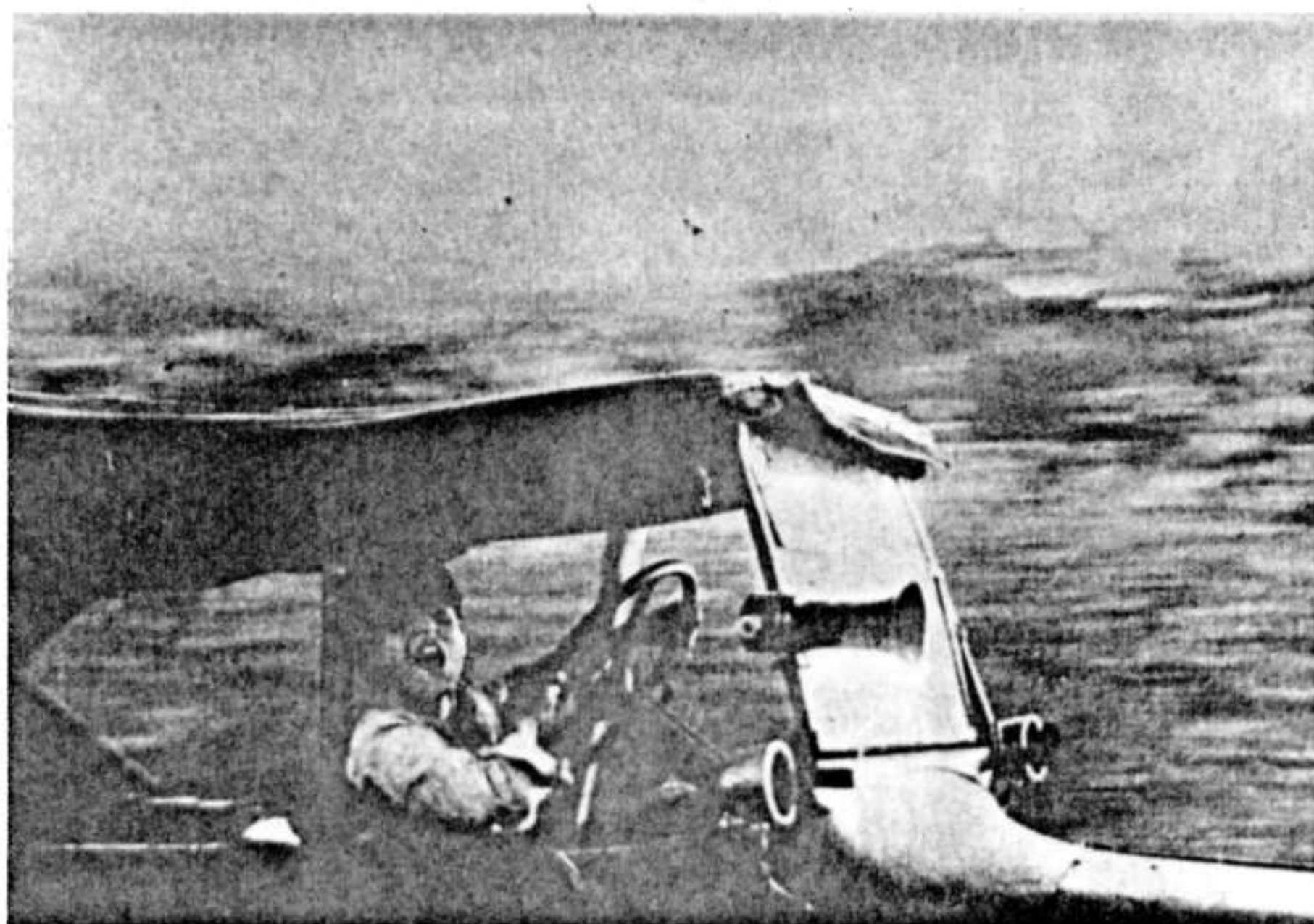


Document Citation

Title	Ajantrik
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	synopsis
Language	English
Pagination	26-33
No. of Pages	4
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Ajantrik (The mechanical man), Ghatak, Ritwik, 1958



Ajantrik (Pathetic Fallacy) 1958

Production: L & B Films International

Story: Subodh Ghosh

Screenplay and Direction: Ritwik Ghatak

Cinematography: Dinen Gupta

Music: Ali Akbar Khan

Art Direction: Ravi Chattopadhyay

Editing: Ramesh Joshi

Sound: Mrinal Guha Thakurta and Satyen Chattopadhyay

Cast: Kali Bandyopadhyay, Gyanesh Mukhopadhyay, Satindra Bhattacharya, Gangapada Basu, Tulsi Chakravarty, Dipak, Anil Chattopadhyay, Kajal Gupta, Sita Mukhopadhyay

The scene is a mofussil town somewhere in Bihar in the 1950s. Bimal is an eccentric taxi driver, whose feelings

for his dilapidated 1920 Chevrolet far exceed the normal limits of a man's fondness for a machine. The old jalopy, Jagaddal, is Bimal's friend and breadwinner, and also, in some strange way, his beloved. His love for Jagaddal isolates him from the people around him. The other taxi drivers laugh at him. The mechanic at the garage, who is a well-wisher, keeps reminding Bimal that it is time he sold off that old machine and bought a new one. The only one who understands and sympathizes with him, and is equally loyal to Jagaddal, is a street urchin who, with his child's mind, can sense what Bimal knows for a certainty Jagaddal is no mere machine.

Jagaddal has a mind of her own. She cannot bear to be ridiculed. A derisive comment from a passenger would stop her in her tracks in pouring rain. It happened to the bridegroom and his uncle, who were in a hurry. They had to push the old car till she was appeased.

Jagaddal is also jealous when Bimal's attentions waver. A runaway bride whom Bimal tries to help,

Bimal's little helper



causes Jagaddal to sputter and jolt with rage.

Jagaddal's large eyes, her headlamps, turn curiously to watch the view on a mountain road. The sound of tribal songs floats up in the breeze and Bimal feels impelled to take a closer look. Not all children love Jagaddal. At a fair on the way, children gather around the car. When Bimal tries to shoo them off, they collect in an army and pelt the car with mud. Bimal protects his beloved with his own spreadeagled body.

But Jagaddal's days are numbered. Even Bimal loses patience with her erratic behaviour. Yet he cannot accept that Jagaddal is old and dying. He even feels



*The road to Bimal's
hideout*

that he has betrayed her somehow, this friend who feeds him in these troubled times. When the car finally breaks down, to make his amends, he decides to spend his life's savings to put her back on the road. The derision of the other taxi drivers only acts as a spur to his obsession. Gour Mistri, the mechanic, warns him not to fritter away his hard-earned money on a condemned bit of machinery. Even his little friend pleads with him to give up this madness. But Bimal is adamant. He works in a frenzy day and night, to get Jagaddal to move again.

The day comes when the last lick of paint has dried on Jagaddal. Bimal prepares for the test-run. He drives into the taxi stand in triumph, to the utter amazement of everybody around. Gour Mistri cannot believe his eyes. The other taxi drivers look crestfallen. Even the *paan* seller woman's raucous laughter is stilled.

The trial drive starts off well enough. But after a while, Jagaddal starts making strange noises. She almost stalls. Bimal in his frustration rushes to the wayside, picks up heavy boulders and dumps them on the back seat. It is his revenge. The car starts again, then lurches violently and reels back downhill, and finally comes to a stop. It is the ultimate betrayal. In a rage, Bimal drives his fist through the windscreen,

Jagaddal is sold as scrap to a dealer at two rupees a maund. Bimal bids farewell to Jagaddal: 'Go, dear friend. You've fed and clothed me long enough. After all, you can't do it forever.'

The runaway bride



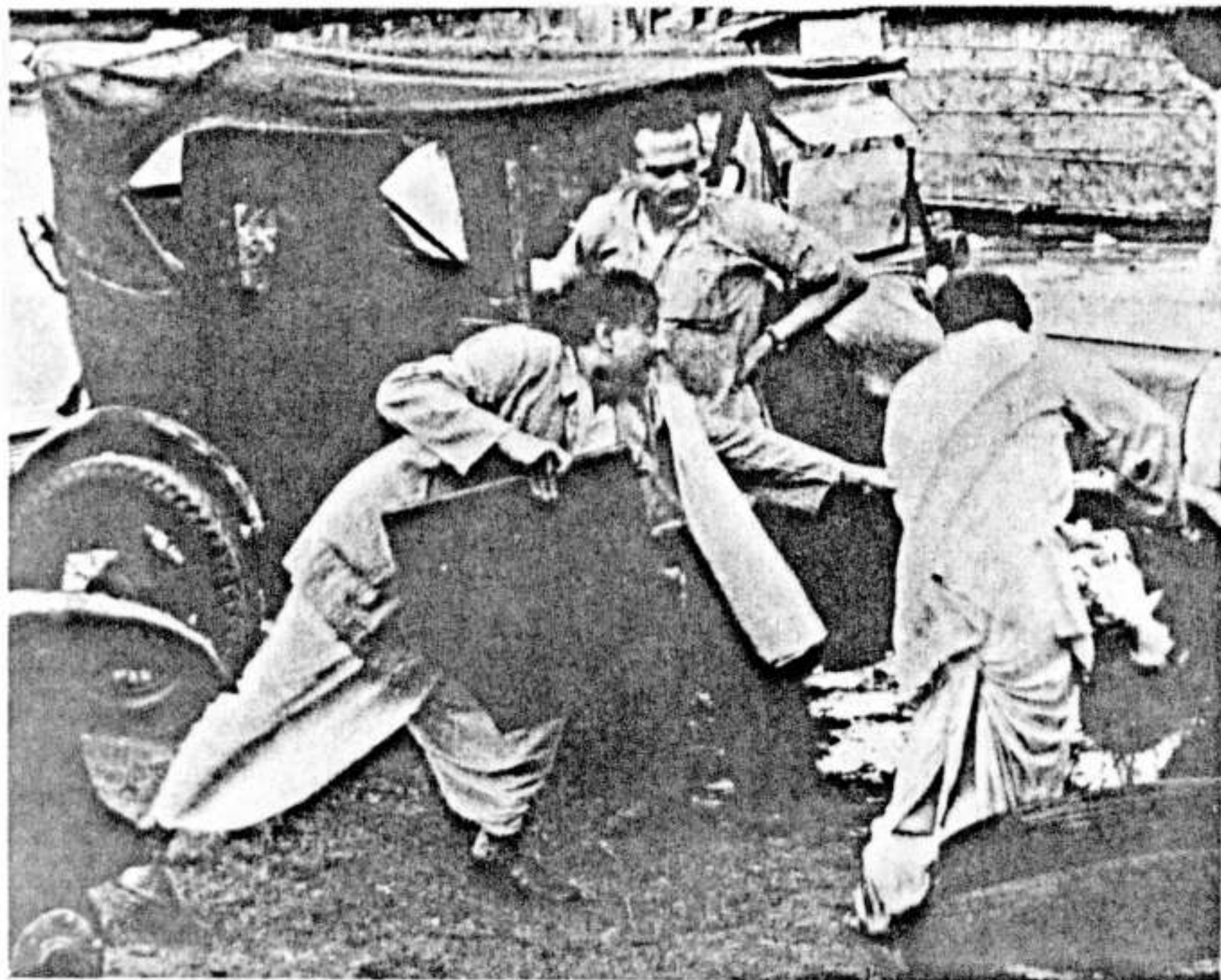
Jagaddal is torn to bits, put on a cart and hauled away. Her headlamps reflecting the sunlight, seem to give Bimal a last naughty wink. The cart trundles past Bimal. Suddenly, he hears the familiar sound of Jagaddal's horn. Bimal rushes out, only to find a child playing with the horn which the scrap dealer had thrown away. The child smiles at Bimal. Bimal smiles back through his tears.

THE SOUND OF LIFE

Karuna
Bandyopadhyay,
Bichinta vol. V

*A rough and tumble while
Bimal and Jagaddal
watch in silence*

Ajantrik swung into view in 1958 in the manner of a nonsense rhyme. The nature of the film, and its theme, were both startlingly new. Ritwik sees reality at the level of humour. The relationship between Bimal and his car, Jagaddal, may not be an everyday relationship. Yet it is certainly not unreal. There is no doubt that men like Bimal, or cars like Jagaddal, exist. Some of us have seen them with our own eyes, some of us haven't. The relationship is elemental, like that of tribals, or children. It is sometimes harsh (like the *paan* seller woman's grating laugh), sometimes gentle (like the young girl full of wonder at the moonlight streaming



through the torn canvas covering of the car). The love of Bimal and Jagaddal flows through many channels, until Jagaddal's death. But it is still not the end of the road. The little boy plays with the car horn. That is the last tune, the sound of new life.

THE ANIMATE AND THE INANIMATE

Kumar Shahani,
Filmfare 1976

Ajantrik (The Pathetic Fallacy) is probably his best known film in Europe. It deals with a taxi-driver and his relationship with his jalopy. The film humanizes the car but draws attention to the fallacy of investing an inanimate or a natural object with human feeling. He achieves this objectification by comic, picaresque treatment. Moreover, he shows the very source of 'animistic' belief in the excellent tribal sequence in the film. Unlike the films of other Bengali directors, working directly from the nineteenth century novel, the transference of human pathos to nature, takes place only in the minds of the characters, not in the organization of the director. After demonstrating the romantic extension of a character's sentiments into nature, Ritwik Ghatak immediately counterpoints it with his

*Bimal suspects his pas-
sengers of a lack of loy-
alty towards Jagaddal.*





The bridegroom's uncle
squeezes himself into
Bimal's car

Subrata
Bandyopadhyay,
Indian Cinema
'77/'78

distinctive 180° panoramics on empty landscapes. Nature, in the end, is grandly indifferent to human joy or sorrow.

Critics have seen in *Ajantrik* a study in human obsessions, and even an element of satire. The basic social content to my mind, has been missed by them. To me *Ajantrik* remains a rich experience of a study of a basically agrarian society moving towards industrialization. It has been handled with a great deal of tenderness and humour, arising out of the artistic exaggeration of humanizing the machine. Such a treatment could have only been possible in the cinema, and that too by a director who had already grasped the language of the medium.

It was possible for Ritwik to get away with this seeming unreality, by placing it in the background of the tribal areas, with their child-like primitive myths. It was bold of Ritwik to suggest, through the various episodes, that the machine is not the end. It is only the beginning. Life continues, though on a different plane, as the boy plays with the discarded horn of the dead car. Despite Ritwik's obsession with human suffering and death, he is no pessimist. Practically every film of his ends on this note of the continuity of life. As he has

Ritwik Ghatak,
Movie Montage 1967

himself said, 'Through decay I see life. I believe in the continuity of life.'

GHATAK'S COMMENTS

You can call my protagonist, Bimal, a lunatic, a child, or a tribal. At one level, they are all the same. They all react to lifeless things almost passionately. This is an ancient, archetypal reaction. The child's imaginings of fear at the sight of a lifeless object, the madman's anger at seeing clouds, and the tribal investing a railway train with godhead, they are all the same process.

The tribal songs and dances in *Ajantrik* describe the whole cycle of life-birth, hunting, marriage, death, ancestor worship, and rebirth.

This is the main theme in *Ajantrik*, this law of life the cruelty inherent in the madman's forgetting his beloved old tub after getting a new one, and right at the end the child playing with the car horn, the sound of which makes Bimal smile with a new realization—both these sequences describe the same thing. It is a variation on a minor scale of the main theme, a sort of echo, something that is essential for any symphonic structure.

My mistake was that I did not introduce the idea through popular symbols. But the background and the theme did not allow me to do so. So it had to remain esoteric, and could not be comprehended universally.