

# The Philosophy of Compromise

**JANEYBHIDYARO**

This is supposed to be an anticorruption film. But its philosophy is summed up in its title which is a colloquialism meaning : “Let it go, chum, why bother?”

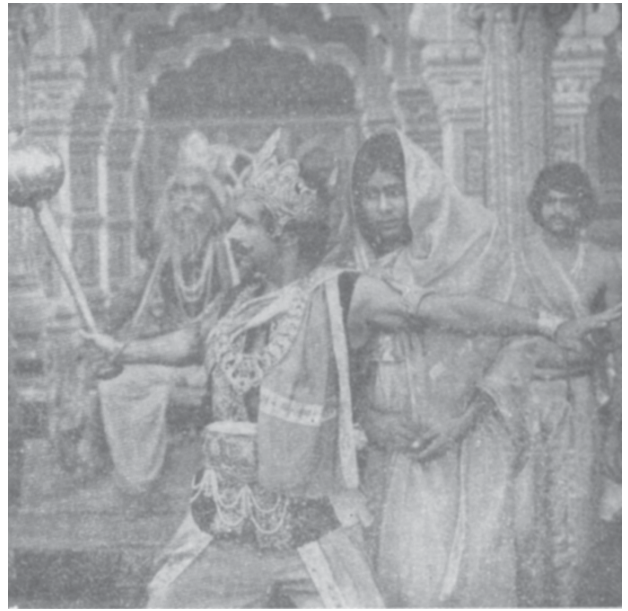
The situation in our society today is such as to evoke in most people’s minds two contrary responses which coexist uneasily—one, the feeling that the situation is intolerable and we ought to do something to change it, and two, the feeling that nothing we do is likely to have much effect. Many people today remain inert, not so much because of apathy as because it is unclear what kind of action will be effective.

The two heroes of this film, Sudhir and Vinod, set out to expose corruption. The film maker treats their defeat as symbolic of the inevitable defeat of the “small man” who is honest but powerless. Sudhir and Vinod constantly extol their own honesty and virtue, and lament the fact that no one acknowledges or appreciates their worth. While the director pokes good-natured fun at their blunders and naivete, the film endorses the heroes’ view of themselves as good guys in a bad world that is not worth reforming or bothering about.

Throughout the film, Sudhir keeps advising Vinod to play safe and not to stick his neck out. Ultimately, Sudhir’s philosophy is vindicated, when the powerful vested interests collude to make scapegoats of the two friends.

I am not suggesting that it is necessary or desirable to show “good” triumphing over “evil.” The defeat of a crusader need not, in itself, evoke cynicism or defeatism. It can evoke tragic feeling ; it can even inspire others to carry the struggle forward. Why is it then that the defeat of Sudhir and Vinod fails to move one to indignation, admiration or emulation ?

First, it is because the heroes’ vision of success is so limited. When they declare that truth will prevail and sing their song “*Hum honge kamyab...*”, what kind of *kamyabi* do they want ? Quite clearly, they expect that their honesty should be materially rewarded. They should get a 10 lakh reward for their exposure of corruption or Rs 5,000 in a



**Woman a corpse, man a buffoon  
—inculcating cynicism**

photography contest, or should make a success of their studio. By any or all of these means, they wish to become rich, for riches to them spell success, *kamyabi*.

Thus, success, as the “heroes” define it, has already been attained by the “villains.” If there is no difference between the aspirations of the honest and the dishonest, then how are we to distinguish between them? The most visible difference in the film is that the dishonest are successful while those who pride themselves on being honest see themselves as failures, because they yearn for the kind of success that the dishonest have achieved.

Sudhir and Vinod’s antagonism to Taneja and his friends starts off not as principled opposition but as envy of a successful rival, the Super Photo Studio. At its root, their hatred of Taneja and Ahuja is nothing but the petty businessman’s hatred of the big industrialist. Since they cannot hope to outshine their rivals, they can only console themselves with the thought of their own honesty and moral superiority.

The film reduces a sense of social justice to a small shopkeeper’s version of honesty and hard work. Thus the director reveals as evidence of Taneja’s villainy his mixing sand in cement, his adding an unauthorised twenty fourth floor to his skyscraper, his bribing government officials. No serious objection is taken, however, to his owning a building with 23 floors, that is, to his wealth in itself. After all, the heroes’ cherished dream is to make millions by “honest” means. Their gobbling up Taneja’s Swiss pastry, though intended to be just good fun, shows that they are eager for a slice of the cake that is shared between the wealthy and the powerful. The implication is that a “fair profit” is honest but adulteration and bribery are dishonest. There seems to

be little recognition that profit itself is based on charging more than cost price. In fact, Taneja's openly proclaimed philosophy "Success in business is based on one's own profit and the other's loss" seems more accurate and in that sense, more "honest" a statement than the heroes' self deluded "vision of themselves as honest businessmen.

In many other ways too, the heroes' morals and norms seem no better than those of the men they consider corrupt. For instance, their concept of beauty as revealed in their Beauty Photo Studio is a seminude pin up, and their concept of "excellent salesmanship" amounts to sexual harassment, when the customer is a woman. The director evidently means us to laugh at their behaviour as evidence of their well meaning naivete. But the humour has a definite misogynist slant. In the burkah episode, too, a laugh is raised from women's predicament as in the corpse episode, from the mishandling of a dead body disguised as Draupadi. Both scenes are in bad taste and overdone to the point of being boring.

Besides, is it just by chance that the film shows the good, downtrodden person as the "man in the street" but the powerful and hardhearted as both men and women?

There are only two women characters in the film. One is Ashok's girlfriend who is used as a sexual bribe to the commissioner, and is shown as actively enjoying her role. The other is Shobha, the editor of a magazine which is renowned for its exposure of corruption. In her, the strong and independent woman is caricatured in a very malicious way. When she rejects Vinod's crude advances, the film maker suggests that this "unnatural" and "unfeminine" refusal is not genuine. It is only calculated to lead on Vinod and make a cat's paw of him.

It is significant that today, when the press is playing an important role in exposing corruption in high places and is causing embarrassment to the ruling party and the government, this film openly attacks the press in the government's own terms. Shobha's small paper, *Khabardar*, which is known for its bold criticism of the powerful is shown to be based on scandalmongering yellow journalism. It gets its scoops by dishonest means, by trespassing on people's privacy, by blatant fraud. Most important, its editor, who pretends to be inspired by social concern, is actuated only by avarice, and is just as bad as those she claims to expose. She tries to blackmail Taneja and accepts 20 lakhs to cover up the murder he has committed.

Today, most people are aware that big business and the bureaucracy are hand in glove and are hopelessly corrupt, but there is a growing belief in the efficacy of the nongovernment press, particularly of small local papers, to expose such corruption. In such an atmosphere, it is understandable why the government chose to overlook this film's attack on bureaucratic corruption, but rewarded its attack on the press by granting it exemption from entertainment tax as well as a national award.

Also, the apathy which the film actively propagates as wisdom can only work to the benefit of those in power, who need to maintain the status quo.

—Ruth Vanita

### SWIKARKIYAMAINEX

A variation on the *Masoom* theme, this film gives more space to the woman's resentment of double standards and of her husband's hypocrisy. However, though advertised as a "women's rights" film it retains intact the framework of compromise and acceptance of the status quo. Here too, the wife, Gopika, like her counterpart in *Yeh Nazdikian*, is a singer who drops and picks up her career corresponding to the ups and downs that her relationship with her husband Kishen goes through. She meekly submits to his dictation of dependence as her lot. He declares: "I cannot bear the thought that my wife should contribute to the household expenses", and even before marriage, she says: "Clearly, his wishes will be mine", thereby earning the approval of another happily married woman, Parminder, who says: "You are a farsighted, broad-minded girl."

Through the first two thirds of the film, Kishen is shown in a more sympathetic light than is Gopika. He is absolved of guilt for not telling her about his first marriage. The blame for this deception falls on Parminder, who was supposed to have told Gopika the truth. Besides, Gopika is shown as the



stereotyped extravagant wife who becomes a burden for her husband. What is more, she discovers the truth by opening and reading a letter addressed to him, minutes before he decides to confess.

After Gopika discovers and adopts Kishen's child whom he had given up for dead, the plot takes a strange twist. She takes revenge on him by pretending that the child is hers by an earlier secret marriage. The child becomes far more attached to its loving stepmother than to its biological father, who treats it with open contempt and aversion. The director spares no effort to show up male prejudice, and ends the film by glorifying woman's ability to love and accept a child that is not her own, while pointing out that a man because of his narrow outlook is not able to fulfil his own child's needs.

Despite the manifest improbabilities of plot, the director has somehow managed to convey a psychological reality.

