, the Shaw Brothers MFP studio brought in other Indian directors in the late forties and early fifties. They were K.M. Basker, S. Ramanathan, B.N. Rao, V. Girimaji, Phani Majumdar and Diresh Ghosh. MFP's films in the hands of these Indian directors were mostly remakes of Indian films in Malay. Most of the time film scripts were directly translated from Tamil, Hindi or Benggali. The films were Indian in almost every aspect except that the actors and actresses were Malay and spoke the Malay language.

3.6 Companies other than MFP

The lucrative trade of film productions during that period managed to attract a few other wealthy Chinese to establish their own companies competing with those of the Shaw Brothers. Among them were:

3.6.1 Rimau Film Production

Ho Ah Loke[12] who owned a chain of independent cinemas in the late thirties established the film production company called Rimau Film Production in 1951 in Tempinis, Singapore. Rimau Film Production managed to produce three films, **Ramli Ramlah**, **Berbahagia di Singapura** (Love in Singapore) and **Setia** (Loyal). **Ramli Ramlah** was directed by Jaafar Wiryodinomo, a popular stage actor from

Indonesia who introduced Rosini, Ahmad Shah and Tuminah in this film (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 222). **Setia** was directed by an Eurasian, A.C. Simmons, who engaged Ahmad Mahmud, Rosini and M. Amin to play major roles. After **Setia**, Rimau Film Production changed its name to Keris Film Productions.

3.6.2 Keris Film Productions

Keris Film Productions was originally set up by Roomai Noor with financial help from Ho Ah Loke and two other businessmen (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 222). The company's first film was **Nafsu** (Desire). Roomai Noor, who was still under contract with the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions studio, secretly helped the people at Keris Film Productions. Jaafar Wiryodinomo was given the chance to redirect **Berbahagia di Singapura** with Siti Hanim, Rohaya and M. Amin playing major roles. Wiryodinomo then made **Cinta Abadi** (Eternal Love) or **Kembali ke Desa** (Return to the Village) and **Kampung Nelayan** (Fishermen Village), both with Salleh Ghani and Mislia as the male and female leads. Wiryodinomo's efforts were not all satisfactory and some of his films had to be re-shot by Roomai Noor and Shaw Vee Ngok, a nephew of the two brothers, Runme and Run Run Shaw (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 223). Vee Ngok was at that time MFP's manager. He soon left his uncle's film studio and joined Keris Film Productions permanently. Roomai Noor also joined the company openly once he was free of his contract with the Shaw Brothers' studio. He directed his first film, **Adam** for Keris Film Productions in 1954. Other directors who left the Shaw Brothers studio together with the company's

manager, Shaw Vee Ngok, were B.S. Rajhans and L. Krishnan (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 223).

When the two directors left the MFP studio to join Ho Ah Loke's Keris Film Productions, some of the actors made the same move, including Ahmad Mahmud, Mustaffa Maarof, Bakaruddin, Mimi, Maria Menado, Shariff Medan and Noor Lambak (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 223-223).

Keris Film Productions was at its peak when it made the first Malay film in colour. The film was **Buluh Perindu** (Sacred Bamboo) and directed by none other than B.S. Rajhans. The location shooting of the film was done in Kangar, Perlis, the northern state of Malaya (Salleh Ghani, 1989; 3). Playing the lead roles were Rosini, Bakaruddin and Shariff Medan; the supporting roles were played by almost all of the company's artistes (Salleh Ghani, 1989; 3).

3.6.3 Nusantara Film Company

Another Chinese businessman, Hau Chow Meng set up Nusantara Film Company in Tanjung Bali, Singapore in 1951. The company later moved to a building which had originally been a soap factory on a hill at Bukit Timah Road (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 220). Chow Meng, who had once studied drama and film-making in Shanghai, (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 217) was a very ambitious man and tried very hard to compete with the Shaw Brothers MFP studio. Within two years (1951-1952) he managed to produce seven films. He had a close relationship with Zubir Said,[13] a musician and composer, Naz Achnas,[14] a painter with a keen interest in film-making,

and A.R. Tompel, a talented writer and an experienced performer. Tompel, whose real name was Aman Ramli Jaafar, (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 217) was given the chance to direct seven films for the company. Since he was still under contract with the Shaw Brothers MFP, Tompel used the pseudonym Armaya while directing films for Nusantara. His seven films included **Perkahwinan Rahsia** (Secret Marriage) with S. Kadarisman, Eloni Hayat and Rokiah Hanafi playing lead roles; **Norma** came next with Kadarisman partnering Salbiah Harun, supported by Salmah Ismail. Other films by Armaya with the same cast were **Cinta Murni** (Pure Love) and **Sehati Serasa** (One Heart One Feeling). After that he introduced Ratna as Kadarisman's partner in **Sesal Tak Sudah** (Never Ending Regret) supported by Daeng Idris, Salbiah Harun and Salmah Ismail. Armaya's last film with Nusantara was **Seniwati** (Actress) in which he introduced Normadiah in the female lead with Kadarisman, supported by Bakaruddin.

The second director trusted by Chow Meng was Nas Achnas an Indonesian residing in Singapore, who directed **Pelangi** (Rainbow), with Nona Asiah, Ismail Kassim and Salmah Ismail in the cast (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 217), **Pacar Putih** (White Streak) with Kadarisman, Normadiah and Junaidah in the lead roles, and **Dian** (Candle) with Kadarisman, Normadiah and Osman Gumanti.

Hau Chow Meng himself directed two films called **Mencari Jodoh** (Seeking a Life-Partner) and **Budi Mulia** (Good Deeds). Both films were made under the pseudonym of M. Wijaya. **Mencari Jodoh** had Kadarisman, Rahman B. and Daeng Idris as lead players. Both Kadarisman and Rahman appeared again in **Budi Mulia** supported by Daeng Idris.

Nusantara went a step further in their marketing strategies by signing an agreement with a film distributor in Indonesia. For every film produced the distributor was willing to pay $40,000.00. Chow Meng therefore tried to limit each of his film's budgets to not more than thirty thousand dollars thereby clearing profit of ten thousand dollars (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 217).

3.6.4 Maria Menado Film Productions

Maria Menado Film Productions was owned by Maria Menado and her husband Abdul Razak. In the beginning the company was more successful in doing travelling stage shows presenting plays or *sandiwara.*[15] The company tried to produce four films but only two were completed, **Siti Zubaidah** in 1960 and **Raja Bersiong** (King with Fangs) a year later. However, only **Raja Bersiong** managed to get into the cinema circuits.

The main problem faced by Maria's company was similar to those experienced by other small companies. They failed to have their films exhibited through cinema circuits belonging to companies who were also engaged in film productions. Only Ho Ah Loke managed to screen his own films through his limited chain of cinema halls, while other companies had to depend on either the Shaw circuit or those belonging to Loke Wan Tho. But neither were interested in screening local films made by other companies. In the end those companies were left to negotiate the screening of their films with small and uncomfortable independent cinema halls.

All the companies wrapped up their businesses and made no more films. Even Ho Ah Loke later joined up with Loke Wan Tho. In 1953 his Keris Film Productions became Cathay-Keris Productions and moved to bigger and better equipped studios on East Coast Road. In 1959 Chow Meng of Nusantara Film together with a few friends opened up an advertising film company in Kuala Lumpur. His Bukit Timah studio was sold to Baskaran, an Indian film director working with the Shaw Brothers MFP who later quit to establish his own company called Cinecraft dealing with film equipment rentals (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 219).

3.6.5 Cathay-Keris Productions

Cathay-Keris Productions (1953) resulted from the merger of two companies, Cathay Films owned by Loke Wan Tho and Keris Films by Ho Ah Loke. The new and modern Cathay Keris studio at East Coast Road (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 226), Singapore operated under the wing of the parent company Cathay Organisations which owned chains of cinemas in Malaya, Singapore and Borneo.

From 1953 onwards Cathay-Keris was the only competitor to the Shaw Brothers' MFP studio. Both companies were on an equal footing in all aspects of film production, distribution and exhibition. Both the Shaw Brothers' and Cathay Organisation's theatre circuits throughout the country were heavily patronised by the Malays whenever a Malay film was screened.

Cathay-Keris produced an average of ten to twelve films per year. Initially the studio also relied on the works of Indian directors but later gave more chances to Malay actors and film editors to become fully-fledged directors. The studio produced some well-made and memorable films like **Hang Jebat** (1961) directed by Hussein Haniff, a film editor turned director and **Seri Mersing** (1961) directed by Salleh Ghani, a veteran actor who started playing lead roles in the time of B.S. Rajhans's **Seruan Merdeka.** The studio's most popular stars were Nordin Ahmad who played most of the male leading roles and a well-known female star Latifah Omar who played opposite him.

Ho Ah Loke the co-owner of Cathay-Keris studio was the man who really put great effort into supporting high quality films produced by the company. Together with Tom Hodge the studio manager and Hamzah Hussein who handled public relations and information affairs, Ho Ah Loke managed to persuade actors and directors from the Shaw Brothers MFP studio to cross over to his side with higher salary and bonus offers. Actors and actresses like Mariam, Nordin Ahmad, Latifah Omar and Musalmah were once MFP's artistes who left for Ah Loke's Cathay-Keris Studio (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 176). When Ah Loke found out that despite his studio's effort to get the best people in Malay films, the Malay audience still preferred products from the Shaw Brothers MFP, he asked Hamzah to persuade P. Ramlee, the Shaw Brothers MFP's golden boy to cross over to Cathay-Keris. Hamzah made the deal through Musalmah who then acted as Ramlee's agent. Ramlee agreed and almost left MFP but Run Run Shaw came to know about his intention and immediately offered him a much higher payment for each film he directed for the studio (Hamzah Hussein, Interview; August 16, 1986).

Within a twenty year period (1953-1973) Cathay-Keris studio produced a total of 122 Malay films on various themes and types directed by Eurasian, Chinese, Indian and Malay directors. The studio closed down in 1973 after completing its last production **Hati Batu** (Heart of Stone) directed by M. Amin.

Notes

1 *Kata Aluan* (Foreword) by Mohd Adib bin Haji Mohd Adam dated January 25, 1983, in Baharuddin Latiff, 1983, and Zulkifli Haji Ahmad, 1973; 4. According to Zulkifli the first Malay film made was **Nelayan** in 1938, but veteran artistes related to the early days of the industry claimed that **Laila Majnun** was made in 1935 or 1938.

2 *Bangsawan* was a popular performing art form of the pre-war period which originated from*Wayang Parsi* (Persian stage-play) brought to Penang by Indian traders of the early 30s. A few old *bangsawan* groups still exist in Kuala Lumpur and Alor Star today. They perform a few times a year during festivals and celebrations.

3 Opera in Malaya was actually a simplified version of the Western art form donein Malay comprising of songs, dance and drama.

4 Marzuki died in Kuala Lumpur in 1984.

5 Zulkifli named Syed Ali Al-Atas, Suki and Fatimah Jasmin as lead players in **Laila Majnun** while Jamil Sulong mentioned them together with another male actor Saad. Mohd Adib in his foreword for Baharuddin Latiff's book mentioned Shariff Medan, Miss Tijah, Syed Al-Atas and Yem. Copies of the film are not available for confirmation.

6 **Laila Majnun** was taken from one of the *bangsawan* popular stories which was originally taken from Arabian tales. This "Indian-in-Malay-Garb" art was in line with *Bangsawan* traditions of borrowing stories from the Indians, the Arabs and the English. **Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Merchant of Venice** were among Shakespeare works appearing on Malay Bangsawan stages together with tales from the Arabian world and the Indian epics.

7 Since the print is untraceable, it is difficult to determine the form and content of the film in relation to Malay customs and traditions.

8 The hero or protagonist in the early Malay *bangsawan* was known as 'orang muda' (young man). Later on he became a stock character for the art form. The same traditions were retained by the audience when *bangsawan* lead actors appeared in films.

9 The leading lady of the *bangsawan,* also known as primadona. The 'seri panggong' is normally the main attraction for a particular *bangsawan* group. She would also appear in the extra-turn as the lead dancer and singer and the audience, mainly males will shower her with money and cigarettes. During the heyday of *bangsawan* a *Seri Panggong* was considered a hot property. Managers who could offer better pay would try to persuade a popular *seri panggong* to join his company. In some cases a *seri panggong* would be either married to the*Orang Muda* or the company's manager. According to Zulkifli Haji Ahmad, 1973; 11, some *Seri Panggong* received gifts and money from aristocrats and royals. Some of them were either married to members of the royalty or became their mistresses.

10 The print is unavailable.

11 The Indonesian stage actors usually belong to *sandiwara* troupe performing in Singapore, Malacca and other towns in Johore. See also Salim Said, 1989; 185:

Bachtiar Affendi began his film career as an actor in 1930 with Tan's Film and later became an assistant director. In 1931 he directed **Nyai Dasima**. In 1935 he followed Andjar Asmara with his *sandiwara* troupe which came and settled in Malacca in 1945. He went to Singapore and acted in films and in 1950 went back to Indonesia. He then directed two films: **Djiwa Pemuda** (1951) and **Antara Tugas dan Tjinta** (1954).

12 Jamil Sulong, 1990; 222: According to Jamil, Ho Ah Loke was born in British Guinea on May 3, 1901 and studied at Hong Kong University. Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 176: wrote that Ah Loke was born in Jamaica. Ah Loke died on September 16, 1982 in Kuala Lumpur.

13 Zubir Said was the composer of Singapore's National Anthem "Majulah Singapura". He died in Singapore in 1987.

14 Naz Achnas is an Indonesian citizen who stayed in Singapore during thise period. He is now living in Jakarta with his family.

15 *Sandiwara* is a stage drama. The term was originally used by travelling Indonesian troupes in the 30s and 40s.

CHAPTER IV

THE STUDIO ERA

4.1 The Malay Film Productions Studio

The film studios operated by the Shaw Brothers, Malay Film Productions, (MFP) were no more than a few blocks of timber buildings which were believed to be a godown originally (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 31). They were situated at No. 8, Ampas Road, a tributary of Balestiar Road, Singapore in an area covering only about an acre. The place was chosen because of its quiet surroundings. Ampas Road itself was a no-through road, so there were not many passing vehicles except those belonging to the studio's staff coming to work in the morning.

Apart from the studio blocks, there was a double storey bungalow which was used as the headquarters. On the ground floor were the Manager's office, the preview room, a film-processing room and rooms occupied by the Shaw family. The upper floor housed the dance rehearsal room, script-writers' pool room, an editing room and the directors' office. The old bungalow was demolished after a few years and a new building was erected (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 59).

There were altogether three studio blocks each measuring about 40 x 60 feet (Jamil Sulong, Interview; August 18, 1986). Their height was sufficient

to have lights suspended and focussed as well as to accommodate various set pieces according to the needs of each particular scene shot. 35mm Mitchell cameras were used and sound was recorded direct. Both interior and exterior scenes were filmed in the studios, except for those bridging shots that required an actual location like panoramic shots of the city, river vistas or seascapes.

The grounds around the studio buildings were also used for filming. Set pieces depicting the palaces of Malay Sultans, Malay wooden houses in a village area, market stalls, paddy-fields, a garden with ponds, a martial arts courtyard and small-town street shops were built and used as background. Those set pieces were modified for different films. The man responsible for designing set pieces for the studio was A.V. Bapat, (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 35) a Gujerati from India, a gifted artist who also designed and painted film posters and backdrops as well as doing the character make-up. In set designing and construction Bapat was helped by a team of carpenters salaried by the studio.

Productions were handled by three different units working on three different films and each unit took about a month to complete shooting. Since film processing, grading, printing and sub-titling were in-house efforts, a film was normally made available for exhibition on the cinema circuits three months after its first day of shooting. MFP managed to produce an average of six to eight films a year.

A detailed view of the MFP's studio, both interior and exterior can be seen in a comedy film **Seniman Bujang Lapuk** (The Old Bachelor Actors) directed by the late P. Ramlee. The film tells a story of three penniless

young men undergoing a screen-test at the studio. The film contains scenes showing them in the manager's office, the make-up room and when the three face the camera in one of the studios. Other scenes show them walking around the studio compound and having a coffee break at the stall. **Seniman Bujang Lapuk** is an interesting and humorous account of bachelor life during the fifties and the dreams and inspiration in seeking a glamorous life as a film star in a big city. The film also details the process of indoor film shooting with the three would-be-actors not knowing that the actors on the set are performing in front of a camera.

MFP's management set up rules and regulations to ensure the smooth running of the film production work. The main objective of the management was to produce films as quickly as possible with a minimal budget. The studios were equipped with all the indoor and outdoor set pieces so as to minimise actual location shooting. Directors were greatly discouraged from taking their unit away from the studio. Location shooting was allowed only when it was calculated to be too expensive to have sets built in the studio. Even so, the permissible distance allowed for filming was only a 30 miles (Jamil Sulong, Interview; August 18, 1986) radius from the studio. The management was also strict on the usage of filmstock. Each director was always reminded not to use more than 30,000 feet (Jamil Sulong, Interview; August 18, 1986) of raw stock for each production.

4.2 The Cathay-Keris Studio

The Cathay-Keris Studio in East Coast Road was more relaxed in its production regulations. Tom Hodge the studio's production manager demanded a rather different visual style and look for the company's films

(Hamzah Hussein, Interview; August 16, 1986). Background authenticity and realistic set pieces were called for each time a film underwent a pre-production meeting. In order to get what the studio was looking for more freedom in location shooting was exercised. While MFP's films excelled in their artistic studio lighting and gigantic set pieces, Cathay-Keris spent more money bringing their productions unit outside the studio and thereby giving their pictures a different trade-mark altogether. Films by the late Hussein Haniff, **Hang Jebat** and **Jiran Sekampung** (Neighbours) both produced in 1961 and **Seri Mersing** by the late Salleh Ghani, showed excellent use of actual location, in villages, on the sea-side and in thick jungle areas.

4.3 The Artistes and Production Staff

Film-making in the late thirties and early forties in Singapore can be regarded as a trial and error stage. The Indian businessman Chisty and his friend B.S. Rajhans, the Shaw Brothers Runme and Run Run, and Ho Ah Loke were actually trying their luck when they persuaded Malay *bangsawan* artistes to act in front of the camera. Little did they realise that they would soon be investing their money and starting an industry that would turn out to be a highly profitable venture. The early *bangsawan* artistes turned movie-stars were fascinated so much by the new medium that most of them quit their earlier profession as stage actors and sacrificed everything for the film medium.[1] The early Malay films took the form of moving photographs of stage plays. *Bangsawan* stories as performed on stage were recorded on camera. The stage artistes were excited because for the first time they were able to see themselves in action. As more Indian directors with some basic knowledge of cinematic

techniques were employed, the straight-forward recording of the *bangsawan* stories began to be modified to suit the new medium.

When companies began to set up studios in the early fifties, entrepreneurs like the Shaw Brothers, Loke Wan Tho and Ho Ah Loke were already heavily involved in the Malay film trade. They definitely wanted some guarantee of the return of their money plus a handsome profit. So the artistes and the production staff were asked to sign a contract and were salaried. Not only that, their welfare was also taken care of by the companies. Artistes were given quarters to stay in with their families. In the case of MFP, the housing area for the artistes was specifically planned to be within walking distance of the studios so as to make sure they always reached the studio for shooting at the specified hour. The artistes' quarters were situated at Boon Teck Road (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 63).

The Cathay-Keris company was more flexible in its housing regulations. According to Hamzah Hussein (Interview; August 16, 1986), the former Cathay-Keris studio's Information and Publicity Officer, artistes under the studio's contract were allowed to choose their own place to stay. Top stars like Latiffah Omar and Nordin Ahmad stayed in bungalow houses of their choice. The company paid the rental as well as electricity and water bills. Thus in that aspect Cathay-Keris artistes were better off as compared to those working for the MFP studio.

Salary scales for artistes varied according to their film roles. Those playing the lead role or hero (male) and heroine (female) were paid between M$430 - M$610 a month and they would also get a bonus of M$480- M$680 for each picture completed (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 22). Artistes in supporting roles

were paid between M$230- M$330 a month and the picture bonus for them would be from M$150- M$200 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 130). Female artistes were paid less than their male counterparts because they normally worked for fewer days in a month and some had to undergo a confinement period after giving birth. Out of their monthly salary fifteen dollars were deducted by the management for the rental of their quarters (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 77). Another benefit enjoyed by the artistes were the free passes to the companies' cinema circuits in Singapore to see local and imported films. The idea was to encourage the artistes to learn the craft of acting from their own local artiste friends as well as from world renowned foreign actors (Mariani, Interview; May 1984).

Cathay-Keris paid more or less the same amount of monthly salary to its artistes, but there were cases where artistes crossed over from MFP to Cathay for higher salaries (Jaafar Abdullah, Interview; August 20, 1986).

In the early years, studio film production staff were all non-Malays. The directors were Indian and the technicians were Chinese. It is not known how much were they paid by the management. It was only in the late fifties that some local Malays were recruited as assistant directors, film editors, art directors, still photographers and film processors. Their monthly salaries ranged from M$100- M$320 a month according to the nature of their jobs (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 130).

4.4 Indian Directors - Malay Films

In 1949 Shaw Brothers' MFP company brought in two more Indian film directors from Madras to join B.S. Rajhans. Krishnan was a budding

director of low budget films in Singalese when he applied to join MFP. Krishnan got the job and was assigned to direct **Bakti** (Service) in 1950. **Bakti** was Krishnan's own adaptation of **Wuthering Heights** (New Straits Times, June 23, 1985; 10). Krishnan picked Ramlee Putih or P. Ramlee to play the lead role beside Kasma Booty, the up and coming female star who was first introduced by Rajhans in **Chempaka. Bakti** was Ramlee's first film in a lead role. The Ramlee-Booty pair as hero and heroine proved to be successful. Within the same year Krishnan completed three more films, **Dewi Murni** (The Pure Goddess), **Takdir Illahi** (Divine Fate) and **Pembalasan** (Reward).

Another director who arrived with Krishnan was S. Ramanathan who was assigned to direct **Kembar** (Twins) in 1950, **Pulau Mutiara** (Pearl Island) and **Juwita** (Love), both in 1951. Ramanathan picked Mariam to play the female lead in his first two films but later worked with the Ramlee-Booty pair for **Juwita.**

The second batch of Indian directors came in late 1952 and early 1953. They were K.M. Baskaran, B.N. Rao, V. Girimaji and K.R. Sastry. Of the four only Baskaran had some knowledge of Malay customs and way of life. He was originally from Malabar, India but was raised and studied in British Malaya. His father was in the government service and had served in places like Segamat and Temerloh (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 63).

No one really knows the experience and expertise of the imported Indian directors. On what kind of a merit did the Shaw Brothers decide to offer them the jobs of directing Malay films? Why did the Shaw Brothers turn to

India for their studio's film directors? Two main reasons are cultural and economical.

Culturally, Indians and Malays have a lot in common.[2] Until the 15th century there had been many Hindu influences on the customs and ritual traditions of the Malays. Even after the coming of Islam in the fifteenth century, the Malays still kept many Hindu customs and traditions inherited from the Indians. The Indian cultural heritage not only influenced the Malays in their way of life but especially in their art forms and popular entertainments. Stories from the Hindu epics of **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana** for example had already been adapted in the Malay *Wayang Kulit* and *Makyong*, the two popular traditional art forms. Therefore when Indian films were first introduced, the Malays found it easy to assimilate and identify the plots and characters as they were presented along the same linear structure as that of the Indian epic stories of **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana**. Furthermore, some Malay words were borrowed from Sanskrit which is the root or older stage of most Indian languages, especially Hindi. Malay film audiences of the fifties in Malaya and Singapore may not have understood the whole dialogue of a Hindi film, but some keywords spoken by the characters may have enabled understanding of the basic plot-line. Thus Hindi films became a favourite. Stars like Nargis, Madhubala, Suraya, Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor became household names to the Malay film-goers.

The economic reason also worked to the advantage of the Shaw Brothers. Indian directors provided them with cheap creative labour. The studio did not need superstar directors to direct the boy-meets-girl type of films. It needed someone who understood basic cinematic techniques and who had

had some experience in film-making. Krishnan, Ramanathan and Baskaran had never been first-rate directors in India, but they knew something about the trade, which the Malays in Singapore did not. Being unknown in the huge and highly competitive Indian film industry of the fifties, Krishnan, Ramanathan, Baskaran and their friends may have found it difficult to get jobs to establish themselves. The offer by MFP was an opportunity for them to exercise and expand their creative talents in film directing. Furthermore they did not need to start everything from scratch as the studio allowed them to bring along Indian filmscripts or story-lines. Their job was simple. It was just a matter of re-shooting filmscripts which had already been made into films. The only difference was the Malay cast who now delivered the dialogues in another language. Some of the Indian directors may have used the opportunity to do a remake of their favourite Indian films in the new studio; others might have tried to do a film from subjects or materials close to their hearts which they had failed to do while working in their own country. The all-Malay cast might have given them some problems, but with a sufficient working knowledge of English and a helper who would then translate the directions and dialogues, the Indian directors managed to have good creative control of the films.

It is not known how much was paid to the Indian directors. Since the Shaw Brothers did not face many problems in recruiting the-not-so-famous Indian directors, the management would have probably been in a better position as to decide their worth. The directors themselves were in no position to demand high salaries as they were not very experienced nor were they popular in their country of origin. As the studio's budget for each film during that period was only M$30,000.00 to M$50,000.00, (Jins Shamsuddin, Interview; August 22, 1986) and the lead player was only

paid in the range of M$300 to M$400 a month, a director's salary could have been in the range of M$600 to M$800 a month (Ahmad Abdul Hamid, 1986; 13).

It was for these cultural and economics reasons that Indian directors were brought in by the studio to help make Malay films. The Shaw Brothers wanted to keep their overhead as low as possible. They also had the impression that the Indian directors' minimal understanding of matters related to the socio-cultural heritage of the Malays was enough to help them turn basic Indian story-lines into Malay films. Little did they realise that the Indian directors were actually making Indian films with Malay actors and starting an era where Indian acting styles and techniques became the accepted norms in the Malays' mode of expression for more than a decade.

A close look at some of the early Malay films by the Indian directors does not reveal much evidence of their understanding of the Malay socio-cultural system. The Indian directors did not seem to pay attention to Malay etiquette and manners. Malay women were portrayed as ill-mannered and full of lust with their revealing dresses and seductive movement in **Panggilan Pulau** (A Call to an Island) directed by S. Ramanathan in 1954, and in **Gelora Hidup** (Life Suffering) directed by B.N. Rao in the same year a young Malay maiden was shown begging for a job in a city office, which at that time would be unbelievable as only the rich and urban-educated Malay girls would be office workers.

As an art form the films were lacking in the visual styles and techniques of Malay traditional performing arts. Methods of presentation were very

much similar to those of the Indian films of the thirties. They were stagey with restricted camera movements and the editing was slow and conventional. Reality was exaggerated with extravagant dialogue, songs and dance, and characterisations were stereotyped, black and white portrayals.

It is surprising that despite an attempt to use experts from India, Malay films of the early period never achieved the high standard of the Indian products themselves. Indian films of the early fifties were already known for their artistic quality. Satyajit Ray's **Pather Panchali** for example, was produced in 1952, the same time as imported Indian directors were teaching the Malay actors to face the camera.

Things could had been different had the Shaw Brothers been more generous and selective in their choice of Indian directors. With a higher salary offer MFP could have got more experienced directors with more sophisticated ideas. It might not have been Satyajit Ray, but at least someone of a similar calibre. Directors chosen by the Shaw Brothers were unknown as far as the Indian film industry is concerned. Firoze Rangoonwalla who wrote *75 Years of Indian Cinema* (1975; 112) lists almost all the works of Indian directors from the early twenties onwards, but does not mention any works by directors imported by MFP. This suggests that the imported "directors" were not really important film-makers of the period. They could have worked in the Indian film industry as assistant directors, cameramen, etc., but definitely not as film directors of any substantial standard.

Krishnan, in his own words, admitted that he got into the movie world in India only as a chauffeur to the artistes and stagehands. He met an Indian

director while working as a security guard in the Indian Congress office in Madras. While chauffeuring artistes in and out of the studios he "...picked up tips on directing" (New Straits Times, June 23, 1985; 10). It was those 'tips' which enabled him to land at the Shaw Brothers studio in Singapore as a full-fledged film director. According to Jamil Sulong (1990; 19), Krishnan acquired some filming experience while working as a clapper boy in a film studio in Madras in 1947. He came to work at MFP two years later. Krishnan has undergone a vast experience in life. He was in Singapore during the Japanese occupation and was actively involved in the Indian Liberation Army led by Subhas Chandra Bose. He speaks Malay, Tamil, English and Japanese.

No other Indian directors matched Krishnan's ability in their understanding of the Malay film substance. Naturally Krishnan did a much better job than the rest. Krishnan was raised in Malaya from the age of six when his father, a cloth merchant, took him and his elder sister to settle in Penang. He was educated in Tamil and English schools and did his Senior Cambridge examination in 1941 when the war broke out. He then worked in Singapore, Acheh (Indonesia) and later in Madras.

Krishnan's better understanding of Malay values and customs was an advantage compared to his comtemporaries' ignorance of such matters. While he spoke Malay to his artistes, other directors had to be helped by assistant directors who also functioned as interpreters. And when other directors borrowed directly from popular Tamil, Hindi, Chinese and American film stories, Krishnan made friends and invited Malay writers and journalists to submit original story-lines. His effort resulted in the production of **Rayuan Sukma** (Persuading Soul) in 1951. Later, while

working under contract with Cathay-Keris, Krishnan turned to Malay novels and picked **Cinta Gadis Rimba** (Love of a Jungle Maiden) by Harun Aminurrashid (L. Krishnan, Interview; July 1988) which he turned into a film called **Virgin of Borneo** shot in colour on location in Sarawak (then North Borneo) which is now part of East Malaysia. The production was completed in 1958.

When Cathay-Keris studio was set up in 1953, Krishnan, Rajhans and later Rao and Baskaran left MFP and joined Ho Ah Loke's team of directors. According to Krishnan, (Interview; July 1988) he asked for a pay rise of fifty dollars from the studio's manager but was turned down. He then took the offer from Ho Ah Loke to work for the Cathay-Keris studio. Along with the directors came their favourite artistes like Neng Yatimah, Nordin Ahmad, Maria Menado and Siput Serawak. The new studio seemed to take advantage of the experienced directors and artistes from MFP by offering them higher salaries and better benefits. MFP studio replaced the four directors they lost to Cathay by importing a second group of Indian directors. This time the Shaw Brothers were more generous and chose better qualified and experienced directors. They were Phani Majumdar, Dhiresh Ghosh and Kidar Sharma. Of the three, Majumdar and Sharma were among the well-known directors in India. Majundar started directing films in the thirties when he did **Street Singer** in 1938 (Ranggoonwalla, 1975; 101) for Bombay's New Theatre Company and again in the early forties when he directed **Kapal Kundala** for the same company. In 1954 he directed **Bandhan** for the Cooperative Society formed by the workers of the Bombay Talkies company (Ranggoonwalla, 1975; 104).

Majumdar's first assignment for MFP was **Hang Tuah**, (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 85) an epic based on the legend of the Malacca sultanate. The film was one of the studio's big-budgeted films and shot in colour. After **Hang Tuah** (1956) he went on to make other well acclaimed films like **Anakku Sazali** (Sazali My Son), **Kasih Sayang** (Loving Care) and **Long House,** a semi-documentary, both in 1957. In 1958 Majumdar directed three films for the studio, **Masyarakat Pincang** (The Crippled Society), **Seri Menanti** and **Doktor** (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 85).

The Shaw Brothers brought Kidar Sharma from India in 1958. Sharma was already an established film director when he accepted an offer to direct Malay films for MFP. In India Sharma had earned for himself the reputation of creating art for art's sake with films like **Neki aur Badi** and **Bawre Nain** in the mid-fifties (Ranggoonwalla, 1975; 133). Sharma was a graduate with an M.A in English from Indian Punjab University. He used to work under the tutorship of Debaki Bose and later became a leading Bombay film director and attained a status equal to Bimal Roy, Nitin Bose and K. Abass (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, 1980; 77 and 186). In the late fifties Sharma's **Suhag Raat** was considered a high art film. But in the Singapore based MFP studio Sharma tried his hand at a comedy. The film he directed was **Kaki Kuda** (The Gambler). It was Sharma's first and last attempt. The film was a failure and Sharma left MFP to go back to India.

Dhiresh Ghosh had come a few months before Sharma. Although Ghosh was practically unknown in the Indian film scene, he did some good work at MFP. His first film was **Gergasi** (Giant) produced in 1958. After that he directed some films based on Malay legends and semi-historical scripts.

Ghosh completed his five-year contract with the studio and went back to India in 1962 (Jamil Sulong, Interview; August 18, 1986).

4.5 The Filipino Directors

In 1955 the Shaw Brothers shifted their focus from India to the Phillipines and brought in the first Filipino director, Eddy Infante (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 94). His assignment was a film **Gadis Liar** or **The Elephant Girl.** Infante brought along an actor, Teddy Belamino, and an actress, Paraluman. Both of these Filipinos acted beside the Shaw Brothers' artistes. Two years later another Filipino director, T.C. Santos, was called to direct **Taufan** (Storm) with Ahmad Mahmud and Zaiton in the lead roles (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 103). Ramon Estella who came in the same year, became the Filipino director working the longest under contract with MFP. Estella stayed on until 1964 and completed eight films for the studio. Later, he also directed films for the Cathay-Keris Studio.

Ramon Estella was the son of a famous Filipino composer, Jose Estella (Guerrero, 1983; 210). Long before he directed for MFP, he already had two nationally relevant films to his credit: **Buenavist** and **Huling Habilin** (Guerrero, 1983; 210). **Buenavista** was a film about land ownership and distribution, while **Huling Habilin** was a love story described as dramatic and rich in visual imagery as well as affecting in its dark and unearthly mood. Both films starred Rosa del Rosario, at that time the Phillipines' most accomplished actress, with Angel Esmeralda as her leading man in **Buenavista** and Leopoldo Salcedo in **Huling Habilin** (Guerrero, 1983; 210).

Estella definitely was one of the best choices made by the Shaw Brothers' management. The eight films that he directed in Singapore were quite different and stood out amongst the studio's previous productions. His creativity covered all film genres, encompassing horror, drama, historical, gangster and comedy. Three of his best efforts were **Matahari** (The Sun) set during the Japanese occupation of Malaya, **Samseng** (The Crook) a crime film, and **Dupa Chendana** (Beauty and the Cripple) a fantasy about a cripple, abused and neglected by his fellow villagers, who bravely ventured to a haunted island and brought back a beautiful girl. Estella's other films were: **Anak Pontianak** (Son of a Vampire), **Saudagar Minyak Urat** (Ointment Merchant), **Melancong Ke Tokyo** (Holiday in Tokyo) and **Pusaka Pontianak** (Vampire's Heritage).

Two more outstanding Filipino directors were Rolf Bayer and Lamberto Avellana who came in 1958. Both men had worked together in a Filipino film, **Badjao,** Bayer as the screenplay writer and Avellana as director. They won Best Direction and Best Screenplay Awards in the Asian Film Festival 1957 in Tokyo, Japan (Guerrero, 1983; 52). Earlier in 1956, Avellana's film **Anak Dalita** easily won the Golden Harvest Award for Best Picture in a similar festival held in Hong Kong (Guerrero, 1983; 52).

Lamberto Avellana made his first film, **Sakay**, in 1936 while he was still studying for his Bachelor of Arts degree in dramatic arts from the Ateneo de Manila University (Guerrero, 1983; 208). He was greatly influenced by the tradition of neo-realism established by Rossellini and De Sica in films like **Open City** and **The Bicycle Thief** (Guerrero, 1983; 203). Avellana's **Badjao** and **Anak Dalita** were made in this tradition with extensive use of documentary technique which gave them a sense of authenticity. **Badjao**

depicts some of the legendary attributes and traditional customs of the sea-nomads of southern Mindanao,and **Anak Dalita** is a story of cave-dwellers in a modern city levelled to the ground by total war, leaving only the skeletons of buildings (Guerrero, 1983; 200).

It was definitely Avellana's triumph at the Asian Film Festival that won the hearts of the Shaw Brothers to contract him for yet another war film set during the Japanese occupation of Malaya. The film was **Sergeant Hassan** (Hassan the Sergeant). Avellana's experience in his earlier film, **Sakay,** about a Filipino soldier who went underground to make guerrilla sorties against the Americans and their Filipino collaborators (Guerrero, 1983; 213), was put to good use in **Sergeant Hassan**. This time it was a Malay soldier who went underground to fight the Japanese and their Malayan collaborators. According to Lent (1990; 154), **Sakay** was Avellanas's first effort, and is considered one of the most artistic Philippines' films of all time.

According to Jamil Sulong, in order to establish authenticity in **Sergeant Hassan**, Avellana took his unit to Port Dickson in Negeri Sembilan, the training ground for the members of the Malay Regiment. The production unit stayed in Port Dickson for some time and then did location shooting in a number of places in the state of Negeri Sembilan (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 103).

Avellana's **Sergeant Hassan** failed to come up to the standards of his earlier films made in the Philippines. It was not altogether Avellana's fault. After he had left, the studio management decided that a few scenes were not quite right according to their own judgement and aesthetical standard.

Worst of all there were no songs in the film! Avellana's concept of authenticity in accordance with Italian neo-realism clashed with the management's aesthetics. It thought that the Indian pattern of song and dance in films was vital to a Malay film; so, P. Ramlee, who had played the role of Sergeant Hassan in the film, was asked to compose songs and add singing scenes to the film (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 103).

The last of the Filipino directors was Rolf Bayer who directed **Azimat** (Talisman) also in 1958. A Filipino actor, Pancho Magalona acted in the film together with the studio's Daeng Idris, Jins Shamsuddin and Siti Tanjung Perak (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 103). **Azimat** was a successful thriller with a clever twist and revelation in the story-line.

Bayer and Avellana each did only one film with the Shaw Brothers studio, although both were proven to be among the best directors and screenplay writers in Asia during the late 50s and early 60s. In particular, Avellana won international accolades for his feature and documentary films. **Badjao** enjoyed invitational exhibitions at the Vancouver Film Festival in 1961, at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1962, and at the Colorado Film Festival in 1963 (Guerrero, 1983; 217). Another of his films, **No Way Out,** was shown at the San Francisco Film Festival in 1963. He was also the first Filipino film-maker to have his films shown at the Cannes Film Festival with his **Kandelerong Pilak** (Guerrero, 1983; 217).

Apart from his assignment at the MFP studio, Avellana also had the distinction of having directed feature films for prestigious foreign companies: **Destination Vietnam**, filmed in Saigon in 1969 for Universal

International, and **The Evil Within,** filmed in Bombay in 1970 for 20th. Century Fox (Guerrero, 1983; 217).

None of the Malay films from Singapore ever enjoyed invitational exhibitions in any international Film Festivals, and not one of the studio's directors ever reached Avellana's level during the period. Malay cinema of the 50s and 60s was only suitable for local consumption because of its self-created limitations.

4.6 The Emergence of the Malay Directors

The involvement of Malay technical staff in film-making during the studio era of MFP and Cathay-Keris Films was very minimal. Their lack of understanding of the film medium was the sole factor that deprived them of being active participants; but they were willing to learn by working harder in order to grasp the art and craft of film-making. A few of them were assigned easy jobs like clapper-boy, boom operator, focus puller or continuity clerk. It was from here that they slowly picked up the tricks of the trade.

From the written record of MFP's management, the first Malay to be salaried as a cameraman was Abdul Rahman Jais in 1953, followed by Jumari Saripan in 1954 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 130). Before these two, Nordin Adam had already been an assistant cameraman. Kamal Mustaffa was a soundman from 1957 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 130). Other Malays were hired to work in jobs such as make-up attendant, driver, sweeper, wireman and property boy, and as members of the camera and lighting crew. There is no evidence to show that either Abdul Rahman or Jumari

were promoted to the post of director after having worked as cameramen for more than a decade.

The highest post given to the Malays in the late forties and early fifties was that of assistant director. A young man like Jamil Sulong, an active member of the Malay literary group *Asas 50* (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 35) in Singapore during that period was given the job of assistant director and paid only $180 a month; (Jamil Sulong, Interview; August 18, 1986) but his only work was translating the film dialogues from English to Malay to be spoken by the cast in front of the camera. He was not involved at all in the actual film production.

It took more than seven years before Jamil was allowed to try his hand at directing. During his seven years (Utusan Malaysia, September 18, 1985; 13) as a script translator cum assistant director, Jamil paid very close attention to the way the Indian directors practiced their craft in film-directing. In 1959 the studio gave him a chance to direct a film **Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup** (Cursed Stone).

Jamil however was not the first Malay to be given the important job of directing. When the Shaw Brothers came to know that one of their senior actors, A.R. Tompel, was helping to make films for the *Nusantara* company the management called and offered him a directing assignment. Tompel was allowed to make a film from his own script called **Fatimah** but later he gave up the idea because he was not prepared to accept the payment offered to him. The **Fatimah** script was given to another senior actor, Mahadi Mohd Said, who changed the title to **Permata di**

Perlembahan (Jewel in the Slum). Mahadi became the first Malay director in 1952 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 75).

The reasons why Mahadi was chosen by the management of MFP were firstly because he was considered a senior among the artistes; he was already 38 years old when he joined the studio. Secondly, Mahadi was highly respected not only by the artistes but also by the management as he had already made the Hajj , that is he had made his pilgrimage to Mecca and his knowledge of Islam was very thorough, and lastly, his understanding of the grammar of Malay language. He had frequently corrected the random mistakes made by actors and actresses while speaking their lines during shooting.

Mahadi's **Permata di Perlimbahan** was not, however, a success at the box-office and the management was not particularly happy with the way he had handled the production. The film became the first and the last for Mahadi. Mahadi's failure ended the dreams of other senior actors and assistant directors to become film directors. The studio's management seemed not to trust any other Malays to handle directing jobs. So Malay films continued to be moulded by the Indian mind. According to L. Krishnan (Interview; July 1988), the failure of **Permata di Perlimbahan** was because Mahadi did not cast P. Ramlee in the lead role. P. Ramlee was at that time a rising star and the centre of attraction for the Malay movie-goers and MFP relied greatly on him for the company's profit.

Mahadi had chosen Nordin Ahmad and Maria Menado as the hero and heroine for his film. Nordin had never before been given a lead role (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 75). Mahadi wanted to do the film in his own way and did not

want to stick to the Indian trade-mark established by the Indian directors. P. Ramlee had already been moulded by the Indian directors to be the Malay film hero in the style and mannerism of Indian films. His curly hair style, pencil-line moustache, oversize blazer and baggy pants were the accepted visual image of a star. His singing and exaggerated acting style, moulded by Indian directors had already won the hearts of the Malay audience who had never seen actual Malay gestures and mannerisms in the movies. Mahadi wanted to get away from all that. He chose Nordin and Maria because he wanted to establish a new image altogether. The management disagreed with his intention of trying to project new faces as the hero and heroine for his film. But Mahadi was right; he was actually ahead of his time. Nordin and Maria later proved to be a successful actor and actress when they moved to work for the Cathay-Keris studio.

The 1950s in Singapore and Malaya also saw the expansion of Malay literary activities. There was the Singapore based *Utusan Melayu,* a daily Malay newspaper with an entertainment columnist writing comments on the Malay film industry. There were monthly entertainment magazines such as *Hiburan, Filem Raya, Gelanggang Filem, Mastika, Majallah Filem* and *Berita Filem.*[3] *Majallah Filem* focussed on the activity of MFP, while *Berita Filem* publicised Cathay-Keris studio activities. Some staff writers of those monthly magazines became very vocal about the fate of Malay films in the hands of foreign directors and started questioning the studios' policy of not promoting Malay assistant directors to become fully-fledged directors. They said that directors who directed Malay films must first of all understand Malay customs and traditions (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 147).

Jaafar Abdullah,[4] MFP's information officer and editor of *Majallah Filem* had similar thoughts to the Malay literary group. Sometime in the middle of 1955 Jaafar sent a proposal to Run Run Shaw suggesting that Ramlee be given a chance to direct a film. Jaafar took a gamble by saying, "...if my suggestion fails, I am willing to serve this company for another five years without salary" (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 139). Such was Jaafar's confidence in Ramlee. Run Run Shaw regarded Jaafar's sacrifice as crazy, but Jaafar was deadly serious about his proposal.

P. Ramlee had started his career with MFP as a playback singer in the late forties and later appeared as a supporting actor. In 1950 the director L. Krishnan assigned him a lead role in his film **Bakti.** He then appeared in another twenty films under the direction of all the Indian directors. He was given both the role of a villain as well as a hero. As noted earlier, he projected an ideal model of a Malay film star.

In the end Run Run agreed to discuss the matter with him and Ramlee. Ramlee and Jaafar were asked to review some Hindi and Chinese films to get some ideas for a screenplay. Run Run Shaw was thinking that Ramlee and Jaafar could translate or adapt one of those film into Malay, but neither of them found any of the films they saw suitable and they asked Run Run to be allowed to write an original screenplay. At last at the end of 1955, P. Ramlee was given a chance to be the second Malay director and allowed to use his own screenplay. The first film that P. Ramlee directed was **Penarik Becha** (The Trishaw Peddler) with himself in the lead role as a poor young man living with his blind aged mother. It was a love story between the young poor trishaw peddler and a rich girl whom he took to a seamstress school each morning.

Penarik Becha was a box-office hit. It was hailed by film reviewers as the best Malay film in 1955. Readers of *Utusan Filem dan Sport* voted the film the Best Picture in preference to **Kasih Menumpang** by the established director L. Krishnan and two more films **Kipas Hikmat** and **Merana** by more than 5000 votes (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 146). Abdullah also wrote that Ramlee's directorial debut was the source of great pride to the Malays (1973; 147). The success of **Penarik Becha** provided Ramlee with a solid foundation for further directing assignments with the studio. He went on to direct another fourteen films before leaving MFP to join Merdeka Film Productions in Kuala Lumpur in 1964.

A year after P. Ramlee's successful **Penarik Becha**, the management at Cathay-Keris studio assigned its first Malay director, S. Roomai Noor, to direct **Adam**, a film about a young boy surviving all by himself in the bustling city. In 1957 Roomai Noor directed **Selamat Tinggal Kekasihku** (Good Bye My Love) and a year later, **Rasa Sayang Eh!** (Love Came Calling). He directed another four films and the last one was **Che Mamat Parang Tajam** (Mamat with a Sharp Dagger) a comedy he finished in 1963. He left in 1964 for Kuala Lumpur to work for the Malayan Ministry of Information's film unit called *Filem Negara* (Dewan Budaya, April 1982; 32).

Jamil Sulong was the third Malay director appointed by MFP in 1959. He directed **Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup** (Cursed Stone), a story based on the Malay legend about a mother leaving her daughter to take care of her younger brother. The children were separated in the jungle but later met again as a young man and a woman. Jamil directed another sixteen

films for MFP specialising in *purba*[5] stories adapted from Malay legends and mythologies.

MFP later appointed two more Malay directors, Omar Rojik in 1960 and S. Kadarisman in 1961, while Cathay-Keris studio picked their film editor Hussein Haniff for a directorial job in 1961 also. After Haniff came Salleh Ghani who was made a director at the end of the same year. Cathay then went on to appoint M. Amin (1962) and Nordin Ahmad (1964) to direct films for the studio.

All the Malay directors appointed by the management of both studios worked hand in hand with the remaining Indian directors. However, by 1963 only two foreign directors were left working with MFP: Dhiresh Ghosh an Indian and Ramon Estella, a Filipino. Ghosh completed his last film **Korban** (Sacrifice) in 1963 and Estella finished in 1965 with a thriller **Pusaka Pontianak** (The Vampire's Heritage). Malay directors were in complete control of most productions in the years 1963 to 1967 until the MFP studio closed down.

4.7 The Golden Era of Malay Films

It is hard to assess the validity of claiming an era as the Golden Age in the artistic world. The cinema as an art form commands more than just an aesthetical element because it is a commodity generating commercial returns. When it turns into a highly profitable industry and manages to survive a rather long period, it could be regarded as having enjoyed a "golden time" from the economic perspective. And when the product is

highly acclaimed by people outside its national boundary and regarded as a model for great artistic achievement and continues to be so for a number of years, there are further reasons to claim there was a "golden age". The intersection of economic and aesthetic criteria, thus, constitute an assessment standard for a "golden age". On both grounds the period 1955 - 1965 marked the Golden Era of Malay films.

As an industry Malay film-making in Singapore and later Malaysia had never been undertaken on a large scale compared to other forms of industry. Malay films marketed in of Malaya, Singapore, Borneo and Indonesia in the 40s and 50s were not the dominant product exhibited on theatre circuits. The monetary return was marginal when compared to imported foreign products. Films from America, Britain, China and India were already widely exhibited throughout these countries. When the Malay film industry began to enjoy a wider market in Indonesia, the effort was successful only because the Indonesians happened to speak the same language and were also from the same ethnic stock practising similar customs and traditions. Malay films from the Shaw Brothers' and Cathay-Keris studios' era never managed to find a market much wider than Indonesia.

The Malay cinema enjoyed good support in the late fifties and early sixties. The films made during that era could be considered as a true Malay national cinema. Films directed by Malay directors were somewhat different from those delivered by the Indian directors. There were serious attempts to establish a national character through film substance depicting the traditions and culture of the people. Even though the Malays did not gain much from the economic aspects of film-making, aesthetically the creative

force behind each production could be credited to the Malay directors, cinematographers and editors.

Veteran Malay film actors and directors when relating their past glories in the film world always refer to the 50's and early 60's as the Golden Age of the Malay film industry.[6] They claim that those were the years when Shaw's Malay Film Productions and Cathay-Keris studios were at their peak, producing large number of movies which were not only box office hits but also critically acclaimed. Records show that within seventeen years (1950-1967) MFP produced 155 films. Cathay-Keris Studio produced 97 films for a period from 1953-1967.[7]

From the cultural and aesthetical points of view, however, this period cannot altogether be considered as the best for Malay movies. The early fifties was a period of trial and error for both studios. MFP and Cathay-Keris studios were not actually making Malay films in the real sense of the word. Successful Indian films were translated into Malay and produced with Malay actors speaking the dialogues in the Malay language. The films' contents and styles were Indian and the dialects were a mixture of bazaar Malay, Indonesian and Chinese. Both studios were testing their market in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia.

For a period of five years (1950-1955) seven Indian directors made 63 films for MFP (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 75, 84 and 86). Most of them were copied from Indian films and some were specially tailored for the Indonesian audience. Within this period the Shaw Brothers alone managed to sell seventeen films to Indonesia. They definitely did make a handsome profit each time a film was sold and distributed to Indonesia because

the Indonesian film market was (and still is) far greater than that of Singapore, Malaya and Borneo put together. So, from an economic point of view the early 50s could easily be regarded by the Shaw Brothers management as the golden era. But culturally speaking, the Malay film culture was not yet established prior to 1955.

However, the Shaw Brothers success in selling their products to Indonesia also meant a great deal to the artistes. When those films were exhibited in Indonesia, the Indonesians began to know and admire Malay artistes for their acting talent. The artistes also took pride in the fact that their films were being acknowledged as better products not only in the technical sense but also in terms of plots and characterisation. According to L. Krishnan (Interview; July 1988) the high status of Malay films in Indonesia during that period was the result of the Shaw Brothers' efforts to make films specially for the Indonesian audience. MFP's film actors even talked in a way that sounded like the Indonesian language in films intended for export.

By 1952 Malay films from MFP were already a threat to the Indonesian film industry. The Indonesian film market was initially suffering from competition from films made in the Philippines, but later products from Malaya were enjoyed by the working class because the stories were simple and not complicated by lengthy conversation (Misbach Y. Biran, 1980; 35). By 1956 Indonesian films were imitating Malayan films which were reported to be making increasing inroads into their market.

The Shaw Brothers "golden trade" with Indonesia did not last very long. Towards the end of 1956 Indonesia managed to restrain the import of Malayan films and at the same time increase its own productions.

Attempts at restraining Malayan films entering Indonesia were not new. According to Haji Jaafar Abdullah when the Shaw Brothers started to sell films to Indonesia a one to one quota system had already been implemented by the Indonesian companies. The quota later became one to two, i.e Shaw Brothers had to buy two Indonesian films for every single film they sold. After 1956 Indonesia again changed the ratio to one to three. Despite that Shaw Brothers still obliged, but the two or three Indonesian films bought for each one of MFP's films sold were never screened by the Shaw Brothers, not only because the quality was bad, but the company was also trying to outsmart the Indonesians while at the same time protecting its own films domestically. So while Indonesia was trying very hard to protect her own film market by restraining Malayan films, the action by the Shaw Brothers was said to be more than justified.

From 1957 to 1959, MFP sold only six films to Indonesia (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 101-125). After 1959 the Shaw Brothers decided to stop selling films to Indonesia. The new regulations imposed by the Indonesian authorities put the Singapore company in a rather difficult position. The Indonesians were definitely trying to cut the profit margin of the film exporter. In the end the Shaw Brothers found that it was not a worthwhile venture anymore. Indonesia on her side began to exercise tighter control in the film export-import trade. Apart from the one to three ratio, Indonesia also prevented money belonging to the Shaw Brothers from being taken out of Indonesia (L. Krishnan, Interview; July 1988).

It is not known how much profit was made by the Shaw Brothers in their dealings with Indonesia. They never made their accounts known. In fact in any meeting with the artistes' union the Shaw Brothers management

never discussed the studio's financial situation even if they claimed that they were losing money (Zilkifli Ahmad, 1973; 76).

Cathay-Keris studio apart from its irregular export of films to Indonesia, also tried to penetrate the Middle Eastern market. Hussein Haniff's **Hang Jebat** made in 1961 was exported to test the audience reception in the Arab speaking countries like Iraq, Iran, Syria and Qatar (Hamzah Hussein, Interview; August 16, 1986). The distribution of the film was handled by Paramount with which the Cathay Organisation had some kind of an agreement. The experiment however, did not work very well. **Hang Jebat** was probably the first and the last Malay film seen by the people of the Middle East.

Earlier than that Cathay Keris had already tested the Chinese market in Hong Kong and Taiwan. **Pontianak** (Vampire) a film directed by B.N. Rao, made in 1958 was dubbed into Chinese and released in those two countries (Hamzah Hussein, Interview; August 18, 1988). How much money Cathay collected is not known but the fact that no other films were sent after that proves the failure of the venture. From an economic point of view the success of films from the Cathay-Keris studio abroad was insignificant when compared to the Shaw Brothers success story in Indonesia.

The year 1955 marked a second beginning of the Malay film industry. MFP tested the local audience with **Penarik Becha** (The Trishaw Peddler), P.Ramlee's directorial debut. **Penarik Becha** was claimed to be an original story by Ramlee but according to Hamzah Hussein (Interview; August 16, 1986), it was actually another adaptation of a successful Indian film. It is a melodrama of a poor boy falling in love with a rich man's daughter, a

theme which had already been done again and again. The Indian influences still abounded, but somehow Ramlee's treatment of the story-line was good enough to camouflage them with local colour and values. The film moved a step away from the make-believe world of Indian tales. The theme and characterisation of **Penarik Becha** are closer to the social reality of the period. The story revolves around the world of the lower class society, that of the trishaw peddler which was made to look even more helpless and inferior in comparison to that of the rich. The film was a big success. Ramlee who also played the lead role became a hero for young and old alike. The real young trishaw-pullers in large and small towns of Malaya and Singapore during that period were excited over Ramlee's portrayal of a person like themselves as a film hero in **Penarik Becha.**

With Ramlee's **Penarik Becha** and later Phani Majumdar's **Anakku Sazali** (My Son Sazali), the Malay film world was coming more down to earth. Problems and characters in those films were closer to the reality of the period and could easily be identified with by the audience. By 1958 when Jamil Sulong directed **Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup**, a story based on Malay legend about the parental love for children, other non-Malay directors were beginning to be more Malay in their selection of film stories. By 1965 when Omar Rojik completed **Takdir,** almost all aspects of Malay social and cultural life had been explored by both Malay and non-Malay directors be it in the form of *purba* (old) or modern films. Thus the period from 1955 to 1965 established the Malay film industry as being Malay both in form and content; a Malay film culture had been born. For the first time a Malay film audience felt pride in and a real sense of belonging to a Malay film. From the cultural point of view, that ten year period can thus be considered the golden era of Malay films.

The years that followed after **Penarik Becha** saw the Shaw Brothers management working with more confidence in its Malay film venture. In 1966 Shaw Brothers brought a well-known Indian director, Phani Majumdar to direct **Hang Tuah,** a Malay costume epic set during the peak of the Malacca Sultanate. The legend of Hang Tuah was very well-known to the people of the Malay archipelago. It is a story about the unquestioning loyalty of a warrior to his master (the Sultan) to the extent of killing his own childhood friend.

The Shaw Brothers readiness to make **Hang Tuah** as a full-colour production and to hire such a well-known director as Majumdar was considered to be a big step forward in the Malay film industry. With Ramlee in the lead role as Hang Tuah, the gamble turned out to be a worthwhile one. The film was a big success not only in Singapore and Malaya, but also in Indonesia, Brunei and British Borneo.

Even though **Hang Tuah** was assigned to an Indian director, a number of Malay experts were given important parts behind the camera. Jamil Sulong was the assistant director and took care of the dialogue (refined Malay as spoken at the royal courts), Buyong Adil was the consultant in areas of Malay custom and court gestures, and Mustaffa Yassin designed the sets comprising both the exterior and interior of a Sultan's palace and the courtiers' residence. All aspects of the Malay court traditions were studied in great detail before the film was shot (Jamil Sulong, Interview; August 18, 1986).

Five years after the Shaw Brothers' grand production of **Hang Tuah**, Cathay-Keris Studio did a remake of the same historic legend with equal success. The film was titled **Hang Jebat** and directed by Hussein Haniff in 1961. Hussein's treatment of the same material was somehow different from Majumdar's **Hang Tuah**. Hussein's emphasis was more on Hang Jebat, the rebel friend killed by Hang Tuah. His Jebat was seen as the champion of the poor who chased the Sultan away from the palace and distributed the wealth from the palace treasury to the village poor. Hussein's effort was highly acclaimed by the audience and film critics and regarded as the best filmwork ever done by a Malay director. His directorial techniques with tracking shots, unusual camera angles and fast editing tempo were reniniscent of the influence of the Japanese master, Akira Kurosawa (Dewan Budaya, October 1983; 25).

The ten year period of the Golden Era also witnessed some artistic achievements by both studios. **Hang Tuah** which was completed in January 1956 was sent to the Asian Film Festival in Hong Kong in the same year. The film won an award for the Best Theme Music which had been composed by Ramlee (New Straits Times, July 11, 1982; 10). It was the first award won by MFP in the dramatic feature film category.

A year later (1957) Ramlee gained his highest accolade as an actor in Asia when he won the Best Actor award for his fine performance in Phani Majumdar's **Anakku Sazali** (My Son Sazali). Eight year-old Tony Castello also won an award for the Best Performance by a Child Actor in the same film. Castello played the small Sazali while Ramlee was in a dual role as the father and the young man Sazali.

Anakku Sazali is a social drama closely depicting Malay middle class society. It tells the story of a young man as a single parent bringing up a son with full love and affection and showering him with material wealth. The son becomes a spoiled brat and later turns out to be a gang leader who robs a bank. When the son comes back to the house seeking protection from the father, he has no choice but to send him to the police.

In 1958 MFP received yet another of its highest compliments when P. Ramlee's **Sumpah Orang Minyak** (Curse of an Oily Man) won an award for outstanding black and white photography at Manila's Asian Film Festival (New Straits Times, July 11, 1982; 10). The film's photographic work was by Abu Bakar Ali.

At the Tenth Asian Film Festival in Tokyo in 1963, an award in the same category was again won by another of Ramlee's films, **Ibu Mertuaku** (My Mother-in-Law), another family drama about a young musician marrying a rich widow's daughter against the mother's consent. The marriage does not work out well and the couple are in great difficulties when the husband is not allowed to play music in a night club but manages only to find work as a construction labourer. The wife is pregnant and the mother comes to claim her daughter back promising the husband that she will return her and the baby when everything improves. The mother however sends a telegram to the son-in-law telling him that both his wife and baby have died during child-birth. She later arranges her daughter's marriage to a young doctor whom she likes very much. **Ibu Mertuaku** won admiration from film critics and audience alike. The cinematography was outstanding and the man behind the camera was again Abu Bakar Ali.

When the Sixth Asian Film Festival was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya in 1959, the Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris films won a plethora of awards. These were Best Comedy for Ramlee's **Pendekar Bujang Lapok**, Best Portrayal of country folklore for Cathay's **Mahsuri**, and again the Best Performance by a child actor for Cathay's Addie Ali in the film **Satay** directed by K.M. Basker. Bat Latiff, another of the MFP's child actors won the Best Performance by a Child Actor award for two consecutive years in 1963 and 1964 for the films **Lela Manja** and **Gerhana**, both directed by Jamil Sulong.

The Asian Film Festival may not be considered as a major film competition and the awards won by the two Malay film producing studios may not be as prestigious as an award won at Cannes, Berlin or Venice. But the achievement of both the studios in competing with products from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines and Japan during those years was quite significant. The Malay film artistes and workers were proud of their achievements and the film audience attuned to the Malay film scenario.

4.8 The Collapse of the Studio System

On April 30th 1965 the Shaw Brothers notified 109 production staff of its well-known Malay Film Productions studio in Ampas Road, Singapore, of the termination of their services (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 20). The decision came as a shock not only to the artistes, directors and film crew concerned, but also to the Malay entertainment circles. The news was front-page headlines in the major newspapers the following day.

The United Malays National Organisation,[8] the major component of the ruling Alliance Party in Malaysia was much concerned with the news. Ghazali Shafie, who was then the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Abdullah Ahmad, the political secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, came down to Singapore to discuss matters regarding the Shaw Brothers decision to close their MFP studio. Haji Mohamad Taff, who was then the Singapore branch's UMNO president, was also involved in the discussion (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 21). The Shaw Brothers then withdrew their termination notices and a big tea party was held in the studio grounds to celebrate the reopening of the company on June 12, 1965 (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 21).

Tunku Abdul Rahman the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, a highly respected leader and statesman, discussed the possibility of MFP undertaking the making of **Raja Bersiong** (King with Fangs), a costume epic of the early Malay Kingdom in the north of Malaya which was under attack by the Siamese king. The Shaw Brothers, Run Run and Runme agreed to the proposal and a story board led by Jamil Sulong was formed. Jamil and Jaafar Abdullah met the Prime Minister on a number of occasions to discuss matters relating to the story-line of **Raja Bersiong**. After a few re-writes and when visual details had been finalised after several consultations with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the studio started shooting on December 23rd., 1966 (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 21).

Raja Bersiong was directed by Jamil Sulong based on a script written by Tunku Abdul Rahman himself. The film was shot in colour and three technicians from Japan, Tokujiro Yamazaki, Ryoichi Arami and Tokio Matshushita, were flown in to Singapore to handle equipment during

shooting (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 208). The production was mounted on a large scale involving almost all the artistes and crew members of the studio. Shooting was scheduled for three months, but was extended to more than five months (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 208). It was the most expensive production undertaken by MFP and also the most extravagant production ever done during the studio era.

With **Raja Bersiong** Tunku Abdul Rahman, was for a short period hailed as the saviour of the Malay film industry. Everything went back to normal. MFP made five more films before the release of **Raja Bersiong** which took quite some time to be colour-processed in Tokyo.

The situation after the reopening of the studio in 1967 was not quite the same anymore. The Shaw Brothers were very stringent on the production budget. The directors and artistes were uneasy with the management's attitude. Despite that a good number of the artistes still believed that so long as Tunku Abdul Rahman was around their future would still be good, and they were hoping that **Raja Bersiong**, which had yet to be released, would set a new era in the Malay film industry. The Shaw Brothers however did not release the film until January 1968 and prior to that, they decided to close the Ampas Road studio for good. That was in December 1967 (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 23).

Word about the Shaw Brothers decision to close permanently spread around and Jaafar Abdullah, the studio's publicity and formation manager warned the artistes to prepare for the worst and start saving for their future. Most of them did not believe him. They said, "*Mana boleh tutup,*

kita baru saja bikin gambar Tunku Abdul Rahman" (Jaafar Abdullah, Interview; August 20, 1986). [9]

The decision was final. Attempts by the Artistes Association to get some Malaysian ministers to negotiate relief for their distressing situation were no longer entertained by the management. The water and electricity supply to the artistes' quarters were cut off and the quarters were given back to Singapore's council. Artistes who decided to remain at those premises had to pay the monthly rental to the city's housing board (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 29).

A.V. Bapat, Jins Shamsuddin and Jaafar Abdullah all agreed that the main reason for the closing of MFP was the trade union involvement. The dispute between the management and the artistes had started way back in 1954 when the Malay journalists and writers group in Singapore, which knew and understood the problems of the Malay film artistes, had suggested that for their own good they ought to get together and form an association. *Persatuan Artis Malaya* or Malayan Artistes Association was formed on March 23, 1954 and the address used was 271, Tembeling Road, Singapore (Salleh Ghani, 1989; 53). It was the residence of one of the artistes named Musalmah. P. Ramlee was appointed as President, Salleh Ghani as the Secretary and Jamil Sulong was Treasurer (Salleh Ghani, 1989; 55).

Initially the association was meant to take care of the welfare of the artistes but later issues like salary scales and working conditions became the main focus. At that stage the association was registered as a trade union and began to look into matters relating to the revision of salary

scales for the artistes. The association was preparing a memorandum to be sent to the studio's management but before anything happened the studio's management gave them a shock by terminating the services of one artiste and four assistant directors (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 130). Thus began the legal battle between the association and the MFP's management. The association sought the help of one T.T. Rajah, Singapore's Commissioner for Labour and Lee Kuan Yew, a lawyer and a trade unionist. It demanded that the five employees be immediately reinstated. The management refused and members of the association began a strike that lasted nearly a month from March 16 to April 7, 1957 (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 171). In the end the management agreed to reinstate the five employees and negotiations for a salary rise started.

For ten years (1957-1967) the crisis between the management and the employees of the studio dragged on. When the demand of the artistes was agreed upon by the management, the workers began to fight for their share. After 1964 when Jamil Sulong took over as President from P. Ramlee who was sent to Kuala Lumpur, the association branched out into two, the artistes and the workers. The workers association then became affiliated to the Singapore General Employees Union which was part of Singapore's Association of Trade Unions. The workers association began to pressure the management by implementing the work-to-rule approach in film production. According to Jamil Sulong the work-to-rule tactic slowed down each production. The production crew was in control of studio and location shooting. They worked at their own pace and strictly observed the normal working hours of nine to five. Each film therefore took much longer to shoot and thereby the budget was increased.

Directors and artistes could not do anything to change the attitude of the workers who were members of a separate association.

In 1965 Jins Shamsuddin took the helm of the artistes' association when he was elected President to replace Jamil Sulong. Under the leadership of Jins Shamsuddin the artistes and the workers reformed once more into one association. Again the demand for higher salaries became the main issue. One reason given was the cost of living in Singapore. The association also demanded that a yearly increment be stipulated in the contract.

The association then was still affiliated to the Singapore General Employees Union, a left-wing trade union dominated by leaders and members of Singapore's opposition party, the Socialist Front. Union leaders walked in and out discussing the salary matter with the management. In the end the union appealed to Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman to help settle the dispute. Tunku sent Senu Abdul Rahman, one of his cabinet ministers to have a talk with the Shaw Brothers' management staff. The management gave in. The salary scales of both artistes and workers were amended:

Table 4.1
The New Salary Scale (Artistes)

	Before 1964	After 1964
Directors	$500.00	$700.00 - $1200.00
Assist. Directors	$200.00	$335.00 - $ 400.00
Main Actor/Actress	$300.00	$430.00 - $ 610.00
Main Supporting	$200.00	$270.00 - $ 510.00
Supporting	$120.00	$230.00 - $ 320.00

Source: (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 22).
*In 1964 the rate was approximately: M$2.50 = A$1.0

The production workers were also given a salary rise of more or less the same range depending on the nature of their jobs.

While MFP was facing a big crisis, Cathay-Keris studio was at its peak. Artistes and workers were not involved in the trade union and their welfare was well taken care of by the management. One example which shows the clear-cut difference between artistes from the two studios was their type of accommodation. While Shaw Brothers artistes had to be content with a one-room cardboard partitioned unit in army-style barracks or quarters, Cathay's leading artistes lived in bungalow houses of their own choice in any area, all paid for by the management.

So there was a marked difference in the output of the two studios in the years 1964-1967, seen in Table 4.2. As can be seen from the figures, the Shaw Brothers' stringent attitude did not pay off. The loss suffered in 1964

taught them a lesson and in 1965 the management tried to get even with the artistes and workers and also tried to prove to them that it was the management who was actually in power and could determine the future of the industry. The Shaw Brothers closed the production studio saying they could no longer bear the high production costs while the returns were not satisfactory.

The temporary closure of the MFP studio in 1965 resulted in some ugly incidents. Some of the artistes lost their tempers. Kwek Chip Jian, the studio manager was threatened by Salleh Kamil and his close friends. When Jaafar Abdullah recommended to the management that the studio be closed temporarily and re-organised, he himself was also threatened by the artistes (Jaafar Abdullah, Interview; August 20, 1986).

Table 4.2
Number of films produced
Between 1964 - 1967

Year	Shaw's MFP	Cathay-Kris studio
1964	2	11
1965	5	10
1966	6	4
1967	7	4
Total number of films produced within four-year period.	20	29

After 1965 the artistes' and workers' union became disorganised. The affiliation to Singapore's General Employees Union did not bring positive effects to the members as it had in 1964. Dominic Putuchery, the man behind the trade union and Singapore's Socialist Front was arrested together with some other union leaders. Jins Shamsuddin and Nordin Arshad who led the artistes' and the workers' union were sent to Hong Kong by the Shaw Brothers management. According to Jins, the Shaw Brothers were trying to protect him and Arshad from being arrested by the government while at the same time providing them with a programme in their Hong Kong studio (Jins Shamsuddin, Interview; August 22, 1986). Jins and Arshad together with a new-comer, Sharifah Aminah acted in two of the Shaw Brothers productions in Hong Kong in 1966 and 1967. Two films **Bayangan Ajal** (Shadow of Death) and **Jurang Bahaya** (The Danger Line) were dubbed in the Malay language and released in Malaysia.

The absence of Jins and Arshad from the Singapore scene weakened the unity of the artistes and the workers at MFP. When the Shaw Brothers decided to close the studio in 1965, the artistes and workers were helpless and their bargaining power was no longer strong. After Tunku Abdul Rahman came onto the scene with his **Raja Bersiong**, the spirits of the artistes were lifted up a bit. The Shaw Brothers however did not release the film until the studio was closed for good in 1967. Prior to that MFP was not operating at its full capacity. There were only three directors left, Jamil Sulong, Omar Rojik and S. Kadarisman. In fact, even from 1960-1967, the Shaw Brothers' number of directors was only six: four Malays, one Indian and one Filipino. The Indian director, Dhiresh Ghosh left for India in 1962 and P. Ramlee left for Kuala Lumpur in 1964. Ramon

Estella, the Filipino director was working for both the Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris studios from the years 1963 to 1965.

Cathay-Keris studio was very productive in the years 1964 and 1965 simply because the total number of directors working was nine; but towards the end of the years 1966 and 1967 Cathay also slowed down in its productions. It was quite obvious that even though Cathay did not face the same crisis as the Shaw Brothers studio, the decision made by the company to close down the studio in 1965 did affect Cathay's momentum. In the end Cathay-Keris studio closed down six years later in 1973. The management was scared that its artistes and crew might demand higher salaries as had happened at the Shaw Brothers' studio. Cathay also realised that the cost of production for each film had escalated due to higher prices of raw stock and processing chemicals. Malay films were also facing stiff competition from Hindi and Indonesian films.

There were also other factors that lead towards the closing of the studios and the collapse of the Malay film industry. The three directors remaining at MFP were being pushed to their limit. They were working under many constraints. Each of them was making an average of four to five films a year (1965-1967). They not only directed the films but were also writing the screenplays. Their peak had passed and they could no longer come out with good, original and commercially viable scripts.

Singapore was separated from Malaysia on August 9, 1965 (Gullick and Gale, 1986; 119). The country's participation in Malaysia from September 16, 1963 had proven short-lived. After separation anything that happened in Singapore was entirely her own domestic affair and leaders or ministers

from Kuala Lumpur could no longer interfere. Also Singapore's 14 percent Malay population did not in any way justify government support for a Malay film industry or culture. This was another reason why Cathay-Keris studio decided to stop production in 1973.

The late sixties was also the time when Malaysian commodities, particularly rubber and tin suffered in the international market. The Malay small-holders were affected by low prices and had to cut down their daily budgets including entertainment expenses. Malay films during this period failed very badly at cinemas throughout the country.

Malaysia introduced television in 1963. With imported television programmes such as **High Chaparal**, **Combat**, **The Man from UNCLE**, and **Gunsmoke**, people did not bother to go to their local cinemas anymore unless there was an exceptionally good film being screened. And the 'good' or better quality films in the early sixties were those imported from Hong Kong, India and Indonesia, besides the ever-popular Hollywood products.

4.9 The Merdeka Film Productions

The establishment of Merdeka Film studio in Kuala Lumpur in 1961 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 241) could be seen as an attempt to move the Malay film industry into its proper place within a favourable environment. The Malaysian government may not have given financial support to the industry, but it had definitely given spiritual support and encouragement to both the artistes and the management of film companies. It also realised that since the majority of the Malay film audience is in Malaysia and not

in Singapore it would be more viable for the centre of the industry to be in Kuala Lumpur the capital of Malaysia.

Singapore in the sixties was no longer conducive to the simple methods of the Malay film-making world which had always been free of interference from unions or organisations subject to political influece. The socialist political movement in Singapore in the late sixties and its influence on the labour force through trade unionism was a major problem to the management of the Shaw Brothers. The influence from members of the Singapore General Employees Union had changed the attitude of artistes and production workers of MFP. Never in the history of the studio had the management been labelled as an oppressor. For the first time the artistes and the workers were told by people from outside that they had been exploited. They therefore not only demanded a salary rise, but also fixed working hours and better living conditions. Even though the management agreed to provide salary rises and improve the living conditions of the artistes, the idea of rigid studio working hours was found to be ridiculous and could not be tolerated. To the management films were not made only during normal office hours; after all, the studio had facilities for shooting at all hours, day or night, but the artistes demanded double rate overtime payments for night shoots. In the end the management found that the cost of production had sky-rocketed and the rate of productions slowed down. Each production took more time to be completed.

Any management seeking efficient and profitable production would do the same as the Shaw Brothers did to its MFP company. The studio was closed

down and the Shaw Brothers began shrewdly to move their film-making base to Hong Kong (New Straits Times, March 3, 1985; 12).

Cathay-Keris was left with no choice except to continue production at its Singapore base, even though Cathay-Keris did not face a union crisis as the Shaw Brothers had. But it did not take long for the management to realise that the same atmosphere would soon spread to their studios. The last days of Cathay-Keris in the late sixties saw the decline of its productions not only in quantity but also in quality (Hamzah Hussein, Interview; August 18, 1986). Cathay's Ho Ah Loke was quick though to realise the potential of moving the industry to Kuala Lumpur when he decided to tie-up with H.M. Shah, a Malaysian entrepreneur who was then trying his luck in the local film industry.

In 1960 H.M. Shah bought a piece of land of about 36,696 square meters (Buletin Finas, No.3, 1986; 10) next to the National Zoo in Ulu Klang, Selangor, Malaysia, a quiet locality about 30 kilometres from the city of Kuala Lumpur. Shah only paid M$600 to the Selangor State government for the less than a quarter acre plot. Shah agreed to bring in Ho Ah Loke, the Malay movie mogul who once owned the Cathay-Keris studio in Singapore, as a partner. They then built a studio, an office block and a few wooden houses in the compound to be used as film settings. The studio was named Merdeka and the company was known as Merdeka Film Productions. Shaw Vee Ngok who had once worked for his uncle as Studio Manager at MFP in Singapore was appointed as Merdeka's studio manager assisted by his wife (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 241).

The opening of the Merdeka studio saw yet another move by the Malay film directors. The prime mover behind the reshuffle was none other than Ho Ah Loke, whom the actors and directors described as the most persuasive and easy to work with (Jaafar Abdullah, Interview; August 20, 1986). Ah Loke always got what or who he wanted in the film industry simply because he was always willing to pay the price. Jins Shamsuddin described him as "the man who carried money in a paper-bag" (Jins Shamsuddin, Interview; August 22, 1986) and made an instant offer whenever he needed you. With Ah Loke at the helm of the new film company, L. Krishnan did not hesitate to join him and thereby became the first Merdeka director to undertake its pioneer production of **Tun Tijah** in 1960, (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 243) a semi-historical film about a princess being abducted by a court warrior to be presented to his Sultan. The film was made in 1961 and released the same year. The cast included Abdullah Chik, Salmah Ahmad and Mustaffa Maarof.

In 1962 another Cathay-Keris director joined Krishnan at the new Merdeka studio. He was Salleh Ghani who had already directed three films for Cathay-Keris in Singapore. Salleh's first film at Merdeka was **Siti Payung**. In the same year Krishnan directed three more films, **Keris Sempena Riau** (The Riau Dagger), **Selendang Merah** (The Red Scarf) and **Ratapan Ibu** (Cry of a Mother). In 1963 Merdeka brought M. Amin from Cathay-Keris and Omar Rojik from MFP as guest directors. Amin directed **Pertiwi** (Motherland) and Rojik directed **Anakku Suamiku** (My Son, My Husband) and **Si Buta** (The Blind).

A year after that Shaw Brothers was brought in as a partner in Merdeka Film Productions and not long after Shaw Brothers became the major

shareholder. By 1964 they acquired all the shares and became the sole owner of the studio. Shaw Brothers paid M$370,000.00 for the land and buildings to H.M. Shah and Ho Ah Loke (Jaafar Abdullah, Interview; August 20, 1986).

The year 1964 was the troubled period at the Singapore MFP studio. Shaw Brothers' acquisition of shares in Merdeka was actually an attempt at rebuilding their Singapore Malay film empire which was about to collapse. Shaw Brothers still believed that the Malay film industry was a profitable venture and wanted very much to establish yet another empire in a new environment.

The strike at MFP in 1964 almost crippled the industry as well as the company. MFP's output for the year was only two films. However the Shaw Brothers were still confident about the good future of the Malay film, and one man that they put their faith in was P. Ramlee. By then Ramlee was already a great asset to the company. Ramlee's dramatic films like **Antara Dua Darjat** and **Ibu Mertuaku** as well as his comedies like the **Bujang Lapuk** series were a big hit and had made huge returns to the company. Ramlee was also the President of the Actors' Union and Shaw Brothers had to find ways to break the relationship without displeasing their "golden boy". Ramlee was persuaded to leave the Singapore studio for the new Merdeka studio in Kuala Lumpur. On April 20, 1964 Ramlee left Singapore for Kuala Lumpur (Majallah Filem, May 1964; 7). The Shaw Brothers were hoping that the Golden Age of the Malay movies could be repeated in Kuala Lumpur with Ramlee around.

Ramlee did the best he could to prove his worth at Merdeka. He directed a musical called **Ragam P. Ramlee** (Ramlee's Variety Show) in 1965, **Do Re Mi**, **Sabaruddin Tukang Kasut** (Sabaruddin the Cobbler) and **Nasib Do Re Mi** (The Fate of Do Re Mi) in 1966. All three films were comedies. In 1967, the year when Singapore's MFP studio closed for good, Ramlee directed four films for Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur. That year showed Ramlee at his peak as far as quantity was concerned. Never in the history of Malay film industry had Ramlee made so many films within a year. Ramlee's record at MFP had been in 1959 when he managed to direct three films; other than that he managed to complete only one or two a year.

Ramlee experienced the most difficult period in his career at Merdeka. The studio was not a film studio in the real sense of the word. It was more like a warehouse where old equipment was kept (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 212). Ramlee had to work extra hard not only as a director but also as a composer, actor, singer, script-writer, cameraman and film editor. He had to work as film director at the studio to support himself (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 213). He did not make much money from the studio and was always in financial difficulties. He had to earn extra income by doing stage-shows all over Malaysia as well as Brunei. He also formed a musical band called **Ben Putih** to accompany his singing on stage.

In 1965 Ramlee was joined at Merdeka by Diresh Ghosh, the Indian director who had eleven films to his credit from the time when he first joined MFP in 1958 until he left in 1963. Ghosh directed **Bumiputera** (Son of the Soil) and **Dajal Suchi** (The Sacred Devil) along with Ramlee's musical to complete his first year's assignment at Merdeka.

Table 4.3 Merdeka Film Production Studio Output 1961 - 1980

Name of Film Director	Year																				Total number of film for each director
	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	
L. KRISHNAN	1	3	1																		5
A. R. TOMPEL	1																				1
NAZ ACHNAS	1	1							1		1										4
OMAR ROJIK		1	1					1	3												6
SALLEH GHANI		1	3	1																	5
MAROETI			1																		1
M. AMIN			1									1									2
FREDDY YOUNG				1																	1
P. RAMLEE				1	1	3	4	2	2	1	1	1									16
DIRESH GHOSH					2	1															3
S. KADARISMAN							1	2	2	3			1	1							10
JAMIL SULONG								1						1	1	2					5
S. SUDARMAJI														1							1
JINS SHAMSUDDIN									1	1											2
(HONG KONG)																		1			1
HAFSHAM																				1	1
Total Number of Film Each Year	3	6	7	3	3	4	5	6	9	5	2	2	1	3	1	2		1		1	64 (Total Number of Film Produced)

After the closure of the Singapore studio, directors like S. Kadarisman,[10] Jamil Sulong and Omar Rojik were given the chance by Shaw Brothers to continue their directorial jobs at the Merdeka studio. As can be seen from Table 4.3, Merdeka's output increased with the arrival of those directors.

Table 4.3 shows that Ramlee made the most films for Merdeka studio. He directed 16 films altogether within a period of nine years (1964-1972) before he died of a heart failure on May 29, 1973 (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 227). Next in line after Ramlee was S. Kadrisman with ten films to his credit. Kadarisman was well-known for his expertise in presenting *purba* stories, a Malay film genre similar to that of the Hollywood's western.

Merdeka started very well in its early years with three films in 1961, five in 1962 and seven in 1963. It slowed down in the next three years, only to pick up again in 1968, 1969 and 1970. Those were the years after MFP closed down in Singapore and most of the directors moved up to Kuala Lumpur.

The seventies were certainly not the best years for the Malay film industry. Cathay-Keris closed down in 1974 leaving only Merdeka studio in Kuala Lumpur to continue the ailing industry. The absence of competition from other studios should have put Merdeka in a comfortable position, but the years after 1974 were the period when the whole Malay film industry came to a standstill.

Merdeka's output as compared to Singapore MFP and Cathay-Keris studios in the late sixties can be seen in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4:
Film output from the three studios as from 1965 - 1980

Year	Studio		
	Malay Film Prod.	Cathay-Keris	Merdeka
1965	5	10	5
1966	5	4	4
1967	closed	4	2
1968		3	8
1969		6	9
1970		3	5
1971		4	2
1972		4	2
1973		1	1
1974		closed	4
1975			1
1976			2
1977			-
1978			1
1979			-
1980			1
			closed
Total	10	39	47

4.10 The failure of Merdeka Studio

When Shaw Brothers closed down the MFP studio in Ampas Road, Singapore in 1967, actors, directors and workers had to face the real world outside the studio and start looking for jobs to support their families. Those with a few savings started their own small businesses, others became stage-show promoters or part-time television actors, and some became taxi-drivers or even sold *nasi lemak*' [11], at road-side stalls.

A good number of actors and directors moved to Kuala Lumpur. Other artistes like cameraman Abu Bakar Ali and make-up director A.V. Bapat ended up working for Malaysian Television. Shaw Brothers who owned the Merdeka studio welcomed most actors and directors to work at the new studio. But history did not repeat itself. Even with the same actors and directors Merdeka studio did not function with the same style and set-up as the former Singapore studio.

In the middle of 1972 Merdeka studio analysed its output and takings from films produced since 1968. Statistics for nine films produced and released from February 1968 to June 1970 showed that the company only made a profit of M$91,000 from six films, an average of fifteen thousand dollars per film. The studio lost five thousand dollars on two films and another one managed to break even. (See Table 4.5) Comparing each film budget and takings after deduction of entertainment tax, distribution and exhibition costs, the studio found that income was not at all encouraging. The actual profit was only M$43,000 from the six films, an average of only 7.1 thousand Malaysian dollars per film.

Table 4.5: Comparison of Film Budget and Takings for Merdeka productions 1968 - 1970

Film Title (Director)	Released date	Budget M$	Takings M$	Net Profit (loss) M$
Lain Jalan ke Syurga **(Jamil Sulong)**	Feb.'68	77,000	94,000	17,000
Pedekar Empat **(Kadarisman)**	Sept.'68	79,000	82,000	3,000
Kancan Tirana **(P.Ramlee)**	Feb.'69	87,000	91,000	4,000
Kembang Layu **(Kadarisman)**	Mar.'69	66,000	63,000	(3,000)
Bukan Salah Ibu Mengandung **(Jins Shamsuddin)**	May '69	64,000	112,000	48,000
Lanang Sejagat **(Omar Rojik)**	July'69	62,000	62,000	-
Panglima Harimau Berantai **(Kadarisman)**	Oct.'69	63,000	80,000	17,000
Keranda Jingga **(Omar Rojik)**	Dec.'69	58,000	60,000	2,000
Perintah Seri Paduka **(Kadarisman)**	June'70	64,000	62,000	(2,000)
TOTAL		**620,000**	**706,000**	**86,000**

Source: (Jamil Sulong: 1990:257)

In the middle of the seventies the studio faced yet another crisis. In 1974, after producing four films which failed miserably at the box-office the studio manager decided to restructure the production methods and management. Kadarisman, Naz Achnas, Omar Rojik and Sudarmadji, the directors who contributed a film each in 1974, were dispensed with by the Merdeka studio. Jamil Sulong was called in to begin a new era for the studio. The studio's management was taken over by the Shaw Brothers headquarters in Jalan Sultan Ismail, Kuala Lumpur. It was decided that there would be no more indoor shooting and thus the studio in Ulu Kelang would no longer be used for filming. Films would be shot on location and post-production work would be done in Hong Kong (Jamil Sulong, 1990;258). However the production output from the studio was still small. There was only one film produced in 1975, two in 1976 and again one each in 1978 and 1980 after which the studio closed down. In 1977 and 1979 the studio produced no films at all.

Four main factors contributed to Merdeka's failure:

i) The studio's set-up and regulations.
ii) The studio's outdated equipment and its stringent budgeting.
iii) The free entry of Indonesian films to Malaysia.
iv) The death of P. Ramlee.

Each of these is now examined in detail.

4.10.1 The Merdeka studio: set-up and regulations

Shaw Brothers operated the Merdeka studio on a short-term contract basis. Actors, directors and workers were hired and paid for each production. They were not considered as permanent staff of the studio and therefore not paid a salary as before. The only studio staff on a monthly salary were the film editor, sound recordist, scenic artist, store keeper, projectionist and a few production assistants (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 117). The welfare of actors, directors and other non-salaried workers was not the responsibility of the management. There was thus no sense of belonging to the studio anymore.

Fees paid to the actors were very low compared to the monthly income of actors during the Singapore period. Merdeka used to pay M$3000 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 250) to the leading actor or actress per film and a leading actor or actress could only land a part once or twice a year in the few films produced by the studio. A film director was paid M$6000 (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 254) for each film completed and each production took three months to complete, which meant that a director could only earn an average of M$2000 a month if he was given one directing assignment every three months. There were too few films produced and a director could have considered himself lucky if he was called twice in a year for a film directing assignment.

Being a film actor or director during the Merdeka studio period was no longer a glamorous profession. The standard of living of a film-star was much lower than that of an ordinary government clerk. With the small fees they got from the studio, actors had to survive on their own, renting a

house, going to the market on public transport to buy daily provisions or even joining the queue at the government dispensary for their medical supplies (Jaafar Abdullah, Interview; August 20, 1986). In other words, the film-stars were no longer the special people to whom the public had always looked up. They were seen around much too often and became part of the actual world outside the studio. The situation resulted in most leading actors and actresses refusing to accept film-role offers from the Merdeka studio. A few of them started to do other things for a living and to forget the film world altogether. According to Lent (1991; 191), the difficulty of obtaining the services of talented movie personnel was not that they did not exist in Malaysia; they were not offered enough money to return to movie careers. Kasma Booty, a Malay star of 1940s and 1950s said she felt 'ashamed to say how much they offered me' to perform in films in the 1970s (Ng, 1970; 10).

Directors working with a limited budget from Shaw Brothers tried their best to make do with the available talent. Newcomers were screen-tested, recruited and given parts in films for very low fees. Because of their lack of experience and lack of proper training in acting, none of these newcomers became well known stars. They disappeared from the film scene even before their films were released, and a few other new faces were tried out in the next film. The actors willing to accept the relatively low salaries were mediocre, partly because, as one writer said, they 'have to struggle with an office job, modelling or operating a boutique for a living', and cannot devote their full time to film-making (Khoo, 1973; 12). The cycle went on with no great success. Among those new talents introduced to the Malay screen by the studio were Rosmawati, Sharifah Hanim, Sophia Ibrahim, Wan Chik Daud, Nor Azizah, Dayang Sulu, Rubiah Ismail, Ismail Mahmud,

Ed Osmera, Gus Shariff, Fazliyaton, S. Ahmad, Mariati, Khatijah Hashim, S. Rosley, Noran Nordin, Dali Siliwangi, Anita Jaafar, Tamam Idris, Latiff Borgiba and Karim Latiff (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 241-257). This same group of artistes appeared in almost every film produced by the Merdeka Films Production studio. The lack of money hindered efforts to use foreign co-stars and young local talents, therefore, the audiences, in addition to seeing the same old scenes, saw the same old faces (Lent, 1990; 191).

The free-style working conditions given to the directors was of no help in improving the quality of Merdeka's films. P. Ramlee who used to like the idea of working freely with his actors and production crew did not manage to sustain the same high standard of film-making as had been practised in the studio system of the Singapore MFP era. The right team spirit and dedication to the work were missing. The only consolation was that Merdeka's efforts somehow managed to sustain the Malay film industry from total collapse (Faridah Shreef, 1986; 21). The Merdeka era was dominated by Malay directors who learnt the trade of film-making in the hardest way. But in terms of content, Merdeka films were more Malay than those produced during the Singapore studio era.

4.10.2 Merdeka's low budget and outdated equipment

With Merdeka Studio the process of film-making in the country was actually moving backwards. The Shaw Brothers still thought that it was possible to make simple and low-budget Malay films for a Malay audience as they had in Singapore during the fifties and sixties. The budget for each black and white film produced at Merdeka was said to be as low as

M$80,000 (Faridah Shreef, 1986; 48). According to Omar Rojik, the Shaw Brothers were never willing to increase the production budget (Faridah Shreef, 1986; 20).

Directors had to schedule their indoor shooting in just one studio building. The studio did not employ a carpentry unit to built sets for interior scenes so whatever backgrounds were needed by the directors for their interior scenes were done with whatever materials were made available by the art director. Therefore each background for interior scenes lacked authenticity and was not professionally done. Even the furniture on the set was never changed. Sometimes only the covers were changed when those furniture was used in different films.

Shooting of exterior scenes was done within the studio's limited ground area with a few set-pieces as backgrounds. Location shooting was restricted to a ten-mile radius of the studio so that the same scenes appeared in all of its films - the zoo and surrounding jungle (Lent, 1991; 191).

Film equipment was also outdated and inadequate. Even though the studio produced films in wide scope which they termed *Merdekascope*, the camera was equipped with only one 50mm anamorphic lens. There were no 75mm and 100mm lenses and there were no big close-up shots in films produced by the studio. The same lens was used for all kinds of shots. It was only after the closing down of the studio in Singapore that a complete set of lenses was brought to the Merdeka studio (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 243). Lighting equipment was also limited resulting in most interior scenes being underlit.

4.10.3 The Influx of Indonesian and Hong Kong films

The standard of Malay films produced by the Merdeka studio was far inferior to the films produced during the Singapore studio days. The same directors working at Merdeka seemed to have lost their magic. Story-lines were very pretentious and technically the films were poorly executed. In the late seventies the Malay audience began to scorn Malay films (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 31). Even P. Ramlee's films failed to attract them to the theatres.

At the same time as the Merdeka studio was declining in its capacity, the Shaw Brothers studio in Hong Kong was turning out swordplay films which captured a big market in Malaysia. The films were not only patronised by the Chinese, but also the Malays. Hong Kong actors like Wang Yu and David Chiang suddenly became household names in Malaysia.

The Shaw Brothers were excited with the new found formula and thought that the same craze could also be churned out from the Kuala Lumpur Merdeka studio. Directors were asked to imitate the Hong Kong swordplay films. Thus Malay *purba* or films based on a traditional way of life turned into Chinese swordplay films in local costumes and settings. S. Kadarisman made **Panglima Harimau Berantai** (The Chained Tiger Warrior) and **Satria** (Warrior) and P. Ramlee made **Enam Jahanam** (The Six Rascals) and **Kancan Tirana.** Only Jins Shamsuddin refused to bow to the management's directive of making Malay films more Chinese. In 1969 Jins made **Bukan Salah Ibu Mengandung** (Not a Mother's Fault),), a drama based on a Malay novel of the same title by Harun Hassan, and

a year later made **Di Belakang Tabir** (Behind The Curtain) a crime drama set in modern Kuala Lumpur.

The years after 1974 saw the Merdeka studio facing stiff competition from imported Indonesian, Chinese (Hong Kong) and Indian films screened on the independent cinema circuits. The Malays, who used to patronise locally produced films from the time of the Singapore studios' era, were no longer interested in Merdeka's low-budget black and white films. According to Baharuddin Latiff there was a silent indirect boycott by the Malay audience of locally produced Malay films and they instead started to fall in love with Indonesian films (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 31).

While Hong Kong films were making huge profits on the Shaw Brothers and Cathay circuits, newly set-up Malay film companies were turning to Indonesia. The new companies, being unable to produce their own films, turned to distribution and started to import Indonesian films for the local market. Among the early films were **Lelaki Tak Bernama** (Man Without Name), and **Orang-orang Liar** (The Fugitives), both with the handsome Ratno Timoer in the lead role. Then came **Pahlawan Sembilan** (The Nine Warriors) and **Tuan Tanah Kedawung** (The Kedawung Landlord). These films were made in 1970 and 1971 (Salim Said, 1989; 130).

Malay audiences were fascinated by the new Indonesian films and began to compare them with the locally produced Malay films which they found to be far inferior. Indonesian films were in colour and wide screen in contrast to the black and white Malay films. Handsome actors and beautiful actresses dominated the Indonesian films while the same old faces or unknown and untalented newcomers in Malay film scenes were a bore to

the Malay audience. According to some critics that was the main attraction of the Indonesian products. But a thorough analysis of the early Indonesian films brought to Malaysia also reveals that the story-line and characterisations were very strong and well conceived; actors were well-chosen for their roles and the acting was very natural. Films like **Lelaki Tak Bernama** (The Man Without a Name), **Orang-orang Liar** (The Fugitives), **Pahlawan Sembilan** (The Nine Warriors), **Bernafas Dalam Lumpur** (The Longest Dark) and **Dusun Besar** (The Big Village) were a great box-office success in Malaysia.

Even in the late seventies, when Indonesian films were influenced by the Hong Kong swordplay films, the Malaysian audiences still welcomed such films. Imitations from Indonesia were acceptable to them because colour photography somehow managed to hide whatever shortcomings the films might have had. Comparatively, the new Indonesian films were in actual fact far superior to the Malay films in almost every aspect. Good actors with refined cinematic acting techniques and good cinematography helped to make the films very appealing to the Malaysian audience whose ability to accept Indonesian films with their distinctive speech and cultural styles had greatly improved over the years.

The Shaw Brothers Merdeka Film Productions was influenced by the colour and scope of films from Indonesia. Realising these facts, the Shaw Brothers slightly changed their attitude and in the late seventies announced that Malay films would also be made in colour and wide screen. Thus the Shaw Brothers became a trend follower. Five films were produced within the 1975-1980 period. They were **Permintaan Terakhir** (The Last Wish) in 1975, **Jiwa Remaja** (Dead End) and **Cinta dan Lagu**

(Song of Love) both in 1976, **Loceng Maut** (Bell of Death) in 1978 and **Adik Manja** (The Loved One) in 1980.

But the Shaw Brothers did not believe in using local materials. Jamil Sulong was called in to put the Shaw Brothers new formula into practise. The period was then dominated by Jamil who was asked to translate English screenplays of successful Hong Kong films into Malay. Jamil was allowed to travel anywhere in Malaysia to scout for locations. Shaw also allowed Jamil to conduct screen-tests and to select fresh new talent for the films. But when Jamil asked that he be allowed to work with local technicians and film crew the Shaws said no. Equipment and technicians were brought from Hong Kong and films like **Permintaan Terakhir** (The Last Wish) and **Jiwa Remaja** (Dead End) for which directing credit was given to Jamil, were in actual fact were filmed by the director of cinematography and the camera crew Hong Kong. Jamil Sulong who was employed to direct both **Permintaan Terakhir** and **Jiwa Remaja** and Naz Achnas who directed **Loceng Maut** had much to say about working with the Hong Kong crew. Jamil Sulong did confess that at the time he did not know who was actually directing the films because most of the time the Hong Kong director of cinematography was handling the camera set-ups. Jamil's job was limited to communicating with the local talent, arranging places for actors and supervising their lines in Malay as the camera crew from Hong Kong could not understand a word of Malay or English. Thus began the era during which Malay films were made by Chinese film-makers.

With **Permintaan Terakhir** the Shaw Brothers scored a first in the renaissance of Malay film, a fact which is much disputed by the Malay cultural elites because the material for **Permintaan Terakhir** was not

originally Malay. The film was actually a translation from a successful Hong Kong film. But the general cinema-going public in Malaysia did not seem to care much about the origin of the film material and **Permintaan Terakhir** was a box-office hit. The material has been very well adapted into the Malay scene, replete with local ingredients and colour thus turning it into a Malaysian product.

The Shaw Brothers did the same with the other four films produced through their Merdeka studio. **Jiwa Remaja, Cinta dan Lagu**, **Loceng Maut** and **Adik Manja**, which all originated from successful Hong Kong movies, were translated into Malay and adapted to the Malaysian environment with its local taste and colour.

However, the Shaw Brothers' success formula of Hong Kong films made in Malaysia did not last long, especially with **Jiwa Remaja** and **Loceng Maut** which were very Chinese in their presentation. **Jiwa Remaja** was full of kung-fu type fighting scenes and **Loceng Maut** had in most scenes a close resemblance to Hong Kong's sword-play films. Both films did not do well on the local cinema circuits especially after the Malay press were very vocal about the Chinese elements depicted in both films. The source material for both films was of much concern to the Malay literary circle who claimed that local materials written by Malay writers were abundant and readily available for screen adaptation. Furthermore it had already been proven that materials taken from Malay novels were well received by the film audience.

After using Jamil as a puppet director the Shaw Brothers Merdeka studio made two more Hong Kong films translated into Malay and adapted into

local scenes and conditions. The films were **Loceng Maut** (Bell of Death) and **Adik Manja** (The Loved One) in 1979 and 1980. Naz Achnas was paid as a puppet director for **Loceng Maut** but for **Adik Manja**, Hafsham, a graduate of the London National Film School, refused to work with Hong Kong technicians and film crew.

Adik Manja marked another sucess by a Malay film director and proved to be another box-office success. It was a feature film debut for Hafsham who had worked previously on small budget television dramas and short commercial films for private advertising and production houses. **Adik Manja** won the Best Comedy Award in the First Malaysian Film Festival 1979 which was organised by the *Association of Entertainment Journalists.* The film tells of the appointment of a male teacher to an all-girls boarding school. Hafsham managed to make the film look more Malaysian as compared to previous efforts by the Shaw Brothers. However the local Malay press were not too happy about its source material and created quite a controversy.

After **Adik Manja** Shaw Brothers Merdeka Film studio ceased production. Film scripts from its Hong Kong studios were no longer favoured by Malay directors. Jamil Sulong did not want to work with a Hong Kong film crew or filmscript anymore and Jins Shamsuddin, a veteran from the Ampas Road studio days and a fresh graduate of the London School of Film Techniques (now the London International Film School) told the Shaw Brothers bluntly that if they wanted him as a director, the whole source material had to be Malaysian (Jins Shamsuddin, Interview; August 20, 1986). Even Hafsham who worked with a young Malaysian crew for his **Adik Manja,** started to write his own screenplays and no longer wanted to adapt material from

Hong Kong. Shaw Brothers stopped the effort and closed the studio for a couple of years before it was sold to the National Film Development Corporation of Malaysia for 1.4 million dollars on February 7, 1985 (Finas Buletin No. 3,1986; 10).

4.10.4 The Death of P. Ramlee

P. Ramlee died of a heart attack at the age of 45 on the morning of May 29, 1973 (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 228). His death came as a shock to the whole nation. Many people cried upon hearing the 7.30 news over the radio that particular morning. Telephones kept ringing at the radio station, newspaper offices and P. Ramlee's house that morning. His close friends were stunned upon hearing of the tragedy. It was only at midday when the *Malay Mail*, an English afternoon tabloid, published the news as front page headlines with a full page report together with P. Ramlee's photograph that people began to realise that the nation had indeed lost a great film artiste. The *Malay Mail* was sold out within minutes (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 232).

Such was P. Ramlee's place in the eyes and the hearts of Malaysians of all races, young and old. His sudden departure affected thousands of fans all over Malaysia and Singapore. He had been a household name for more than two decades.

Newspapers the next day were full of articles about P. Ramlee. Tun Abdul Razak, then Malaysia's Prime Minister, regarded the death of Malaysia's foremost artiste as a loss that would be difficult to replace (Abdullah

Hussein, 1973; 232). Other ministers also expressed their condolences. They included Ghazali Shafie, who was then Minister with Special Portfolio, Hamzah Abu Samah, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, and Senu Abdul Rahman, the Secretary-General of the ruling party, UMNO. Ghazali Shafie spoke of how the Panel of Jurors at the Asian Film Festival of which he was once a Chairman, regarded Ramlee as the Asian Charlie Chaplin (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 133).

An article in *Utusan Malaysia* described Ramlee as a Malay film artiste admired and loved by fans of all races from all walks of life (Utusan Malaysia, May 30, 1973; 10). Eric Peris of *New Straits Times* wrote: "...Ramlee is looked upon as father of Malay movies and the man who gave new life to Malay music. He was one of the most creative men in the film world. He had this wonderful gift of mastering a subject in the shortest possible time and excelling in whatever he did. He was most original in his work and the first person to add comedy to Malay movies (Utusan Malaysia, May 30, 1973; 10). Another article in the *New Straits Times* on the same day titled 'Superstar's Passing' wrote:

> (Ramlee) was a singer, script writer, music arranger, winner of the Best Actor Award at the Asian Film Festival (1957) and judged the Most Versatile Talent at the Tokyo Asian Film Festival (1963). But the mere listing of his accomplishments cannot adequately convey what he was in the Malay entertainment world. P. Ramlee was "a pimply little extra" in his first film, made in 1948. He rose quickly to fame, taking comedy away from farce and the Malay film towards a vital character of its

> own, stripped of an Indian straight-jacket. The superstar ranged from "**Pendekar Bujang Lapok**", possibly his best comedy, to "**Antara Dua Darjat**", surely his best critique of class in society (Abdullah Hussein, 1990; 235).

Sri Delima, a *New Straits Times* columnist was also full of praise for the late P. Ramlee. She wrote: "The Malay entertainment world has known equally accomplished actors, directors, script-writers, composers and singer - but none with P. Ramlee's abundant talent and originality (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 236-237).

P. Ramlee has become a legend. Cassette tapes of his songs and video tapes of his films have become permanent collections in many homes in the country. His fans range from tiny tots to toothless grandmothers, from amahs to academics (New Starits Times, April 2, 1986; 2). The country has honoured him. The Ministry of Culture has taken the initiative to collect his photographs, scripts, letters,and anything associated with him and his career in the entertainment world. The National Archives also began a collection of Ramlee's films on tapes, photographs and his written works. In 1983, the Ministry and the National Archives turned his former residence in Kuala Lumpur into P. Ramlee's Memorial Museum. A street in Kuala Lumpur was also named after him, and so was an auditorium at the Malaysian Radio and Television station.

Ramlee was great during his time, a fact hard to deny. According to Sri Delima, "...Ramlee threw himself into his work and electrified others into doing the same...His scope was wide. His films included comedy, tragedy,

history, satire, romance, the lot. His songs ran the gamut of human emotions from bouyant joy to brooding despair" (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 237).

However, not many realised that Ramlee also owed his great achievement to the management of the Shaw Brothers studio who had planned his success through the help of everyone working in the studio. The studio was functioning on the model of the Hollywood star system. Once Ramlee was discovered to be multi-talented, it wasted no time in promoting him as a star in the Malay film world. During his time as an actor, director and singer, many people working in different areas were helping to provide him with the best of everything. Omar Rojik wrote the scripts for some of his best films like **Semerah Padi** and Ahmad Nesfu provided the story-line for such films as **Antara Dua Darjat** and **Ibu Mertuaku.** S. Sudarmaji and Jamil Sulong were lyric writers for most of his songs while Osman Ahmad and Yusoff B. did the arrangement. S. Shamsuddin, Aziz Satar, Mustarjo, M. Zain and Udo Omar provided him with humorous lines and actions for his comedies. Moreover, A. Bakar Ali , the most talented cameraman the studio had, filmed his studio and location scenes.

Ramlee's best films were made when he was working for the Shaw Brothers' MFP in Singapore. When he moved to work for the Merdeka Studio in Kuala Lumpur, Ramlee failed to produce any films comparable to his best films while in Singapore. The people who once worked for him in Singapore were no longer there. Eighteen of his films at Merdeka were considered below average in content, form and cinematic styles. By forfeiting the supportive infrastructure of MFP, Ramlee had lost his magic. His perks as the studio's number one man in Singapore were

missing in Kuala Lumpur. Run Run Shaw who had paid special attention to Ramlee's work was not in Kuala Lumpur to encourage and observe his 'golden boy' of the Malay movies. Ramlee was working on a contract basis for each film he directed and the payment he received was much lower than in the Singapore days. He tried working with new writers and formed new partners for his comedies and selected new members for his musical group, but somehow his comedies, tragedies, satires, romances as well as his songs and music failed to strike the right chord. None of his Merdeka films became a box-office hit.

Ramlee knew his limitations and in 1972 confessed that like all actors he realised that, "...now I am fat and forty I must retire gracefully from playing Romeo ...I know better now. Haven't got the face for it, you know" (New Straits Times, April 2, 1986; 2). But that was not what Ramlee did. He continued to play the lead roles in his films and the younger generation of Malay film-goers did not like them. He was writing a script called **Tears in Kuala Lumpur** and was planning, with a few of his close friends, to make the film with their own money, when he died. Before that, he had wanted to make a suspense thriller called **Hidayat,** which also failed to materialise.

Ramlee had had his time. As an artiste he also had to face his downfall when everything took a turn for the worst and the old magic no longer seemed to work. The decade of the seventies was a different period altogether. Young people in the country were looking for something new and fresh. Fast life styles with new kinds of music and film culture, popularised by **The Beatles** and **The Rolling Stones** as well as films like **To Sir With Love**, **American Graffiti** and **West Side Story** ruled the

period. Furthermore, Malay film audiences had found an alternative in Indonesian films with plenty of young and new faces and actors who sang popular songs.

The death of P. Ramlee was certainly not an excuse for the failure of Malay films. In the 70s, P. Ramlee failed to get along with society's changing social pattern and cultural preferences. During the last years of his life P. Ramlee was like a *samurai* who had lost his master and tried very hard to look for a new one. He needed lots of encouraging words and kind patronage in order to become stronger and to win battles. Earlier Ramlee had fought hard and won on many battle fields and his master had rewarded him well, but the battle in Kuala Lumpur of the seventies was too hard a battle for a lost *samurai* like Ramlee.

In 1986, Noraini Shariff, a journalist with *The New Straits Times* wrote, "I do not remember much of that day, May 29, 1973, the day P. Ramlee died. Except that I recall seeing my mother cry a lot...Although I had not known him personally, I felt sad too. For I love his films and his songs. That was thirteen years ago. Now my three-year-old son can recognise P. Ramlee's face anywhere..." (New Straits Times, April 2, 1986; 2). Ramlee will always be remembered by the young and old alike for what he had done. People continue to watch his films on video tapes perhaps because he is no longer around. Many of them would agree that it is difficult not to sink into despair and quote the words of his song: "Where could we ever get someone to replace you..." (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 238). But that was not what the new Malay films audience asked for. They never wanted another P. Ramlee. What they wanted was something altogether different from what P. Ramlee had done.

Notes

1 Earlier *bangsawan* artistes were S. Kadarisman, Marzuki Nordin, Syed Ali Al-atas and Ahmad Nesfu. See Jamil Sulong, 1990; 14. Zulkifli Ahmad (1973; 12) mentions one important bangsawan actor named Khairuddin. According to Zulkifli *bangsawan* began to deteriorate with the coming of the cinema in the 40s.

2 For a complete discussion on the influence of Indian culture on the Malays, see Josselin de Jong, 1965; 34-42 and also Michael Kirk Endicott, 1970; 3.

3 *Majallah Filem* focused on the activities of the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Production studio and *Berita Filem* was about activities of the Cathay-Keris studio. *Majallah Filem* was published monthly by Chinese Pictorial Review Limited, 112-120 Robinson Road, Singapore., and *Berita Filem* was published by Md. Salleh bin Hj. Ali, 62 Java Road, Singapore. Both magazines were sold at 50 cents a copy. Other film magazines published in the 60s were *Mastika Filem* and *Filem Malaysia.*

4 Jaafar Abdullah (1921 - 1988) was involved in almost all the Malay films produced by the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Production studio as information and liaison officer. He was also the editor for *Majallah Filem..* Jaafar came to Kuala Lumpur 1973 and was one of the founders of *Perfima* and also its General Manager before joining Syed Kecik Film Production as Execitive Producer in 1978.

5 It means old. In Malay cinema a 'purba' film can be considered a genre similar to the American western. The story-line revolves around a tragedy that will cause the protagonist to travel and search for the killer and take his revenge. It was also popular in *bangsawan* and *sandiwara.*

6 Interviews with Malay film veterans such as Jamil Sulong, Jaafar Abdullah, Hamzah Hussein, Jins Shamsuddin and many more.

7 Calculated from information in Jamil Sulong, 1990 and Zulkifli Haji Ahmad, 1973.

8 United Malays National Organisation: a major political party in Malaya (Malaysia) since 1946.

9 "No way it 's going to close! We've just completed a picture by Tunku Abdul Rahman".

10 Kadarisman passed away on February 16, 1987 in Singapore. He was 68. His real name was Shahadat Kadarisman. See Jamil Sulong, 1990; 212: he was actor and assistant director before being promoted to a full-fledged film director by the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Production studio in 1965. His directorial debut was *Seri Andalas.* He directed three more films for the studio before coming to Merdeka Film Production Studio in Kuala Lumpur in 1967. He directed ten films for the studio and left in 1974 to settle down in Singapore again. See also Utusan Malaysia, February 18, 1987; 11.

11 Rice cooked with coconut milk and served with hot chilly and some vegetable which usually eat as breakfast.

CHAPTER V

THE INDEPENDENT ERA (1976-1986)

We have seen earlier that the film business in Malaya (Malaysia) has been a matter of duopoly of two giant companies, the Shaw Brothers and the Cathay Organisation, for nearly half a century. Smaller companies found it very hard to compete and survive and soon lost out. The major obstacles were the distribution and exhibition sectors which were controlled by the two giants. It was easy for a small company to participate in production, but a finished product might not find a market without having to go through the distribution and exhibition arms of either the Shaw Brothers or the Cathay Organisation. The level of charges imposed by them would normally put small production companies into great distress and financial jeopardy.

The involvement of the Shaw Brothers and the Cathay Organisation in the making of Malay films was strictly a business venture. They were willing to invest money in building the infra-structure and purchasing the expensive equipment when the times were good and the returns were high. They were under no obligation to anyone. They were there to make money and provide a service to the Malay community and they were not obliged to stay when the times were bad. Their Malay film output and the net return were negligible as compared to the return from distribution and exhibition of imported foreign films. Malay films made by studios belonging to the two companies averaged less than twenty a year whereas the imported

films totalled between three and five hundred titles in a year.[1] So even without making Malay films, the two companies were still be able to remain strong in the film business.

It was the Malays who had always had strong feelings about the making of Malay films even though the money and the expertise initially never came from them. It was a love for the industry that kept the Malays sacrificing their hard cash and energy in reviving the Malay film-making activities when the two giant companies were already making an exit due to poor economic returns in the early seventies. The formation of independent film companies in Malaysia was due to the efforts of the Malay film veterans and also the Malay politicians. According to Ratnam (1972; 11), the involvement of politicians resulted in some shake up of the industry. In the early seventies, politicians urged Pernas, the government trading corporation, to break the show business monopoly of Cathay and Shaw Brothers, by establishing independent cinemas, by obtaining overseas contracts from film companies for distribution to independent theatres in Malaysia and by forming a local film production company. But the suggestions were easier made than realised. It was not easy to break the monopoly of all sectors of the film trade by the two giant companies.

It was only in production that some of the Malay film veterans who were once trained and employed by the Shaw Brothers, managed to establish a footing. Among them were Shaw's "golden boy" P. Ramlee, the Information Officer Jaafar Abdullah, Jins Shamsuddin and Sarimah, the top actor and actress from the Singapore studio days. These were the veterans who realised the fact that they, too, could stand on their own feet as far as film-making was concerned. They together with a handful of Malay

businessmen took the gamble to produce films independently in the early seventies when the industry was actually dying out.

5.1 The Independent Film Companies

In the early seventies Merdeka was already facing competition from newly formed film companies owned by *bumiputeras*. However the Shaw Brothers, who owned the largest chain of cinema halls in Malaysia, could still play their same old game of blocking independently produced films from being exhibited on their circuits. Thus the Shaw Brothers, despite not being able to produce large quantities of local films, could still import foreign films for distribution and exhibition. Films produced by the newly-formed independent companies had to be content with screenings in smaller independent cinema chains (Cowie, 1978; 222).

The first independent Malay film company was formed in 1967 after the closure of the MFP studio in Singapore. However, it was the early 1970s, the time of the influx of Indonesian films, which marked the real beginning of the independent film companies in Malaysia. By 1976 there were already twenty independent film companies thriving on imported Indonesian and Hindi films (Cowie, 1975; 246).

5.1.1 Gafico

The first independent Malay film company formed after the closure of the Shaw Brothers' MFP studio in Singapore in 1967 was *Gabungan Artis Filem Company* or *Gafico*. Three actors from the defunct studio Salleh Kamil, Omar Suwita and Aziz Jaafar together with another Singaporean

Malay Syed Omar Shariff, managed to persuade most of the artistes and workers of the former studio to join the company and make a film called **Ibulah Shorga** (Heavenly Love of a Mother) in 1968. The film was partly financed by Syed Omar who loaned his 16mm Bolex camera for the shoot. Other equipment was borrowed from an advertising film company owned by K.M. Basker who used to direct films for the MFP studio in its early days. The post-production work was done at Basker's office cum studio.

Ibulah Shorga tells the story of a young man pursuing religious education and leaving his beloved mother at home. One day he is called to teach his knowledge to a group of islanders who understand little about Islam. The island is also being harmed by a group of trouble-makers who want to wrest power from the headman. The young man comes to the rescue but is easily overpowered by the crooks. The man falls sick and wishes to see his mother for the last time before he dies. The village folk help to find and fetch his mother but he dies before seeing her.

The film was made from a story by Salleh Kamil. It was directed by S. Sudarmaji, who had been an assistant director during the MFP days. The cameraman was Yaakob Mahmud and Hayat Haris was editor. The effort by the Malay artistes and technicians could be regarded as an attempt to prove to the former studio owners and the Malay film audience that they could make a film independently. The film was released in 1968 through an independent distribution company and screened in independent theatres, but the return was poor. It did not make much money. Syed Omar Syariff (Interview; September 17, 1986) who claimed to have invested about thirty thousand dollars could not even get half his money back. The film was later

sold for television screening. The company closed down and **Ibulah Shorga** became its first and last production.

Ibulah Shorga failed miserably at the box-office. It is a very low quality film. The story-line is too simplistic and full of cliches. The good versus evil theme is not only overdone but also over-loaded with didactic messages. The cinematography by Yaakob Mahmud is inconsistent, resulting in poor picture quality due to inadequate lighting. Day and night scenes are not well distinguished. Sudarmaji's direction fails to establish believable characterisations and meaningful cinematic visuals that would have helped to unfold the story-line and to move it forward in an interesting and unexpected manipulation of sequences. Everything is straight forward leaving little room for suspense.

For five years after *Gafico*, no other independent film company ventured into film production. By 1974 only Merdeka studio in Kuala Lumpur was producing films in Malaysia, but the studio's output was declining. For a period between 1974 - 1980 the studio managed to produce only nine films.

5.1.2 Perfima

P. Ramlee who had been with the Shaw Brothers for twenty-five years as an actor, director, writer, singer and composer was frustrated with Shaw Brothers' non-committal attitude towards reviving the Malay film industry and was looking forward to financing his own production with his close friends. Jins Shamsuddin who had regarded P. Ramlee as his mentor was very happy to be in association with the doyen of the Malay movies. In

1970 together with Jaafar Abdullah, the former MFP studio's Information Manager, and H.M. Shah, the businessman who had once started Merdeka with Ho Ah Loke, they discussed the idea of forming a company to be known as *Perusahaan Filem Malaysia* (Malaysian Film Industry) or known for short as *Perfima.*

Perfima, set up in 1972, planned to built theatres throughout the nation and to produce colour films for foreign and domestic markets. In its first year of operation, it concentrated on boosting the showing of Indonesian films which used colour and cinemascope techniques not seen in Malaysian movies. It purchased distribution rights to Indonesian films through an Indonesian company *Sarinande* (Finas, 1982; 25). By May 1973, *Perfima* had succeeded in importing sixty Indonesian films (Lent, 1990; 191). In the same year some government ministers began to voice support for the newly established local film company. They insisted that cinemas should be set up in every state to screen *Perfima* films (New Straits Times, November 5, 1972). Other ministers called on local film-makers and writers to produce movies comparable to foreign counterparts, but without the detrimental social influences (The Star, August 30, 1973; 6).

The moral support from those government ministers definitely boosted up the confidence of local film-makers and producers. *Perfima* was meant to '...meet the rising expectations of the people' who had been imbued with foreign-type films, to allow locals to participate in the distribution of films and to assure that an equal balance be achieved to develop the recently revived Malay film industry (New Straits Times, October 25, 1972). P. Ramlee, Jaafar Abdullah and H.M. Shah agreed that Jins Shamsuddin should go abroad and study film-making for the company's future benefit.

Jins left for London on January 13, 1970 on a scholarship to undertake a three-year Diploma course in film-making at the London School of Film Technique. P. Ramlee in the meantime continued to direct films for Merdeka. He directed **Dr. Rushdi** (1970), **Gelora** (1971) and his last film with the studio, **Laksemana Do Re Mi** in 1972. While Jins was away and Ramlee was trying to make some money from the Merdeka job, *Perfima* failed to function as a film-producing company. Shah was too busy with his hotel business and Jaafar lacked experience as a film-maker.

In 1973, Ramlee and Shah left Perfima and the two together formed yet another company called *Rumpun Melayu*. The company bought a small dilapidated theatre in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, had it rebuilt and started screening imported Indian and Indonesian films. The cinema was named *Pawagam P. Ramlee* (P. Ramlee's Cinema). In the same year Ramlee was preparing a script called **Airmata di Kuala Lumpur** (Tears in Kuala Lumpur) to be produced by *Rumpun Melayu*, but he died of a heart attack on May 29, 1973 (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 227). Thus came the end of *Rumpun Melayu*.

Jins Shamsuddin who came back in early 1973 took the trouble to revive *Perfima* with Jaafar Abdullah. *Perfima* was re-registered as *Perfima Film Production*. Datuk Abu Bakar Titingan, a millionaire from Sabah, an East Malaysian state, was offered a partnership and became one of the members of the board of directors. *Perfima* did not enter the feature film scene straight away. In the beginning Jins was busy making a big budget religious documentary, **Dakwah Islam** (Islamic Missionary) for the Sabah Islamic Religious Council, a job secured by Datuk Abu Bakar Titingan himself. It was only in 1974 that Jins started to prepare a script for a

feature called **Menanti Hari Esuk** (Waiting for Tomorrow). Jins took nearly two years to complete the film and it was exhibited to the Malaysian public in 1976.

Menanti Hari Esuk was a big success. For the first time Malay film audience applauded the work of an overseas-trained film-maker who managed to produce a film through an independent *bumiputera* film company. *Perfima* went on to produce two more films after which Jins withdrew and formed his own company, Jins Shamsuddin Film Productions in 1980. *Perfima* ceased production soon after and its equipment was sold.

5.1.3 Sari Artiste

The company was formed in 1972 by Sarimah, a top Malay actress from the Singapore Ampas Road studio together with her designer husband Yusoff Majid. The company which started on a shoe-string investment of 30,000 Malaysian dollars, surprisingly multiplied its assets by fifty times in just under two years merely by purchasing distribution rights to Indonesian and Hindi films and screening them at independent theatres (Finas, 1982; 25).

Sari Artiste found itself so busy distributing foreign films that the company could never find time to plan its own productions. The company also signed contracts with Thailand, Philippines and Japanese companies to distribute their dubbed productions in Malaysia. When *Sari Artiste* started to produce films in 1975, it did so as joint-venture projects. The first project was with *Juver Productions* from Manila, to produce a film called **Malaysia Five**. Another joint-venture project was with *Titanus Productions* from Italy

producing **Sandokan - Tiger of Malaya** starring Claudia Cardinale, Sarimah and Kabir Bedi, an Indian actor.

By 1976 *Sari Artiste* had branched out into other forms of the entertainment business and had got into financial trouble that lead to a legal battle in court. In the end *Sari Artiste* did not produce any Malay films at all.

5.1.4 Sabah Films

Six months before Jins Shamsuddin exhibited his **Menanti Hari Esuk**, *Sabah Films* finished its first feature, a comedy called **Keluarga Si Comat** (Comat and Family). The film was directed by Aziz Satar, another veteran actor from the Singapore studio days. Aziz had been in Ramlee's comedies together with S. Shamsuddin. The three of them had already established a name through Ramlee's evergreen **Bujang Lapok** series.

Deddy M. Borhan who established and owned *Sabah Films* was a newcomer to the Malaysian film scene. The practically unknown Borhan was a graduate of the University of Malaya and prior to his involvement in the film trade, he had been a businessman in Sabah. Being always an ardent fan of Malay films, Borhan saw the opportunity of succeeding in the local film industry by regrouping the old Jalan Ampas stalwarts especially those from the **Bujang Lapok** fame, into a totally new Malaysian film. Aziz who directed the film also played the lead role with support from S. Shamsuddin and Ibrahim Pendek.

Keluarga Si Comat, though lacking in imagination and rather incoherent in its plot and characterisations, was much applauded by the Malaysian audience. The success of **Keluarga Si Comat** boosted Borhan's confidence in the industry. He then went on to produce **Hapuslah Airmatamu** (Don't You Cry Anymore), a film about an up-and-coming singer who rejected her old boy-friend, and **Pendekar** (Warrior) a *purba* story about power struggle.

Other than Aziz Sattar, Borhan also assigned M. Amin, Omar Rojik and Aziz Jaafar, all veteran actors and directors from the Singapore studio days, to direct films produced by his company. Up to 1984 *Sabah Films* contributed sixteen feature films to the Malaysian film industry and stood out as the most prolific company in the trade. The company's last film, **Mat Salleh** (The Sabah Hero) was however, a failure both commercially and aesthetically. Borhan then decided to end his film production activities and to concentrate on other business ventures.

5.1.5 Indra Films

The company was established in 1979 by two businessman brothers Zain Ibrahim and Zaharan Ibrahim. Both were newcomers to the Malaysian film scene and practically unknown in film circles. The success of Borhan's *Sabah Films* in the local film industry might have had some appeal to both Zain and Zaharan who were already successful in their manufacturing business. *Indra Films* was yet another company to be added to their chain of companies.

Without prior experience and knowledge in the film trade, the brothers had to rely on the Malay film veterans from the Ampas Road studio days. Thus people like Aziz Sattar were contracted to direct low-budget comedies for the company. Aziz delivered **Prebet Lapuk** (1979), **Penyamun Tarbus** (1980), **Da Di Du** (1981), and **Setinggan** (1981). All were based on shoddy screenplays which Aziz wrote himself. But the comedies proved to be popular with the rural Malay audience, thus keeping the company in business for another two years.

In 1982 *Indra Films* produced a drama written and directed by Patrick Yeoh, a film critic and the head of the entertainment section of The New Straits Times. It was the first Malay film produced by an independent company to be directed by a Chinese. The film was called **Kami** and tells a story about two young boys surviving in the city of Kuala Lumpur. **Kami** had Sudirman Haji Arshad, Malaysia's top singer and entertainer in the lead role as Tooko, the elder boy. **Kami** was well-scripted but poorly directed. It failed at the box-office despite being highly praised by critics in the English press. The film marked the exit of Patrick Yeoh from the Malay film scene.

Indra Films however did not give up hope of producing dramatic films. In 1983 Aziz Sattar was given a chance to handle the production of **Darah Satria** (Hero's Blood), a patriotic drama about an officer in the armed forces commanding a troop fighting against communist terrorists in the Malaysian jungle. **Darah Satria** did not do well at the box-office either. The story-line was weak and the acting was too melancholic. The film was the last seen from *Indra Films* which closed down soon after.

5.2 The People in the Independent Film Industry

As can be seen from the statistics in Table 5.1, during the period between 1979 and 1981 more independent film companies were set up. The success of films like **Menanti Hari Esuk** (*Perfima*), **Keluarga Si Comat** (*Sabah Films*) and the comedies from *Indra Films* attracted more people to venture into the film business. The quick returns from successful films made people think that the film industry was a pot of gold. Basically there were two categories of people becoming involved in the industry after the end of the studio era. They were firstly those who were famous but not rich: and secondly, those who were rich but not famous.

The famous but not rich were the people who could be classified as the veterans from the studio days in Singapore. They were once either actors or directors. They were famous names who are still remembered by the Malay film fans including Jins Shamsuddin, Sarimah, Ahmad Mahmud, Saadiah, Aziz Jaafar, Aziz Sattar and Jamil Sulong.

These people were never rich although some of them were at one time very highly-paid by the Shaw Brothers, but they could never produce their own film or start their own independent film company. They were, though, very talented and dedicated to the film profession. They knew no other means of making a living apart from working in the film industry. They were very experienced in the film-making process but they were never businessmen.

The rich but not famous were the successful Malay businessmen who had ventured into all kinds of business. They were known only in business circles and not in the artistic world. Their names were not known to the

general public and their faces seldom appeared in newspapers or magazines. This group knew nothing about film-making, but it knew how to handle and generate money and it had good business connections.

The two groups met and became inter-dependent in the revival of the Malaysian film industry. The famous needed the financial support from the rich, and the rich needed some glamour and publicity for themselves and expertise from the veterans to do things unknown to them. Thus independent film companies were set up either in the form of partnerships between the rich and the famous, or the rich paid the famous to work for them.

5.3 Film Companies and their Films

The total number of registered independent *bumiputera* film companies within a fourteen year period (1975-1988) was forty-three and the number of feature films produced was one hundred and twelve (Table 5.2). The break down of films produced for each year is given in Table 5.3. The years 1980 to 1984 were the peak period when an average of eleven films was produced yearly. But 1985 and 1986 were the slump period. However the total number of productions took another upward turn in 1987 with seventeen films all together.

As can be seen from Table 5.1, the number of film companies formed from 1975 to 1985 gradually increased in 1979 and 1981. Seven new independent companies were formed in both these years. The three year period 1979-1981 saw the independent film-making industry at its

peak with twelve companies competing in the business (see Table 5.4). But by the end of 1981 five companies wrapped up their business and in the following year seven more companies went out of business leaving only eight companies making films. Four more companies closed in 1984 and by 1985 only six independent companies remained.

The year 1979 could be considered as the bright new beginning of the independent era. The success story of the Sabah Film Company, which by then had produced five features, was the factor that attracted other entrepreneurs to get involved in the film industry. Most of them thought that the industry must be a profitable venture to hold Borhan with his Sabah Film Company for more than four years. Prior to setting up their own film companies, those entrepreneurs were playing a wait and see game to find the right time to go in.

Jins Shamsuddin's production of **Menanti Hari Esuk** (Waiting for Tomorrow) was a yardstick used by the new entrepreneurs to measure the potential of Malay films as a business commodity. Jins had proven that with a good storyline and well-chosen cast, a Malay film shot in full colour could still attract the Malay audience and restore their lost confidence.

Another factor that encouraged Malay entrepreneurs to invest money in the industry in the years 1979, 1980 and 1981 was the serious consideration given by the government to establishing a body to look after the ailing industry. The talk of setting up a National Film Corporation started in 1977 and by the beginning of 1978 the National Film Corporation Act was scheduled for presentation in Parliament (Cowie, 1978; 222). The film companies owned by the *bumiputera*, which by 1978

already numbered more than twenty (Cowie, 1978; 222), were therefore hoping that great things were in store for them once the Act received Parliament's blessing and the Corporation was subsequently set up.

Table 5.1
Number of Independent Film Companies formed during (1975 - 1987)

Year	Total number of companies
1975	2
1976	1
1977	-
1978	2
1979	7
1980	4
1981	7
1982	3
1983	3
1984	2
1985	2
1986	1
1987	9
Total	**43**

Source: Finas, 1989.

Table 5.2
Number of films produced by the Independent Film Companies (1975 - 87)

Year	Total Number of Films produced
1975	2
1976	2
1977	1
1978	3
1979	9
1980	11
1981	14
1982	12
1983	9
1984	13
1985	4
1986	6
1987	18
1988	10
Total	**114**

Source: Finas, 1989.

Table 5.3
The Independent Film Companies and
Number of films made

Company Names	Year Estab.	No. of films made	Year	Total No. of films made
Baiduri Film Prod.	1975	1	1975	1
Sabah Film Prod.	1975	1	1975	
		1	1976	
		1	1977	
		1	1978	
		1	1979	
		2	1980	
		2	1981	
		1	1982	
		2	1983	
		4	1984	
		1	1986	17
Perfima	1976	1	1976	1
Jins Shamsuddin	1978	1	1978	
Film Prod.		1	1979	
		1	1982	3
Solo Film Prod.	1979	1	1979	1
Gala Film Prod.	1980	1	1980	1
Maju Film Prod.	1979	1	1979	1
		1	1980	2

Varia Film Prod.	1979	1	1979	
		1	1980	2
Indra Film Prod.	1979	1	1979	
		1	1980	
		3	1981	
		2	1982	7
Pantai Timur Film Prod.	1979	1	1979	1
Sharsaree Film Prod.	1979	1	1979	1
Syed Kechik Film Prod.	1979	1	1979	
		1	1980	
		1	1982	
		1	1983	4
Anang Enterprise.	1978	1	1978	
		1	1980	2
Karya Film Prod.	1980	1	1980	1
Sarimah Film Prod.	1980	1	1980	
		1	1981	
		1	1982	3
Zarad Film Prod.	1980	1	1980	1
Ahmad Mahmud	1981	1	1981	
		1	1983	
		2	1984	4
Darul Makmur	1981	1	1981	
		1	1984	
		1	1986	3

EPA Film Prod.	1981	1	1981	
		1	1983	2
Fleet Comm.	1981	1	1981	
		1	1982	2
ISE Film Prod.	1981	1	1981	
		1	1982	2
OHMS Film Prod.	1981	1	1981	1
Pancar Seni Film Prod.	1982	1	1982	1
Zahari Zabidi Film Prod.	1981	2	1981	
		1	1982	
		2	1984	5
Cahaya Jaya Film Prod.	1982	1	1982	1
Reza Film Prod.	1982	1	1982	1
Nirwana Film Prod.	1983	1	1983	
		1	1984	2
Kay-Sarimah Film Prod.	1983	1	1983	1
Kay Film Prod.	1984	1	1984	
		1	1985	
		1	1986	
		1	1987	
		1	1988	5
Asli Film Prod.	1985	1	1985	1
Asmah Film Prod.	1983	1	1983	1
MJM Film Prod.	1984	1	1984	1

ZSA Film Prod.	1984	1	1984	
		1	1985	
		1	1988	3
Amir Comm.	1985	1	1985	
		2	1986	
		4	1987	7
Asa XX.	1986	1	1986	
		1	1987	
		1	1988	3
Cinematic.	1987	1	1987	
		1	1988	2
Fuego Film Prod.	1987	1	1987	
		1	1988	2
Motion Picture.	1987	1	1987	1
S.V. Prod.	1987	2	1987	
		2	1988	4
Aniko	1987	2	1987	2
Gulfpac	1987	1	1987	1
J.D. Prod.	1987	1	1987	1
Pengedar Utama	1987	2	1987	
		2	1988	4
R.J. Film Prod.	1987	1	1987	
		1	1988	2
Total Films made by independents between 1975 and 1987				**112**

As all things governmental, and as Baharuddin Latiff put it, the scheduling and the presentation of the Act had been rather slow and it was not expected to bring in its wake any immediate redress of the incongruities existing within the industry (Cowie, 1978; 222). After seven long years of speculation the Malaysian Film Development Corporation only came into being in June 1981 (Cowie, 1982; 199). The same year saw seven more new film companies being set up.

It is interesting to note that the formation of new companies each year did not mean that the number of companies kept growing. In fact companies that ceased production after producing one or two films were common. Baiduri Film Productions, for example, closed down soon after its first production of a film called **Bunga Padi Berdaun Lalang** (Weeds and Flowers) in 1975. Perfima also ceased production after **Menanti Hari Esuk** (Waiting for Tomorrow). Its second production of **Dendam Membara** (Burning Revenge) never got started (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 69). After its first film the company functioned as film equipment rental outlet and a sound mixing studio. A few independent film companies made use of Perfima's facilities for their production and post-production works.

Four companies formed in 1979 alone closed down after their first film. They were Solo Film Productions, Tuah Films, Pantai Timur Film Productions and Sharsaree Film Productions. Table 5.4 above shows the number of companies that closed their film producing business as well as those still remaining in business within a ten year period (1975-1985).

Table 5.4
Number of Bumiputera Independent Film Companies 1975 - 1985

Year	No.of New Companies Established	No.of Companies Closed	No.of Companies Remaining in Business
1975	2	-	2
1976	1	1	2
1977	-	-	2
1978	2	-	4
1979	7	-	11
1980	4	3	12
1981	7	5	14
1982	3	7	10
1983	3	4	9
1984	2	4	7
1985	2	1	8

Source: Finas, 1989.

In 1980, five companies found it hard to survive after producing one or two films. Gala Film Productions closed down after its first feature and so did Karya Film Productions after its controversial film **Potret Maria**. (Maria's Portrait). Two companies formed in 1978 and 1979 survived with two productions each. Varia Film Productions produced **Dendang Perantau** (Ballads of a Traveler) and **Tuan Badul** (Badul the Boss) and Anang produced **Dendam Perawan** (Vengence of a Virgin) and **Ceritaku Ceritamu** (Your Story, My Story).

Companies closing down then became a yearly affair. *OHMS, Pancar Seni, Cahaya Jaya, Reza, Kay-Sarimah, Asli, Asmah and MJM* closed after their first films. *OHMS* in 1981, *Pancar, Cahaya* and *Reza* in 1982, *Kay-Sarimah* and *Asmah* in 1983 and *MJM* in 1984.

5.4 The Economic Struggle

Taking the M$350,000 as a standard budget for a feature film, returns for all films released in 1981 to 1985 were not at all encouraging, as shown in Table 5.8. Returns from films released to the public from 1981 to 1985 were declining. Eleven films released in 1981 and ten in 1982 collected slightly more than four million dollars. The figure dropped to 3.07 million in 1983 and 3.6 million in 1984. From 1985 onwards the figure declined quite drastically to only 2.5 million dollars. In both 1984 and 1985, one film grossed more than one million Malaysian dollars, however, the total collections for each year still declined.

Seventeen films or 32.7% made profit, 33 films or 63% lost money and 2 films or 3.9% managed to break even. From the seventeen profitable films only four managed to make more than a marginal profit: **Bukit Kepong** (1982), **Mekanik** (1983), **Azura** (1984) and **Ali Setan** (1985). **Bukit Kepong** and **Ali Setan** were directed by Jins Shamsuddin, **Mekanik** by Hafsham and **Azura** by Deddy M. Borhan. **Mekanik** and **Ali Setan** are comedies, **Bukit Kepong** is based on an historical event and **Azura** is a teenage romance melodrama. Each of the four had its own appeal to a different type of audiences. **Bukit Kepong** was a patriotic adventure in the 50s and happened to be the only war film made in the new independent era. It had quite a large following. **Mekanik** had the Malaysian multi-racial society as background and its fresh new approach in depicting Malaysian daily life styles was the main attraction not only to the regular Malay movie-goers but to some extent the young Malaysian Chinese and Indians. **Ali Setan** was actually a family drama set on several levels of mood and environment. Its main attraction was the talented Azmil and Ogy Ahmad Daud in the lead roles. Azmil also appeared in the lead role in **Mekanik** as his film acting debut. **Azura**'s main attraction was again Ogy Ahmad Daud who acted along Jamal Abdillah, a popular singer turned actor.

Table 5.5
Malay Films (1981) Gross Return on Cathay/BFO Cinemas Throughout Malaysia

Film title	Type	Release Date	Returns in Malaysian Dollars
Sumpah Semerah Padi	Drama	15.01.81	390,523.05
Gelombang	Drama	5.03.81	134,058.71
Da Di Du	Comedy	19.03.81	671,198.59
Abang	Drama	7.05.81	683,147.17
Dia Ibuku	Drama	21.05.81	866,476.45
Serampang Tiga	Drama	2.08.81	254,738.89
Si Luncai	Comedy	22.10.81	259,327.05
Ribut Barat	Drama	18.11.81	226,922.86
Tuan Besar	Comedy	16.12.81	172,906.12
Anita Dunia Ajaib	Science Fiction	31.12.81	64,730.74
Total for 1981			**4,105,213.44**

Source: Cathay Organisations

Table 5.6
Malay Films (1982) Gross Return on Cathay/BFO Cinemas Throughout Malaysia

Film title	Type	Release Date	Returns in Malaysian Dollars
Ribut Di Hujung Senja	Drama	7.01.82	208,812.61
Langit Petang	Drama	5.02.82	278,633.06
Kabus Tengah Hari	Drama	22.02.82	447,260.93
Penentuan	Drama	10.03.82	301,909.53
Bukit Kepong	Historical	29.04.82	853,693.82*
Kami	Drama	27.05.82	272,979.51
Bertunang	Comedy	22.07.82	723,608.31
Esuk Untuk Siapa	Drama	23.09.82	416,437.32
Sikit Punya Gila	Comedy	16.10.82	469,892.80
Anak Sulong Tujuh Keturunan	Drama	17.11.82	251,653.23
Total for 1982			**4,224,881.12**

Source: Cathay Organisations

Table 5.7
Malay Films (1983) Gross Return on Cathay/BFO Cinemas Throughout Malaysia

Film title	Type	Release Date	Returns in Malaysian Dollars
Bila Hati Telah Retak	Drama	17.05.83	241,972.42
Mat Salleh Pahlawan Sabah	Drama	26.05.83	75,406.59
Manis Manis Sayang	Comedy	12.07.83	579,787.85
Aku Yang Berhormat	Comedy	16.08.83	266,323.48
Mekanik	Comedy	15.09.83	984,313.56*
Cikgu Sayang	Comedy	1.10.83	131,479.65
Darah Satria	Action Drama	16.10.83	307,098.10
Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan	Drama	27.10.83	423,921.83
Pertentangan	Drama	10.11.83	67,438.05
Total for 1983			**3,077,741.53**

Source: Cathay Organisations

Table 5.8
Malay Films (1984) Gross Returns on Cathay/BFO Cinemas Throughout Malaysia

Film title	Type	Release Date	Returns in Malaysian Dollars
Ilmu Saka	Thriller	12.01.84	32,261.95
Jauh Di Sudut Hati	Drama	8.02.84	52,019.25
Pagar Pagar Cinta	Comedy	1.03.84	509,859.63
Sumpah Di Bumi Merkah	Drama	15.03.84	36,805.40
Matinya Seorang Patriot	Thriller	29.03.84	119,634.65
Jasmin	Drama	30.06.84	258,946.37
Talak	Comedy	29.07.84	444,074.00
Ke Medan Jaya	Drama	5.09.84	201,600.07
Melati Putih	Drama	20.09.84	65,296.95
Selangkah Ke Alama Batin	Semi-docu. Thriller	4.10.84	185,468.46
Minah Manja	Comedy	26.10.84	176,274.67
Di Ambang Kasih	Drama	22.11.84	127,207.54
Azura	Romance	9.12.84	1,394,682.69
Total for 1984			**3,604,131.63**

Source: Cathay Organisations

Table 5.9
Malay Films (1985) Gross Return on Cathaty/BFO Cinemas Throughout Malaysia

Film title	Type	Release Date	Returns in Malaysian Dollars
Roda Roda	Drama	31.01.85	73,938.77
Ali Setan	Comedy	16.02.85	990,526.62*
Tujuh Biang Keladi	Comedy	3.04.85	251,965.82
Komplot	Drama	4.05.85	41,579.40
Kumpulan O	-	16.05.85	10,102.25
Bujang Lapuk Kembali	Comedy	22.08.85	193,545.01
Ali Setan II	Comedy	2.11.85	530,790.85
Gila Gila Remaja	Comedy	30.11.85	371,760.75
Mangsa	Thriller	28.12.85	23,988.40
Total for 1985			**2,488,197.87**

Source: Cathay Organisations
* Figures not quite accurate.

A few other comedies were also making comfortable profits namely those directed by A.R. Badul, **Bertunang** (1982), **Manis-Manis Sayang** (1983) and **Pagar Pagar Cinta** (1984). Some of these comedies were actually adapted from successful Hong Kong comedies. Comedies with simplistic themes and superficial characters like **Tuan Besar**, **Si Luncai, Sikit Punya Gila**, **Aku Yang Berhormat**, **Cikgu Sayang**, **Minah Manja** and **Tujuh Biang Keladi** were an insult to the audience's inteligence by portraying silly characterisations and ridiculously unbelievable situations. All of them failed at the box-office. Some new ventures like the science fiction **Anita Dunia Ajaib** and a thriller **Ilmu Saka,** a children film **Roda-Roda** and **Kumpulan O** were disasterous.

Film Negara's production of dramas like **Gelombang** (1981), **Bila Hati Telah Retak** (1983), and **Ke Medan Jaya** (1984) were not quite successful despite being technically good in sound and picture quality. These films were made by the film department of the Government Ministry of Information. Somehow the films failed to portray a realistic Malaysian way of life due to the heavy handed government propaganda on a number of things like drug abuse, calls for cooperatives for rural fishermen and the importance of government rural clinics.

There were also films with a heavy historical content but they flopped at the box-office despite being given a high production budget. **Mat Salleh Pahlawan Sabah,** a film about a revolt against the British in Sabah was also a flop. Another film with popular actors Ahmad Yatim and Rahim Razali playing the lead roles, **Sumpah di Bumi Merkah** was also a disaster due to technical inferiority and a confusing story-line as well as

poor publicity. Rahim Razali's **Matinya Seorang Patriot** was one good film which did not manage to capture the interest of Malaysian audience simply because they found the film too heavily laden with social and political references to Malaysia.

Matinya Seorang Patriot (Death of a Patriot) was a dismal failure at the box-office despite having won five awards at the Fifth Malaysian Film Festival in December 1984. Another film by the veteran director Jamil Sulong, **Jasmine** was also a box-office flop despite being well-acclaimed by the film critics. The failure of those two well-made films illustrated the fact that the Malaysian film audience, especially the Malays, was not ready yet for serious issues to be discussed in local films. **Matinya Seorang Patriot** was about the power struggle and dirty tactics in a big business organisation and **Jasmine** tried to take a look at the spirit of Malay nationalism against the backdrop of British colonial rule in the fifties.

Malaysian film-makers of the 1981-1985 period were still not quite sure of the direction in which they should be heading. Only Hafsham and Rahim had grasped some sense of direction and managed to inculcate national elements and characteristics in their films. Hafsham explored the realistic multi-racial Malaysia while Rahim discussed the socio-economic challenge faced by the Malays within the relationship of politics and big business in Malaysia.

On the producers' side, the profit margin was small and the risk was still high. The producers' share of the gross returns was still small after the deduction of entertainment tax, distribution fees and the publicity and

promotion cost. A film with an average budget of 300,000 Malaysian dollars would have to gross triple the amount for a producer to make from 30 to 50% profit. The 25% entertainment tax taken by local councils was another factor that limited the amount of money returned to producers. The split of receipts still favoured the exhibitor, who took 60 per cent in larger cities (or key towns) and 70 per cent in smaller towns. (See Appendix V). Theatre ownership remained a monopoly, 216 being under Cathay and Shaw Brothers /Golden Communication (Lent, 1990: 194).

Factors in the failure of independent film companies in the early 1980s were: distribution, film quality, and internal business problems. First, these companies producing films had a very minimal understanding of the distribution and exhibition procedures. Most of the time films were made without any prior arrangement with distribution companies or cinema owners. Thus films which were ready for screening were delayed because bookings had not been done prior to post-production. This resulted in late returns to the companies concerned thereby limiting the cash flow for the next production. Second, as has been said earlier, some of the entrepreneurs getting involved in film productions were those who came from other lines of business which had little to do with film-making. Thus, their understanding of the medium and the creative process of film-making was very restricted which resulted in poor quality films being produced. Films that only lasted a couple of days on the cinema circuits gave poor returns and the companies incurred losses. Third, often there was a break-up in partnership; this happened when a director employed as a partner in a company decided to do it alone and establish his own company.

From 1985 and 1986 the new Malaysian film industry declined. Two new companies emerged in 1985 and only one in 1986. The number of films produced within the two-year period was only eleven: six in 1985 and only five in 1986. As noted elsewhere (Chapter VI) the Malaysian Film Festival which was supposed to be a yearly affair was not held in 1985 due to the small number of films produced. The Sixth Malaysian Film Festival was not held until December 1986 and all films produced during the 1985-86 period were considered for awards in various categories.

The box-office failure of some good films produced in 1984 was the main reason for producers not investing their money in new productions. The economic slow down in the 1984-1986 period was another factor that discouraged people in the business circle from trying their luck in the film trade. People who made some profit in other forms of business were sceptical about investing their money in the film industry. Previously people in the manufacturing and food servicing industries had been involved in the film industry and some of them did gain a reasonable return on their investment, but the slump of 1984-1986 did not attract them at all. The economic decline had also caused a fall in living standards amongst a broad segment of the population (Khor, 1987; 68). The film industry is often related to the living conditions of the people. It will automatically take a dive when people working in different sectors directly affected by retrenchments or commodity price declines have suffered a fall in their incomes more sharply than that portrayed by the average figures (Khor, 1987; 68). As a result the already existing and the would-be film producers thought twice before investing their capital in a situation where the people had a very low purchasing power. However, in 1987 the industry took an upward turn. This year marked the best time ever in the history of

the Malay film industry in the independent era. Nine new film companies were established in 1987 and seventeen films were produced.

There are several factors that contributed towards the establishment of more film companies and simultaneously a higher number of productions in 1987. The box-office success of **Azura** in 1985 and **Ali Setan** in 1986 gave more confidence to the people in the business circle about getting involved in the film industry. **Azura** is a teenage romance with Fauziah Ahmad Daud and Jamal Abdillah[2] playing the young couple in love. The film was directed and produced by M. Borhan of Sabah Films. **Ali Setan**, a comedy based on university campus life, was directed by Jins Shamsuddin and produced by Harun Hassan, a veteran journalist and writer who owned Amir Communications. **Ali Setan** was the company's inaugural venture into film production. Previously Amir Communications had been engaged in the publication of books and monthly magazines.

Azura collected more than M$1.8 million and **Ali Setan** M$1.1 million (New Straits Times, December 17, 1986; 14). **Ali Setan** was third in the box-office list of the top 20 earners in 1986. The first and second top earners were Sylvester Stallone's **Rambo: First Blood** (Part II) and **A View To Kill** (New Straits Times, December 17, 1986; 14). The success of **Azura** and **Ali Setan** attracted other producers to make films along the same themes. Light-hearted, fast action comedies and teenage romance ruled the day. Producers were dreaming of doing good business and getting seven-figure ticket sales for their films.

Amir Communications produced four films in 1987 alone: three comedies and one teenage rock musical directed by Nasir Jani, the young and up-and-

coming Malaysian film director. Companies with more than one film were *S.V. Productions*, *Aniko* and *Pengedar Utama*, each with two productions. *Aniko* and *Pengedar Utama* took the lead in establishing joint-venture productions with Indonesian companies, which was another factor that lead to more film being produced in 1987.

The National Film Development Corporation of Malaysia's (Finas) successful attempt at persuading the government to have the 25% entertainment tax returned to the producers was another factor that resulted in more people venturing into the film industry. The tax return incentive did not only attract Malay businessmen but also non-Malays who had never before paid any attention to producing Malay films. *S.V. Productions*, owned by M. Raj, an Indian businessman, is a good example of the involvement of non-Malays in the film industry of the eighties. *Motion Picture*, another new company established after the tax return incentive was implemented, is owned by a Chinese.

5.5 Distribution and Exhibition

The distribution and exhibition sectors were actually the major problem facing all independent companies from the beginning. As has been discussed, the two giants, Shaw Brothers and the Cathay Organisation, not only controlled film productions but also the distribution and exhibition outlets. Jins and Borhan had great difficulty in trying to negotiate with the two companies to have their films exhibited at their chain of theatres. It was the Cathay Organisation which first opened its doors to the new Malay films of the independent era. Borhan succeeded in persuading Cathay to

distribute and exhibit his first film **Keluarga Si Comat** (Comat and Family) in 1975.

From 1975 onwards the Cathay Organisation started to distribute and exhibit films made by other independent companies. In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city, an old cinema hall called the Coliseum became the one and only place where Malay films were screened. Other theatres belonging to Cathay and Shaw Brothers kept screening imported films from Hong Kong, United States, Britain, India and Indonesia.

The Coliseum was chosen simply because it had once been very popular with the Malay audience who used to patronise Hindi and Indonesian films in the early seventies. When some independent Malay film producers voiced their dissatisfaction with the screening of their films at the Coliseum, Cathay Organisation tried exhibiting them at their other better theatres like the Cathay and Odeon, but they soon found that Malay films screened at those theatres did not last long and the returns were poor. Films like **Kisah Seorang Biduan** (A Singer's Tale) by Sabah Films and **Detik 12 Malam**[3] (Midnight Hour) by Sharsaree Film Productions lasted only five days at the Cathay and twenty-one days at the Odeon respectively.

Table 5.10
Malay Film Screenings: Number of Days and Gross Returns (1975 - 1979) in Kuala Lumpur

Film title	Theatre	No.of days screened	Returns in Malaysian dollars
Keluarga Si Comat	Coliseum	14	42,443.35
Hapuslah Airmata mu	Coliseum	36	124,152.50
Pendekar	Coliseum	31	106,996.35
Menanti Hari Esuk	Coliseum	54	214,415.10
Si Badul	Coliseum	56	216,291.40
Tiada Esuk Bagimu	Coliseum	48	156,433.25
Kisah Biduan	Cathay	5	15,653.55
Dayang Suhana	Coliseum	27	86,500.75
Detik 12 Malam	Odeon	21	79,574.60
Gila-Gila	Coliseum	36	132,435.65

Source: FINAS.

As Table 5.10 shows, films like **Menanti Hari Esuk** (Waiting For Tomorrow) and **Si Badul** were considered a box-office hit screening for 54 and 56 days respectively. Thus the number of screening days and the returns for each film exhibited by Cathay Organisation at its Coliseum theatre became a yardstick in measuring the success of Malay films produced by independent companies. Such films would also gross more money when exhibited at other theatres in various towns in both West and East Malaysia. In towns like Penang, Ipoh, Johore Bharu, Seremban and Alor Star, a film could be considered good if it lasted for more than two weeks.

All the above films were among those released for exhibition through the Cathay circuit from the years 1975 to 1979 and screened at either the Coliseum or the Cathay in Kuala Lumpur.

The positive role played by the Cathay Organisation was another factor that encouraged more film productions. Cathay welcomed any producers to negotiate terms before the production got started. In some cases Cathay undertook the cost of film processing and publicity for the films it agreed to distribute and exhibit through its circuit (New Straits Times, May 24, 1986; 3). The total cost paid by Cathay would then be deducted from the producer's share of the film's collection. This form of support encouraged producers with a good script in hand but with only minimal capital to come forward and make a deal with Cathay.

Shaw Brothers agreed to exhibit Malay films through their circuit only in 1981 when **Perjanjian Syaitan** (The Devil's Deal) by Darul Makmur Films and **Sesejuk Airmata Ibu** (Mother's Love) by Zahari Film Production were

screened at Shaw Brothers' theatres throughout the country. In 1982 Shaw Brothers screened Rahim Razali's **Pemburu** (The Hunter) at nine cinemas of which three were in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya,[4] a satellite town about 12 kilometers from the capital city.

By the early eighties some of the films produced by the independent companies were already a box-office success. Shaw Brothers had to change their attitude when they felt that they were losing the market share to the Cathay Organisation. They realised that the new Malay films were gaining good support from the Malay audience.

There were three ways in which an independent company could reach an agreement with the Shaw Brothers or Cathay: outright purchase, film rental, and producer distribution. Outright purchase is where the distributor or exhibitor buys a film and pays the producer an agreed total sum. The producer shall provide the distributor or exhibitor with a certain number of copies of his film together with trailers. Normally ten to twelve copies are provided. The distributor or exhibitor then holds the rights to have the film screened at his chain of cinemas for a certain period (normally three or five years). Secondly, in a film rental arrangement, a producer will rent out his films to a distributor or exhibitor and collect rental fees for each day the film is screened. The number of film copies and trailers and the rental period may also be in the same category as in an outright purchase. Thirdly, the producer himself acts as the distributor and deals directly with the exhibitor which includes private cinema owners. In this manner the producer shall collect 50% of the returns for each screening, and the other 50% shall go to the exhibitor.

5.6 Feature Film Budget

Initially the independent Bumiputera film companies worked within a very limited budget of not more than 200,000 Malaysian dollars. Some even shot their feature films on 16mm and later had them blown up to 35mm for theatrical release. One good example of a very thrifty production company was *Zahari Zabidi Film Productions* which made five films within a four-year period (1981-1984) on 16mm format and later had them blown up to 35mm. None of the films cost more than M$200,000. By the late seventies and early eighties film budgets rose to between 300,000 to 350,000 Malaysian dollars as producers and directors began to be more adventurous in their outings and began to move their film settings outside the living room and onto various locations. An estimated budget for a feature film in 1983 was more than M$350,000 (See Appenddix IV).[5] In fact in 1982 Jins Shamsuddin Film Productions with the help of the Royal Malaysian Police Force made **Bukit Kepong**, a war drama based on an historical account of a communist attack on a police station in rural Johore in 1952, with a total budget of more than M$500,000. It was the biggest budget for a Malaysian film during the eighties.

Table 5.9 shows how the 1984 and 1985 box-office successes of **Azura** and **Ali Setan** had influenced the film producers to churn out products along the same lines. The staying power of comedies at the local cinemas proved that Malaysian cinemagoers prefered films to be light-hearted entertainment rather than a serious forum for discussion. Serious films like **Jasmine II** and **Rahsia** (Secret) failed to stay long despite winning

awards at the country's film festival and being highly acclaimed by local film critics.

Table 5.11
Malay Films (1986) Gross Return on Cathay/BFO Cinemas Throughout Malaysia

Film Title	Type	Release Date	Returns in Malaysian Dollars
Bas Kondaktor	Comedy	18.01.86	177,685.70
Kembara Seniman Jalanan	Drama	22.02.86	299,841.15
Bujang Selamat	Comedy	18.03.86	63,585.00
Tsufeh Sofiah	Drama	5.04.86	89,858.60
Balik Kampung	Comedy	20.05.86	406,709.69
Gadis Hitam Putih	Drama	29.06.86	307,616.40
Jejaka Perasan	Comedy	24.07.86	314,179.45
Suara Kekasih	Drama	6.08.86	542,809.15
Total for 1986			**2,202,285.14**

Source: Cathay/Borneo Film Organisation, 1987.

Table 5.12
Malay Film Screenings (1987): Number of Days at Kuala Lumpur theatres and Gross Return

Film title	Type	Release Date	No. of Screening Days in K.L	Returns in Malaysian Dollars
Si Jantung Hati	comedy	17.01.87	15	161,964.05
Rozana Cinta '87	teenage romance	25.02.87	23	257,277.95
Anak Niat	comedy	14.03.87	10	44,765.00
Dewi Cinta	comedy	21.03.87	26	236,461.00
Jasmine II	drama	2.04.87	7	N.A.
Mawar Merah	teenage romance	11.04.87	27	371,138.10
Marah-Marah sayang	comedy	29.05.87	14	N.A
Aniaya Jenayah	action	14.06.87	3	N.A
Misteri Rumah Tua	thriller	5.07.87	15	99,849.10
Kepala Angin	comedy	26.07.87	17	137,821.05
Sayang	teenage romance	11.08.87	6	17,406.25
Keluarga 99	comedy	30.08.87	23	146,821.05
Rahsia	thriller	21.11.87	19	213,405.90

Source: Buletin Finas (NFDC) and Cathay Organisation.

Table 5.13
Malay Films (1988) Gross Return on Cathay/BFO Cinemas Throughout Malaysia

Film Title	Type	Release Date	Returns in Malaysian Dollars
Perempuan	Drama	16.04.88	86,808.40
Antara Dua Hati	Drama	19.06.88	196,661.95
Dendang Remaja	Teenage Romance	16.07.88	86,262.70
Ragam Pemandu	Comedy	21.08.88	103,738.50
Ujang	Comedy	20.10.88	258,286.60
Total for 1988			**731,758.15**

Source: Cathay/Borneo Film Organisation, 1989.

The three-year period from 1986- 1988 was the most painful time for Malay film producers. The **Azura** and **Ali Setan** formula of teenage romance and comedies with songs and beautiful scenery did not seem to work anymore. The country's economic slow-down had greatly affected the film industry. Fewer films were produced and total takings from the theatres dropped to M$2.2 million in 1986, rose slightly to M$2.6 million in 1987, but dived in 1988 to only M$732,000 with five films released.

Notes:

1 Foreign Films especially those from America, Hong Kong and India had always outnumbered local productions from the very beginning. The situation remains true until today. See Table 8.1 and 8.2 in Chapter VIII.

2 Jamal is a popular singer after winning the Radio Television Star Contest in 1984. **Azura** was his debut film.

3 A Malaysian production with an Indonesian star appearing as a guest.

4 Petaling Jaya has seven cinemas of which only one screens Malay films once in while. The majority of the films screened are American and Chinese (Hong Kong).

5 Equivalent to about A$180,000.

CHAPTER VI

THE ERA OF NATIONAL SUPPORT

From its early beginnings in the fortiest the Malayan (Malaysian) feature film industry never had the benefit of government patronage . The Singapore Malay Film Productions and Cathay-Keris studios and later the Kuala Lumpur Merdeka Film Productions were private companies formed without any form of government support. But at the same time the government had never been a hindrance in film business activities of those companies. The companies enjoyed their own rights and existed with minimal government scrutiny. There were no rules and regulations that could dictate to film-producing companies in either Singapore or Malaya with respect to the type and content of the films produced. The only government involvement was at the exhibition stage whereby the companies had to obtain a licence for their theatres and pay the entertainment tax for each ticket sold at the box-office.

No ministers or government administrators were given the responsibility of overseeing the film industry. Nobody seemed to realise the fact that cinema could be the most important medium in the task of nation building.

Cinema as an entertainment industry was seen as a separate activity that needed little or no guidance at all from the authorities. There was a board of film censors formed by the government but it was concerned only with the aspect of film screening and not production.

According to Jaafar Abdullah (Interview, August 16, 1986), the only interest shown by the people from the government during the studio era was in the form of personal letters from a minister to the management of the Shaw Brothers asking for a salary rise for his favourite female star.[1] Apart from that there was no other commitment or involvement on the part of the Malayan government as far as the film industry was concerned.

As noted in Chapter IV (4.7) there had been involvement of officials in times of crisis. Perhaps the most ironic involvement of the government was when Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia's own first Prime Minister, sold a script to the Shaw Brothers for thirty thousand Malaysian dollars soon after the reopening of the studio. The highest budgeted film ever produced by Shaw Brothers was called **Raja Bersiong** (King with Fangs) and launched on December 23, 1966 (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 21). A year later the studio closed for good. In a way, therefore, Tunku was also responsible for draining the studio's money and energy resulting in the complete closure of the studio. Although Tunku's involvement was actually in a personal capacity and the Shaw Brothers obliged out of respect and admiration for the elderly statesman, one of the Shaw Brothers, Runme Shaw, did get a reward out of that obligation. In 1967 he was bestowed the title of Tan Sri, a high-ranking, non-heriditary title of honour granted by the Malaysian King.

6.1 Early Appeal for Support

It was during the filming of **Raja Bersiong** in 1966 that the artistes and the workers got together and planned the establishment of a film company in Malaysia. Their representatives, Salleh Kamil, Aziz Jaafar, Haji Mahadi and Nordin Arshad, approached Tunku Abdul Rahman to talk about the plan. The four were asked by Tunku to discuss the matter with Senu Abdul Rahman, the Information Minister (Berita Minggu, March 18, 1982; 13). Later the group went to see Tun Abdul Razak, the Deputy Prime Minister who then suggested that they talk to Ghafar Baba, the Chairman of *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* or MARA (Council of Trust for the Indigenous People), a government agency set up to help Malays in business ventures. They wanted a loan of three thousand Malaysian dollars to finance a company and produce films (Berita Minggu, March 18, 1982; 13). MARA wanted collateral security before the loan could be approved, but the group could not produce any kind of property that would be acceptable. The plan failed to materialise and hopes of establishing a film company with the government's help were shattered.

The early period of the private or independent film production era also saw no help of any kind from the government. In fact the film-makers themselves were left in limbo, not knowing where to turn to for any sort of guidance. They bravely invested their money and tried very hard to keep the ailing industry alive.

Quite a number of the veteran studio-days artistes did try to voice their grievances to the authorities concerned. At a forum organised by the Malay Language Society of University Malaya on September 7, 1972

(Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 59), P. Ramlee talked at length about the bleak situation faced by the Malay film industry which was without any support from the authorities who seemed not to have the confidence to establish a national body or to invest money in an industry which was important not only from an economic point of view but also for the cultural development of the country. Ramlee questioned government agencies like the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and MARA for not taking any interest in saving and developing the Malay film industry, but instead letting other people monopolise and make huge profits from the sweat of the Malays (Zulkifli Ahmad, 1973; 59).

The 1971-1975 period fell within the Second Malaysia Plan which was a blueprint for the New Economic Policy which incorporated the two-pronged objective of eradicating poverty, irrespective of race, and restructuring Malaysian society to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function (Malaysia, 1971; 2). In line with this objective, the government participated directly to help create a Malay commercial and industrial community. Through agencies like UDA (Urban Development Authority) and MARA business premises were constructed, money invested in productive commercial and industrial enterprises; in-service training programmes and a variety of activities covering financial and technical assistance were also established. Thus, Malays participating in businesses like printing, food processing, furniture making, etc. were getting help in order to be able to reach a competitive level with other races. The film industry was one of the very few areas where no programmes were drawn up and no incentives or help given.

The few independent film companies started to be very vocal about the negative attitude of the government as far the film industry was concerned. A joint association of *bumiputera* film-makers was formed in early 1973 (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 33). The association was called *Gabungan Perusahaan Perfileman Bumiputera Malaysia* (Association of Bumiputera Film Entrepreneurs Malaysia) and the chairman was Jaafar Abdullah, the former Information Manager of the defunct Malay Film Productions studio.

Jaafar headed a delegation to meet Datuk Ali Haji Ahmad, then the Minister of Youth, Culture and Sports (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 33). The whole idea of the meeting was to appeal to the ministry to help the ailing Malay film industry. The minister asked the association to conduct a thorough research study on the industry and to produce a complete report. At the same time he promised that his ministry would also conduct special research separately (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 33).

In 1974 a Commission of Inquiry on Local Film Industry was formed by the government (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 1). The commission took about six months to produce a report suggesting the formation of a National Film Development Corporation under either the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 2). It was also suggested that the corporation be given the task of handling film imports, marketing and distribution, and lastly film production.

According to the findings of the Commission, published in 1975, the factors that contributed to the dismal state of the local film industry were:

i) limited production budgets due to lack of confidence on the part of the investors in the industry's potential;

ii) lack of modern cinematographic equipment;

iii) lack of well-trained talent in scripting, designing and directing as well as the absence of qualified technicians to handle the various technical aspects of film-making;

iv) lack of exhibition outlets for the finished products due to the monopoly of the two giant companies (Shaw and Cathay); and,

v) low payments to artistes and crew, thereby discouraging talented individuals from participating.

The fourth factor, the breaking of the forty year old film exhibition duopoly by the Shaw Brothers and Cathay Organisation, was stressed very strongly by the commission. It suggested that a third circuit of cinemas be built throughout the country (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 6). Sixteen first class cinemas were to be built in each of the sixteen states of both East and West Malaysia and the projects were to be handled by the National Film Development Corporation. Other than this the corporation could also buy out the hundreds of independent cinemas throughout the country and equip them with modern facilities (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 8). It was suggested that the corporation work closely with other government agencies such as UDA (Urban Development Authority), MARA (Council of Trust for the Indigenous People) and also with various State Economic Development Corporations (SEDCs).

The strength of both the Shaw Brothers and Cathay Organisation in monopolising the various aspects of the film trade in Malaysia and Singapore was not only a threat to the independent film-makers but also to

the government should it become involved in the industry. It was said that even the commission set up by the government had in its early stages refused to divulge its findings, claiming that premature disclosure might be unwise (Cowie, 1976; 266). It feared that Shaw Brothers and Cathay, which at one time had planned to merge into a single conglomerate, might resort to protective measures and subsequently block whatever moves the ministry investigation proposed.

The proposals from the commission looked excellent on paper. Every single independent film-maker in the country was looking forward to the implementation of the various suggestions, especially the setting up of the National Film Development Corporation, thinking that their grievances would soon be resolved through the government body. However, seven years passed before the body was established.

6.2 The National Film Development Corporation

Prior to the establishment of the National Film Development Corporation in 1981, The Commission of Inquiry into the Film Industry in Malaysia was formed on July 26, 1980 (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 88). The Commission was chaired by Datuk Abdul Hamid Omar. The members of the commission included the Chief Secretaries from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and Ministry of Information. Five more people from various organisations were also appointed to sit as committee members. The commission undertook the task of organising the new corporation and institutionalising its by-laws which now exist as Malaysian Law 244 known as The National Film

Development Corporation Act 1981 (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 89). The Act was passed by parliament in December 1980, gazetted in February 1981, and given royal assent on February 12, 1982 (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 96).

The corporation, known in Malay as *Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional* or FINAS, was established in October 1981 and began operating on November 1st, 1981 (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 96). Two well-known figures from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports were chosen to head Finas. The chairman appointed was Tan Sri Samad Idris, formerly a Minister, and the Director General post was given to Ismail Zain, formerly the Director of Culture at the Ministry.

The Finas headquarters were temporarily placed in a bungalow at No 7, Ampang Hilir Road, about five kilometers from the Kuala Lumpur city centre. The office was initially staffed with twenty-seven full-time people undertaking the administrative and creative jobs. Among the well-known artistes selected were Norma Nordin, a scene designer with the Malaysian Television station, and Jamaluddin Kadir a graduate from the Creative and Descriptive Writing Department, University of Malaya. Suhaimi Baba a graduate from the National Film School, Beaconsfield (England), joined Finas as Director (Training Division) in 1982.

NFDC or Finas came into being after about seven years of speculation (Cowie, 1982; 199). The commission set up by the Federal Government delivered its report and findings suggesting the formation of the corporation in 1975, but Finas only came into being at the end of 1981. Many of Finas' goals were in line with the earlier recommendations - to stimulate local production with an influx of Malay participation, wrest distribution

from outside agencies and set up a professional training institute (Lent, 1990; 193). Finas was placed under the Ministry of Trade and Industry and was given about $17 million as its launching grant under the Fourth Malaysia Plan ending in 1985 (Cowie, 1982; 199). The amount of money granted soon became a big issue.

The Minister who tabled a Bill in parliament to pave the way towards the establishment of Finas stressed that the corporation was aimed essentially at protecting and encouraging the local film industry without, however, taking on a direct commercial role (Cowie, 1982; 199). And in line with Malaysia's New Economic Policy which aimed to place at least 30% of corporate wealth under Malay control within a 20-year period beginning in 1970 (Cowie, 1982; 199), Finas was regarded as one of the necessary measures to ensure that a sizeable portion of the total volume of business in the production, distribution and exhibition sectors would be handled by the Malays. (See Appendix I : The Functions of Finas according to The National Film Development Act 1981).

Participation of Malays in the production sector was already a reality. Even before the establishment of Finas sixteen independent Malay film companies were engaged in feature film production. But in the distribution and the exhibition sectors the Malay businessmen never had a chance of challenging the two giant companies of Shaw Brothers and the Cathay Organisation. In 1980 there were about 500 cinemas (Cowie, 1982; 199) in the country. The Shaw Brothers, and Cathay Organisation, together accounted for about 300 and the rest were independent being mostly Chinese-controlled (Cowie, 1982; 199).

However, the situation in the early 80s was not favourable for the government agencies and Finas to encourage participation of the Malays in the aspect of cinema-ownership or exhibition. The local film industry was striken by recession owing to several factors including a shrinking cinema audience, problems in getting financial support for productions, cash flow restrictions and stiff, almost crippling competition from television and video. Both Shaw Brothers and Cathay Organisation were forced to shut down those of their cinemas showing exclusively Malay films. Statistics show that of the 716 cinemas which existed in Malaysia in 1977, only 179 remained in operation by the middle of 1986 (Pengiran Sarpuddin Ahmad, 1986; 3). 537 cinemas closed down within a nine year period. At the end of 1986, 85 closed down leaving only 94 still operating (Pengiran Sarpuddin Ahmad, 1986; 3). Some 10,000 people had lost jobs in various sectors of the industry.

The idea of Finas (NFDC) spending money to build 16 first class cinemas throughout the country, or buying out the hundreds of independent cinemas, as suggested by the Commission had to be dismissed altogether. Finas had to find ways to remedy the situation and get people interested in going to the cinemas again and at the same time prepare for a future in which the industry would be more beneficial and prolific.

In the first four years after the establishment of Finas the local film industry was still in a state of limbo. Industry statistics show that of the 67 Malay movies shown over the 1980-1985 period, only four touched the magic figure of $1 million and another 15 produced slightly more than $500,000 in gross returns (Buletin Finas, No. 1, 1986; 7). (A complete survey of films and their gross returns can be found in Table 5.7 in Chapter

V.) A shortage of quality products resulted in poor returns and, while quality was something hard to come by, quantity was also diminishing. A Finas survey shows that from January 1 to December 31, 1985, only six films were released, and of the six, only three demonstrated a staying power of more than two weeks at Kuala Lumpur cinemas; one lasted only four days with less than 20 patrons at the last screening (Buletin Finas, No. 1, 1986; 7).

The deteriorating state of Malay movies was blamed by young film-makers on the old graduates of the 50s and 60s studio system under Malay Film Productions and Cathay-Keris in Singapore. They lacked the bravura to come up with fresh new ideas in their films which could appeal to a whole new generation of the Malay cinema-goers (Buletin Finas, No. 1, 1986; 5). As a result, they readily lost a big portion of the 15-30 age group of film-goers of the 80s which accounted for more than 70% of the audiences (Buletin Finas, No.3, 1986; 5).

The dismal state of the local film industry could hardly be readdressed by Finas in its first few years of operation. From the outset, Finas was criticised because none of its members hailed from the film business. But fears of the government monopolising film production were allayed by top officials, including the prime-minister-designate. In fact the parliamentary bill that created Finas ensured that no corporation, public or private, could swallow up the industry by stipulating that film companies could undertake only one pairs of these activities: producing and distributing; distributing and screening; or producing and screening (Malaysian Digest, March 1981; 5).

6.3 Finas (NFDC) 1981-1984

Ismail Zain was the first Director General of Finas. Prior to his appointment to head the newly formed corporation, Ismail was Cultural Director to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. Ismail was a graduate of Kirby Teachers' Training College, Liverpool (1951-53) after which he studied art at the Ravensbourne College of Fine Arts and Slade School of Fine Arts, University of London from 1961 to 1966 (Berita Minggu, October 4, 1981; 6). In his six years of study at the two colleges, Ismail also enrolled in Film History and Film Aesthetics courses.

Finas as a national corporation had a lot to do as far as the Malaysian film industry was concerned. After its formation every single film enterpreneur in the country looked forward with great hope and expectation to sopport by Finas.

The early 80s, however, were a bad time for Ismail to start. The dismal state of the local film industry, the global recession, and the lack of properly trained staff, put him in a very difficult situation. He had to start from scratch. There were no records or past information that could serve as guideline as far as film corporation administration was concerned. With his sound academic background and years of experience at a ministerial level of administration, Ismail managed to get things organised and to set the direction in which Finas was meant to head.

One of his major contributions was to involve a broader spectrum of Malaysians in the discourse of national cinema, and most importantly, Ismail worked closely with academics from local universities. Overseas

trained lecturers in related fields such as communications and theatre arts were invited to discuss programmes, write and present papers, undertake research and serve on the juries of film festivals.

Morever, Finas under Ismail Zain was more concerned about long-term programming. He recognised that few film-related courses were offered at the local universities and planned to work closely with the teaching staff to have the programmes extended thus enabling young talent sponsored by Finas to be trained and later to contribute towards the development of the industry. Ismail was also negotiating for funds from various quarters to create scholarships to enable young film-makers to undergo advanced training abroad. He was also keen to set up an Actors' Studio or Workshop so that proper acting training could be conducted for young talent.

Ismail was very enthusiastic about his plans to reorganise and re-orientate the whole industry on a much higher professional level. He was very confident that the film people in the country could be re-educated so that they would actually know what they were doing. His programmes included a film criticism seminar, acting workshop, film production workshop, screen-writing workshop and film festivals.

6.3.1 Film Criticism Seminar

The first film criticism seminar took place on December 21 to 23, 1981, a few months after Finas was officially established. Six papers covering aspects of theatre and films, films as a critical medium, films and mass media, and films and copyright law were presented by well-known theatre

activists, a journalist, university lecturers and a lawyer. Local film producers, directors and actors were also invited to attend the seminar. The response was quite disappointing. Only the intellectuals, who were not directly involved in the industry, participated in the discussion on film theory and aesthetics . Film enterpreneurs found it hard to grasp the whole meaning and the objectives of the seminar. The film directors and actors found it hard to understand the form and content of the papers and the discussion that followed.

Ismail's era at Finas began with the film theory and criticism seminar. Two groups of film enthusiasts clearly emerged soon after: firstly, the university educated officers, lecturers, journalists from the English-speaking press, lawyers and film-makers from advertising agencies; and secondly, the veteran directors of the defunct studio days, young untrained actors, the less educated film producers and the high school drop-out journalists of the Malay press. Thus the whole idea of re-educating and re-orientating the film people who were mainly from the second group was not as easy as had been expected earlier.

6.3.2 The Acting Workshop

Sometime in the middle of 1982, Jamaluddin Kadir, a Finas administrative officer handling the creative division was asked by his Director General to send out letters to about 65 film actors and actresses inviting them to undergo a three months traning in acting. The ten hours a week workshop was to be conducted on Saturday afternoon, and Sunday morning and afternoon.

At its official opening twelve actresses and six actors who had had some experience in film-acting attended. Another eight young men from various theatre groups in Kuala Lumpur came and expressed their desire to attend the workshop. They were allowed in by Jamaluddin, who acted as the workshop co-ordinator. The workshop was conducted by a young American-trained acting lecturer and another middle-aged acting coach who had received his training at Australia's National Institute of Dramatics Arts (NIDA). Various aspects of basic acting styles and techniques were taught in the workshop including movement, vocal projection and articulation, characterisation, and improvisation exercises.

The workshop was not very successful. As it went on, the attendance became smaller and smaller. In the end only one film actress was left together with the eight young men who represented the theatre group. The workshop went on to the end with the nine remaining students.

6.3.3 The Screen-writing Workshop

The workshop was started towards the end of 1983. A lecturer with a doctorate from the University of Southern California who taught at the University of Malaya's Creative and Descriptive Writing Department, was called by Ismail Zain to conduct the workshop. Local film directors and playrights were called to attend.

Ismail was again toying with the idea of trying to re-educate the graduates of the Singapore studio system. But it was soon realised that this particular group could not comprehend the kind of discipline and the techniques of modern screenplay writing. One after another dropped out

of the workshop and after some time only the young playrights who had been writing for the stage, remained to learn the trade of writing for the big screen.

6.3.4 The Film Production Workshop

In early 1984 a young woman, Suhaimi Baba, came home after graduating from the National Film School, Beaconsfield, England. She went to Finas and talked to her old mentor, Ismail Zain. Soon after she was made the Assistant Director for Training and Development at Finas.

Suhaimi was a drama producer with Television Malaysia before she left for England. She had already produced quite a number of good television dramas during her short stint with the television studio. Finas by then had bought film-making equipment such as cameras, lights, sound recorders and editing machines. It, therefore, needed to have the right person to handle the brand new equipment.

Suhaimi managed to gather some fresh young talent from around Kuala Lumpur and started a shoe-string production of a forty-five minute film shot on 16mm. She wrote the script herself and directed the production. The drama was titled **Maria** and tells of the problems faced by a newly married couple about to have their first baby. The drama was aired by the newly set up privatised television network called TV 3. **Maria** was a good piece of work and was critically well received. But Suhaimi soon left Finas for a post as a producer with TV 3.

6.3.5 The Film Festivals

Although the Malay film industry started way back in the 1940s, a Malaysian film festival eventuated only some forty years later. Neither the Shaw Brothers nor the Cathay Organisation needed publicity through film festivals to advertise their products. Both studios however did participate in the Asian Film Festivals held in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur.

The Malaysian Entertainment Journalists Association (EJA) took the initiative in organising the First Malaysian Film Festival on April 11 to 13, 1980 (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 92). The move could be regarded as making history in the revival and development of the Malay film industry. The committee members of EJA took the trouble to explain to various film producers in the country the objective of having the festival. According to the Association's chairman, Nor Shah Tamby, the main aim was to promote and encourage the local film producers and artistes to keep the industry going. EJA which was dominated by journalists from the Malay press felt concerned about the future development of Malay film.

EJA went on to organise the Second Malaysian Film Festival in 1981 (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 92), this time with support from the government. EJA's two film festivals were heavy with glamor and colourful atmosphere but the contents of the festivals were different. EJA created all sorts of categories for awards such as the Best Heavy Drama, Best Light Drama, Best Comedian, Best Newcomer etc. It became obvious that the people behind the festivals did not really know what they were doing. Their main concern was not to pick the best but to give as many awards as possible so

as to please the participants. From the intellectual point of view, the festivals were cliche-ridden, pretentious and at times humorous.

Finas under Ismail Zain tried to change the trend of the festivals and get rid of the Hollywood imitations. Finas organised the third, fourth and fifth festivals. Some academics were involved. Film seminars became the main items in each of the festivals. The award giving ceremony was still held but with less emphasis. Ismail and his colleagues were more concerned with the papers and discussion at the film seminars. Even the themes for the three festivals organised by Finas were strongly directed towards the incorporation and dissemination of a national film culture and a better understanding of the film medium. The theme for the third festival was 'socialising films', for the fourth 'film as culture', and for the fifth festival, 'film as a communication media'. Papers presented in each of the seminars were geared towards clarifying the themes established.

Again the film people found the seminars and discussions too heavy and they could understand little of what was going on. They were also frustrated with the less glamorous award-giving ceremony, but they were happy with the prize-money that went together with the Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Actress Awards.[3]

Ismail's term of service ended in August 1985 and he himself did not wish to continue. Ismail left Finas and retired from government service disappointed that he had been unable to steer the Malaysian film industry towards the establishment of a national film culture in Malaysia.

6.4 Finas (NFDC) 1985-1987

The Malay press at the time of Ismail's departure was lobbying for the appointment of Zain Haji Hamzah as the new Director General, claiming that Hamzah would be the most suitable candidate as he had had some contacts with the film and television world both in Singapore (during the studio days) and in Malaysia when he was doing magazine programmes with Radio Television Malaysia. Their lobbying was successful. Zain Haji Hamzah was appointed Director General of Finas on September 15, 1985 (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 97). Prior to that he had been the Public Relations Manager with the National Savings Bank.

When Zain took over from Ismail, Finas was in the middle of organising the sixth Malaysian Film Festival. Due to a shortage of time and the decline in film production in 1985, the proposed festival was postponed to December 13 and 14, 1986. So the Sixth Malaysian Film Festival was held to cover a two year period (1985-1986) with a total number of fifteen productions.

Finas was no longer the sole organiser for the festival. A new concept was formulated so that all associations and agencies involved in the film industry could join hands and organise the festival together. An association called *Gabungan Karyawan Filem Malaysia* or Gafim (Federation of Malaysian Film Enterpreneurs) was established. Gafim worked closely with Finas to organise the Sixth and Seventh Malaysian Film Festivals. Representatives from government departments, other agencies, statutory bodies and private organisations directly connected with the industry were called to join the organising committee.

Zain Haji Hamzah believed that in managing a corporation like Finas, ideas from outside people who were related to the industry would help in its future planning. Finas under his management became a central body that co-ordinated various film activities.

The Sixth Malaysian Film Festival which was jointly organised by Gafim and Finas saw the restricted participation of academics from local universities. Heads of private organisations like Cathay and Kay Films presented papers. The issues were more relevant to film enterpreneurs. Even the theme of the festival was changed to a much simpler one, 'Love Malaysian Films'. The same theme was carried on for the seventh Malaysian Film Festival which was held outside Kuala Lumpur on December 6 to 8, 1987.[4] The Malacca state government hosted the three-day festival in Malacca city.

Bulletin Finas (No.3, 1986; 6), an official publication of the corporation quoted the theme 'Love Malaysian Films' as being a simple and yet practical approach to reviving the shrinking Malay film audience. The idea of having the festival in Malacca was also an attempt to revive the interest of film audiences outside the capital city in going back to the cinemas to support Malay films.

6.5 Formal Film Training

The Malay film industry from its early beginnings in the late forties to the middle of the seventies had never been established along a formal film-making discipline. There was no school or institute that helped to train the

film-makers of those eras. Film-making was never considered a subject that could be learned and taught in a formal classroom situation. Malay film directors who came from the studio era in Singapore acquired their skills and techniques through a long and laborious learning process from the Indian film-makers imported by the two studios. It was not until January 1970, that Malaysians realised that film-making was a subject that could be learned in a school. That year local newspapers reported the departure of Jins Shamsuddin to England to study film at the London School of Film Technique which is now known as the London International Film School.

Before Jins there had already been people from Malaysia who had been trained in England in film and television production. Radio and Television Malaysia had sent their producers for three to six month courses in England and Scotland.[5] The British Broadcasting Corporation had been working closely with Television Malaysia helping its staff to undergo training at its station in London. But people from the television and government film department *(Filem Negara)* were never involved in feature film production and most of the training that they acquired was for the drama, documentary and magazine-type productions.

Jins came back from London in 1973 with a Diploma in Film-making from the London International Film School. Since Jins was already a celebrity by Malaysian standards, his coming home with a formal film training background was momentous, bearing in mind his long established stature as an actor and director from the studio era. Jins was, in a way, a model for other young Malaysians wishing to make their way into the Malaysian film world through formal education. There were a few more school-leavers

who did make their way to London and gain entry to film schools. Othman Shamsuddin [6] studied drama and film at the Royal School of Arts and came home in 1974, Adman Salleh [7] and Kamal Mustaffa [8] studied at London International Film School and graduated in 1978. As noted in 6.2, Suhaimi Baba graduated from the National Film School, Beaconsfield, England in 1981.

More Malaysians graduated from various film studies programmes in English institutions in the mid-eighties; among them were Aida Buyong, Nasir Jani and Meor Hashim. [9] In 1982 the Finas sent four students to England and two to the United States to study film-making.[10] All of them completed their courses and returned home.

In the late seventies and early eighties about six university teaching staff went to the United States to pursue their post-graduate studies in communications, theatre and fine arts. This group also took film courses in their programme of studies. Thus far, Malaysia had had graduates majoring in various aspects of film studies from Columbia University, the University of Southern California and Boston University.

However the quality of Malaysian films in the eighties did not improve much. Jins Shamsuddin managed to direct and produce slightly better films as compared to the output of the studio era and Othman Shamsuddin improved the quality a bit further with his **Adik Manja** (The Loved One) and **Mekanik** (Mechanic). Other than these, Malaysian films were still lacking in both artistic and commercial value. The graduates of the old studio system still managed to engage themselves in film productions and the formally trained young graduates of film schools from England and the

United States found it hard to make a breakthrough into the film scene. Film producers and financiers were sceptical about engaging fresh film school graduates as their new ideas might not sell to the small and conservative Malaysian film market. Furthermore their talent and energy had never been tested. So the veterans with their long experience in the film-making world of the past decades still commanded respect from the financiers.

Another factor that contributed towards the state of limbo was the absence of film-trained academics from the world of film-making. Graduates from Boston, Columbia and California never got involved in the film-making process. They only taught one or two film courses in their universities to undergraduates who themselves never got involved in the film industry after leaving the universities. Courses taught in universities were never meant to prepare students for the film-making industry. Once in a while film academics were called to write and deliver papers in seminars attended by people who were not practitioners in the field. Thus overseas film graduates did not help much to improve the standard and quality of films produced locally. Production people and academics remained far apart.

6.5.1 The Finas Training Programme

The 1981 Act empowered Finas to "provide training facilities and to control and supervise the implementation of training projects and programmes relating to the film industry" (Finas, 1989; 3). Therefore when the corporation was set up in October 1981, Ismail Zain paid particular attention to accommodating both short and long term training programmes

in his early project planning. Ismail did try to utilise the expertise of Malaysians who had been trained in film-related fields abroad. Annuar Noor Arai, who had a doctorate in script-writing from the University of Southern California, was called in to conduct a screenwriting course. Ahmad Talib,[11] an actor trained at the Australian National Institute of Dramatic Arts and another acting coach trained in the United States were called in to handle the acting class. Both courses were short-term and did not work well with the would-be film writers and actors for whom they were intended.

When Ismail's term of service ended in August 1985, Finas' long-term training programme was still in its infancy. Nothing definite was finalised until Zain Haji Hamzah took over as Director General in September 1985. Within the same year Hamzah received a government directive through the Trade and Industry Ministry to "study the feasibility of establishing a film academy which can train actors, directors, technicians and such like." [12] At that time Finas had already nurtured the idea of setting up a film and video studio workshop costing about M$3.4 million within its Studio Merdeka Complex in Hulu Kelang as a training centre.

As regards the directive from the Ministry, Finas then initiated steps to obtain tentative views from various institutions of higher learning in Malaysia and various other film-related organisations. The response from the Communications and Malay Letters Department of the National University, the Department of Creative and Descriptive Writing, the University of Malaya, the Communications Studies Centre of Universiti Sains Malaysia, and the School of Mass Communications of the Mara

Institute of Technology were all very encouraging and these sources indicated their willingness to undertake the writing of initial concept papers.

As has been mentioned earlier, Malaysian universities did not offer film subjects as a major area of study and the availability of film equipment for practical training was also limited. The institution that offered most film courses was the Mara Institute of Technology with four courses in film production, script-writing, media advertising and film history. The Communication Studies Centre of Universiti Sains Malaysia offered film production and script-writing, and the University of Malaya's Creative and Descriptive Department offered only one course, screenplay writing. The National University's Communication department had only introduced one subject, documentary film.

Courses taught in these universities did not provide anyone with an adequate ammount of knowledge to venture into film-making as a professional. They were rather superficial and lacking in depth when compared with courses taught in professional film schools overseas. It was then suggested that steps be taken to bring formal film education in line with education provided in film schools in countries such as India, England, Australia and the United States.

6.5.2 Meetings and Concept Papers

On April 7, 1986 (Zain Haji Hamzah, Interview, August 26, 1986), Finas called a meeting of film academics and intellectuals to solicit views and ideas on the setting up of an academy to eschew duplication and also to

satisfy film education programme requirements at intitutions of higher learning in the country. The meeting was chaired by the Finas Director General Zain Haji Hamzah and attended by representatives from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Department of Information, Malaysian Film Producers Association, Mara Institute of Technology, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malayan University, the National University of Malaysia and Finas officials.

It was decided at the meeting that three committees be set up, namely the Central or Main Working Committee comprising all those who attended the first meeting, the Formation Committee and the Technical Committee.

A draft of the concept paper and a memorandum and article of association for the proposed Malaysian Film Academy were also formulated. The technical committee was given the task of preparing a detailed report for the academy which later became the Concept Paper submitted by the Central Committee to the Ministry of Information. The Ministry of Information was said to agree in principle and asked for a complete paper pertaining to the concept, structure and financial strategies of the academy. On April 16, 1987,[13] the Technical Committee held another meeting and three more sub-committees were formed to look into the detailed structure of the academy. The committees were:

i) Curriculum Development Committee,
ii) Equipment, Facilities and Security Committee,
iii) Research and Development Committee.

On June 11, 1987, the Technical Committee held its last meeting to assess reports from its various sub-committees before submitting its detailed report to the Central Committee which had already agreed that the Malaysian Film Academy be set up under the Companies Act 1965 as a company limited by guarantee without share capital. The Academy was registered on April 1, 1987 and started to operate on December 1, 1987 in an old building which once belonged to Merdeka Film Productions studio in Hulu Kelang, Selangor.

6.6 Malaysian Film Academy

Three individuals were named as the Academy's Board of Directors. They were Jins Shamsuddin, a film company director and was also the president of the Malaysian Film Producers Association, Tan Sri Kamarul Ariffin, a lawyer, a former senator, a film director and producer, the owner of the *Kay Film Production* company and also a member of the Malaysian Film Producers Association; and, Tan Sri Samad Idris, the chairman of Finas.[14] Sujiah Salleh who holds a masters degree in communication from Boston University, a former lecturer at the Communication Centre, University Sains Malaysia, and also a journalist with the *New Straits Times,* was appointed as the first Director of Studies and Co-ordinator for the Academy.

On paper it looked as though the Academy as a company did not have anything to do with Finas. But Finas as the organising body for the setting up of the Academy had actually decided on various steps to be taken by the institution. The Ministry of Information under which Finas was placed

had agreed to allow Finas to give support to the Academy under the provision of Section 6(1.b) of the National Film Development Corporation Act 1981. But the Act did not contain any provision for Finas to take part in the management of the Academy. Therefore the Academy was and is free from any form of directive from Finas. The Finas chairman, however, is also one of the three members of the Board of Directors in the Academy, so any particular directive from Finas could still be exercised in the Academy through Tan Sri Samad Idris who could speak on behalf of Finas but at the same time could claim that he spoke in his capacity as a member of the Academy's Board of Directors.

Jins Shamsuddin was one person who did not want to claim any association with Finas as far as the Malaysian Film Academy was concerned. To him the Academy should have stood on its own, free from any form of bureaucracy. According to Sujiah Salleh, Jins even disagreed with a sentence published in the Academy's pamphlet saying that the establishment of the Academy was initiated by Finas and blessed by the Malaysian government.

The academy's memorandum and articles of association have no provision for Finas officials to sit on the Academy's Board of Directors or to have any control in the running of the Academy. One question people ask today is how Finas as a government body could entrust millions of dollars of tax-payers' money to a newly formed company which had yet to prove its worth. What would happen if the Academy failed? What future would the Academy have in a country where the film industry is small and its products are seen by less than a million people?

What was the justification for the establishment of the Malaysian Film Academy? In its initial stage, Finas believed that the proposal to establish a film training institute was based on the fact that film is a significant medium in the development of the economy, politics and culture of a country like Malaysia. It was also agreed that the medium could be a potential tool in promoting a united multi-racial Malaysia and helping to implement government policies. However, it was realised that the country's film industry was still in its infancy and could not as yet bear the burden of promoting the interests of the people and the country due to:

i) the low quality of films produced;
ii) the fluctuating quantity of films being produced;
iii) the lack of qualified film-makers;
iv) the economic slow down and financial difficulties; and,
v) the competition from other communications media.[15]

The steps taken by both the government and the private sector to rectify the situation were not enough. Training facilities for the government sector could only cater for those working in *Filem Negara* and *Radio Television Malaysia.* They were provided by government institutions like the Tun Abdul Razak Broadcasting Institute which could offer limited places. Other than this, training could only be provided on an "in-house" basis. In the private sector the situation was found to be much worse as far as training was concerned.

It was on those grounds that Finas felt the need to establish a central body whereby training could be provided to individuals wishing to get involved in the film industry. It was hoped that the industry would soon get more

people who were properly trained in the various aspects of film-making in order to improve the quality of films. As it was, the ten to fourteen films produced each year were far from reaching a commendable standard. But was this due to the lack of knowledge on the part of the film-makers? Or was it because the film-makers were working under constraints such as very tight budgets or lack of modern film equipment and facilities? Is it true that good quality films can only be made with high budgets and superior film equipment and facilities? The answer may not necessarily be so. India and Indonesia have proven that good films can be made by intelligent film-makers working under very tight budgets and using old-fashioned equipment. Satyajit Ray and Usmar Ismail were classics example.

On 1 December 1987 (Sujiah Salleh, Interview; January 12, 1988) the Malaysian Film Academy went into operation. Finas allowed the Academy's Director of Training and a secretary to operate from a small office in the old Merdeka Studio building.

The Academy appointed Sujiah Salleh, a close friend of Jins Shamsuddin to be its first Director of Studies, Registrar and Programme Co-ordinator as of December 1, 1987 (Sujiah Salleh, Interview; January 12, 1988). On January 1, 1988 the Academy issued a pamphlet which contained a brief introduction to the Academy, its objectives, programme and facilities and at the same time announced its initial short-term programme in the area of cinematography, screenwriting, production management and acting.

Sujiah Salleh would co-ordinate all the four courses offered and the following were engaged to be the course tutors: screenplay writing by Jamil Sulong

and Hamzah Hussein, both graduates from the old studio system in Singapore. The cinematography course was to be taught by Zainal Othman and Haji Azmi Osman, both former cameramen with Television Malaysia. The production management course was to be handled by Othman Hafsham and Mohyee Wardi. Hafsham is a private film director and producer who owns a film company called *Cinematic* and Wardi works for Kamarul Ariffin's film company called *Kay Film Productions*. Kamarul is one of the Academy's Board of Directors. The Acting course would be coached by Othman Hafsham and Maznah Nordin. Nordin was a lecturer in communication at the Mara Institute of Technology.

The groundwork for the Academy's training programme came to a standstill when after six months Sujiah Salleh, the director and co-ordinator resigned due to conflicting ideas of its Board of Directors. The Academy's programme had to be reorganised and rescheduled. Jins Shamsuddin took over as Executive Director and Director of Studies. Five more well-known industry people were appointed as members of the Board of Directors. They were Datuk L. Krishnan, Zain Mahmud, Othman Hafsham, Rahim Razali and Jamil Sulong.

On 2 January 1989 (Sujiah Salleh, Interview; January 12, 1988) the Academy started its first intake of twenty-one students for a three-year Diploma course. The Academy was temporarily placed in the new Finas complex. Financial support from Finas enabled the students of the Academy to enjoy the facilities and equipment at the complex at a special rate. Phase one of Finas' new film and video training complex contained a library and reading room, two training studios (acting and lighting), film and video editing rooms and a preview theatrette capable of seating about 100

people. Finas' three divisions, Administration and Finance, Film Development and Film Control, spread over four floors of the new complex. The Academy had easy access not only to creative activities but also to matters pertaining to finance and policy making.

6.7 Jins Shamsuddin and the Malaysian Film Academy

Of all the Malay film actors and directors Jins Shamsuddin is the one who has survived all changes in the Malay (Malaysian) film world. Jins started from the studio days just like any other veteran, but unlike them Jins went abroad to equip himself with all the modern technological know-how to project himself in the new era of the Malay film industry. In the eighties when the industry began to experience serious support from the government and new film-makers began to get themselves established, Jins was still around making waves that sometimes sparked bitter arguments in the local press. Now Jins is a controversial figure closely associated with whatever programmes are laid down by Finas.

In Ismail Zain's (Interview, January 15, 1986) words, Jins had been a 'lone ranger' in the Malaysian film world. He managed to prove his presence in the rather crowded film scene of the early eighties. He won many awards at the first and third Malaysian Film Festivals in 1980 and 1982, including those for Best Actor, Best Director (twice) and Best Picture. The highest award won by Jins was at the Sixth Malaysian Film Festival 1986 when for the first time the awards presentation committee saw fit to present an individual with the *Anugerah P. Ramlee* (P. Ramlee Award)

for a meaningful contribution to the Malay film world. The award also carried a M$15,000.00 cash prize.

A day after the presentation, Pakar, the National Movement of United Artistes and Cultural Organisations of Malaysia, objected to the decision to award the Anugerah P. Ramlee to the actor-director-producer Jins Shamsuddin. Pakar felt that even though Jins had given the industry much, his talent and contribution was limited only to the film world, unlike the late P. Ramlee who was multi-talented as far as the Malay entertainment world was concerned (Utusan Malaysia, January 9, 1987; 9). Since it was obvious that no one could step into P. Ramlee's shoes, Pakar was of the opinion that the award be given posthumously to P. Ramlee and kept as a momento at the P. Ramlee Memorial. It was quite a controversial issue when Gafim (Federation of Malaysian Film Enterpreneurs) and Finas answered Pakar's allegation by asserting that since no one could equal the late P. Ramlee, it was only right to have the concept changed to honour existing personalities (Utusan Malaysia, January 9, 1987; 9). It was unanimously felt that Jins, a film stalwart who had worked towards the betterment of the industry, had proven himself worthy of the award. His name was synonymous with the rise of a new era in the local film industry and his involvement in films extended to the Asian region too.

Even though Jins did not make any films after **Ali Setan**, he was particularly active in other aspects of film activities in the country. He was the first chairman of Gafim, the Federation of Malaysian Film Enterpreneurs the body that organised the sixth and seventh Malaysian Film Festivals. Jins was also the president of PPFM, *Persatuan Pengeluar*

Filem Malaysia (Malaysian Film Producers Association). He was also on the Board of Directors for AMPA, Asian Motion Pictures Association and FMPPA, the Federation of Motion Picture Producers in Asia-Pacific. As president of PPFM and chairman of Gafim, Jins had been in close association with Finas.

One of Ismail's ideas for a film training programme had been to send as many Malaysians as possible to study film-making abroad and at the same time help expand the film courses in the local universities. Universiti Sains Malaysia's Communication Centre was identified as a would-be major film study centre and money was given to help purchase the necessary film-making equipment for training purposes. When the centre invited Jins to be its first resident artist and to help shape up the film training programme, Jins agreed and spent two years at the university's campus. It was there that Jins made **Ali Setan,** the box-office hit of 1985, working closely with Sujiah Salleh, then a lecturer at the centre, and students on the film courses.

Jins owns a dubbing studio called *Delima* in Hulu Kelang, close to the Merdeka Studio complex. He was also building a sound stage next to the studio. When intervied in August 1986, Jins talked about setting up his own film training centre to be called the Malaysian Film and Television Training Institute. In fact he had already prepared a paper and wanted to register a company. According to him Finas had been very slow in its moves to set up a film school in the country, therefore he wanted to do it on his own. His rationale was that local films still failed to attract local audiences due to their poor quality because almost all the so-called film-makers in the country had never had formal film training.

In his paper Jins outlined the film and television courses to be taught both by qualified local film personnel and guest lecturers from overseas. Jins wanted to have film appreciation and criticism as a core module in his two-year diploma course and a good balance of both film theory and practice. In one of the course-outlines he wrote about the importance of the aesthetical aspects of film and wanted the students to analyse classics by world masters.

Jins submitted his paper to Finas and it was the one used as a guide-line in preparing the concept paper and the Articles of Association for the Malaysian Film Academy. However, the many heads that came from various institutions of higher learning in the country failed to include film theory, history and aesthetics in their curriculum for the Film Academy.[16] None of the courses listed gave emphasis to the theoretical aspects of film studies.

A close look at the individuals sitting on the various committees prior to the setting up of the Malaysian Film Academy would reveal whether or not they were the right choice. Someof them knew very little about the film trade or film as an educational subject. Despite some being qualified to doctoral level, their areas of specialisation were not film studies. Some representatives from the Ministry of Culture and Education had very little knowledge of the film art.

Jins Shamsuddin sat on all the committees. He was later appointed as one of the three members of the Board of Directors. The two other directors did not sit on all the committees. An interview with Sujiah in January 1988

revealed that Jins was the one who had the most say in the running of the Academy and as noted in section 6.7 he never liked the idea of Finas interfering in the academy's administration.

In one of the minutes of the Sub-Committee on Curriculum Development of which Jins Shamsuddin was a member, it was stated that the criteria for the appointment of the Academy's Principal should be based on the fact that the candidate must have experience in film production, be an administrator and must have followed the development that lead towards the establishment of the Academy. One could think of no other candidate except Jins himself.

In late 1987 and early 1988 Jins had been under lots of pressure from the young film-makers and film enthusiasts in the country. The most vocal were Nasir Jani, Dr. Annuar Arai and Mansur Putih. They even asked Jins to retire from the Malaysian film scene on the grounds that his presence could no longer put new life into an industry which was failing to move forward and instead lingered on the past glory of the studio veterans (Utusan Malaysia, January 23, 1988; 10). The young film-makers were asking for more opportunities in order to determine the future direction of the Malaysian cinema.

Judging from the people involved in the planning and set up of the new Malaysian Film Academy and also those who had been called to handle the initial courses offered, the Academy had nothing new in store for its future students. So what future does the industry have as far as film training is concerned? It would just be another training centre producing film technicians but not intelligent film-makers or film-thinkers.

In the aspect of formal film training Malaysia has been far behind compared to the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. The provision of formal film training facilities and resources in Malaysia has not been a priority as it has in the Philippines where film training programmes have been available since the late 30s. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Lamberto Avellana, the Philippines film director who directed **Sergeant Hassan** for the Shaw Brothers Malay Film Production studio in Singapore, was a graduate in dramatic arts from the Ateneo de Manila University in 1936.

Several other universities in the Philippines also offer various courses in film production, writing, criticism, research and evaluation. Among those universities are the University of the Philippines Institute of Mass Communication, the University of Santo Thomas, Miriam College, De La Salle University and Far Eastern University. In Thailand, there are seven universities with departments teaching courses in film history and productions (Suwunpukdee, 1988; 165).

Formal film training has helped to improve the standard of national films in the Philippines and Thailand as proven by the recognition of their films in international film festivals as cited in the final chapter of this thesis. One of the reasons for the failure of Malaysian films has been the late development of formal film training and resources. The importance of formal film training for Malaysian film-makers will be discussed in Chapter VIII given that a number of young film-makers trained abroad have managed to produce several good quality films with artistic merit.

Notes:

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1 An interview with Jaafar Abdullah, August 18, 1986, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. Jaafar did not name the minister, but the favourite star was Siput Sarawak.

2 Anugerah Perfileman: Satu Renongan Terhadap Perkembangan Filem Malaysia, (undated); 8. Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Wartawan Malaysia (Malaysian Journalists Association).

3 Prize-money: Best Picture (M$20,000), Best Director (M$10,000), and other major categories like Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Story, Best Screenplay, each received M$5,000.

4 Tan Sri Samad Idris, Chairman of Finas, in the Film Festival Programme Book expressed his gratitude to the State Government of Malacca for being the first host the Malaysian Film Festival and hoped that other states would also come forward and do the same.

5 Some of the well known Television Malaysia drama producers like Abdullah Zainol, Husner Ahmad, and Hasiah Ariffin were all trained in England and Scotland.

6 Also known as Hafsham. Upon his return from England Hafsham served as drama producer in Television Malaysia. Later he became documentary film director at Filem Negara. In 1980 he resigned and formed a production house with a few friends and started directing advertising filmlets and documentaries. Hafsham now owns Cinematic, a production house specialising in television series.

7 Adman is drama producer with Malaysian TV3.

8 Mustaffa is a free-lance advertising film director.

9 Meor Hashim is a free-lance film editor and television drama director.

10 Those who were sent to America were Aziz Razak and Isa Abdullah. Both graduated and returned to Malaysia to become free-lance film directors.

11 Ahmad Talib is known as Ahmad Yatim. He won Best Supporting Actor Award at the Second Malaysian Film Festival (1980) and Best Actor Award at the Third Malaysian Film Festival (1981).

12 A press statement by the Chairman, Board of Directors, Malaysian Film Academy (April 1, 1987). The directive from the minister came in October 1985.

13 Concept Paper and Reports from various committees (unpublished) available at the Finas Library.

14 A pamphlet published by the Malaysian Film Academy.

16 Committee Report on Malaysian Film Academy (unpublished).

CHAPTER VII

THE INDONESIAN CONNECTION

At one time during the fifties Malay films used to dominate Indonesia. During the years 1956-1963, 27 Malay films from the Shaw Brothers' MFP were exported, distributed and exhibited and greeted with tremendous enthusiasm in theatres throughout Indonesia. Indonesian films produced during the same period were hardly seen in the Malayan or Singaporean market. Then, during the slump of the seventies, Indonesian films flooded the Malaysian screens, both cinema and television, and not one film from Malaysia was brought to Indonesia. Since then there has been wide distribution of Indonesian films in Malaysia but no Malaysian films shown in Indonesia.

7.1 The Early Fifties

As mentioned in Chapter III, film companies in Singapore dominated the export of Malay films to Indonesia. *Nusantara Film Company*, for example, made films to be sold to Indonesia and even signed an agreement with a film distributor in Indonesia and made huge profits from selling their products.

According to Hamzah Hussein, films from the Singapore studios, both belonging to Shaw and Cathay, were enjoying free access to Indonesian theatres in the late fifties. The peak was in 1959 when eight films from MFP alone were sold to Indonesian distributors or exhibitors who paid between M$30,000.00 to M$50,000.00 per film. The most popular films were those which starred P.Ramlee (Finas, 1982; 24). There were instances where Indonesian distributors or exhibitors paid a down-payment to the MFP when it was announced that a film with P. Ramlee as the leading star was to be made. At times, four theatres in Jakarta were simultaneously showing P. Ramlee films (Finas, 1982; 24).

The impact of Malay films really spelled trouble for the Indonesian local film industry. From 1952 the marketing of Indonesian films began to suffer because of competition from films produced in neighbouring countries especially in Malaya (Misbach Y. Biran; 25). According to Misbach, Malay films were enjoyed by the working class because the stories were simple and not made complicated by lengthy dialogues like those found in Indonesian films (Misbach Y. Biran; 35). Probably the very absence of political themes at least partly accounts for the success of Malay films. They were less 'serious', lacking dialogues or speeches containing propaganda about national consciousness, struggling for the fatherland etc (Misbach Y. Biran; 35). By 1956, the general production pattern of Indonesian films followed the themes of the imported Malay films (Misbach Y. Biran; 36).

7.2 The Late Fifties and Early Sixties

The situation, however, began to change in the late fifties and early sixties. Imported Malay films from the two studios in Singapore were facing competition from Indian films in the Indonesian market. Indonesian film producers also felt unsure about their own industry and searched for ways to put an end to the importing of films from Singapore. Film producers got together and started thinking of forming an association. In 1953 Usmar Ismail and Djamaluddin Malik pioneered the way for the establishment of a film production organisation (Misbach Y. Biran; 36). A year later the *Persatuan Penerbit Filem Indonesia* (Association of Indonesian Film Producers) was formed. One of the objectives of the association was the restriction of the import of Malay films (Misbach Y. Biran; 36).

Djamaluddin wanted Indonesian films to be distributed and exhibited in Singapore and Malaya as well. He went to Singapore and was introduced by Hamzah Hussein to Ho Ah Loke who was then the vice-president of Cathay Organisation (Finas, 1982; 25). After a few meetings they came to an agreement that the flow of films from the two countries should be on equal terms. Djamaluddin talked about the changing situation of film production in Indonesia and insisted that Singapore film producers visit Indonesia and see for themselves the new film scene in his homeland.

On February 2, 1954, Hamzah Hussein, S. Rajaratnam and two other journalists from Singapore went to Jakarta. They were shown around the film studios belonging to *Persari*, *Garuda*[1] and *Perfini*[2] (Salim Said, 1991; 53). They found out that the Indonesian film industry at that time had

achieved great improvements under the leadership of both Djamaluddin and Usmar Ismail (Finas, 1982; 25).

Djamaluddin went so far as to make joint-venture productions with Cathay. Indonesian artistes were brought to Singapore and acted together with Malay artistes of Cathay-Keris Studio in those productions. Thus we have Indonesian stars like Radin Mokhtar and his wife Sukarsih appearing in a film called **Terang Bulan di Malaya** (Moonlight in Malaya), Netty Herrawati starred in **Irama Kasih** (Song of Love) and Darulsalam in **Saudaraku** or My Brother (Finas, 1982; 25).

After the joint-venture productions and a free flow of films between both countries, Ho Ah Loke wanted to establish a distribution office in Jakarta and operate along the same lines as the American companies who then handled the distribution of their own films in Indonesia (Finas, 1982; 25). The Indonesians, however, did not agree to Ah Loke's request. They wanted *Persari* to handle the distribution of Cathay-Keris films in Indonesia. After some time Ho Ah Loke decided to stop sending and distributing his films through *Persari.*

While Djamaluddin engaged in joint-venture productions with Cathay, Usmar Ismail made an effort to market directly Indonesian films in Singapore and Malaya in 1958. A Festival of Indonesian film was organised both in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Usmar brought along with him Indonesian stars to appear on stage prior to the screening of their films. **Tiga Dara** (Three Maidens), a film produced by *Perfini,* was a box-office hit and fared better than a few Malay films. **Tiga Dara** was shown

for nearly a month at Odeon theatre in Kuala Lumpur and managed two weeks at the Odeon theatre, Katong, Singapore (Salim Said, 1991; 72).

It was then that both Shaw and Cathay agreed to abide by the Indonesian quota system. Under this system, any company exporting a Malay film to Indonesia would have to buy three Indonesian films and show them in Singapore and Malaya. At the beginning the Shaw Brothers obliged with the one-sided system but fewer films were sold or exported to Indonesia. By 1961 only one film was sold. Another two were sold in 1962 and in 1963 Shaw Brothers sold their last film to Indonesia and the whole arrangement was terminated. Indonesia saw no more Malay films and Indonesian films were no longer shown in Singapore or Malaya (Hamzah Hussein, Interview; August 16, 1986).

Thus the Indonesian quota system did work to the Indonesians' advantage but it also backfired. Indonesian film producers trying to market their products in Singapore or Malaya faced difficulties in getting buyers even when they lowered the price of each film to only six or ten thousand Malayan dollars (Hamzah Hussein, Interview; August 16, 1986). Shaw Brothers and Cathay did not buy the films for the simple reason that they both wanted to protect their own products. Some of the Indonesian films were found to have better story-lines, dialogues and characterisations. This made the two giant companies, who not only controlled the production, but also the distribution and exhibition, more careful in safeguarding their own products. Some of the Indonesian films bought by Shaw Brothers under the Indonesian quota system were never publicly acknowledged and not even shown in the local cinemas (L. Krishnan, Interview; July 18, 1988).

After the mid-sixties Malay and Indonesian films were not exchanged anymore. Distributors other than Shaw and Cathay did not want to risk their money buying Indonesian films for fear that they might not be able to get the films exhibited through cinema chains owned by Shaw and Cathay. The independent circuits were also sceptical of showing Indonesian films because of the bad image created by both Shaw and Cathay when they bought low quality films under the Indonesian quota system.

7.3 Indonesian Connections: the Second Phase

After both Malay film studios in Singapore closed down, and Merdeka Film Productions in Kuala Lumpur was half-way closed in the late seventies, Indonesian films again flooded the Malaysia. By this time their productions were much superior to the Malay films of the preceding decade. The most notable difference was the fact that all Indonesian films distributed and exhibited in Malaysia in the late sixties and seventies were shot in colour and wide screen.

It should be noted here that while the Malay film industry in both Singapore and Malaysia was withering away the Indonesian film industry was rising steadily after the *Dewan Filem Indonesia* (Indonesian Film Council) was established by the Minister of Education and Culture in 1956 (Salim Said, 1991; 45). From then on the country's cultural activists were very vocal about the state of their own cinema and the commitment from their government. The Association of Indonesian Film Companies, for example, were crying foul over "the lack of a clear government policy regarding film. This has resulted from the uncertain position of the film industry itself and the lack of government office or agency with the competence to control

production, imports, exports, distribution, censorship, technical equipment and the like, to serve as an authority for the film industry" (Salim Said, 1991; 45). The Indonesian government's answer to this criticism was a reduction in the import quota of Malayan, Filipino and Indian movies (Salim Said, 1991; 46).

The loss of the Indonesian market was another reason for the collapse of the Malay film industry in Singapore. The reduction in the import quota soon spelt the end of buying and screening of Malay films in Indonesia. The Indonesian opposition to the formation of Malaysia, a merger of Malaya, Singapore and the British colonies of northern Borneo, Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei, which was established on 16 September 1963, (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 216) resulted in the rupture of diplomatic relations (Gullick and Gale, 1986; 112).[3] This also affected the cultural relationship of both countries, including the import and export of films.

By the late sixties and early seventies the Indonesian film industry had greatly improved with support from the government. In early 1986 the Ministry of Information made it mandatory that for every film brought into the country, the importers had to put aside Rp. 250,000 towards the purchase of national film production and rehabilitation shares (Salim Said, 1991; 80). The money was supposed to be channeled to producers as an incentive for production. Ten years later the production of Indonesian films increased in quantity. According to the Directorate for Film of the Department of Information more than one hundred production licenses were issued by this office in the period 1977-1978 (Salim Said, 1991; 89). However, the increase in the quantity of films produced did not guarantee a safe and stable home market. Indonesian producers were facing the

problem of getting their films exhibited in Indonesian theatres, especially in Jakarta and other big cities, because cinema owners were also film importers and did not give priority to local films. The problem was at its peak in 1973 and 1974 during which fifty producers had been forced out of operation because "it was difficult to obtain bookings (for their films) in the movie theatres of Jakarta and elsewhere (Salim Said, 1991; 87). Faced with this problem and not being able to address it immediately, Indonesian film producers turned to Malaysian distributors who were willing to pay money and negotiate for screening rights with Malaysian theatre owners. That could be another reason for the influx of Indonesian films into Malaysia during the late sixties and early seventies.

We have seen earlier that the collapse of the studio system and the absence of locally made Malay films saw the establishment of privately owned film distribution companies in Malaysia. These companies started to buy films from Indonesia because Indonesian films were the best substitute for Malay films: the films used the same language, the actors and actresses were from the same ethnic stock, and themes and characterisations were identifiable by the Malays. Thus Indonesian films dominated the scene, being shown not only in Shaw's and Cathay's theatres in Kuala Lumpur but also in independent cinemas in smaller towns throughout the country. Indonesian actors and actresses like Ratno Timoer, Rachmat Kartolo, Dicky Zulkarnain, Farouk Afero, Lenny Marlina, Rima Melati, Rahayu Effendy, etc. became household names in Malaysia especially among the Malays.

The influx of Indonesian films to Malaysia also affected television. Television Malaysia, established in 1967, began to screen Indonesian films

bought through local distributors in its Malay film slot on Friday evenings. Network One of Television Malaysia could no longer repeat screenings of old Malay films as some of them had already been repeated three or four times. When new films were not avalaible for first time television screening, the station had no other choice but to turn to Indonesian films which were purchased for only M$3,000.00 to M$5,000.00 from local distributors.

Indonesian producers also played a role in helping to shape independent *bumiputera* film companies in Malaysia. When *Perusahaan Filem Malaysia* or *Perfima* came into existence in 1970, the company could not move due to lack of capital. It was the Indonesians who helped to get *Perfima* going. Turino Djunaidy, an Indonesian director/producer who was filming **Kabut Bulan Madu** (Foggy Honey Moon) in Kuala Lumpur met Jins Shamsuddin and persuaded him to form a company together with two of his friends and he was willing to give two of his films **Kabut Bulan Madu** and **Wajah Seorang Lelaki** (The Face of a Man) as its initial capital (Abdullah Hussein, 1973; 225).[4] Jins did not agree because he and his friends had already formed *Perfima*. Turino, however, willingly gave Jins the two films to be distributed in Malaysia by *Perfima* .

After *Perfima*, other newly set-up distribution companies began their film trade along the same track, importing films from Indonesia and slotting them on the independent cinema chains. Some of the companies even entered into joint-venture productions with Indonesian producers. Well known Indonesian actors were brought in to play leading roles in those films. Even Shaw's Merdeka Film Studio in Kuala Lumpur succumbed to the idea of joint-productions with Indonesia.

The impact of Indonesian films on the Malaysian market was strongly felt in the seventies when at one time or another more than five Indonesian films were being exhibited in theatres throughout the country. Both Indonesian producers and Malaysian distributors understood well that they could make easy and quick money with the films when not challenged by local Malay productions. Indonesian films were purchased at a very high price. Between M$40,000.00 and M$50,000.00 (Finas, 1982; 26) were paid by the local distributors for two sets of release prints, five trailers and some publicity material (Finas, 1982; 26). There were also times when those films were paid for up-front, that is, while the film was being made or processed. There had been cases whereby new films were brought in direct from the processing laboratories in Hong Kong (Finas, 1982; 26). Thus some of the Indonesian films were having their first theatrical release in Malaysia instead of their own country. There were also times when copies brought from the laboratory to Malaysia were used to finance copies made for the Indonesian market.

The lucrative trade of importing, distributing and exhibiting Indonesian films in Malaysia almost crippled the local film industry. There were no rules and regulations formulated to restrict the entry of Indonesian films into the country. The only formality which needed to be met by the importers was getting a certificate from the Malaysian Censorship Board for which a fee of 15% from the net return to the distributor was deducted. That was all the government did to the activities of the Indonesian film trade in Malaysia. And all the while when Indonesian films were flourishing in Malaysia, no Malaysian film entered Indonesian market. Even though there was no direct restriction from the Indonesian side, new Malaysian

film producers during this period were not sure of the Indonesian market and did not know how to sell their products to the Indonesians. Furthermore, no Indonesian distributor or exhibitor had ever expressed an interest in taking Malaysian films for screening in Indonesia.

7.4 The Malaysian Film Producers Association

By 1975 a few other Malay film companies were formed. Other than the early Perfima and Sari Artiste, Sabah Films, Syed Kechik Film Productions and Indera Films became pioneers in trying to create renaissance of the Malay film industry. Perfima, Sabah, Syed Kechik and Indera Films started their own productions and marketed their products through the Cathay cinema circuits competing along with the imported Indonesian films. Towards the end of the seventies the number of Indonesian films exhibited at the local theatres was shrinking. The film audience began to pay attention to new locally produced Malay films by *bumiputera* companies. Some of the Indonesian films brought into the country were also found to be of much lower quality as compared to the earlier ones.

The triumph of locally produced films like **Keluarga Si Comat** (*Sabah Films*) and **Menanti Hari Esuk** (*Perfima*) boosted the confidence of producers/directors Deddy M. Borhan and Jins Shamsuddin. Both of them thought that since Indonesian films could enter the Malaysian market so freely, there should not be any problem in marketing their products in Indonesia as well. They both made a few trips to Jakarta lobbying the film distribution companies in Indonesia to buy, distribute and exhibit

Malaysian films. Little did they realise that history would not repeat itself so easily. The glorious days once enjoyed by Malay films in that country were over and long forgotten.

Indonesian film producers were united in their intention to do anything possible to safeguard their local film market from any form of competition, especially from films in the same language. Malaysian films were then regarded as a threat to their own local film industry. When approached by both Jins and Borhan, the Indonesian Film Producers Association, who seemed to have control over the distributors and exhibitors, came up with all sort of excuses not to accept Malaysian films. They never admitted that the Malay and the Indonesian language are from the same root. They said it would be impossible for the Indonesians to understand the language spoken in Malaysian films.

Contrary to this, Malaysian films screened on television are immensely popular with the Indonenesian viewers in both Sumatra and Irian Jaya. The widespread use of parabolic satellite broadcast receivers has made both Malaysian television stations, TV3 and RTM popular with the Indonesian elite. Indonesian film-makers like Turino Junaidy, Teguh Karya and Ariffin C. Noer are full of praise for some well-made Malaysian films. Yet the Indonesian distributors and exhibitors are very protective of their own products and refuse to accept the fact that Malaysian films would do well in the Indonesian market. Each time the Asian Film Festival was held in Asian cities like Jakarta, Bangkok, Hong Kong or Manila, Jins and Borhan would try to lobby the Indonesian producers to buy Malaysian films and have them distributed and exhibited in their country.

Other than the Asian Film Festival which was organised on a competitive level from 1954, *ASEAN* (Association of South East Asian Nations) has also held a yearly Asean Film Festival in capital cities of each member country. These two festivals host film seminars or discussions with an emphasis on cultural understanding through film exchange programmes. But in the First Asean Film Producers Seminar held in Jakarta in 1976, Jins and Borhan who represented Malaysia were not regarded as official representatives. This was simply because neither of them represented Malaysian film producers in an official capacity as Malaysia did not yet have an Association of Film Producers.

However, according to Datuk L. Krishnan, the Malaysian Association of Film Producers had already been in existence since 1967 (Berita Harian, Feb. 21, 1982; 10) when he, together with the late P. Ramlee, Salleh Ghani and Ho Ah Loke, got together and talked about the formation of an association. The four of them even managed to discuss the problems of the local film industry with Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, then the Deputy Prime Minister (L. Krishnan, Interview; July 18, 1988). And in 1969, Krishnan together with P. Ramlee and Saloma had a meeting with Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir, then a Member of Parliament and suggested to him that he bring the matter to parliament (L. Krishnan, Interview; July 18, 1988). There is, however, no record showing the activity of the association initiated by Krishnan. The association was not registered and failed to function as a body binding together film producers in the country. It was almost ten years after that Jins and Borhan came onto the scene reinforcing the tracks laid by Krishnan earlier.

Realising the importance of voicing their opinions and ambitions through a united group, Jins and Borhan persuaded other film producers in Malaysia to get together and form an association. On March 5, 1980 the Association of Malaysian Film Producers was formed with the blessing of the Ministry of Information. Datuk Syed Kechik bin Syed Mohamed, producer and owner of Syed Kechik Film Productions was elected as President (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 60). The Association was registered on February 17, 1981 (Ahmad Idris, 1987; 60). The association is now known in Malay as *Persatuan Pengeluar Filem Malaysia* or PPFM.

PPFM under the leadership of Datuk Syed Kechik sustained the effort of lobbying Indonesia to import and market Malaysian films. A year later when the National Film Development Corporation of Malaysia (FINAS) was formed, PPFM took up the issue of exporting films to Indonesia with Finas. From that year onwards Finas began to formulate strategies to penetrate the Indonesian film market.

7.5 Malaysia-Indonesia: Film Exchange Scheme

Prior to the effort made by Finas to promote Malaysian films in Indonesia, the Ministries of Information of all the Asean member countries had already started what they called Asean Film Week in which films from each country were screened to the public. Malaysia participated in the first Asean Film Week held in Jakarta on January 24-28, 1982 (Berita Harian, February 21, 1982; 10). **Dia Ibuku** (She's My Mother), a film produced by Sari Artiste was chosen to represent Malaysia.

The First Asean Film Week in Jakarta did not do much to pave the way for the entry of Malaysian films into Indonesia. The government to government programme was not much of a success if measured from both the aesthetic and economic points of view. The programme was more of a cultural exchange in form and content. The Director of Film Development of the Indonesian Information Department, Mr. Soelistihardjo, stressed that the objectives of the programme were to foster cultural co-operation of Asean nations through films and to upgrade public appreciation of Asean films (Berita Harian, February 21, 1982; 10). The target audience for the programme was students and members of youth organisation in each country. Besides introducing and promoting the cultural aspects of each other's country the program failed to deliver benefits to the film industry. The question of exports and imports of films from one member country to another remained unsolved. Perhaps from the social point of view the programmes were just an excuse for government officers of a ministerial level of each country to travel around and see places, for they themselves could not do much to promote the sale of films from their own countries as they were not involved in the industry directly.

Finas under the directorship of Ismail Zain began to pursue the as yet unsuccessful effort by the PPFM (Malaysian Film Producers Association) to lobby for the entry of Malaysians films into Indonesia. Sometime in the middle of 1982 Finas officials met staff of the Indonesian Film Council *(Dewan Filem Indonesia)* to negotiate a film exchange programme. Much to the Malaysian delegates' surprise, the Indonesian agreed to an exchange programme. P.T. Perfin or *Peredaran Filem Indonesia* (Indonesian Film Distributors), a subsidiary company of the Indonesian Film Council was given the task of handling the distribution and exhibition of Malaysian films.

As a start, three films were brought into Indonesia and later seven more films chosen by Finas were to follow.

The first three films selected by Finas were **Dia Ibuku** from Sari Artiste Films, **Tiada Esuk Bagimu** from Jins Shamsuddin Film Productions and **Abang** from Fleet Communications. All three were winners in various categories in the First Malaysian Film Festival 1980. By Malaysian standards, the three were the best choice and Finas officials were very confident in capturing the interest of the Indonesian cinema-goers.

In conjunction with the film exchange scheme Finas prepared a sixty-eight pages full colour booklet printed on high quality glossy paper to be distributed to Indonesian officials, film-makers, distributors and theatre owners. The booklet called *Filem Malaysia Merangka Kemajuan* (The Development of Malaysian Films) was very impressive both in its contents and visual presentation. It out-lined the history of the Malay film industry, gave details of Malaysian film festivals, listed Malaysian film producers, and provided synopses, posters and stills of Malaysian films together with local newspaper reviews. In many ways the publication was a near complete guide and introduction for anyone who had not been in close contact with the country's film industry in the eighties.

It took a year after all the negotiations and promotions were done, for the selected films to be sent to Indonesia. The first two films sent were **Dia Ibuku** and **Tiada Esuk Bagimu.** But the two did not make it straight into the Indonesian theatres, instead they only managed to get as far as the Halim International Airport in Jakarta and there they remained for more

than two years (New Straits Times, September15, 1986; 4). TheIndonesian Film Council's representatives in the transaction were apparently ignorant of their responsibilities. When the two Malaysian films were stranded at the airport, then only did the P.T. Perfin people realise that they could not claim the films because they had no licence to import them (New Straits Times, September 15, 1986; 4). This was a flimsy excuse indeed. How could they not have known that a licence would be required for importation of foreign films? These problems should have been ironed out during the early stages of negotiations.

The whole situation was unresolved for almost three years. Both Finas and P.T. Perfin did nothing to rectify their mistakes. Previous meetings and negotiations became a mockery. Indonesian producers were happy with the outcome of the so called Indonesia-Malaysia Film Exchange Scheme, for they in the first place were very much against the steps undertaken by the Indonesian Film Council through its subsidiary company P.T. Perfin. The Malaysian producers whose films were involved in the scheme were angry but they could do little to retaliate. Jins Shamsuddin remarked that the conditions of the agreement were loose; there were too many loopholes and a lot of details were not stated clearly (New Straits Times, September 15, 1986; 4).

Many in Malaysia felt that the film exchange agreement signed by Finas was apparently one-sided, the need for it was heavily on the Malaysian side. The Indonesian policy had always been to ban Malaysian films, music, and even printed materials while Malaysia had continued to practise free enterprise, meaning that anything from Indonesia could come in without restriction (New Straits Times, September 15, 1986; 4).

In May 1985, the Indonesian weekly magazine *Tempo* published a report saying that Malaysian films had failed in their own country and therefore should not be screened in Indonesia. The article created more controversy over the issue of an agreement for a mutual exchange of ten films a year between the two countries. One of the Indonesian film producers, Ibu Tien Samantha was quoted as saying that Malaysian producers should accept with an open heart that Indonesian film distributors were apprehensive about bringing in Malay films as there was no audience for such films.

Tempo 's article put the Malaysian National Asociation of Film Producers, Artistes and Writers (Pakar) in a huff. Its president Zulkifli Ahmad felt that the whole report did not make sense as it was a sweeping statement and not in the spirit of the exchange agreement that was signed earlier (New Straits Times, May 30, 1985; 12). Ahmad questioned how Indonesian distributors could know that Malay films would flop if they had not tested out the market by screening them first. The association then urged the Malaysian government to ban temporarily the import of Indonesian films until the Indonesian side abided by the mutual agreement and accepted Malaysian films for their market.

The issue of banning Indonesian films from entering Malaysian market raised by *Pakar* created a quick response from P.T. Perfin and Finas. Finas sent a letter to the Indonesian company on May 31st. 1985 (Berita Harian, June 27, 1985; 11), urging them to review the agreement signed in 1983. On June 13, 1985 a letter from P.T. Perfin reached Finas saying that they were willing to re-negotiate the film exchange scheme. In early

July 1985, P.T. Perfin's general director R. Soedirgo met Finas Chairman Tan Sri Samad Idris and representatives from the Malaysian Film Producers Association. It was then agreed that Indonesia would return the old copies of two Malaysian films stranded at their airport for more than two years to be replaced with new prints. On September 21st.1985 (Finas, 1985; 10), a new agreement was signed between Finas and P.T. Perfin to re-activate the Film Exchange Scheme between the two countries. P.T. Perfin agreed to distribute and exhibit three Malaysian films for the first three months beginning in July 1986. The programme was considered as a pilot project and would be reviewed upon completion.

Dia Ibuku (She's my Mother), a film released in 1981 and winner of nine awards at the Second Malaysian Film Festival including those for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress and Best Cinematographer, was given a special screening for an invited audience on December 22nd.1985 (Finas, 1985; 1) at the President Theatre, Jakarta. As the screening was not open to the general public, it was hard to test the response of the main-stream Indonesian film-goers. But the encouraging words of praise from the Indonesian officials and their wives after the show boosted the ego and confidence of Finas officials and the film's producer and executive producer, Sarimah and her husband Yusoff Majid.

Before **Dia Ibuku** was released to a public audience, Finas and PPFM put up another excellent effort to open up the market for Malaysian films in Indonesia. A Malaysian Film Week was held in Jakarta from February 4 till 8, 1986 organised by Finas with the co-operation of the Malaysian Embassy in Jakarta, P.T. Perfin (Malindo Division) and the Jakarta Arts

Council (Utusan Malaysia, February 17, 1986; 9). Finas was a bit over-enthusiastic in its effort to gain back the confidence of the Indonesians by reminding them of the glorious days of Malay film in P.Ramlee's time. **Pendekar Bujang Lapuk** (The Bachelor Warriors) a comedy made by P. Ramlee in 1958 was brought along and screened together with four other films, three of which had not yet been slotted into the film exchange programme scheme. The films were **Matinya Seorang Patriot** (Death of a Patriot), **Hapuslah Airmatamu** (Wipe your Tears), **Abang** (Big Brother), and **Jasmine** (Utusan Malaysia, February 17, 1986; 9). All the films were screened at the Taman Ismail Marzuki's theatre and discussions followed after each screening.

Finas felt that they should be fully prepared for questions and arguments put forward by the Indonesian film directors, producers, actors and critics who watched the films and stayed on to take part in the discussions after the screenings. Finas therefore brought along as delegates old established Malaysian novelists, poets, playwrights, university lecturers, senators and film producers/directors. They were Jins Shamsuddin, Mustaffa Kamil Yassin, A. Samad Said, Dr. Firdaus Abdullah, Jamil Sulong and Tan Sri Kamarul Ariffin (Utusan Malaysia, February 17, 1986; 9). These old-timers not only tried to answer questions but also gave lengthy talks on the history and development of Malay/Malaysian films through their own visions and conceptions. The talks resulted in one of the Indonesian producers sarcastically suggesting that Malaysian films should have retained their earlier characteristic of incorporating songs and dances in the plot-line, a trait inherited from the Indian films, if they were to have yet another glorious period in Indonesia.

The Malaysian Film Week at *Taman Ismail Marzuki* was no yardstick to measure the response of the Indonesian movie-going public towards Malaysian films because the target audience for the five-day screenings was Indonesians connected in one way or another to the film world. Film journalists, reporters and critics were also present at the screenings. Finas was hoping that their presence would create some kind of a public awareness about the coming of new Malaysian cinema to Indonesia, through write-ups and reviews in the local newspapers and entertainment magazines. But as it turned out only *Variasari*, (Utusan Malaysia, February 17, 1986; 9), a less popular entertainment magazine, published articles about the programme. Other than that, *Taman Ismail Marzuki's* pamphlets distributed to various hotels in Jakarta mentioned the Malaysian film week as only one of the many monthly items.

7.6 Public Screening of Dia Ibuku

In the new agreement signed between Finas and P.T. Perfin on September 21, 1985, the Indonesian side agreed that Malaysian films brought into Indonesia would not be regarded as imported foreign films. Instead they would be given equal status with Indonesian national films (Buletin Finas 1, 1986; 5). This recognition automatically qualified Malaysian films as Indonesian national products. All Indonesian theatres have to screen compulsorily national films for at least twice a month. The import taxes of about M$30,000.00 per film plus other levies were also set aside for Malaysian films.

P.T. Perfin then established a special Malindo (Malaysia-Indonesia) Division to cater for the promotion, distribution and exhibition of Malaysian films under the so-called Pilot Project of three Malaysian films in Indonesia. The Malindo Division was headed by one Haji Bakhtiar Mohd. Kassim, and it was agreed that all expenses pertaining to promotions, ordering of film copies, cinema rentals and all forms of fees and taxes would be first borne by P.T. Perfin and later deducted from the producer's share of the gross income.

The big day came on February 28, 1986 (Buletin Finas 1, 1986; 5). **Dia Ibuku** opened in Jakarta's seven first class or 'superhall' cinemas. Among Jakarta's superhalls is the Jakarta theatre, touted as Asia's biggest cinema, where **Dia Ibuku** demonstrated a staying power of three days (Buletin Finas 1, 1986; 5). This was considered a rare achievement for even Indonesian films had been unceremoniously cancelled after just one screening. The film's resilience in holding on for three days in Jakarta Theatre represented a house record for a non-Western film. The theatre's high ticket price of 4,000 Rupees (Buletin Finas 1, 1986; 5) dictated that only films with a strong box-office lure could get bookings.

Dia Ibuku collected M$55,000.00 in Jakarta after a screening period from February 28 till April 4, 1986 (Utusan Malaysia, July 10, 1986; 9). The film was circulated in another 27 second and third class cinemas after its premiere at the seven superhalls. After Jakarta, the film was screened in six theatres in Surabaya for three days from April 16 till 18, 1986 and collected M$2,000.00 (Utusan Malaysia, July 10, 1986; 9).

Statistics aside, the screening of **Dia Ibuku** in Indonesia was considered a great success by both Finas and the film's producer. The *Buletin Finas* of May 1986 published a lengthy article after Yusoff Majid, **Dia Ibuku**'s executive producer, was called for a press conference at Kuala Lumpur's Merdeka Studio to account for the success of his film in Jakarta. The Bulletin quoted the screening of **Dia Ibuku** as spearheading a bright and meaningful new era in the context of cultural co-operation between Malaysia and Indonesia which had been at a stalemate for about 30 years since the importing of P. Ramlee films in the fifties (Buletin Finas 1, 1986; 5). Finas Director General Zain Haji Hamzah was said to be satisfied and happy with the positive response of the Indonesian cinema-goers.

Yusoff Majid was very confident that in view of his film's box-office potential, it was highly possible that ultimately **Dia Ibuku** would be able to be screened in a majority of the more than 3,000 cinema halls in Indonesia (Buletin Finas 1, 1986; 5). Haji Bakhtiar Mohd. Kassim, Head of Staff, Malindo Division of P.T. Perfin who was also present at the conference supported Yusoff Majid by confirming that the film would be distributed in another 14 Indonesian districts including Sulawesi, Lampung, East and West Java, Makasar, Riau, Acheh, North and West Sumatra and also Indonesian Borneo or Kalimantan (Buletin Finas 1, 1986; 5). He said that the film was expected to be shown beyong the end of the year stretching into 1987. The number of positive prints available would be increased.

The success story of **Dia Ibuku** as related by both Yusoff Majid and Haji Bakhtiar was supported by evidence in the form of a newspaper advertisement which appeared in the *Jakarta Post* on February 28, 1986

(Buletin Finas 1, 1986; 5), re-published beside the article in the *Buletin Finas*. The advertisement in the *Jakarta Post* carried a by-line: For the first time since 30 years, a Malaysian film which won nine Awards, **Dia Ibuku** (She's My Mother), as of today at Jakarta's best cinemas: *Century Theatre, Jakarta Theatre, Pluit Plaza (1) Theatre, New Rawamangun Theatre, New Krekot Theatre, Tim Theatre* and *Plaza Theatre*. Each theatre was screening the film three or four times a day.

By Malaysian standards the film's advertisement in an English daily was impressive enough. What more could one ask for when a film like **Dia Ibuku** was given a simultaneous opening at seven first class theatres, a phenomenon which would never happen in Malaysia's very own capital city of Kuala Lumpur. The most that a Malaysian film would get in Kuala Lumpur was a simultaneous opening in two theatres. Most of the time a new film would only open in one old second class theatre. So it was justified when everybody at Finas and those associated with the Film Exchange Scheme felt excited at the initial treatment given to **Dia Ibuku** in Jakarta and Surabaya. Everyone was expecting that more surprises awaited the screening of the film in other parts of Indonesia.

However, not too long after the success story of **Dia Ibuku** spread around in Malaysia, producer Yusoff Majid reported to a local daily how difficult it was for him to collect his share of the income from the screenings of **Dia Ibuku** in Jakarta and Surabaya. *Utusan Malaysia*, the Malay language daily which highlighted Majid's grievances, contacted its correspondent in Jakarta to find out the actual story from the Indonesian side. Rosli Ismail, Utusan's correspondent in Jakarta met Haji Bakhtiar Mohd. Kassim and

the 'truth' about the whole deal came out and was published in *Utusan Malaysia* of July 10, 1986. The as yet unrevealed truth seemed to turn the earlier success story into a tragedy. *Buletin Finas* of July/August 1986 was also given the same picture and published yet another article concerning the film exchange scheme. But this time Finas' view was from a different standpoint altogether. Under the heading, "Malaysian Film in Indonesia - The Honeymoon is over", Baharuddin Latiff wrote that after the hullabaloo about the expected box-office success of **Dia Ibuku** had petered out, level-headed final accountings needed to be made, and that "a post-mortem study has shown that returns fell short of expectations" (Buletin Finas 3, 1986; 12).

Yusoff Majid was actually wasting his time and energy trying to get his share of the income from P.T. Perfin, for the Indonesian company was not obliged to pay him directly. Haji Bakhtiar clarified that in the agreement between P.T. Perfin and Finas, payments to Malaysian producers were to go through Finas (Utusan Malaysia, July 10, 1986; 9). The agreement also stated that the gross income from the film screenings would be equally divided between three parties; the tax department, the theatre owners and the Malaysian producer. The producer's share would only be paid after all the expenses borne earlier by P.T. Perfin had been deducted.

P.T. Perfin's expenses for the screening of **Dia Ibuku** totalled M$128,000.00 (Utusan Malaysia, July 10, 1986; 9). Details of the expenditure was disclosed to *Utusan Malaysia* and was published in the July 10, 1986 issue. (See Appendix III). So when Baharuddin Latiff was quoted as saying that returns fell short of expectations he was actually

refering to a shortfall of M$71,714.00 after the gross income collected of only M$57,000.00 had been set against M$128,714.00 already spent by P.T. Perfin. So in actual fact Yusoff Majid or Finas had nothing to collect from P.T. Perfin, instead they would have to come up with more money to cover the costs borne by that company. In the end the Malaysian producer not only lost money, but was also left in debt to the Indonesians. P.T. Perfin had yet to recover its initial expenses in their effort to 'help' promote the first Malaysian film and the Malaysian producer had so far heard nothing about his expected share of net income from his film after it being released in other Indonesian districts. One thing was certain, P.T. Perfin would definitely account for every single item it paid money for each time the film was screened at any class of cinemas in Indonesia, and one should not be surprised when returns again fall short of expectations. Getting the box-office returns or doing any financial transactions with the Indonesians will always be a sticky business (New Straits Times, September 15, 1986; 4).

7.7 Tiada Esuk Bagimu (No Tomorrow) - the Second Film

After **Dia Ibuku**, the second Malaysian film which it was agreed should be screened in Indonesia under the pilot project of the Film Exchange Scheme was **Tiada Esuk Bagimu** (No Tomorrow), a tearjerker directed by Jins Shamsuddin and produced by Perfima. The film won four awards at the first Malaysian Film Festival organised by the Association of Entertainment Journalists Malaysia (EJA). It was scheduled by P.T. Perfin for its premiere in Jakarta on June 13, 1986 (New Straits Times, September 15, 1986; 4).

On September 15, 1986 *The New Straits Times*, Malaysia's English daily carried a shocking story about the fate of **Tiada Esuk Bagimu** in Jakarta. The film was not shown on the sheduled date. In fact it would never be shown at all. It was taken off the schedule in favour of Indonesia's own **Memburu Makelar Mayat.** According to the Indonesian daily *Sinar Pagi*, **Dia Ibuku** had fared poorly, so to save **Tiada Esuk Bagimu** from a similar fate, *Dirgahayu Jaya Film* which produced **Memburu Makelar Mayat**, paid a compensation of about M$12,000.00 for the screening slot and bought over **Tiada Esuk Bagimu**. Such was the fate of another Malaysian film in Indonesian hands; it was endorsed as a failure before it even had the chance of proving itself at the box-office.

Dirgahayu Jaya Film might have thought that the intention of saving **Tiada Esuk Bagimu** from falling flat in Jakarta's theatres was noble, but humiliation was the price which Malaysia paid. It seemed that P.T. Perfin, a subsidiary of the Indonesian Film Council was powerless and had to bow to an Indonesian producer which actually had no authority whatsoever to contravene the agreement signed by Finas and P.T. Perfin. But such was the case. Film producers in Indonesia could easily overpower the central body set up by their own government.

Zain Haji Hamzah, Finas Director General blamed the producer of **Tiada Esuk Bagimu** for not complying with certain clauses of the agreement. It seemed that the Malaysian producer sent only two copies of the film, as against the eight copies required (New Straits Times, September 15, 1986; 4). But Jins Shamsuddin had a different story. According to Jins, P.T.

Perfin had asked his permission to order more prints from the Australian Colour Lab. Pty. Ltd. and the bills would be deducted from the collection later. The procedure agreed was similar to that for **Dia Ibuku** earlier.

The Indonesian insistence on having eight copies of the film was baseless when they were that pessimistic about the audience's response. P.T. Perfin was actually scared of losing more money trying to market the second film after having experienced all the shortcomings from **Dia Ibuku**. But whatever the outcome, they should first have discussed the matter with Finas and the producer of **Tiada Esuk Bagimu** before selling the scheduled slot. Jins was also not prepared to spend some M$40,000.00 to make the eight prints himself as he was sceptical, not about the box-office returns, but about the way the transaction had been handled. In fact if P.T. Perfin had changed their mind about ordering the eight prints from Australia themselves, Jins was willing to sell outright the two prints of his films to any interested party in Indonesia for a mere M$20,000.00. But when *Dirgahayu Jaya Film* paid M$12,000.00 for the screening slot, Jins denied any knowledge of it.

The third Malaysian film to be next in line was **Abang**, directed by Rahim Razali and produced by Fleet Communications. The film was not screened in the Indonesian market either and to this date no one knows what happened to it. Fleet Communications is defunct and no representative has ever claimed ownership of the film (New Straits Times, September 15, 1986; 4). It seems that the film had been sacrificed to the Indonesians for nothing and with that the whole film exchange programme ceased.

7.8 Malaysia-Indonesia: Joint-venture Productions:

After the Film Exchange Scheme turned into a tragedy for the Malaysian part, Finas and P.T. Perfin formulated tighter rules and regulations regarding the film exchange programme. P.T. Perfin would no longer bear the expenses of getting the Malaysian films ready for their market. Finas published a booklet called *Guidelines of Film Services* in December 1987 and in the section about the Malaysia-Indonesia Film Exchange Scheme the following procedures were outlined:

1) A Malaysian producer wishing to take part in the scheme has to fill in a form and submit the application to Finas (NFDC).

2) Finas and or a representative from P.T. Perfin shall first view the film and decide whether it will be suitable or not.

3) The producer whose film has been chosen will have to sign a separate agreement with P.T. Perfin and the latter will then determine the screening schedule in Indonesia.

4) The screening schedule in Indonesia will be worked out by P.T. Perfin in every quarter year. Those Malaysian producers who failed to comply within the scheduled screening slot, will have their film scheduled last in the list according to P.T. Perfin's discretion.

5) The Malaysian producer has to supply at least ten release prints in good condition within the stipulated time frame.

6) The producer will be fully responsible for the safe delivery of his films and will pay all fees including entering tax, censorship fee and other forms of payments levied by the Indonesian government.

7) The producer will have to provide enough publicity materials like posters, stills and banners.

8) The producer will be levied a servicing fee by P.T. Perfin.

Since the introduction of these regulations not a single Malaysian producer has ever forwarded an application to Finas. None of them were willing to spend another M$100,000.00 or so to have their films marketed in Indonesia.

After the dismal failure of the film exchange programme, Finas did not seem to be interested in negotiating another fair and concrete deal with the Indonesians. When the new set of guidelines and procedures was introduced and no Malaysian producers took notice and offered their films, Finas tried to encourage another form of introducing Malaysian films to Indonesia. Finas began to help Indonesian producers coming to Malaysia seeking partners for joint-venture productions.

The idea of joint-venture productions with Indonesian companies was not

new to Malaysian producers. *Sari Artiste* and the Shaw Brothers had tried it in the early seventies, but found that they could not gain much working together with the Indonesians. Therefore Finas' new idea of a joint-venture project did not gain support from established Malaysian film companies. However in 1986, *Aniko Sdn. Bhd.*, a company which had never committed itself to film production and was practically unknown in the Malaysian film scene agreed to a joint-venture production with P.T. Garuda of Indonesia.

Haji Khalid Idris, director of the *Aniko Sdn. Bhd.* agreed to a proposal by Hendrik Ghozali of Indonesia's P.T. Garuda to put in 50% of the total budget of about M$600,000.00 to produce **Gadis Hitam Putih** (The Black and White Girl). Khalid also agreed to have the takings from the film divided 60-40 in favour of the Indonesians (New Straits Times, July 16, 1986; 4). The artistic control of the production was also in Indonesian hands. The screenplay and direction was by Wahayu Sihombing. The lead role was given to Malaysia's Fauziah Ahmad Daud and the male lead was played by Indonesia's Deddy Mirzar. Another Malaysian actress Maria Arshad was given a supporting role and two others were given non-speaking roles and appeared in no more than four scenes. All other speaking and non-speaking roles were played by Indonesians. The film was also shot entirely in Indonesia with Indonesian form and content. The dialogues were Indonesian. The two Malaysians playing the speaking roles spoke with an Indonesian accent.

Gadis Hitam Putih marked the beginning of Malaysian support of the Indonesian film industry. .Indonesian producers were happy because they managed to make film with half of the money coming from Malaysia. The film made was Indonesian. There was nothing in it that the Malaysian

could claim to be theirs. Almost everything was sacrificed to the Indonesians. Malaysia's best actor Azmil Mustaffa was reduced to a mere extra in the Indonesians' **Gadis Hitam Putih**. Fauziah Ahmad Daud, Malaysia's best actress was playing a role as an Indonesian, behaving and speaking just like any Indonesian. So the role of the Malaysian producer was not to introduce Malaysian films to Indonesia but instead to finance an Indonesian production to be marketed both in Indonesia and Malaysia.

According to both Khalid and Tan Sri Samad Idris, Finas' Chairman, a joint-venture production like **Gadis Hitam Putih** was the most effective way they could think of to introduce Malaysian stars to the Indonesians (New Straits Times, July 16, 1986; 4). They both felt the need to introduce Malaysian actors to the Indonesians because the Indonesian public had been out of touch with the Malaysian movie scene for a long time. Idris also added that the aim of breaking into the Indonesian market was not only due to commercial considerations but also to foster closer cultural ties with Indonesia. But what Khalid did was more commercial than cultural, for there were no cultural considerations on the Malaysian part pertinent to the making of **Gadis Hitam Putih**. The Malay or rather Malaysian cultural elements were totally absent from the form and content of the film. If Finas was to foster closer cultural ties with the Indonesians it should have pursued the film exchange programme and not have endorsed a Malaysian company financing an Indonesian film project.

Another phenomenon that came into being after the failure of the Finas film exchange programme was the trend of treating local productions with the Indonesian market in mind. One such example was **Suara Kekasih** (Lover's Whisper) a film produced by Harun Hassan of *Amir*

Communications. Hassan assigned the male and female leads for his film to Azmil Mustaffa and Fauziah Ahmad Daud. An Indonesian female director, Ida Faridah was called to handle the production. Hassan was hoping that through the Indonesian director he would be able to establish contact with Indonesian film distributors to buy his film for release in Indonesia. However nothing materialised and **Suara Kekasih** was only released in Malaysia with much criticism from the local press due to Hassan's decision to assign the Indonesian director who shaped the Malaysian content into an Indonesian style of expression.

The Indonesians seem to be more knowledgeable about the tricks of the film trade. They knew about the progress and development taking place in the Malaysian film industry which had resulted in a poor reception for their films in Malaysia. They were therefore finding ways of selling their products in this country on the pretext of making a joint-venture production. A few Malaysian actors would definitely attract the Malaysian crowds, which in a way became a catalyst helping to sell back their films.

A co-production is not a healthy way of establishing a country's own national cinema. Economically it might work for the two or more producers who are willing to invest their money and share the profit, but aesthetically it creates confusion on the part of the creative talents, the director and actors. Some co-productions in the past tried to solve the creative problem by employing two directors working either hand-in-hand or separately. Malaysia and Indonesia had also tried this compromising formula but with little success. The strength of a film normally rests on the creativity and cinematic style of a single director and no two directors would film the same script in exactly the same style.

Notes:

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1 Perusahaan Filem Nasional Indonesia; formed by Usmar Ismail on March 31, 1950. See Salim Said, 1991. **Shadows on Silver Screen,** Jakarta: The Lontar Foundation, p. 53. Original Indonesian title: **Profil Dunia Filem Indonesia**. First published by Grafiti Pers, 1982; second edition by P.T. Pustakakarya Grafikatama, 1990.

2 Persatuan Artis Indonesia; formed by Djamaluddin Malik in 1951. See Salim Said, 1991. p. 53.

3 Salim Said, 1991. p. 68.

4 Salim Said, 1991. p. 112. **Wajah Seorang Lelaki** was Teguh Karya's debut film made with members of his theatre group. It tells the story of a young man growing up.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAKING OF A NATIONAL CINEMA

As stated in the final part of Chapter I, the term National Cinema is appropriate for the 'works of young film-makers who make films about the life and struggle of their people' and at the same time 'stays away from the old stereotypes and cliches of the Hollywood traditions'. And this National Cinema is a phenomenon not only in Europe but also in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The most important thing for a film-maker is to be sincere in choosing the subject-matter and not to leap at anything popular or trendy in order to capitalise on it and create something which looks pretentious and misleading. New cinema may not necessarily be political or radical in nature. Cinema of opposition may not fit into certain standards to qualify as a cinema that could appeal to a majority audience. Asia's audiences in the 80s are no longer passively stupid, taking things for granted. Malaysian audiences, for example, are more sensitive to good films with identifiable characters and believable story-lines like **Fenomena** (1989) and **Bintang Malam** (1990)

Malaysian cinema, despite technical improvements, still dwells on cliche-ridden basic structures and materials. Popular songs are turned into

flimsy story-lines; popular singers who know nothing about film acting are given leading roles; and trivial matters like family quarrels and students falling in love with teachers are made into films. Social problems are seldom discussed at length. National tragedies and crises have never been exploited in Malaysian films which is why too few films qualify to be considered as national cinema. The Hollywood tradition of story-telling through pictures, which has influenced both the Indian and Hong Kong mainstream cinemas, is still being used as the basic cinematic expression in Malaysian films.

8.1 The Making of National Cinema: the Early Days

There is no doubt that Malay cinema was started by the Chinese and Indians. They were the ones who invested ideas, money and energy and gambled to establish an industry without any form of support from anybody else. Without the Shaw Brothers and the Cathay Organisation there would not have been a studio era where Malay films were produced and exhibited for entertainment for a period of more than two decades. Although the early studio films were very much influenced by Indian characteristics and elements, the involvement of Malays as actors and actresses at least marked the beginning of Malay national cinema. Later films directed by Malay directors represented yet another step forward in determining the notions of Malay cinema. In the hands of Malay directors the film's substance came closer to the reality of the Malays' way of life, their values, customs and beliefs.

P. Ramlee, Jamil Sulong and Hussein Haniff paved the way for Malay films to be more Malay in their content and presentation. Film stories were taken from Malay legends and some historical facts about early Malay sultanates and their kingdoms, while modern stories tried to reflect the contemporary realities.

But the main purpose of the studio films was entertainment and the target audience was the lower class. So themes, story-lines, and characterisations were simple and straight-forward. Films depicting Malay traditional life styles centered around moral discussions of good versus evil. The protagonist would always be the underdog who would undergo all kinds of suffering before he managed to eliminate the antagonist usually in the form of a cruel territorial chief, a step-mother or simply anybody who would do anything to deny the objective of the protagonist. Even in modern films the narrative structure remained more or less the same. It was always the good who, in the end, triumphed over the evil.

Most of the films depicting Malay court traditions revolved around the strength, wisdom and justice of a ruler and the undivided loyalty of his subjects and at the same time documented the poor agrarian nature of the ordinary people as against the extravagant palaces, gardens, costumes and jewellery of the royalty. Hussein Haniff however took a giant step forward by presenting a fresh anti-establishment attitude of the people against their ruler. The concepts of loyalty and justice were being questioned on a much higher level in **Hang Jebat,** which he directed in 1961. Haniff rewrote the script by Ali Aziz,[1] giving a more prominent anti-heroic version of the popular Malay legend of the five warriors

serving the Sultan during the great Malacca kingdom of the fourteenth century.

Hang Jebat deserves a special mention as far as the Malay national cinema is concerned. Haniff's intepretation of the character Jebat was against all popular beliefs and norms. Earlier, Jebat, who rebelled against the sultan, was considered a traitor and Hang Tuah who killed him to fulfill the directive by the Sultan, was a hero. In **Hang Jebat** it was Jebat who questioned the Sultan's decision to eliminate his brotherly friend, Hang Tuah, because he was reported to be having an affair with one of the Sultan's maids. It was the first time that ordinary people were portrayed as heroes who dared to question the meaning of justice as practiced by the royalty. And for the first time social reality such as this had ever came out clearly on the Malay screens.

While Haniff presented the peoples' viewpoint through traditional material in his films, Ramlee took up the perspective in the modern environment of the period. Ramlee's **Penarik Becha** (1955), **Antara Dua Darjat** (1960) and **Ibu Mertuaku** (1962) clearly defined the differences between the two classes existing in the Malay society: the poor working class and the rich aristocrats. In **Antara Dua Darjat** (Between Two Classes) Ramlee criticised the hypocrisy of the aristocrat who hid his wrongdoings in smiles and sweet words. The film tells the story of an aristocrat father who forbade his daughter from seeing a commoner musician. The daughter was then married to an elderly man from the same class who was actually more interested in inheriting the deceased father-in-law's property and at the same time taking revenge on the musician whom his wife was still seeing secretly.

Ramlee's brave and intelligent attempt at portraying the feud between the two classes could also be regarded as a first in the history of Malay films. The issue of the blue blood society keeping away from the commoner is still true in today's Malaysia. It is something not widely talked about but commonly practised.

Other than Haniff's and Ramlee's attempts at discussing issues common to the majority of the Malays, there were no other serious topics being taken up as subject matter for the studio films. The medium seemed to have taken its own course altogether. Not only did it stay away from the political struggle of the Malays during that period, but it also failed to portray the actual truth about the social issues in a much bigger dimension.

Unlike other contemporary Malay art forms, Malay cinema had never been a vehicle of political influence on the views and attitudes of the Malays. Malay nationalism of the late forties and early fifties was never stirred through films. Other forms of performing arts like the *bangsawan* and *sandiwara* of the period were active in staging shows which were consciously geared "to arouse the spirit and the consciousness of the Malay nation" (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985; 120). Organisations such as The Literary Organisation of Young Malay Men and Women of Singapore, The Federation of Malay Student Unions of the Malay Peninsula, and *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* or *Asas 50* (The 1950 Literary Generation) were strongly committed to arousing the consciousness of the Malays in order to improve their lot educationally, economically and socially. Although there were members from these

organisations involved in the film industry of the period, their political consciousness never seemed to find an outlet in the films. Bakhtiar Effendi, a popular dramatist as well as a politician, acted in the Shaw Brothers production of **Singapura Di Waktu Malam** (Singapore By Night) directed by B.S. Rajhans in 1947. Bakhtiar was the leader of a stage group called *Bolero* and his most popular play presented in an episodic manner in the late forties and early fifties in Singapore was called **Harimau Jantan** (The Male Tiger). The plot of **Harimau Jantan** was similar to the Robin Hood theme with a clean social critique (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985; 119-120). But it was strange that Bakhtiar was never able to assimilate his nationalistic ideas into films.

Another individual from a nationalist organisation who managed to get into cinema was Jamil Sulong (as noted in Chapter III). Sulong was an active member of *Asas 50* when he managed to get a job as an assistant director in the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Production studio in 1952. Sulong was later made a fully-fledged director in 1958. But surprisingly Sulong's earlier involvement in the Malay spirit of nationalism in *Asas 50,*[2] did not bring any substantial improvement in the Malay cinema which could lead it to be classified as distinctive national cinema. Sulong may have been successful only in giving a Malay look to his traditional characters in films that he rewrote from popular legends.

When compared to the nationalistic nature of the Malay literary and theatrical activities of the late forties and early fifties, Malay film was far behind. Malay films produced by the two studios stayed away from the

serious undertone of propagating the idea of nationalism among Malays as found in articles published in magazines and newspapers, stage plays and songs of the period. Even though the illiteracy rate among the Malays was high, it was the newspaper articles that reached the majority of the people and inseminated the spirit of nationalism. The illiterate majority of the Malays living in villages and small towns benefited from newspaper and magazine articles by listening to someone reading them in the local coffeeshops which had become a kind of 'institution' - a favourite gathering place (Engku Maimunah Mohd Tahir, 1987; 9). Film could well have been the right medium because the Malay audience could easily understand the language without having to read or listen to someone else's explanation, but it never happened. Films only entertained with stories not related to the serious issues of the period, instead bringing the Malays into a kind of dream world of living in a glamorous big city like Singapore with its colourful night life.

One reason why the medium stayed away from the political struggle of the period from the late forties and early fifties is that film production was not in the hands of the Malays; they had no control over the themes and messages in the film story. The Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions and Cathay Keris studios did not want to have anything to do with Malay nationalism for fear that their film business might be jeopardized in the eyes of the British administration. Both managements were taking the safe alternative of not offending the British who were not quite happy with the Malay literary and theatre groups trying to arouse feelings of nationalism among the *rakyat* (Roff, 1980; 9).

8.2 Post-Independence Period

The Japanese ruled Malaya and Singapore for a period of three and a half years beginning in February 1942 and ending in August 1945 (Winstedt, 1986; 248).[3] After the Japanese surrendered, the British took over the administration. Malaya and Singapore were put under the British Military Administration for more than ten years. Malaya got its independence on August 31, 1957 (Khong, 1984; 202) and Singapore got self-government in 1959 (Windstedt, 1986; 226).

The Malay film industry did not seem to be affected by the formation of independent Malaya. It remained in Singapore and the people of Malaya still regarded Singapore as the centre of the entertainment world. Malay films from the two studios continued to dominate the market in both Singapore and Malaya. Malaya's independence did not change any of the existing regulations regarding the film trade between Singapore and Malaya. The Shaw Brothers and Cathay Keris studios kept on producing Malay films and screened them in their cinemas throughout Malaya just like in the pre-independence days.

Malaya's independence did not mean complete self- government. The country remained a British protectorate in the areas of defence and the economy. The British interest in Malaya's natural resources was well protected through her companies. The Malay nationalists who were once very vocal about Malaya's independence were frustrated when the ruling party UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman, accepted independence from the British in a very compromising manner allowing the wealth of the country still to be

manipulated by the British. New political parties were formed to fight for greater control of the economy and the implementation of Malay as the country's national language replacing English.

The ruling party, UMNO, was new and faced a lot of pressure from other parties including the banned Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) who had created numerous problems after the British took over Malaya and Singapore from the Japanese in 1945. The British Military Administration (BMA) took twelve years and spent more than 180 million pounds (Windstedt, 1986; 253) fighting the Malayan communists until 1960, three years after Malaya achieved independence.

After independence still more political upheaval took place. In 1963 Malaysia was formed. Singapore, Brunei, and British North Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak) joined Malaysia. Indonesia launched its *konfrantasi* (confrontation) with Malaysia protesting this merger; armed troops invaded Singapore and Malaya. Brunei left the merger soon after and Singapore was expelled in 1965 (Jesudason, 1989; 45).

The political upheaval in British Malaya before and after the Japanese occupation, the communist resurgence known as the emergency period from 1948 to 1960 (Windstedt, 1986; 251-253), and the trouble caused by Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew after the creation of Malaysia, and the Indonesian confrontation (1963 - 1966) remained at a distance from the themes and substance of Malay films produced during and after those periods. Film-makers of both the Shaw Brothers' and Cathay-Keris' studios seemed to have very little interest in subject-matter related to the political situation from the fourties and early sixties.

The only films made by MFP that had some historical bearing on the struggle of the Malays against colonial power were **Matahari** and **Sergeant Hassan**, both produced in 1958. It is striking, however, that neither was directed by Malay directors. **Matahari** was directed by Ramon Estella [4] and **Sergeant Hassan** by Burt Avellana.[5] Both were Filipino directors working under contract with the MFP.

Matahari and **Sergeant Hassan** were set during and after the Japanese occupation of Malaya and Singapore. **Matahari** tells a story of a beautiful village girl who disguised herself as a man to free her aged father from a Japanese prison. **Sergeant Hassan** is about two adopted brothers who join the army prior to the Japanese invasion. One of them is very dedicated to his work and is promoted to sergeant. After the fall of the British the sergeant continues to work underground to oppose the Japanese.

Sergeant Hassan is in some ways an early example of a Malay national film in the sense that it manage to portray a Malay soldier of a Malay Regiment, who was defeated and captured by the Japanese, but who escaped and later organised an underground unit to fight back. The bravery and sincerity of Hassan the sergeant, was patriotic enough to the audience of the late fifties. At the end of the film Hassan, with the help of some British soldiers, managed to attack and capture a Japanese army headquarters and free his village folks from the prison. Hassan also fought a duel with Buang, his childhood friend who turned traitor by supporting the Japanese and suppressing his own villagers.

Both **Sergeant Hassan** and **Matahari** depict the struggle of the Malayan people, especially the Malays, against the brutality of the Japanese. The people of Malaya wereshown living in fear during the reign of terror that lasted for more than three years. Food was scarce and the cost of living was high. Those caught in possession of or listening to a radio or criticizing the administration were regarded as political criminals by the Japanese. To be suspected of such a crime meant torture and to be convicted meant death (Windstedt, 1986; 249). Such cruelty was clearly depicted in both **Matahari** and **Sergeant Hassan**. Malaysians today can at least have the feeling of what it was like to live under the Japanese rule experienced by their parents or grand-parents by looking at those films. In this aspect the two films can be considered as important national documents.

However the British rule in pre-war and post-war Malaya was hardly documented through Malay films. The British economic exploitation, the problems that they created by bringing in the Chinese and Indian immigrants, (Roff, 1980; 249) [6] the fight against the communist terrorists and the struggle of the Malay nationalists could well have been explored for cinematic substance had the Malay film industry been more alert to the historical events during a period that spans more than a decade. But as stated earlier, in Chapter III, the industry choose to stay away from the political and social reality of a nation struggling to free itself from the colonial grip. Even after Malaysia was formed and the film-making activities shifted to Kuala Lumpur, the Malay film industry still moved in a lost direction, forgetting the history and aspirations of the nation and its people. It was only in the eighties that Malay films in the hands of Malay independent companies tried to look at the nation's history for its subject-matter.

8.3 The making of Bukit Kepong - a National Epic

Bukit Kepong is a milestone in the history of Malay film industry. It tells the story of how eighteen Malay policemen fought against 180 communist terrorists attacking their station in a battle that lasted for five hours. The battle took the lives of fourteen policemen, two of their wives and two of their children, while the terrorists lost twelve of their men.

The film recounts the historical tragedy that took place on the morning of February 23, 1950 in Bukit Kepong, a village in the district of Muar in the southern Malayan state of Johore. The attack on the Bukit Kepong police station took place twenty months after the British Military Administration in Malaya declared an Emergency Period beginning in June 1948. The Malayan Communist Party who was engaged in jungle warfare against the Japanese during the 1942 - 1945 period, turned against the British when the communists were denied a role in governing Malaya after the Japanese surrender (Khong, 1984; 142). The British Military rule of Malaya after the Japanese occupation was a period of bitter struggle to overcome the various attacks on rubber plantations, tin mines, railways and police-stations by the communists. The attack on Bukit Kepong police station was one of the incidents that took place during the early years of the twelve-year emergency period declared by the British.

From the Malay point of view the attack on Bukit Kepong police station was a national tragedy. The battle was regarded as a symbol for the gritty courage of the Malays fighting against what they believed was an invasion of their own mother-land (Asia Magazine, November 1981; 13). But from

the Malayan Communist Party's point of view the attack on Bukit Kepong police station was just one of their routine methods of teaching the British a lesson. It was the British that they were fighting against and not the Malays, and it was unlucky that the station was manned by Malay policemen. But since the Malays were so much against the communist ideology and the MCP happened to be Chinese-dominated, the whole incident was high-lighted as the Malays fighting against the Chinese communists, even though a few of the communist terrorists were Malays. The communists were not only fighting the Malay police force, they also terrorised Chinese shopkeepers and farmers. So the twelve-year period from 1948 - 1960 was a national disaster brought on by the communists fighting against the British and later the Malayan government and its people of various races, the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Since the communist insurgence continued even after Malaya became self-governing, the cruelty and hardship imposed by it on the Malayan people was actually a national crisis, and the incident of Bukit Kepong could be regarded as a significant national tragedy worth portraying on films as an example of national cinema.

But as an example of Malaysian national cinema, **Bukit Kepong** did not go far. It won the best picture and best director awards at the Third Malaysian Film Festival in November 1982 (Utusan Malaysia, September 5, 1982; 9), but was not picked to represent Malaysia in the Asian Film Festival held in Kuala Lumpur the year after. Critics hailed the film as Malaysia's best and it did well at the box-office by being the top grosser for 1982 (Mingguan Malaysia, March 28, 1982; 12). Indeed **Bukit Kepong** was the best effort so far by a Malaysian film-maker. Jins Shamsuddin, the director as well as the lead player, proved that with an adequate budget

a Malaysian film could achieve a substantial standard at par with other Asian productions.

The idea of **Bukit Kepong** originally came from the public relations department of the Royal Malaysian Police Force who wanted to make a film in 1977 (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 129). The idea was brought to the Malaysian Television and the National Film Board, but the two government bodies could not provide a good enough director to handle such a colossal film. At the end of 1977 the police force started focusing their attention on Jins Shamsuddin who had graduated from the London International Film School and was making waves in the new Malaysian film scene with his **Menanti Hari Esuk**. Jins successful effort in reviving the Malay film industry strengthened the police confidence in him and he was given the job of directing **Bukit Kepong**. **Bukit Kepong** was thus made with the full support of the Royal Malaysian Police Force without which such an effort would not materialised. So economically speaking **Bukit Kepong** is in fact a national film, with nationalistic themes and government subsidy.

Statistics prove that **Bukit Kepong** was an extravaganza production as far as the Malaysian film industry was concerned. The total budget was one million Malaysian dollars (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 137), triple that of an average Malay film. Jins Shamsuddin Film Productions spent some M$480,000.00 and the Royal Malaysian Police spent more than M$500,000.00. The entire shooting was on location in Lenga, a small town about 10 kilometres from the actual Bukit Kepong, and took 94 days (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 131). 43,200 feet of film negatives were used which were later edited to about 9,900 feet making Bukit Kepong a film of 110 minutes duration (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 132). The police provided

250 types of period weapons used in the fifties after searching for them from police stations all over the country (Baharuddin Latiff, 1983; 130). Ten lorry-loads of old timber taken from a twenty-year old abandoned police-station were transported to the location and the police took three months to re-erect the timber buildings to resemble those of the actual Bukit Kepong police station which was burnt down by the communists in the 1950 attack. About 300 area defence corps members were recruited to play communists and alternately soldiers. More than 40,000 rounds of blank ammunition were fired during the course of reconstructing the events leading up to the attack. More than 100 gallons of petrol and diesel were used to blow up the buildings and other items, such as a bridge, a bus and a car.

Jins, his technical crew and stars spent some five months on location. The unit was spending between M$5000 and M$7000 a month for immediate expenses, not including fees for the artistic and technical staff (Asia Magazine, November 1981; 11). A local villager was contracted to cater for meals for the whole crew. Local villagers were paid as extras. Jins himself played Sergeant Jamil Mohd Shah, the officer in charge and the last to die when the burning station finally engulfed him. Other stars playing major roles were A. Rahim, Yusoff Haslam, Samsuddin Baslah, Jamaliah Arshad and Aida Ahmad. Some police personnel also played key roles as policemen and as the communist leader.

Baharuddin Latiff, a local film critic and publication officer of the Malaysian National Film Development Board drew a parallel between the **Bukit Kepong** incident and that of the Alamo in Texas where, in 1835, a group of Texans withstood an onslaught of more than 7,000 soldiers of the

regular Mexican army under General Santa Ana. Latiff wrote, "...if those brave fighters sacrificed their lives for an ideal far more lofty than could be understood by their fellow Americans at the time, then the defenders of Bukit Kepong could not have put their lives on the line without some inkling of the nobility of their action. The heroes of Bukit Kepong, not unlike their counterparts at the Alamo, did what was expected of them. As professionals, they knew what they must do and they did it without flinching" (Asia Magazine, November 1981; 11).

Bukit Kepong represents the epitome of Jins Shamsuddin's 25-year career in film acting and directing. He was totally immersed in the project. He spent two years researching and re-writing the screenplay and admitted that no other film in his entire career had touched him as deeply as **Bukit Kepong** (Jins Shamsuddin, Interview; August 16, 1986). Jins had nothing but undisguised admiration for those gallant men and their wives who stood their ground defending Bukit Kepong. In his own words Jins saluted them, "...despite the insurmountable odds of 10 against one in that one-sided battle, not a single defender deserted his post, even though death was just around the corner. Surely, this is chivalry of the highest order" (Asia Magazine, November 1981; 11).

Compared to the story of the Alamo when 188 people died fighting Mexican troops who numbered more than 4,000 after holding them for 13 days (Asia Magazine, November 1981; 12), **Bukit Kepong** with 18 policemen holding back 180 communists for five hours was an incident similar in form but smaller in scale. But the philosophy behind the battle is something arguable and may not parallel that of the Alamo.

The Malayan communists attacked Bukit Kepong police station thinking that they could easily take control of the post within 20 minutes and could scare the British. But the 18 Malay policemen who had been entrusted the post by the British took it as their responsiblity to fight to the end of their lives despite pleas by the communists to surrender. What were they actually fighting for? Was Bukit Kepong worth the struggle? Were not the eighteen Malay policemen who risked theif life defending the station victims of British belligerent attitude? Sergeant Jamil and his men knew that the station they were posted to was ill-equiped. The British did not provide enough weapons and ammunitions and there was no wireless supplied to the station to be used in case of emergency. Bukit Kepong police-station was defenceless when compared to stations in other towns where there existed large rubber plantations owned by British companies. The British had little economic interest in the Bukit Kepong area but called for its population to support British rule. The population in Bukit Kepong, the majority of whom were Malays had earlier been persuaded by the communists to join them to fight the British. But ordinary Malays and some Chinese who wanted to lead a normal life did not believe in armed struggle. If they could survive well under the British administration, why should they bother to fight.

Malays in particular did not want the communists rising to power. One of the main reasons was their strong faith in Islam which is opposed by the communists. The Malays had also seen the cruelty of the communists during a short period after the Japanese surrender and prior to the return of the British. The Chinese communists believed that China had won the war and Malaya would be made one of its provinces (Khong, 1984; 141). They then took possession of district offices and police stations and started

robbing and murdering the Malays. It was a bitter lesson to the Malays who were saved only by the British. So to the Malays, communists were Chinese and they would never be allowed to hold power in the Malay Peninsula. After Malaya's independence, the urban Chinese and Indians who shared the new administration of the new nation were also opposed to the communist armed struggle (Khong, 1984; 152).

Malaysia is one of the few countries to have won an armed struggle against communists (Windstedt, 1986; 253). The 12-year Emergency period was officially ended in 1960, three years after Malaya achieved its independence. So, although the historical Bukit Kepong may tell us more about British priorities and Malay soldierly fealty, the cinematic **Bukit Kepong** is an important national film. **Bukit Kepong** is the first film to have been made by a local film company on the subject of communist terrorism during the fifties. As such, it holds vital lessons for Malaysians wishing to learn more about their own country's triumphant struggles against the elements that tried to cripple the new nation.

8.4 Jasmin, Nadrah and the Malayan Union

In December 1950 an unforgettable event in the history of Malaya known as the Maria Hertogh or Nadrah riots broke out in Singapore. The violence of the riots can be gauged from the damage it caused to life and property. Eighteen persons were killed and 173 injured, 72 motor vehicles were burned and another 119 damaged (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985; 117).[7] Three days of disorder characterized by looting, arson and other general chaos

caused serious adverse effects on communication, trade and business activities.

Then Nadrah incident is known to all Malaysians especially the generation of contemporary Malays. The riots were preceded by a prolonged legal battle in the Singapore High Court over the custody of a 13-year old girl, Maria Hurbedina Hertogh. The disputing parties were her Dutch natural parents and her Malay foster mother (Singapore, 1951; 30-31). The girl's father Mr Adrianus Petrus Hertogh had been a sergeant in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army serving in Java prior to the Second World War. In the early stages of the war, the Hertoghs were arrested and interned by the Japanese, but little Maria was left in the care of Aminah binti Mohamad, their servant. Maria was brought up by Aminah in the Muslim faith and in the Malay culture and her name was changed to Nadrah (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985; 118).

The legal battle of the Nadrah case in Singapore took more than a month (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985; 118). Nadrah or Maria maintained her loyalty to her foster mother, Aminah, and to her Malay identity. The Chief Justice, however, ruled that Nadrah must be returned to her natural parents. Aminah filed an appeal and prior to the hearing, Nadrah was placed in the custody of the Department of Social Welfare.

The Nadrah case became a national issue when members of the Malay Nationalist Party (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985; 77),[8] an organisation suppressed by the British colonial administration, formed the Nadrah Action Committee which was responsible for organising public rallies where passion-arousing speeches were made. Some members of the same

party were also on the editorial board of a Malay daily *Melayu Raya* and the monthly magazine *Qalam* (Firdaus Abdullah, 1985; 118), which portrayed the trial in great detail. Since the case was heard in a British court with British judges and lawyers involved, the Malay NationalistParty saw it as a battle of pride and dignity between Malays and the British colonial power.

After one month the Court of Appeal set aside the previous orders and returned Nadrah to the custody of Aminah. All might have been well for Nadrah and her foster mother after that but at that point the unfortunate girl was promised in marriage to Mansoor Adabi (New Straits Times, July 5, 1984; 12).[9] The Hertoghs then resumed legal proceedings on the grounds that Nadrah, at 13, was below the minimum age for marriage. To Aminah and the Malay community at large of that period arranging for the marriage of a girl at the age of 12 or 13 was a normal practice. But the judge ruled in favour of the Hertoghs and declared the marriage invalid.

That was when the riots broke out. The Muslim community, Malays in particular, viewed the court ruling by the British as a violation of Islamic law (Jamil Sulong, 1990; 24). It then turned into a battle of pride and dignity between Islam and Christianity. The already tense atmosphere of the postwar pre-independence era was capitalised on by Malay nationalist groups and the Nadrah riots became a symbol of the fight against British rule.

It was this historical event that inspired filmmaker and producer Kamarul Ariffin to make **Jasmin** in 1983. Ariffin, however, did not

follow the historical facts directly. In his film the girl is Jasmin, a five-year old English child forced into Munah's care in 1941 after her mother, Mrs Brown, has been captured by the Japanese. Twelve years later in 1953, Munah the former servant to the Browns, is summoned by lawyers to bring 17-year-old Jasmin to Kuala Lumpur to face legal proceedings brought about by Mrs Brown who had earlier come from England looking for her long lost daughter.

Jasmin the movie chose to avoid the political fervour of the original incident, and, in so doing, it also avoided the racial and religious issues, and the riots. The time frame was also slightly changed but it stayed in the early fifties of the pre-independence era. Jasmin in the movie is seventeen years of age when she is married to Johar. It is Johar's father who helps to arrange a lawyer for Munah's defence in court against Mrs Brown. And it is Johar's father who gives all the support and encouragement to Munah to fight the case. However, Kamarul Ariffin did choose to link the "Jasmin" story to politics. Johar's father specifically referred to another important political event. "We will fight this case the way we fought the Malayan Union" (New Straits Times, July 5, 1984; 12), he says.

The Malayan Union that Johar's father was refering to in **Jasmin,** was another historical event in pre-independence Malaya. In 1946, the British wanted to form a unitary state consisting of all the nine Malay states in the Malay peninsula and the British settlements of Penang and Malacca in the hope of destroying the foci of loyalty and activity among the Malays (Mohamad Nordin Sopiee, 1974; 18). The Malayan Union plan was greatly opposed by the Malays and their Sultans. The Malays demonstrated

against the idea. The installation of the first British Governor was boycotted by the Malays who were prepared to denounce and disown their Sultans had they insisted on attending the British Governor's installation (Khong, 1984; 95). The anti-Malayan Union feelings was fast becoming an anti-British attitude.

In **Jasmin**, Johar's father is portrayed as one of the Malay nationalists who opposes the British Malayan Union. But his only reference to the historical uprising is expressed in just that one sentence, "We will fight this case the way we fought the Malayan Union," and the film's period setting does not do much to evoke the temper of the Malays in the early fifties. Thus the film fails to do justice or pay homage to the nationalistic sentiments of the period (New Straits Times, July 5, 1984; 12). What the film is left with is the minimal matter of two woman, one English and one Malay, fighting for maternal rights to a 17-year old girl, born English and subsequently raised as Malay. Thus, by making the political setting of the event a mere footnote to a touching melodrama, **Jasmin** is yet another case of a national Malaysian film that failed. The Malay film-makers were afraid to deal directly with the momentous political issues raised by the actual historical event.

8.5 National Crisis

Bukit Kepong, Sergeant Hassan, Jebat, Antara Dua Darjat and **Jasmin** are some examples of Malaysian films that try to discuss national issues or crises, each with its own limitations. **Bukit Kepong** and **Sergeant Hassan** take a patriotic inclination in the treatment of the

subject-matter and characterisations. Both try to rest on the historical events of the country. **Jasmin** to some extent tries to emulate the same nationalistic elements albeit in a less direct manner. **Jebat** and **Antara Dua Darjat** focus on the class struggle between the ordinary people and the royalties. **Jebat** has some concrete reference to a popular tragic legend or myth which has been widely read and discussed in Malay society, while **Antara Dua Darjat** lingers along the same Tuah-Jebat conflict but done in a modern context. The Tuah-Jebat conflict is a concept in the life of the Malaysian Malays. National issues and problems can always be traced along this concept of undivided loyalty and a fight for justice. The hegemonic structure of Malay society in the traditional and modern days has not changed much. Only the styles and the environment have changed; the structures remain intact. Modern Malaysia has in fact managed to draw other ethnic groups into assimilating the hegemonic concept and the life styles of the society.

There are basically four social classes of Malaysian: the royalties, the ministers (politicians), the businessmen, the police and the army and lastly the *rakyat* (ordinary people or workers). Malaysia still maintains nine Malay Sultans and four Malay Governors. The Sultans are well-looked after by the politicians, the businessmen, the police and the army. Businessmen also look after the politicians in order to gain access to big developmental projects. The politicians look after the *rakyat* in order to remain in power. The politicians and the businessmen hand in hand try their best to please the Sultans in order to be rewarded with the royal honour that will automatically uplift their social status and gain them access to various state functions giving the opportunity to rub shoulders with royalties. The businessmen make use of their close association with

the Sultans to pressure politicians and state executive councillors into allowing access to strategic state lands and business opportunities. The politicians get percentages from the businessmen, and the *rakyat* get nothing from anybody. "Money politics" has crept into the political arena, with businessmen peddling their influence to obtain concessions, and with politicians making use of money to secure positions in their parties (Khor, 1987; 101). The whole practice is a tragedy for the people and the tragedy at times becomes a major national crisis.

But this tragedy and crisis seldom appears in films. The silent majority has been a set-back for a long time. There are too many things that cannot be discussed openly. Various laws, acts and regulations protect the authorities. There has never been a film that focuses on corrupt politicians, the police or the army, or the big spending by the Sultans. Themes for a national film often linger on trivial matters of no interest to the majority of the people. Issues and problems are shallow, artificial and pretentious and the presentation is always glossy and glamourous. Aspects of truth and reality are never given proper consideration. National crises like poverty, power abuse, corruption at the highest levels and national identity concerning attitudes, values and world views of the people are left untouched by film-makers and producers who prefer the popular and trendy approach in order to gain recognition from the movie-going public.

8.5.1 Corruption

On November 2nd. 1980, a seminar on 'Corruption and Society' was organised by *Aliran Kesedaran Negara,* the first non-partisan, multi-ethnic

reform movement in the country. In his opening address, Raja Tan Sri Azlan Shah, the present Malaysian *Yang Dipertuan Agung* (King), who was then the Chief Justice, said:

> ...we may console ourselves by comparing the position in our own country with some other countries where corruption is worse. But, that I think is not a good yardstick. A better one would be how much we have improved internally rather than where we stand compared with the worst internationally (Aliran, 1981; 5).

Corruption is one major problem in Malaysia. A few times it has become a national crisis and almost crippled the economy of the country. Many top level executives were said to be involved and the opposition was crying foul most of the time. The Bumiputera Malaysia Finance (BMF) scandal rocked the country to the extent that a Royal Commission of Inquiry was suggested by an opposition party. The BMF Committee of Enquiry which was headed by Auditor-General Tan Sri Ahmad Noordin Zakaria regarded the incidents to be prompted by intention to defraud (Alatas, 1986; 132). The incidents of fraud and manipulation took place between December 19, 1979, and October 12, 1982, by members of the board and officials of BMF in a so-called 'concerted plan' involving loans totalling US$292 million (about M$2,136 billion) to Hong Kong-based companies for the purpose of speculation in the stock market and in real estate.

But other than this, there have always been cases involving politicians and business circles. According to Khor Kok Peng (1987; 101), there is a

widespread perception that there has been too much politicisation of business and too much commercialisation of politics in Malaysia. Two state level chief ministers had been brought to court on charges of corruption, and in 1986 a managing director of a cooperative investment company was sentenced to eight years' jail and fined M$100,000 for criminal breach of trust involving M$338,000 of the company's money.

The Kuala Lumpur High Court judge, Mr Justice Harun Hashim commented in court that:

> ...the cooperatives affair was a case of "the rich and powerful literally robbing the poor". The government White Paper, he said, was "a parade of Tan Sris, Datuks and politicians, some of them still in power, who have been taking money from the poor - the hawker, taxi driver, vegetable gardener - in order to enrich themselves" (Star, January 21, 1987).

The Tan Sris, Datuks and politicians are those referred to by the Chief Justice as "...the big ones and of a different class. They may be very highly educated and highly-placed government officials. Their accomplices may even be a multi-national corporation" (Alatas, 1981; 5).

Other corrupt practices happen in government departments, the police and the army. At one time there were irregularities in the supplies for the Malaysian army in East Malaysia. For example, instant noodles for the period of January 1977 - December 1978 were supplied at the contract prices of M$4.90 and M$3.90 respectively per packet while the average price in Peninsular Malaysia was only 14 cents. The government could

have saved M$962,000 had this item been bought in the peninsula and then transported to East Malaysia (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1991; 78).

Regarding this Syed Hussein Alatas[10] (1991; 77), a scholar and at one time a president of an opposition party, added that the auditors alone can do nothing but expose the irregularities. From the Malaysian audit reports alone there are sufficient grounds to suspect that corruption is firmly entrenched within the usual channels of the decision-making chain in the high budget administration.

No film-maker in the country has dared to touch on the subject even though the report was published in the local newspapers and the public knew about it. No politicians, the police, the army or businessmen are shown as corrup in Malaysian films. From a cinematic point of view this situation could have been made into either a serious crime story or even a comedy.

According to Alatas, in the entire developing region of Asia, Singapore is the only government practically free from corruption. Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia are all facing the problem of corruption. Apart from Singapore, of all the developing countries of Asia, corruption is least endemic in Malaysia. The fear is that since 1957, the year of independence, corruption has definitely been growing. Numerous political figures and others may be seen amassing wealth through being in office. It is public knowledge that there is a great deal of corruption in the customs department, among the highway police, immigration control, the land office, the supply acquisition units of the various ministries, the religious departments in the states of the federation, and the road transport offices (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1991; 86).

Alatas agreed that the newly independent states of Asia all started with a democratic system, though many abandoned it later. The habit of corruption and the marriage between business and politics was introduced at that time and since then the bond has become stronger - until death do they part (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1991; 91). This marriage could have become an interesting backdrop to Malaysian film story-lines, but so far no one has really taken advantage of the reality behind the business and political situation that goes hand in hand. In Malaysia it is widely believed that firms and industries contribute millions to party funds (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1991; 91).

8.5.2 Poverty

No poverty exists in Malaysian films. The Malaysian film world is far different from the real world. We find heroes in films who drive imported cars, live in huge bungalows on the top of hills, dine at exclusive clubs and dance in sophisticated discotheques. This dream world is created on film giving the impression that the whole nation lives in style and comfort. Of course there is great difference between what is portrayed on film and the real world outside. Dreams created by the film-makers always crumble the minute a film-goer steps out of the cinema after the lights brighten the dark cinema halls. A look at the basic comparative indicator in the life of South East Asian people below (see Table 8.1) will give some idea about the poverty line in Malaysia.

It is true that Malay films of the 50s and 60s managed to some extent to show the truth concerning poverty in the country. Films like **Penarik Beca**, **Gerhana**, **Kasih Tanpa Sayang** manage to show the struggle and hardship of the common people even though the acting and characterisation were at times exaggerrated.

But Malaysian cinema of the new independence era has totally divorced itself from the reality of life. No recent film has ever shown the hardship of the rural population. It is always the city people with the glamorous and colourful life styles who go about and do all the wonderful things in daily life. A similar situation occurs in Indonesia. The jury of the 1977 Indonesian Film Festival for example, came to the conclusion: "Our movie producers project themselves mainly as dream merchants and, as such, fail to portray the realities of Indonesian life; the beautiful dreams we see are from a world we do not always recognize" (Salim Said, 1990; 3).

As a basis for comparison, the table below outlines the poverty lines in Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia:

Table 8.1
Comparative Basic Indicator, 1985

Country	Per Capita Income ($US)	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000)	% Pop. in Poverty	Total Population (Mill.)
Indonesia	530	96	39	179
Phillipines	580	48	52	56
Thailand	800	43	31	43
Malaysia	2000	28	28	17

Source: World Bank (Far Eastern Economics Review: August 18,1988; 34)

The table indicates that poverty is still a major problem in South East Asian countries. Even though the per capita income may indicate that the basic neccesities can be purchased by the majority of the people, there is still absolute poverty among the many urban slum dwellers in the capital cities of Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, as well as in rural areas. Absolute poverty, in the sense of having an income that does not enable one to satisfy basic needs is still common. This phenomenon is something that cannot be ignored by film-makers in the country.

8.6 The Malaysian Film audience

Who is the prominent audience which is addressed by the Malaysian films? Some similarities co-exist in many African, South American and Asian countries, Malaysia included. The first similarity is the hierarchy of films; indigenous films are ranked below Western films. For example, in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, until the early 70s, Sinhalese films were not screened at the six or seven prestigious cinemas with air-conditioning and good sound-reproduction systems; these were reserved for imported films which came almost exclusively from Hollywood or Britain (Jayamane, 1981; 211).

The same situation also applied to Indonesian films in Jakarta and Malaysian films in Kuala Lumpur. While the situation in Kuala Lumpur is improving with the introduction of compulsory screening for local films in 1991, the situation in Jakarta is getting worse. In Kuala Lumpur, low esteem for indigenous films was mainly prevalent in the late 70s and early 80s, when independent Malay producers found it hard to get their films exhibited at the major cinema chains owned by the two giant companies: the Cathay Organisation and Shaw Brothers.

A second similarity is the appeal of local films for the lower class. Films are generally more popular with the working class for whom it is the cheapest form of entertainment. In Asian countries, cinemas in themselves already manifest different classes of society. In India and Indonesia, different classes of cinemas exist for different classes of people. In early Malaya as shown earlier in Chapter II, a cinema had

different seating arrangements for segments of the audience of different social and economic status.

8.6.1 Asean Film Week in Malaysia

The Second Asean Film Week was held in Kuala Lumpur from March 11 to 17, 1990. It was attended by delegates from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. They were film producers, directors, actors and actresses, script-writers, exhibitors, archivists and officials. The programmes during the week included film screenings, symposia and workshops, study tours and receptions. Four feature films, one each from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand were screened in two major cinemas in Kuala Lumpur. The films were **Nusa Penida** (Indonesia), **Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan** (Malaysia), **Pahiran Ng Isang Umaga** (Philippines) and **Khong Shong Chao** (Thailand). 5000 free tickets were distributed to the embassies of Asean member countries, the general public, institutions of higher learning and high school children. Questionnaires were distributed to the audiences during each screening to find out their appreciation of and opinions on the films.

It was found that males outnumbered females during the screenings of three films. The majority of the audience for all films were in the 18 to 25 age group and the majority of them were bachelors. It became clear that most of the audience were high school and college students. Table 8.2 below shows the actual audience pattern recorded during the screenings of the four films from Asean countries.

Table 8.2
The Audience Pattern

Audience	Films			
	RSJ	**NP**	**PNIU**	**KSC**
Total	314	410	107	91
Male	126 (40.1%)	323 (78.8%)	85 (79.4%)	71 (78.0%)
Female	187 (59.6%)	84 (20.5%)	22 (20.6%)	18 (19.8%)
Age:				
Below 18	45 (14.3%)	22 (5.4%)	6 (5.6%)	4 (4.4%)
18 - 25	172 (54.8%)	193 (47.1%)	57 (53.3%)	51 (56.0%)
26 - 35	68 (21.7%)	139 (33.9%)	35 (32.7%)	27 (29.7%)
36 - 45	23 (7.3%)	44 (10.7%)	8 (7.5%)	7 (7.7%)
46 - 56	4 (1.3%)	7 (1.7%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (1.1%)
Marital Status:				
Single	243 (77.4%)	270 (65.8%)	81 (75.7%)	66 (72.5%)
Married	71 (22.6%)	137 (33.4%)	26 (24.3%)	23 (25.3%)
Educational level:				
Primary	15 (4.8%)	20 (4.9%)	8 (7.5%)	5 (5.5%)
Sec. 1-3	35 (11.1%)	38 (9.3%)	6 (5.6%)	4 (4.4%)
Sec. 4-5	119 (37.9%)	152 (37.1%)	31 (29.0%)	21 (23.1%)
College	127 (40.4%)	169 (41.2%)	48 (44.9%)	60 (65.9%)
Univer.	5 (2.9%)	17 (4.1%)	8 (7.5%)	1 (1.1%)

Source: Report of the Second Asean Film Week, 1990: Kuala Lumpur, National Film Development Corporation, Ministry of Information, Malaysia.

8.6.2 Types of film preferred

One of the questions asked in the questionnaires distributed to 922 respondents was about the type of films preferred. Eight different types or themes were given. They were family drama, love story, comedy, musical, action, horror, historical and war. Even though the sub-division of film types is rather confusing because there could easily be an overlapping of themes and genres, the respondents were given explanations to help them determine the types according to local content and interpretation so that they would focus on an international definition of film genres.

It was found that the majority of the audience chose drama as their first preference. Love stories were second, followed by comedies. Least preferred were war and musical films.

The preference for dramatic types of film, love stories and comedies has been characteristic of the majority of Malaysian film-goers since the early period. This preference does not seems to change much. Research done in the 70s and 80s shows almost the same result. A random survey to find out the type of film preferred by 300 and 295 respondents in 1977 and 1978 respondents respectively in Kuala Lumpur revealed the following result:

Table 8.3
Film Types and Preference

Film types	No.of respondents	Percentage
Drama	439	47.6%
Love Story	302	32.8%
Comedy	291	31.6%
Horror	264	28.6%
Historical	263	28.5%
Action	231	25.1%
War	186	20.2%
Musical	121	13.1%

Source: Finas, Malaysia: 1990.

Table 8.4
Film Types and Preference
(Kuala Lumpur)

Film Types	Number of Respondents 1977	Percentage	1987	Percentage
Comedy	95	31.7	93	31.5
Action/Thriller	65	21.7	59	20.0
Teenage Romance	70	23.3	69	23.4
Family Drama	27	9.1	29	9.8
Horror	16	5.3	14	4.7
Adventure	15	5.0	20	6.8
Science Fiction	7	2.3	6	2.1
Musical	5	1.6	5	1.7
TOTAL	300	100	295	100

Source: Finas, Malaysia: 1990.

Table 8.3 shows that Malaysians generally do not enjoy musicals and war films, though there have been times when a particular war film became the exception to this rule. **Bukit Kepong** (1980) by Jins Shamsuddin was a successful venture due to some dramatic elements injected in that war epic. While **Kolej 56** (1988), a musical directed by Ahmad Fauzee, was a failure with the Malaysian audience.

Table 8.4 suggests that comedy and teenage romance are the preferred types of films. The first two choices remained the same after ten years (1977 to 1987). Comedies proved to be popular not only with the 15-25 age-group audience but also with the older age-group or married couples with children. While teenage romance films are watched mostly by youngsters who make up the majority of film audiences. Successful films of this types include **Azura** (1982), directed by Deddy M. Borhan, **Ali Setan** (1984), directed by Jins Shamsuddin and **Fenomena** (1989), directed by Aziz M. Osman. While in the comedy categories, Hafsham's **Adik Manja** (1980) and **Mekanik** (1985) were all time hits.

8.7 Is there a place for a National Cinema?

Malaysia like any other country in the world exercises censorship of films meant for public screening. Film censorship started as early as 1927 during the British Colonial period. The FMS Enactment No. 3 of 1927, or The Cinematograph Films (Control) Enactment, 1927, authorised censorship officers to check all cinematographic films, still photographs, posters and billboards concerning the films, before they could be screened in the Federated Malay States (Wan Abdul Kadir,

1988; 154-155). Almost sixty years later, the same practice is being exercised by the Malaysian government through officers appointed by the King to sit on the Censorship Board. And for the last sixty years little has changed.

For the last thirteen years, statistics show us that Malaysia generally imports an average of 704 films each year, of which an average of 39.2% are Chinese films from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and 36% American films. Local Malay films average only 2.1% of the total number of films screened in the country.

For two years, 1976 and 1977, American films dominated the Malaysian cinemas with 36% and 42% respectively out of the total number of imported films. Chinese films were next with 33% (1976) and 36% (1977). However, the situation changed after 1977. For eleven years, 1978 - 1988, Chinese films from Hong Kong and Taiwan took the lead. A record number of 457 Chinese films was imported and screened in 1980 and the lowest number was 147 in 1987. Until 1990 Chinese films still occupied the highest position of imported films into the country. One does not have to be in Hong Kong to feel and to experience the Chinese atmosphere in a great number of cinema halls in Malaysia which have always been and will continue to be the "little China" of the country. These cinema halls have always been screening only Chinese films.

Table 8.5
Number of imported films compared to local (Malay) films: 1976 - 1980

Language	**Years**				
	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Indonesian	31	42	41	54	50
English	246	305	234	303	291
Chinese	226	258	279	342	457
Hindi	84	47	37	48	40
Tamil	70	55	90	58	103
Others	23	6	8	10	4
Total number of imported films	680	710	685	823	957
Total number of local Malay films produced and the percentage	6 (0.9%)	3 (0.4%)	4 (O.6%)	18 (2.2%)	14 (1.5%)

Source: The Malaysian Film Censorship Board.

While it is true that the Malaysian Chinese form the highest number of cinema-goers in the country and patronise only American and Hong Kong films, the new generation Malaysians of Chinese origin have shown some interest in local Malay films. There have also been some Chinese getting involved in Malay film productions either as actors or production assistants.

Table 8.6
Number of Imported films compared to Local (Malay) films for 1981-1988

Language	Years							
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Indonesian	77	88	71	28	77	51	34	36
English	251	242	305	248	184	187	175	340
Chinese	377	311	338	299	211	157	149	276
Hindi	34	28	36	3	7	6	4	-
Tamil	109	73	81	51	39	26	4	36
Others	28	36	17	5	35	25	16	5
Total number of imported films	876	778	827	693	554	452	382	735
Total number of local (Malay) films produced	12	11	16	24	10	9	28	22
	1.4%	1.4%	1.9%	3.5%	1.8%	2.0%	7.3%	2.9%

Source: The Malaysian Film Censorship Board.

On the whole, however, the cinema scene in Malaysia is still operating along ethnic lines in almost every aspect. Malaysian cinema is still regarded as Malay cinema dealing with the life and struggle of the Malays, projecting Malay values and customs, and is basically made by Malays for the Malays. This notion has been taken for granted, so much so that an attempt by a few producers and directors to portray the Malaysian reality of diverse ethnic origins with multi-racial problems, conflicts and solutions would still fail to cross the racial barrier. The Chinese and Indians would still stay away from such productions. Films based on the multi-racial historical facts about the country such as **Bukit Kepong** (Jins Shamsuddin) and **Yassin** (Kamarul Ariffin) were not patronised by the non-Malays because they were regarded as being pro-Malay and pro-Muslim.

Table 8.7 below shows an average cinema attendance per cinema per year and also the total attendance for all cinemas in each year. Figures given are for general attendance for all films screened and the audience of all races. The general pattern of cinema attendance in Malaysia in relation to ethnic groups is rather hard to determine. As stated earlier the majority of cinema-goers are Chinese who prefer Chinese films, although some Malays and a few Indians also watch Chinese films. The Hong Kong swordplay films of the early seventies were popular with the Malay audience. While Indians form the majority audience for the Tamil and Hindi films, a large number of Malays patronise Hindi films; this was especially true in the sixties and seventies. Very few Chinese watch Hindi films and none has been known to watch Tamil films. American films are watched by Chinese, Malays and Indians, while Malay films are seldom watched by the Chinese and Indians. It is justifiable to say that the

audience for Malay films is 99.9% Malay. Those Chinese and Indians who have been known to watch Malay films may do so because their friends or relatives have acting roles in those films or because the films were directed by a close friend.

Table 8.7
Cinema Attendance 1985 - 1987

Year	No of Cinemas	Average Attendance /cinema/year	Total Attendance
1985	152	238,692	16,281,199
1986	83	210,397	17,462,951
1987	118	255,431	18,140,905

Source: Finas Annual Report, 1987, p.14

The total cinema attendance of 16 to 18 million a year, as shown in Table 8.5 is rather low when compared to figures for the later part of the eighties. The three year period (1985 - 87), was a prolonged patch of bad times. The recession of 1985/86 and the video craze of the period were the main reasons behind the poor attendance. By 1988, however, the cinema industry appeared to have overcome the obstacles and won back its audience.

Table 8.8 below indicates the upward trend of cinema attendance for the years 1988 to 1990.

Table 8.8
Cinema Attendance
1988, 1989, 1990

Year	Total Attendance
1988	21.9 million
1989	22.8 million
1990	25.6 million

Source: The New Straits Times, December 1990.

According to Survey Research Malaysia 1990, 70% of the Malaysian film audience falls in the 15 - 30 age group, 64% are males, and the ethnic groupings are 70% Chinese, 23% Malays and 7% Indians. Taking the 25.6 million total cinema attendance for 1990, the total number for each ethnic group is 17.9 million Chinese, 5.8 million Malays and 1.9 million Indians. The exact number of regular cinema-goers according to ethnic group is rather hard to determine; however, an estimated figure of 1.5 million Malay regular cinema-goers was determined in the late eighties, and out of this estimate, only 750,000 Malays are regular patrons of Malay films. So, the home market for a national cinema in Malaysia is actually very small.

Survey Research Malaysia is an independent body conducting a continous survey to establish a Media Index through distribution of questionnaires and interviews. A survey done in 1988 for a twelve month period (July 1988 - June 1989) resulted in quite a reasoanable demography of film audiences in Malaysia. It was found that Malaysian males are more

regular cinema- goers than females. From a total of 1,965 respondents who went to the cinemas, 63.8% were males and 36.2% females, and 79% were in the 15 to 29 age group. The 30 - 39 age group formed only 12% of the cinema-goers and those above 40 were only 8%.

The total numbers for weekly cinema attendance for films in various languages were:

Table 8.9:
Weekly Attendance According Film Languages

Film Language	Attendance No	Percentage of total Attendance
Malay/Indonesian	28,000	6%
Chinese	280,000	57%
English	173,000	36%
Hindi/Tamil	5,000	1%

Source: Survey Research Malaysia, 1988.

It is interesting to note that of the 280,000 who watch Chinese films in a week not all are Chinese, and of the 28,000 who watch Malay/Indonesian films in a week not all are Malays. Table 8.6 below gives a very interesting pattern of the cross cultural setting in film viewing among the multi-racial Malaysian population.

Table 8.10:
Weekly Cinema Attendance According to Ethnic Group

Film Language	Malays	Chinese	Indians
Malay/Indonesian	26,000	200	2,000
Chinese	11,000	266,000	2,000
English	76,000	74,000	22,000
Hindi/Tamil	450	89	5,000

Source: Survey Research Malaysia, 1988.

It is obvious that Malay and Indonesian films are patronised only by Malays and some Indians. The Chinese have never shown interest in Malay, Indonesian and Indian films. The less than 500 figure could just be a few who came for reasons not related to interest. They may come for the sake of a friend or relative who was involved in the production. A few of them are students who are required to watch the films for the sake of their research and studies in Malay literature, drama or films in local colleges and universities. On the other hand, the Indians demonstrate quite

good support for Malay, Indonesian and Chinese films. About 2,000 of them watch both Malay/Indonesian and Chinese films.

Malays are the main film audience in the sense that they watch all films. In the sixties and seventies, Malays used to patronise Hindi films but the situations changed in the mid-seventies; very few Malays today watch Tamil films at all. Malays also form the majority of the audience attending English/American films with 76,000 compared to 74,000 Chinese and 22,000 Indians. Except the Chinese who are very loyal to films in their own languages, usually Mandarin and Cantonese, more Malays and Indians watch English and/or American films than films in their own languages. The majority of these Malays and Indians are part of the English-educated urban population. The same applies to those Chinese who patronise English/American films. So the situation for local Malay (Malaysian) national cinema is quite embarrassing considering that only a fraction of the Malays and a handful of Malaysians of other ethnic origins give their support.

From an economic aspect, Malaysian national cinema is not a major money-earner for the film industry. The national film industry needs to be supported in all aspects. By world standards, the Malaysian film community is negligible. A small group of producers, directors, actors and production personnel is now largely concentrated in Kuala Lumpur. After the establishment of Finas in 1981, there has been considerable interaction between different sectors of film-workers in the country through workshops, seminars, forum, film screenings and discussion. Much has been debated on every aspect of film production, distribution and exhibition in the country. There has been some

improvement in the quality of films produced, but the strength and significance of a national cinema has yet to be fully realised. Eight Malaysian Film Festivals have been held for the last ten years since 1980, but the number of good quality films in each festival has been no more than one or two. Most films produced and entered into the festivals have not been worthy of the judges' time and energy. A great number of them were slapstick comedies copied from popular Hong Kong films, superficial melodramas or unrealistic teenage romances.

There are too few film producers and directors in the country who want to give serious attention to realistic and significant subject-matter for their films. Most of them have the notion that serious films would be box-office flops. Not many are willing to test the market and create a precedent for a serious film that would attract the well-educated middle class Malaysian, who has so far thought that Malay films were meant for the lower income group, in particular for the not-so-well educated rural youth who have migrated to the city and who now seek solace in the cinema by watching good-versus-evil or boy-meets-girl fantasies. In the mid-eighties, however, there was a great number of well-educated Malaysians who showed an interest in locally-made Malay films. This group started to pay attention to films made by some talented new directors who managed to create films with a different look and style. Among them were Rahim Razali, Shahrum Mohd Dom, Othman Hafsham and Nasir Jani.

Another new Malay film producer/director who has so far contributed four good films, qualified to be considered as national films is Kamarul Ariffin. Ariffin produced **Ranjau Sepanjang Jalan** (Thorns All The Way) and **Jasmine**, both films directed by Jamil Sulong; Ariffin later produced

and directed **Jasmine 2** and **Yassin.** **Yassin** is another important document of Malaya's history, like **Bukit Kepong**. It tells the story of a man who was tried by the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, or the *Bintang Tiga,* for allegedly helping theJapanese during the Pacific War. Ariffin researched the film for five years, spending a substantial amount of time at the London public offices and archives as well as drawing on his own experience to make **Yassin** (New Straits Times, October 31, 1988; 12).

Ariffin is by far the most nationalistic among film makers in Malaysia. He loves to make films on history - a subject that he has always found fairly interesting. "We cannot be laughing all the time" (New Straits Times, October 31, 1988; 12), says Ariffin in response to the observation that comedies and romances are popular in Malaysia. He is also of the opinion that the making of Malay and other ethnic films should be abandoned as it will keep the objective of multi-racialism and national unity remote (New Straits Times, March 11, 1986; 4) To him, local films should be premised on the multi-ethnic make-up and cultural wealth in the country. What Ariffin is suggesting is to make Malaysian films, rather than Malay films, as a national product. Malaysian cinema should portray the life and the struggle of various races in the country. Ariffin's **Jasmine, Jasmine II** and **Yassin** did just that. **Yassin** for example, portrays Malays and Chinese as they were during the last few days of the Japanese occupation in Malaya. Even though the relationship between the two races was rather strained and vindictive, **Yassin** also gives us the espirit de corps of the Malayan society of different races during that period.

If **Yassin** were the model for a basic national cinema and young Malaysian film-makers were willing to study the truth about the country's history and cultural heritages as well as its present day multi-racial structure, we would then be on the right track towards creating a national cinema for all Malaysians as well as for the world at large.

Notes:

1 The original title of a stage play was **Hang Jebat Mendurhaka** (Hang Jebat the rebel). Ali Aziz is a lawyer residing in Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.

2 *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* (The 1950 Literary Generation) had been formed on August 6, 1950 in the house of a school teacher and short story writer Mohd. Arif Ahmad. The *Asas 50* organisations were constituted within the period between the beginning of the Emergency and the outbreak of the Nadrah incident and each was strongly committed to arousing the consciousness of the Malays in order to improve their lot educationally, economically and socially. See Firdaus Haji Abdullah, 1985; 121 and Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, 1987; 32.

3 Khong, 1984; 24.

4 A Filipino film director working under contract for the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Production studio in Singapore.

5 Another well-known Filipino film director.

6 See Roff, 1980; 249, 253 and 256.

7 See "Report of the Singapore Riots Inquiry Commission 1951", Singapore: Government Printer; 30-31., and Nordin Hussein, "The Moslem Riots of 11 December 1950 in Singapore", Bangi: The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

8 The Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya (MNP) was the first political party in post World War II Malaya. It was formed on October 17, 1945 and known in Malay as *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* or PKMM. See Firdaus Haji Abdullah, 1985; 77.

9 See *New Sunday Times*, October 16, 1988; 1. Mansor Adabi died of a heart attack on October 15, 1988 in Singapore. He was 60.

10 Dr. Syed Hussein Alatas, graduated with degrees in the political and social sciences from the University of Amsterdam. He was Professor of Malay Studies at the University of Singapore since 1967, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur (May 1988-January 1991). He has been preoccupied with the problem of corruption for more than thirty years. He is author of several books, including **The Myth of the Lazy Native,** London, 1977; **Intellectuals in Developing Societies,** London, 1977; **The Problem of Corruption**, Singapore, 1986; and **Modernisation and Social Change in Southeast Asia**, Sydney, 1972.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION:
ASIAN NATIONAL CINEMA
AND THE WEST

When movie studios began to be built in Hollywood and silent movies began to roll down the assembly lines, they became consumer products, marketed throughout the world through a network of distributors and exhibitors. Movie-making became a business venture that took the world by storm. Screening of those Hollywood products spread to all parts of the world, including Asia.

9.1 The Non-Nationals' Interpretation

Hollywood silent movies in the 1920s and later its sound films of the 1930s were a popular success in Asian countries. Hollywood then repeated what the Lumiere brothers had done earlier. They began to manufacture not only products depicting their own life but also tried to please the Asian customers by showing something with which they could identify, and at the same time portraying the exotic Asians for their American customers. By 1915, the American motion picture began presenting Asia the way Asia never was or never would be (Rolnick, 1983: 3).

It was actually not the fault of Hollywood altogether, and Asia was not the only victim of this misrepresentation. Hollywood also tried to present its own versions of Black Africa and the Arab world as well as any other: the 'Hollywood France' have nothing in common with the real France. Since the Asian film industry was still in its infancy during that early period of the movie-making business, the role of presenting Asia to the eyes of the world was not yet an affordable venture for them. So it was left to Hollywood to come up with its idea of presenting Asia the best way it could think of. It is rather amusing to know now that some of the Hollywood depictions of Asia were done without any knowledge or research of any kind. The Austrian-born Josef von Sternberg who made **Shanghai Express** in 1932, for example, confessed, "...I took great pleasure in recreating mainland China in Hollywood, according to my imagination. Later on, in 1934, I actually went to mainland China. I took the Shanghai Express and it was quite different..." (Rolnick, 1983: 3). **Shanghai Express** was a melodrama with Marlene Dietrich in the lead role, supported by a few real Chinese and the few thousand Chinese he hired who had no character roles at all (Rolnick, 1983: 6).

More films were made by Hollywood on Asian subjects or with materials about life in Asian countries, especially China, Hong Kong, India, Japan and Vietnam. From the silent era to the sound movies, there have been Hollywood films depicting Asians either as villains or hilarious stock figures. According to Rolnick (1985; 5), the sound era gave an added dimension to the Oriental face: the Oriental detective. Peter Lorre, Warner Oland and Boris Karloff played various Asian roles and they were adept at their yellow-face interpretations as Charlie Chan, Mr Moto and Fu Manchu.

Here the comic Asian and the sinister Asian merged. After all, if Al Jolson could put on black-face and dance around like a Black minstrel, then obviously whites could don yellow-faces and portray the devious, inscrutable Asian villains or detectives. The difference was not great: Asians had enormous powers of the mind, equal to the "power" of the black man in the feet (Rolnick, 1983: 3).

More Hollywood actors played Asian characters in the 1940s. John Wayne, Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable, Errol Flynn, William Holden, Robert Donat, Peter Sellers, all at one time or another played Chinese or Indian characters in Hollywood productions. Some of the actors such as William Holden and Anthony Quinn and a few directors like Samuel Fuller and James Clavell, tried their best to take Asia seriously. But their works are badly distorted. It was British directors like David Lean and Sir Richard Attenborough and actors such as Ben Kingsley who were more successful in their works about Asia. Later, Bernardo Bertolucci's **The Last Emperor** took a giant step forward in presenting a much truer picture with a period film on China with actual location shootings and Chinese actors and extras.

But **Ghandi** and **The Last Emperor** could not be regarded as Asian national cinema even though the subject-matter, location and people were Asians. Because there were no Asian film-makers working as the main creative forces behind those huge epics about India and China, these are definitely not Asian national cinema nor can they represent the people and the countries of Asia. New Asian films that dwell around periods in history are just a part of a bigger subject. Crises of national stature are still

abundant in major Asian countries; however, these are yet to be exposed and discussed as the subject-matter for films by Asian filmmakers.

Asian film-makers see the life and the struggle of their people from a much closer and more involved angle compared to the detached and distorted version of Western producers, directors and actors. Film-making is like writing one's own history. One has to experience the happenings and get involved in the incidents to give detailed first-hand information or to write a book for others to read. No historian would base his findings on interviews and physical evidence alone. Western film-makers' interpretation of events read in novels which are later made into films are much different from the interpretation of Asian film-makers making films among their own people in their own environment. Foreign and indigenous film-makers can never think alike.

9.2 Asian Cinema: Truth and Social Reality

Western audiences may find that Asian films usually come across with a very bleak and despairing vision of their own countries. Cabral (1973: 42), a cultural theorist from Guinea Bissau, West Africa, says that Third World cultures have been characterized as 'repressed, humiliated, betrayed, and grossly misunderstood'. As a result, says Gabriel, 'authentic cultures have been forced to take refuge in villages, in slum dwellings and jungles' (1979: 58). This authentic culture has been depicted in a number of Third World films which have been seen in the West. Examples include the work of Satyajit Ray in India and Lester James Peries in Sri Lanka. According to Gabriel:

> As nationalism became the dominant concern in post-independence India and Sri Lanka, Peries and Ray turned to the village as the setting for their films feeling that it was the only place where national culture had survived under colonialism...Ray started his Apu trilogy as far back as 1956 when he made an impact on world cinema with his **Pather Panchali**. The trilogy depicts the harsh realities of rural life which finally succeed in destroying a family. In the same year Peries made **Rekawa**, followed in 1963 by **Gamperiliya** (Changes in the Village) which brought him wide recognition. Both films are set in Sinhalese villages and express the same preoccupations with rural life as Ray's early films. (Gabriel, 1979: 16)

But the situation in the Third World, Asia in particular, is not always that bleak. Ray in an interview about his films, answered, '...Certain unpleasant truths are expressed in it, but that is part of drama, it applies to all kinds of films. You can analyze a Western film and find a very despairing statement about Western values. You can't make happy films all the time' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 384).

Satyajit Ray also stayed away from major political statements. At least that is the assumption of Western film critics. But according to him, he has '...made political statements more clearly than anyone else, including Mrinal Sen...But there are definitely restrictions on what a director can say. You know that certain statements and portrayals will never get past the

censors. So why make them?' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 384). Ray added:

> '...You simply cannot attack the party in power. It was tried in **The Story of a Chair** and the entire film was destroyed. What can you do? You are aware of the problems and you deal with them, but you also know the limit, the constraints beyond which you just cannot go...It is very easy to attack certain targets like the establishment. You are attacking people who don't care. The establishment will remain totally untouched by what you're saying. So what is the point? Films cannot change society. They never have. Show me a film that changed society or brought about any change' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 384-385)

Whenever a non-American or a non-European film wins a prestigious award at an international film festival, people always jump to the conclusion that it is merely a sympathetic gesture on the part of the organiser to recognise the ugly truth about the hardship and misery of the people depicted in those films. People related or unrelated to the industry always assume that their films would always be winners if they portrayed some ugly image about the country and the people. When **Rashomon** won the Grand Prix at the Venice International Film Festival in 1951 and then again the American Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, Japanese critics insisted that these two prizes were simply reflections of Westerners' curiosity and taste for Oriental exoticism (Kurosawa, 1982: 187). The comments according to Kurosawa struck him then, and now, as terrible. He went on to

ask, why is it that Japanese people have no confidence in the worth of Japan? Why do they elevate everything foreign and denigrate everything Japanese?

This notion may no longer be true about the Japanese film critics these days but worshipping something foreign, especially American, still holds true with present day Japanese youth and the middle and upper class groups. As Ian Buruma (1984; 51) writes, '...An aesthetic fascination for the West is still evident in modern Japan... Fashion magazines use blondes from Sweden and California to show Japanese-designed clothes; Caucasian dummies stand stiffly in Japanese shop-windows; students decorate their dormitory walls with Playboy magazine pin-ups'.[1]

The same situation exists in both Malaysia and Indonesia. Malaysian middle and upper class families usually converse in English and never watch Malay films, except once in a while on television. Their English-educated children, who usually study in private schools locally or overseas, never talk about Malay films in their conversations. These particular groups would normally spend money and time in discotheques dancing to American rock music. In Indonesia, local films find it hard to last even one day at first class cinemas. Rich patrons only go to see American films at those exclusive halls. It was this situation that sparked the need for a film corporation incorporated by the government to initiate respect for national cinema.

The majority of Malaysian films supported by Finas and made by untrained film-makers fit well with the notions of Hollywood tradition discussed in Chapter I which are basically a commercial cinema that exaggerates or

glamourises reality in order to satisfy the average-educated film-goer. The basic premises of the film itself fail to accord with the theory of making realism as the basis for a national cinema movement. Realism in Malaysian films has never come close to anything like the Italian neo-realism as depicted through De Sica's **Bicycle Thief** or the Indian classics like Satyajit Ray's **Pather Panchali.** What Malaysian film-makers produce are not national cinema but merely a 'second cinema' as defined by Clyde Taylor and Gabriel in Chapter I of the thesis.

9.3 Cinema and National Language

The language spoken in a film is still a determining factor for the success of national cinema in Southeast Asia. A country with a widely spoken national language tends to have a bigger share of the home market. Bahasa Indonesia for example is spoken and understood by all ethnic groups in Indonesia. In the Philippines, Tagalog which is the language of national films is the language spoken by the majority of the popuation, although English is the lingua-franca. In a majority of theatres, the Philippines give locally-produced films far greater exposure than their imported counterparts. In fact, 75 per cent of the 2000 theatres in the country show exclusively Filipino motion pictures (Joaquin, Allison and Jeffs, 1992; 14).

In Thailand the number of locally-produced films in the Thai language outnumber those imported from America. The only foreign language films that manage to outdo the number of Thai films at the local cinemas are from Hong Kong. The fact that those Hong Kong films are dubbed into

Thai makes them more appealing to the Thai-speaking majority audience. Even some American films are dubbed into Thai. Thai is spoken by everyone in Thailand, even by the minority ethnic groups of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Malay origins. Fluent second language competence is still a rarity in Thailand.

In Malaysia a good majority of the multi-racial population fail to patronise national films in Malay due to the loose policy on national language. Even though Malay has been the national language since 1957, various Chinese and Indian dialects are still widely spoken. Chinese and Indian films are given priority by their ethnic groups. English is another language that has become a major barrier to the national films in Malay as it is the most important second language. Almost everyone can speak some English in Malaysia, from newspaper vendors to top level executives. It has been seen earlier in Chapter I how American films find a captive market in the English-speaking countries such as Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Malaysia is no exception and the same phenomenon has put local productions into a state of distress (Chapter I; 43). Even though most film-makers believe that film has its own universal language that can cut across racial and linguistic barriers, an average local film-goer will always be primarily concerned with the spoken language of the films. Visual interpretion is only secondary. And a film will still be defined and determined by its country of origin and its spoken language at least in its domestic market.

In Malaysia, foreign films from America and Hong Kong are sub-titled in both Chinese and Malay. This is one of the reasons why they are popular with the Malaysian audience. American films get the largest audience

simply because they not only attract the English-speaking Malaysians of all races but also those who read Chinese and Malay sub-titles.

9.4 Asian National Cinema: art and commercialism

The freedom of film-makers in expressing their own views and portraying their countries plight has always resulted in their films being censored or banned by the authorities. But artistic freedom does not usually guarantee a great masterpiece worthy of being recognised as National Cinema, appreciated by both local and foreign cinema-goers alike. Cinema cannot ignore the audience. Wajda, for example, believes that 'the Polish cinema during its best years was supported by the audience, not by the Ministry', and also admits that 'the weakest aspect of Polish cinema is that it produces a lot of films that are completely unnecessary, that are not addressed to any audience at all' (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1984: 316) . This phenomenon is not only true in Poland but all over the world.

In Southeast Asia, for example, lots of money is wasted by making the 'unnecessary films', films that are not concern with the life of Southeast Asian people, either politically or socially. The majority of these productions are not politically motivated, socially conscious or aesthetically articulated. The majority of Southeast Asian films are not original but cheap imitations of American films. The percentage of good films from the total made each year in Asian countries is negligible. It is always a difficult task for organisers of films festivals like the Tokyo International Film Festival, the Hong Kong International Film Festival and the Singapore International Film Festivals to select the best films that could represent

Southeast Asian countries. The Tokyo International Film Festival for example has yet to pick an entry from an Southeast Asian country to participate in the competitive section of the festival. The ten Asian films selected are only meant for exhibition in the non-competitive the Best of Asian Films section.

Southeast Asian film-goers are not ready for serious films yet. The number of viewers interested in quality films is low. Satyajit Ray once expressed the rather bleak situation in his own country. He says:

> I can't do all that Bergman and Fellini do. I don't have their audience and I don't work in that kind of context. I have to contend with an audience that is used to dross. I have worked with an Indian audience for thirty years and , in that time, the general look of cinema hasn't changed...You'll find directors there are so backward, so stupid, and so trashy that you'll find it difficult to believe that their works exist alongside my films. (Georgakas and Rubenstein, 1983; 389)

The check and balance between ideas of film-makers and the receptive capacity of the audience is necessary for a healthy growth of a national film industry. A National Cinema which emphasizes too much social or political content will not go down well with a majority audience which is not culturally receptive due to a commercialized frame of mind and an escapist attitude. One good example is the film audience in Hong Kong. As one producer says: '...Hong Kong people want a dream factory - bigger than-life, exaggerated, escapist pictures. If you deal with the more serious topics, your pictures will be flops' (Lent, 1990; 114).

That is the main reason why Hong Kong new wave directors are said to have been 'eaten up by the old system' by compromising between the aesthetic and commercial. According to Allen Fong, '...films are surviving now as a mixture of commercial and new aesthetic work' (Lent, 1990; 113). This compromise has resulted in the Hong Kong film industry becoming the most prolific in the world after Hollywood and Bombay in terms of output and has also earned itself a reputation for being the "Hollywood of the East".

There is a balance between art and commercialism in Hong Kong cinema. Despite the fact that the majority of film productions are mainstream cinema supported by the majority audience, there have been a number of artistic realistic films which have enjoyed good support from the mainstream film audience.. According to John Hinde, (1981; 19-20):

> '...Indigenous Hong Kong movies of both sorts can often pay for themselves on first release in Hong Kong alone. Imported films can be very big too. But Hong Kong's best sellers, and almost incredibly profitable, have been sophisticated and brilliant local yet worldly-wise films with more than a touch of French and a gently cynical underlayer of Anglo-American, all bound together with self-knowledge bred by Hong Kong itself. It is the ability of Hong Kong to love its own films and to create films it loves that makes it possible to say Hong Kong has a national cinema and not just another film industry.

The Southeast Asian film audience has always been considered unsophisticated, straight forward and non-aligned to any particular political ideologies. Films have always been regarded as the cheapest and the easiest form of modern entertainment, especially in urban areas. Films which tried to pursue an ideology, be it political or social, have never become popular with the mass audiences in the cities of Manila, Bangkok, Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur. In the Philippines it is the *bombas* or the bold, sexual films which feature young starlets which attract the crowd whom Avellana referred as the *bakya*, or the movie-goers who preferred the slam-bang, blood-and-guts, sex-filled 'quickies' films (Lent, 1990; 157). In Thailand similar types of films are also popular with the crowd. The situation is similar in Indonesia, while in Malaysia the bath-tub scenes, starlets clad in towels or underwear appeared in films produced by the Merdeka Studio in Kuala Lumpur in the late 60s and early 70s. Some of the films like **Gelora** (Storm), **Jangan Tinggal Daku** (Leave Me Not), and **Sesudah Subuh** (After the Dawn) were directed by P. Ramlee with scripts by Osman Abadi.

A healthy National Cinema has yet to be firmly established in Southeast Asian countries. The audience's receptive ability has yet to be upgraded so that they can appreciate films on a much higher level than just as entertainment. Film has always manipulated audience's receptive abilities through the use of its cinematic elements including high-technological special effects. It entertains while at the same time causing an unrealistic situation to look real and believable. Therefore, there is no reason why the audience should not be manipulated towards believing truthful situations in realistic films. We have yet to see a situation whereby a truthful political or a socially conscious film turns commercially successful. Only Indonesia has shown some success in quality films at the box-office. Directors like

Teguh Karya, Wim Umbuh and the late Syumandjaja have helped to bring about a renaissance of films in the late 60s and early 70s. According to Lent, (1990; 210) '...Teguh succeeds where many Third World film-makers cannot; he makes quality films that are profitable without too much compromise to commercialism'.

The success of good quality national films in Indonesia and Thailand may be due to the large number of film-goers that the country enjoys. Just like Hong Kong, what the young and new talented directors have to do is to compromise between the aesthetic and the commercial in order to attract large crowds and make some profit for their producers. But Malaysia has yet to experience this kind of situation. Malaysian film-makers and film audiences have very little exposure to world cinema. Teshome Gabriel's 'Third Cinema' with various concepts such as *New Wave, Left Cinema, Cinema Novo, Cinema Shebab, Parallel Cinema, Cinema de Conscience* or *Engaged Cinema* has never happened in the Malaysian film scene. This tends to limit the exploration and understanding of films as something beyond entertainment. Even the films of Lino Brocka, Teguh Karya or Cherd Songsri have never been shown in Malaysia. Malaysian films are not of the 'non-commercial genres' which are hardly entertaining but surprisingly realistic and socially conscious and conform to the need that 'film must be socially useful' (Georgakas and Rubensstein, 1984: 314).

Quality films have yet to gather a large enough crowd in order to break-even. Like Indonesia, the commercial successes popular with the lower class audiences are comedies, teenage love stories and fast-action thrillers. In case of Indonesia, a few more categories may be added to the list: romantic melodramas, and 'mystical' films based on old Javanese legends.

9.5 Foreign Recognition of Asian Cinema

Asian films have never been given much thought to in the West. A few Indian and Japanese films and directors have been given honour and recognition in the West. Satyajit Ray's **Pather Panchali,** completed in 1954 after two years of work, was given its world premiere at the Museum of Modern Art after American director John Huston managed to convince Monroe Wheeler who happened to be in India planning an exhibit on the arts of India for the museum. The film later entered the Cannes Film Festival 1956 but was at first not taken seriously by the festival management and was only assigned to a morning showing, which would mean that only a handful of people would see it, while some of the jurors still rested in bed (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, 1963; 228). After an afternoon showing and yet another rescreening because the French critic, Andre Bazin protested when the judges adjourned before the afternoon screening of **Pather Panchali** to attend a large party organised by the Japanese delegation after the screening of a Kurosawa film, the judges were astonished at the Indian film and voted it the "best human document" of the festival (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, 1963; 228). A year later Satyajit Ray's **Aparajito** again won an international award at the Venice Film Festival.

It is indeed difficult for an Asian film to get into a prestigious international film festival like Cannes. An unknown Asian film director needs to be recommended by certain well-known film-related people to get the attention of the organisers and judges of festivals.

For almost three decades following World War II, the notion of Asian cinema, as perceived in the West, was largely synonymous with Japan and India (Liu, 1983; 13). Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Akira Kurosawa, Yasujiro Ozu and a few other successful Indian and Japanese directors have been a great inspiration to directors from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. But still with few exceptions, little is heard of the numerous national cinemas rooted in the vast area between India and Japan, in particular South East Asia (Liu, 1983; 13).

After 1975 when **A Touch of Zen** by a Hong Kong-based director, King Hu, was honoured with the Grand Prix for Technique again at Cannes, more films from Asia were accepted by film festivals in other European cities such as London, Berlin, Venice, Nantes and Mannheim. The Cannes Film Festival of 1976 accepted films from both Lino Brocka of the Phillipines and Lester James Peries of Sri Lanka. Brocka's **Manila: In the Claws of Darkness** (1974) and **Insiang** (1975) established his reputation in Cannes.

In the 80s more Asian directors received international recognition through participation in film festivals especially in Europe. Cherd Songsri, a director from Thailand received a *Grand Prix* award at the Nantes Film Festival 1981 with **Plae Kaow** or **The Scar,** a film he made in 1979 which was based on a novel by Mai Muangderm. The film was earlier featured at the London Film Festival. Tony Rayns (1988; 194) regarded **The Scar** as one of the two finest Thai films he had seen, and an undoubted landmark in Asian cinema. **The Scar** was the first Thai film to win the *Grand Prix* at a festival in the West. It retells a celebrated story from the Bankapi

district, with a regard for historical reconstruction and authenticity that was entirely new in Thai cinema (Liu, 1983; 130).

Another Philippines film director who achieved international recognition is Mike de Leon. He became the first Asian director to have two features selected by Cannes in 1982 (Liu, 1983; 13). His **Kisapmata** (1981) and **Batch '81** (1982) were featured in the Directors' Fortnight.

According to Jerry Liu, (1983; 16) Indonesian cinema has, traditionally, been even less accessible than that of the Philippines. The only film director who paved the way to international success was the late Usmar Ismail. Usmar started as assistant director and later directed his first film **Harta Karun** (The Lost Treasure) in 1951. It was nearly ten years later after making more than ten films, that Usmar, who had been recognised as the pioneer of Indonesian cinema, became one of the award winners at the 1961 Moscow Film Festival with his film **Pejoang**[2] (The Freedom Fighter) which he made in 1960, (Misbach Y. Biran, 1988; 41). It was ten years later that other Indonesian film directors such as Teguh Karya, Wim Umbuh, and Slamet Rahardjo began to gain international recognition when their films were featured at festivals in Berlin, London, Hong Kong and New York.

Besides those selected Asian films which were screened at film festivals and art houses, mainstream Asian films were also popular especially with Asians living abroad. According to Monaco (1977: 278):

> Filipino blood epics regularly make money in the United States and Europe. Occasional Chinese films reach the West. Most

> noticeable has been the Hong Kong cinema, mainly devoted to the martial art genre, an enormously successful type of film world wide during the late sixties and seventies. King Hu (**Dragon Gate Inn,** 1966; **A Touch of Zen,** 1969, 1975; **The Fate of Lee Khan,** 1970) is one of the few directors who has managed to make a personal mark.

Hong Kong is the only Asian film producing country which successfully penetrates the American market. Much of its success comes from the brave effort of two movie tycoons, Run Run Shaw and Raymond Chow. They managed to get their films distributed and shown in the United States only by doing big-budget co-productions with major Hollywood studios. Shaw has an elaborate distribution network not only in Asia, but also in Canada and America (Lent, 1990; 99). Chow had a highly profitable association with a Hollywood bit actor Bruce Lee, which yielded more than three films, international acclaim through the *kung-fu* genre and some of the colony's first co-productions. The Lee film, **Enter the Dragon,** was made with Warner; it grossed US $100 million in the United States alone (Sun, 1982; 40).

These successful Hong Kong products are actually what Dermody and Jacka term as 'second cinema' which primarily accommodates the dominant stylistic paradigm of Hollywood film. Obviously such films were supported and looked upon by Hollywood for they not only imitated the structure but also brought money to the studios. This is something which no other Asian country outside Hong Kong would be able to do. Hollywood would never be interested in low-budget Asian films. The situation is a purely economic phenomenon and Hollywood cannot be blamed. Hollywood

has to protect its own market and will only help other people's products if this will also generate profits.

But it is interesting to note that while American films were facing an aesthetical crisis in the fifties and sixties, Asian cinema was coming to the front line. John Hinde (1981; 19) says:

> When the cineologists of the West comb through the ruins of Hollywood, and willy-nilly turn the movies into an art, even while they are protesting it is the last thing they want...While this is happening to the Western cinema a handful of national cinemas in Asia seem to be working through the first stages of the cultural task the Western cinema has done with and these Asian cinemas are being allowed not only to do the same work but to operate largely in the classically correct atmosphere of cultural invisibility and upper-class condescension, which is probably the only atmosphere in which the real work (of cinema, or most other human feedback systems) can be done.

What is being described by Hinde happens in most Asian film-making capitals. Young film-makers who are mostly overseas-trained or if not have had some exposure abroad, begin to be more conscious about their own national culture to be incorporated in their films thereby persuading more people from the well-educated upper and middle class society to be involved and begin a more serious discussion on national cinema. It is an Asian phenomenon. Films with social themes directly related to the everyday life of the people are taking shape in the Philippines,

Indonesia and Thailand. Films of this nature are few and not the major money-earner when released for public screenings in their respective countries. They become popular with foreign festivals especially those that pay attention to films from the Third World. But then again festival screenings are only watched by a select group of people, the film buffs and the press. Those films are not commercially released in other countries. None of the Asian films which gained international recognition in the past were the top money earners in their respective countries. One good example is Eros Jarot's **Tjut Nyak Dien** produced in 1987.[3]

While Asian film-makers are struggling to break free from the Hollywood styles, and narrative idioms, and trying to establish a different form and content which are more related to their own socio-political, economic and cultural situation and problems, they face difficulties in trying to capture home audiences. Somehow they still have to take a compromising middle line in order to produce a good balance sheet for the producer. As mentioned earlier, one good example of a national cinema which successfully compromised with the commercial trends are the Hong Kong and Indian cinemas. According to Hinde:

> ...the Hong Kong cinema like the city itself still straddles with success the division between Asia and the West, not so much by being some of each at once. It is rather surprising that Hong Kong's population of only six million people managed to support a film industry and make it one of the major economic ventures in the country.

And according to Lent, (1990; 92) ...the Crown Colony has boasted more than 300 features a year, making it one of the world's top producers, and sports Asia's largest studio complex, Movie Town'. Hong Kong film industry statistics show that in 1985 the turnover of the industry was about HK$1billion (at HK$7 to US$1), when the average film cost HK$4 to HK$6 million to make (Garcia, 1985; 7). Gross income from films continued to rise to US $76 million in 1986 and US$96 million in 1987 (Chanda, 1988; 31). Hong Kong's 5.6 million people each purchased an average of twelve tickets a year (Asiaweek, April 22, 1988; 48). Very few places on the globe have such a level of frequency (Lent, 1990; 92).

Despite the big money, Hong Kong also produced artistically inclined film directors. The Hong Kong cinema of the early 80s was dominated by the young 'new wave' directors whose works were '...refreshingly realistic and socially conscious, held a mirror to aspects of Hong Kong society that the Shaw and Chow directors had long ignored. They revealed the myth of urban prosperity, the dissatisfaction of youth, the uncertainty about Hong Kong's future and identity, and the myriad problems and societal changes of the Crown Colony. Their characters were often out of the ordinary' (Lent, 1990; 111).

In the artististic scene of the 80s two more Indonesian directors joined the previously small group of Indonesian filmmakers who began to map out future developments for the Indonesian cinema both locally and abroad. Ariffin C. Noer and Rahardjo's brother, Eros Djarot joined the group headed by Teguh Karya. Films from this group were featured during the Berlin Film Festival and also screened in New York's New Directors, New Film Programme.

Malaysia has so far failed to achieve the international recognition that has been enjoyed by film directors from her neighbouring countries. No Malaysian films have been accepted in Cannes, Berlin, Nantes, Mannheim or New York. The highest foreign recognition given to Malaysian films was the recent participation in the non-competitive Best of Asian Cinema section of the recent Tokyo International Film Festival. Two films were selected, Rahim Razali's **Anak Sarawak** (Son of Sarawak) and Hatta Azad Khan's **Mat Som** (The Village Boy). Malaysian film-makers have much more to learn from their immediate South East Asian neighbours before they can produce a National Cinema worthy of international recognition through film festivals abroad.

9.6 Malaysian and Southeast Asian Cinema: a comparison

It is interesting to look at the position of Malaysia in the cinematic map of Southeast Asia. This country has been left so far behind that nobody in the world would give a second look if they see a Malaysian film poster at a film festival or film market abroad. Malaysia? Do they make films in Malaysia? What kind of films? Among her close neighbours, like Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, Malaysia occupies the last position in terms of film output, monetary returns and international recognition. Today film-making in these Asian countries has developed into a full grown industry especially in Indonesia and the Philippines. American films still dominate the market but the local film industry has also begun to acquire a bigger proportion of the domestic market. The Philippines occupy the first place as the biggest

film-producing country compared to Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. In fact the Philippines rank seventh among film producing countries in the world, with annual production ranging from 150 to 200 locally produced full-length feature films. In 1971, it reached a peak of 251 (Vertido, 1988; 193). Thailand has produced an average of 80 features a year since the end of World War II, although it shot up to more than 200 titles for a time in the mid-1970s, when the government introduced a massive import tax on foreign movies (Ryans, 1988; 193).

Tables 9.1 and 9.2 gives a basic comparison between the Malaysian national film industry to that of the other Southeast Asian countries.

Table 9.1
Number of national films produced in Southeast Asian countries.

Year	No. of films produced / country			
	Malaysia	Thailand	Indonesia	Philippines
1983	11	124	74	-
1984	16	141	78	-
1985	6	134	62	152
1986	8	113	66	151
1987	19	114	54	139
1988	7	124	84	-
1989	13	98	106	-
Average yearly production	11	121	70	147

Source: Asean Film Week Report, Kuala Lumpur, 1990

The Philippines occupies first position in film production with an average of 147 film titles a year. Malaysia with just 11 titles is very much behind compared not only to the Philippines but also Thailand and Indonesia. In other aspects of the industry Malaysia still fails to qualify as a small nation that tries to justify the importance of national film industry. Malaysia imports more foreign films compared to the other three countries. Table 9.2 clearly shows the size and position occupied by the Malaysian national film industry within the Southeast Asian nations.

Table 9.2
Comparative figures of the Southeast Asian National Film Industry (1989)

	Malaysia	Indonesia	Philippines	Thailand
No. of theatres in the country	239	2600	1200	1014
No. of theatres in the capital city	35	270	-	109
Average no. of national films produced yearly	11	75	147	121
Average film budget (US $)	180,000	150,000	150,000	250,000
Average no. of foreign films screened yearly	704	250	-	225

Souces: Asean Film Week 1990 Report, AMIC Singapore and Asia Magazine

It is clear that there is a very bleak future for Malaysian national films in their own local market. For thirteen years (1976-1988) imported films, especially those from America and Hong Kong, have dominated the Malaysian cinema screens and this phenomenon will go on unless something drastic is done.

Herbert Marshall has been quoted in Chapter I as saying that the making of a film is so expensive that only a very few nations have a home market sufficient for their productions (Perkins, 1972: 164). Film-makers in small nations like Malaysia could survive only if they keep their budgets down. But if a small nation begins to grow big and develops film-making into an industry, film budgets will blow out and costs will never come down again. In that situation if a film-maker tries to make a low-budget film, the cost will still be too high to recoup the money in his local market alone.

9.7 Conclusion

Film as entertainment takes us out of ourselves just as much as it is a factual record of our lives; it can concern itself with our dreams as well as portray our social problems. Audiences certainly feel this, and they turn out in greater numbers to watch a musical or a western rather than to see a realistic film about workers or fishermen (Armes, 1974: 20). This has always been a reason why realistic films that tell the truth about living conditions and problems in India, Japan or the Philippines, were in some ways rejected by their local audience. Realist film-makers or documentarists like Ray, Kurosawa and Brocka continually find themselves at odds with the audiences they wish to meet. And as directors who make studies of social problems in their own countries, they

frequently achieve a greater success with audiences abroad (Armes, 1974: 20). The ugliness which they depict in their films was found to be too bitter and hard to swallow by the people and the authorities alike. **Pather Panchali**, for example, was not allowed to be screened by the Indian government when it was finished and ready for release.

But when Ray's, Kurosawa's and Brocka's films won awards at international film festivals, it was their realistic portrayal of social problems and the living conditions that touched the foreign audience and the jury members. Their true portrayal of real people and places often had a catchy effect upon a foreign audience who found these portrayals new and unheard of. Roy Armes (1974: 20) stated that it is not that such an audience had a greater interest in realism, but simply that there is an added exotic element in the sight of a Sicilian fisherman or an Indian peasant for a spectator who has not visited those countries.

So it is true that reality in the world outside Europe and America is still considered exotic and strange. But there are also other factors to consider. The different cinematic idioms explored and established by those Asian and Southeast Asian film-makers and the way characters and narrative elements were structured with a careful and sincere bearing upon the economic and socio-cultural condition of their own country may also be a major point to be considered when giving accolades to the national products.

In the early seventies in Australia, Phillip Adams proposed that what Australia needed was not a film industry, but 'ten to fifteen quality, lively pictures a year' (Dermody and Jacka, 1987; 32). This should also apply to Malaysia. The country does not need a very large national film industry to

compete with that of Hong Kong or America, but a small national film industry that produces a dozen well-scripted films about its own life and problem, a truly Malaysian cinema. After all, Fellini once said, "The best international film is really a good local film". If a film is about people - real people - and their problems and their lives and joys, then it is going to leap international film boundaries without any problems (Hinde, 1981; 117). Malaysian national cinema has yet to prove that fact.

Notes:

1 This accords with my own personal impressions when I spent two weeks in Tokyo during the 4th Tokyo International Film Festival in late September and early October 1991 I found that Japanese youth were engrossed with American rock culture as manifested by their clothing and music preferences, while elderly middle and upper class men and women walk around in big department stores admiring designer clothes and perfumes from America and Europe.

2 According to Misbach, **Pejoang** (The Fighters) was one of three Usmar films on the theme of the revolutionary struggle against the Dutch made during the 60s. It won the trophy for Best Actor at the International Film Festival in Moscow 1962. Salim Said (1982; 57) says that with **Pedjuang** (The Freedom Fighter) Usmar was trying to say that he was still the same old Usmar and that making money was not his only goal. Misbach does not name the actor who won the award and Salim does not mention anything about the Moscow International Film Festival.

3 Eros told a forum in Kuala Lumpur in June 1990 that the film has still to collect about M$300,000 to break-even. The film was highly acclaimed at foreign festivals such as Cannes, Berlin and Tokyo, but was not a hit in Indonesia itself.

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APPENDIX I: The National Film Development Corporation Act 1981

The National Film Development Corporation Act 1981 incorporated the functions of Finas as follows:

a) to give suggestions to the Minister regarding the policy, methods and steps to be taken to encourage, to upkeep and to ease the development of the film industry.

b) to develop and pursue development and upkeep the status of the film industry through whatever means, which include providing research and advisory services.

c) to control and co-ordinate the peoples and activities of various bodies involved in any aspect of the film industry.

d) generally to encourage and assist the development of the film industry within and outside Malaysia.

e) to control and look into film production, distribution and exhibition in Malaysia, and to issue licences for the above activities.

f) to manage and maintain places and properties belonging to the corporation.

Apart from this, the corporation is also empowered:

a) to conduct surveys related to the film industry and undertake potential research in areas that may contribute towards the development of local films.

b) to provide training facilities and to monitor and supervise training projects and programmes in the film industry.

c) to provide and assist in any form of film services i.e production equipment for the producers, distributors, exhibitors and theatre owners, without itself taking part in the film production either directly or indirectly.

d) to receive commission or any form of payment in return for the services provided.

e) to provide subsidy or credit facilities to film producers without itself taking part in the film production either directly or indirectly.

f) to fix and levy fees or other payments in relation to its authorised functions.

g) to take part in the international organisation related to the film industry and to organise, sponsor or take part in festivals, exhibitions (expo) and film seminars or any such activities in Malaysia and overseas.

h) to establish institutions, centres or workshops for research and other necessary activities related to the development of the film industry.

i) to provide incentives for a healthy film industry.

f) to distribute information to the public regarding various aspects of the film industry.

g) to undertake any other responsibilities as directed by the Minister.

APPENDIX II: The Malaysian Film Academy

The Academy's Training Programme:

The Academy offers three training programmes: a three-year diploma course; a one-year certificate course; and, a three-month short course.

Diploma Course:

The three-year diploma course is sub-divided into six terms, three terms in each year. In both the first and second years diploma students have to do nine courses. The third year of studies is devoted to workshop-style advanced courses and projects. Courses offered for the first two years will be Basic Film Production Techniques, Basic Cinematography, the Fundamentals of Screenwriting, Film Directing, Script and Screenplay Writing, Film Editing, Sound Recording and Mixing, Art Direction, Film Music, Animation, Film Processing and storing, Costume, Make-up, Film Appreciation and Criticism, and Film Management. In the final year besides workshop and group projects students will also take advanced directing and special effects courses.

The student intake for the diploma course is fifty each year and the minimum qualification will be third grade in the Malaysian Certicate of Education which is an equivalent to the British GCSE qualification.

Certificate course:

The certificate programme offers a choice of three modules. Module one will be in script and screenplay writing, film directing, editing, acting and cinematography. Module two will concentrate on the areas of art direction, acting, costume and make-up, dance and screenplay writing. Module three will emphasise laboratory art and techniques, special effects, animation, music, sound and cinematography.

There will be a twenty-five student intake yearly and the minimum qualification is a pass in the Malaysian Lower Certificate Examination and/or five years of experience in the area applied for.

Short-term Course:

A three-month course in any one of the following areas shall be offered to any individual who has had some experience in the area he is applying for: script-writing, art direction, make-up, dance, singing, acting, costume, cinematography, production management and film editing.

The Administrative and Teaching Staff:

It was agreed that the chief executive of the Academy be called *Pengetua Akademi* or Academy Principal and he/she will be assisted by a Registrar and an Assistant Principal. The Principal and his/her assistant shall be someone who has had experience in film production,

an administrator and he/she must have followed the early develoment of the set-up of the Academy.

The structure for the training/teaching division shall be headed by a lecturer assisted by an assistant lecturer. Each programme, diploma, certificate and short course will have its own co-ordinator. The number of the teaching staff for each programme will be seven for the diploma course, five for certificate and three for the short-term courses.

There will be both full-time and part-time teaching staff whose minimum qualification will be a diploma and some experience in each required area of teaching. The Academy will employ some qualified individuals from the Ministry of Information National Film Unit or Filem Negara for its part-time teaching staff.

It is also hoped that qualified film personnel from film institutions abroad will be called to the Academy under programmes such as cultural and technical co-operation between nations at the government to government level.

The Academy currently has one Administrative Officer assisted by a secretary to handle the administration. Jins as Executive Director also acts as the Academy's Principal and one of the lecturers. Academics from local universities and selected film industry people serve as part-time lecturers. The Academy had also seek help from visiting lecturers

from the United States and Australia whenever they were brought in through their embassies for cultural/artistic programmes.

Financial Sources:

In its projected income and expenditure statement for a three year period the Academy registered a total income of M$2.4 million and the total expenditure was expected to be M$1.8 million leaving an excess of income over expenditure of M$0.6 million.

The main source of income for the Academy would be the grant of M$1.5 million from FINAS receivable in equal parts over a three-year period. Next will be the total amount of fees collected from students entering all three programme of study for the same period which will be about M$373,250.00. Other sources of income would be donations from public and private organisations and individuals, membership subscriptions, the sale of magazines and advertisements, and interest from a fixed deposit saving account.

Students are expected to pay study fees and laboratory fees for each year. Study fees will be M$1,150 for a diploma course, M$1,050 for a certificate course and M$350 for a short-term course. The laboratory fees will be M$1,000 a year for a diploma student, M$500 for a certificate student and M$150 for those undergoing a short-term course.

The Academy will also undertake to publish a monthly film magazine for sale to the public at M$2.00 a copy. It is envisaged that the initial circulation will be 5,000 copies reaching a final circulation target of 15,000 copies per month by the 5th year of operation of the Academy.

APPENDIX III: Expenses for the screening of 'Dia Ibuku' in Jakarta

1)	Fees for Special Premiere on December 23, 1985 at President Theatre, Jakarta	M$28,118.00
2)	30 copies of 24 sheets posters	M$ 5,000.00
3)	480 still photos	M$ 4,000.00
4)	4 pieces of 48 sheets poster	M$ 1,333.00
5)	2000 copies single sheet poster	M$ 3,666.00
6)	Designs and Colour separation	M$ 2,668.00
7)	Cost of bringing out films from the airport	M$ 1,688.00
8)	Typeset and still laminatings	M$ 440.00
9)	Food and fuel cost	M$ 676.00
10)	Advertisements	M$29,404.00
11)	Fees for audience checker	M$ 54.00
12)	Tickets bought by P.T.Perfin to keep the audience quota	M$ 1,190.00
13)	Editing cost for 8 relaese prints and 24 traillers	M$ 595.00
14)	Preparation cost for screening in East Java	M$ 2,023.00
15)	Transfer to ANZ bank for payments of 2 release prints and 6 traillers	M$ 7,945.00

16) Promotion fees	M$	952.00
17) Car repairs	M$	97.00
18) Censorship fees	M$	95.00
19) Office equipments and duplicates	M$	24.00
20) Film previews/write-ups	M$	10,714.00
21) Eight audience counting devices	M$	121.00
22) Film trays	M$	114.00
23) Cost of bringing in 6 release prints and 18 trailers	M$	27,797.00
Total:	M$	128,714.00

APPENDIX IV: Malaysian Feature Film Budget

Production Budget for a Malaysian Feature Film of 100 - 120 minutes duration shot on 35mm, sound and colour:

1 Pre-production:

a) Story and script	M$	5,000.00
b) Recce	M$	2,000.00

2 Rawstock:

a) 100 x 400' cans Eastmancolour Kodak 5247 @ $271.40	M$	27,140.00
b) 50 x 1000 rolls 17.5 magnetic Film @ $140.00	M$	7,000.00
c) 20 x 1000 rolls 3/4" tape @ $28.00	M$	560.00
	M$	34,700.00

3 Rental of Equipment:

a) Camera, lenses, lights, dolly generator and crew	M$	45,000.00
b) Editing, dubbing and mixing	M$	20,000.00
	M$	65,000.00

4 Location expenses:

a) Transportation for production personnel, artistes, crew, etc	M$	5,000.00
b) Food & refreshments @ $150 for 45 days shooting and 10 days dubbing	M$	8,250.00
c) Settings and props	M$	10,000.00
	M$	23,250.00

5 Artistes:

a) Main & Supporting	M$	40,000.00
b) Extras & walks-on	M$	10,000.00
	M$	50,000.00

6 Music:

Producer, composer, musicians lyric writer, singers and studio recording	M$	25,000.00

7 Production Personnel:

a) Executive producer	M$	12,000.00
b) Film Director	M$	12,000.00
c) Cameraman	M$	7,000.00
d) Art Director	M$	5,000.00
e) Asst. Film Director	M$	5,000.00
f) Continuty clerk	M$	2,000.00

g) Make-up artist	M$	2,000.00
h) Property man	M$	1,500.00
i) Still photographer	M$	2,000.00
	M$	48,500.00

8 Laboratory Charges:

a) Processing & Developing rushes	M$	30,000.00
b) Negative cutting and optical sound	M$	5,000.00
c) Credit titles & processing trailer	M$	5,000.00
d) First answer print and opticals	M$	6,000.00
e) 8 copies & 16 trailers	M$	20,000.00
f) Freight & handling charges	M$	6,000.00
	M$	72,000.00
	M$	325,450.00
10% Contigencies	M$	32,545.00
Total Estimated Budget	M$	357,995.00

APPENDIX V: Agreement Between Film Producer and Distributor/Exhibitor

THIS AGREEMENT is made the day of

between

(the film company / producer)

(hereinafter called "the Licensor") of the one part and Cathay Organisation (M) Sdn Bhd of No. 1, Jalan SS22/19, Damansara Jaya Town Centre, 47400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor (hereinafter called "the Licensee") of the other part.

1(a) The Licensor hereby grants to the Licensee and The Licensee hereby accepts from the Licensor, upon the terms and conditions of this Agreement, to exhibit for theatrical purposes only the following cinematograph film (hereinafter called "the said film"):-

(The Film Title)

1(b) The said film will be exhibited in the Licensee's circuit of cinemas, Cathay Organisation (M) Sdn Bhd and Borneo Filem Organisation Sdn Bhd's circuit of cinemas and Independent cinemas in Malaysia.

2. The film rentals payable to the Licensor shall be apportioned in accordance with the guidelines laid down by Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia (FINAS).

3(a) Theatre front advertising costs (i.e. exploitation, handbills and cutouts) are to be shared equally by the Licensor and Licensee but all other advertising costs (newspaper advertisements, television advertisements, posters, photos and banners) will be borne solely by the Licensor.

However, the amount for exploitation costs shall be mutually agreed upon between the Licensor and Licensee.

3(b) Transport costs of prints, trailers and publicity materials of the said film to the cinemas within the circuit of cinemas of the Licensee which have been booked for the exhibition of the said film shall be borne solely by the Licensor. The Licensee shall be entitled to appropriate from all nett film rentals (after deducting the distribution fee allowable, advertising and publicity and other relevant expenses related to the said film) due and payable to the Licensor towards payment of the said transport costs and all debts owing by the Licensor to the Licensee and no film rental shall be payable to the Licensor for so long as the said transport costs debts and advances are outstanding and unpaid.

4(a) Notwithstanding clause 4(a) & (b) mentioned above, the Licensor hereby agrees and undertakes to fully indemnify the Licensee in full priority against all others, for any guarantees and/or any other relevant expenses related to the said film issued and/or paid by the Licensee for and on behalf of the Licensor **PROVIDED ALWAYS** that

such guarantees and/or other relevant expenses undertaken or paid by the Licensee is incurred to **make** the said film fit for exhibition.

4(b) The Licensor also hereby grants to the Licensee the exclusive rights to cause the said film to be broadcast in television stations in Malaysia only, on the condition that the Licensor's share of income on exhibition of the said film are unable to repay towards settlements of any shortfalls suffered or caused to be suffered in the course of exhibiting the said film in our circuit.

5. The Licensor hereby warrants to the Licensee that:-

(a) the Licensor has full complete authority grant to the Licensee all rights herein granted to the Licensee in respect of the said film

(b) no part of the said film (including its title) infringes or violates the trademark copyright or patent or other rights of any person, firm or company

(c) no part of the said film by sight or sound contains any defamatory matter or any libellous or slanderous statement or innuendo of any person, firm or company

(d) neither the Licensor nor any other person or corporation who may own or control any rights in respect of the said film has granted or will grant or has purported to grant or will purport to

grant any rights or licence whatsoever in respect of the said film to any person, firm or corporation in Malaysia which conflicts with the Licence granted hereunder to the Licensee

(e) the said film is of not more than 100 minutes duration. The Licensee shall have the right to edit the said film should the duration of the film exceed 100 minutes

(f) the said film in so far as the rights and licence granted to the Licensee are concerned, is and shall at all times be and remain free and clear of all claims, decrees, liens or encumbrances of any kind and does not and will not infringe upon or violate any right or right whatsoever of any party or parties.

6. The Licensor hereby undertakes to indemnify and keep indemnified fully the Licensee, its successors and assigns from and against all losses, damages, costs, expenses and all other liabilities whatsoever that may be incurred or sustained by reason of any breach of the warranty or warranties aforesaid.

7. The Licensor undertakes and agrees to indemnify and keep indemnified the Licensee any loss, liability, cost and expenses in connection with any suit, action, claim or demand made by any person, firm, company or corporation against the Licensee for alleged libel, slander, unfair competition, invasion of the right of piracy of otherwise arising in anyway from the use by the Licensee in accordance with this Agreement.

8. In the event that:-

(a) any censorship clearance that may be required by law in respect of any of the said films for the transmission of the same as contemplated by this Agreement is not granted; or

(b) any of the said films contravene any censorship code which may be established or any laws relating to obscene or indecent publication;

then in any such case the Licensee shall have the right at the Licensee's absolute direction either

(i) to cut and exclude any material from the said films;

(ii) to reject any such of the said films in its entirely.

9. The Licensee hereby warrants to the Licensor that:-

(a) A statement of accounts of all the takings nett of entertainment taxes will be submitted by the Licensee to the Licensor within 45 days after completion of the season of screening of the said film at each cinema.

(b) Payment shall be made by the Licensee to the Licensor at the time of submission of statement of accounts by Licensee **PROVIDED ALWAYS** that upon the determination of the Agreement by the Licensor the Licensee shall pay to the Licensor within two (2) months from the date of the receipt of

notice of termination all monies due and payable under this Agreement

(c) A statement of accounts of all the takings, nett of entertainment taxes will be submitted by the Licensee to the Licensor within 60 days after completion of the season of screening of said film at each cinema

(d) The Licensee will not reprint or copy the said film wholly or partially in form of its picture sound or writing for any purpose whatsoever unless with the express permission of the Licensor

(e) The Licensee will not sublet assign or part with the possession of the said film to any other person other than its servants or agents and other than for the purposes of public screening in the Licensee's circuit of cinemas and Borneo Film Organisation Sdn Bhd's circuit of cinemas

(f) The Licensee shall within a reasonable time after the expiration of the Licensee's rights in respect of the said films as shall be agreed between the parties either return to the Licensor all prints thereof in the same condition as that in which they were supplied to the Licensee hereunder (normal wear and tear excepted) or destroy all prints hereof supplied to the Licensee hereunder and furnish the Licensor with a Certificate of such destruction.

10. The Licensor shall pay to the Licensee a distribution fee of 5% on the gross film rentals.

11. It is agreed that the Licensee shall have full discretion as to the manner, place and time of release and exhibition of the said film.

12. ***Censor Clause***

It is expressly understood and agreed by and between the parties hereto that the Licensor shall be wholly responsible at its own expenses for the submission of said film to the relevant local authorities for censorship. The Licensor shall also undertake on a best effort basis and at its own expense to expeditiously obtain the relevant censorship clearance certificates.

13. The Licensor hereby agrees to indemnify and keep indemnified the Licensee against all actions proceedings liabilities costs damages that any third party may make against the Licensee in respect of the said film.

14. In addition and without prejudice to any other rights or remedies conferred by law or under this Agreement, in the event of a breach of any of the warranties aforesaid on the part of the Licensor or in the event that the distribution and/or exhibition of the said film by the Licensee, its successors, assignees or exhibitors or any sub-licensee shall be restrained, interfered with or hindered by any decrees or orders of any court, whether interim or otherwise occasioned brought about directly or indirectly by a breach or alleged breach of

any contract on the part of any actor, director or producer of the said film or on the part of the Licensor, the Licensee shall be entitled to determine this Agreement.

15. The Licensor agrees to supply a number of 6 prints and 10 trailers to the Licensee. The Licensor may from time to time request for the return of such prints for purposes of exhibition at film festivals but the number of prints available to the Licensee must at all time be not less than 5 prints and 8 trailers.

16. The Licensor grants to the Licensee the exhibition rights of the said film for a period of one (1) year from the first date of exhibition in Malaysia.

17. All rights to this film that is television, video, etc. **cannot** be given to any party without the prior consent of the Licensee. In the event of prior consent been given by the Licesee to the Licensor, release of video tapes and exhibition on television cannot be undertaken before the expiry of the exhibition rights under clause 16 of this agreement.

18. The Licensee may without prejudice to any of the Licensee's rights against the Licensor under this Agreement terminate this Agreement for any substantial or antecedent breach of this Agreement forthwith and for this purpose any failure by the Licensor to remedy any breach of the provision hereof which is not

substantiated within 14 days of being requested to do so in writing by the Licensee shall be deemed a substantial breach of the Agreement.

19. This Agreement shall be governed by and construed in all respect in accordance with the Laws of Malaysia and any dispute arising therefrom shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the Court of Malaysia.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties hereto have hereunto set their hands the day and the year first above written.

SIGNED by	)
	)
for and on behalf of	)
	)
in the presence of:-	)

SIGNED by	)
	)
for and on behalf of Cathay	)
Organisation (M) Sdn Bhd	)
in the presence of:-	)
in the presence of:-	

e.s.

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Typographical Error

(a) *economics* (page 11, line 6) should be spelt *economic*;

(b) *Cinama* (page 15, subheading) should be spelt *Cinema*;

(c) Page 73, line 7 should be: The Federated Malay States (*FMS*), Unfederated Malay States (*UMS*) and the Straits Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Malacca made up what was known as British Malaya (Comber, 1983; 10)[2].

(d) *built* (page 189, line 6) should be spelt *build*;

(e) *break down* (page 196, line 15) should be spelt *breakdown*;

(f) *The three year period* (page 196, lines 2 and 1 from the bottom of the page) should be written *The three-year period*;

(g) *wait and see game* (page 197, line 12) should be spelt *wait-and-see game*;

(h) *prefered* (page 223, line 3 from the bottom of the page) should be spelt *preferred*;

(i) *period from 1986-1988* (page 227, line 1) should read *period from 1986 to 1988*;

(j) *fortiest* (page 229, line 1) should be spelt *forties*;

(k) *one pairs* (page 239, line 3 from the bottom of the page) should be spelt *one pair*;

(l) *sopport* (page 240, line 11) should be spelt *support;*

(m) *Someof* (page 263, line 17) should be spelt *Some of*;

(n) *theJapanese* (page 348, line 4) should be spelt *the Japanese*;

(o) Page 359; (paragraph one and two) as corrected.

Thai makes them more appealing to the Thai-speaking majority audience. Even some American films are dubbed into Thai. Thai is spoken by everyone in Thailand, even by the minority ethnic groups of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Malay origins. Fluent foreign language competence is still a rarity in Thailand.

In Malaysia a good majority of the multi-racial population fail to patronise national films in Malay due to the loose policy on national language. Even though Malay has been the national language since 1957, various Chinese and Indian dialects are still widely spoken and Malay has only been the most important second language to the Chinese, Indians, Ibans, Kadazans and other ethnic minorities who together comprise more than fifty percent of the total population. Chinese and Indian films are given priority by their ethnic groups. English is another language that has become a major barrier to the national films in Malay as it is the most important foreign language. Almost everyone can speak some English in urban Malaysia, from newspaper vendors to top level executives. It has been seen earlier in Chapter I how American films find a captive market in the English-speaking countries such as Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Malaysia is no exception and the same phenomenon has put local productions into a state of distress (Chapter I; 43). Even though most film-makers believe that film has its own universal language that can cut across racial and linguistic barriers, an average local film-goer will always be primarily concerned with the spoken language of the films. Visual interpretion is only secondary. And a film will still be defined and determined by its country of origin and its spoken language at least in its domestic market.