



Rituparno Ghosh: Gender Portrayer in the Modern Society

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I. INTRODUCTION

When we are here to talk about Rituparno Ghosh, what comes to our mind is a person with utmost zeal and vigor, who wants to break the shackles of the orthodox society, and who subtly presents the different facets of feminine emotions bogged down by male chauvinism. That's Rituparno Ghosh, the man who showed society to embrace our inner soul through his incredible films. He always wanted to eradicate social taboos, especially with respect to the inequality of genders. He in his inner self felt the deep pangs they suffered in our society.

Rituparno Ghosh (31 August 1963 – 30 May 2013) was an Indian film director, actor, writer, and lyricist. After pursuing a degree in economics, he started his career as a creative artist at an advertising agency. Ghosh came into the scene when Bengali Cinema was wheezing for breath, having been heaved down over nearly two decades. His stories were gasping for fresh breath full of creativity and new perspective. His way of telling stories was quite different from that of others. He was widely influenced by the works of Satyajit Ray and inspired by Rabindranath Tagore, he had always used Tagore's songs in his movies. While writing this down, it is hard to believe that such a talent is no more.

In this paper, I will focus on a few of his works and analyze them from the perspective of gender. Four movies are taken into consideration for the analysis.

HYPOTHESIS

- Women are given significant importance in Rituparno Ghosh's films.
- Through his works, gender equality is always in focus
- His films portrayed LGBTQ community to change the mindset of the society to be more liberal.

II. OBJECTIVE

From our early childhood, we read in books and saw in movies and were brought up in a society that till date looks down upon women in a totally different perspective to that of men. Not only in respect of male and female but also if we talk about transgenders or the LGBTQ, every one of them faces a lot of problems. Initially, it didn't strike us till the time we were in our primary school days. After a certain age, we realized the reality with respect to the inequality of genders. If I talk about the current scenario, I should definitely acknowledge the change in mindset and the perspective of the current generation. What struck me most is that what is being legalized after such a long time in respect of equality towards gender was portrayed by Rituparno Ghosh in his films with the retrospective period back drop. After I watched his films, I felt that our feelings were portrayed by him in his films in a vivid and unambiguous manner. I felt that someone is there by our side who can speak galore in our thoughts.

The paper is written to study the women projection and characters that have always fanned the female sexuality and freedom and scuttled against the main principles of creating a stereotypical image of characters in Bollywood. He raucously confronted the accepted dynamics of supremacy equations between male and female, among males, between parents and their kids, and between heterosexual and queer groups.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology consists of two parts namely Data Survey & Content Analysis. Due to the lockdown situation, I was unable to collect data. Hence, I am presenting only Content Analysis.

“**Arekti Premer Golpo**” was his first film after the decriminalization of 377. It is about the Delhi-based transgender and clearly portrays filmmaker Abhiroop Sen’s liking toward his partner Basu Kumar, a choreographer. The main character, Chapal Rani, is a woman trapped in a man’s body and has been jammed in a time twist where he is left with only two options: either behave like a man and be a part of this duplicitous society or have to give up everything for the sake of embracing the inner woman in himself. The film describes the different sexual orientations and identities across two generations. His film, “Chitrangada” is about acceptance of a person’s identity. The film is not just about sexuality or one’s own identity but about the story of a choreographer. Ghosh being gay had a complete understanding of the role and has done justice to his role as Rudra, the protagonist.

How the blissful universe of a recently married bride suddenly turns into a miserable one after she undergoes the embarrassment of being ill-treated by roadside eve teasers is the focus of the plot in the film “**Dahan**” which is based on a real-life incident in the city of Kolkata. Rituparna Sengupta along with Indrani Halder won the Best Actress National Award for their alluring performance in the movie. His films often portrayed intimate scenes more enthusiastically than what the norm is in Tollywood, at the risk of chopping off into a broader gamut of audiences. While “**Chokher Bali**” (2003), based on Rabindranath Tagore’s distinctive novel of the same name, distinguishes the female ambitions of a married woman and widow—the former with its social sanction, if not restricted, to accomplish itself, and the latter with its strict prohibition on any form of satisfaction. Ghosh has created a visual presentation of Tagore’s works like “**Chokherbali**” and “**Chitrangada**” and has created a standard in portraying a whole new lot of women characters that talk a lot about the spirit of empowered women.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

During the course of the analysis of the phenomenal works of Rituparno Ghosh, one of the legendary film directors of parallel and intellectual cinema, we have come across many nuances of life which have a deep effect on the present society. Rituparno, through his films, tried to point out the fallacies that lay inbuilt in our orthodox society.

In “**Arekti Premer Golpo**,” the different human emotions are well portrayed by Ghosh. The beautiful scene where Chapal Bhaduri is conversing with Abhiroop Sen (Rituparno Ghosh) about life and how his life was, and somehow listening to that story, Abhiroop kind of related himself with him and understood the pain and agony Chapal went through and the pain in real Abhiroop is going through all his life to get Basu in his life, the way Chapal Bhaduri wanted Kumar in his life. The film shows a homosexual love story as the prime plot contrary to the general trend of putting this kind of love story as a secondary theme. There is a scene where Chapal Bhaduri is doing his makeup to play the character of Goddess Sitala in his biography. Meanwhile, Abhiroop comes and says that the shoot may not continue because the villagers think that they might be infected with pox even if it is in reel life. Because of this non-sensuous superstition the villagers are not even allowing the shooting to take place in the village of Hetampur. At this juncture Chapal breaks down and has a very sad and deserted look on his face. He says that “*tahole ki make up ta tule felbo*” in a somber voice. This scene depicts the blind superstitions of the illiterate villagers. The frustration and dejection of a person of not being able to complete his job is well established in the film by the director.

In “**Dahan**” at the very outset of the movie a scene at Tollygunge Metro Station, a couple is seen walking alongside the footpath. The husband goes to get paan (betel leaf) at the request of his wife who waits near the Metro station. Soon some goons are seen gathering around the lady and start teasing her. The lady then shouts at her husband but to see that she is sexually molested and assaulted by the miscreants. Soon there starts a hustle and bustle between the husband and the goons. Public vehicles were going but most of the passengers were not bothered at the incident. But only one brave lady Jhinuk (Indrani Halder) stopped and took the initiative at the accident. The scene depicts actual reality of our society where the men only talk about chivalry in their drawing room, but when the actual need arises, they shut their eyes and get themselves busy in their own activities and avoid social responsibility. The acting was done by Rituparno in such a way that everyone can easily personify oneself. The humiliation faced by the family in such a crisis situation is depicted in a very sensible manner.

“**Choker Bali**” was one of the masterpieces works of Rituparno Ghosh. In the entire film each and every character had different shades which were well cinematographed by Ghosh. The subtle essence of emotions was well presented in the film. The beautiful scene where Ashalata is seen washing her face after returning from Sindur Khela post immersion of Goddess Durga and Binodini was helping Ashalata in washing her face. Binodini did not at all like the glowing look of a bride in Ashalata’s face as she herself, being a widow, was debarred from all these rituals. At times Binodini restrained herself in her help to wash the face of Ashalata as she was feeling jealous of her. That jealous and sunk look was very much portrayed by Binodini. Ghosh depicted these subtle looks in these characters very well in his movie. Rituparno in this movie has very well portrayed the class difference between the educated and the illiterate women.

“**Chitrangada**” is a film of hope, desire, validation, and existence to live as per the choice of your gender and not what is given naturally or forcefully made by society to abide by. A kind of autobiographical by Rituparno Ghosh, as in, the film with all bits and pieces of emotion, suffering, loneliness, desire, and hope is a phenomenal masterpiece by Ghosh himself which definitely created a history in Bengali cinema. Every action with the opposite reaction in each and every scene is well established. Ghosh himself acted extremely well in the film. The last film of his life which will always be remembered as one of the best works of him. The dialogue presentation with a subtle gloomy atmosphere enhanced the whole movie to another level. The character of Partho (Jisshu Sengupta) was extremely accomplishing and very well portrayed. The vivacious, energetic, and passionate love between Rudra (Rituparno) and Partho was established in a very poignant manner. The scene where Rudra and Partho were conversing about having a baby and how Rudra was extremely passionate about changing his sex to get an adoption procedure very easily was so wonderfully depicted. The love of Rudra for Partho is very well portrayed in the movie with each and every scene totally engrossing.

Rituparno Ghosh said, “SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS, TOO, ARE EXTREMELY SOULFUL, EMOTIONAL AND HAVE THE SAME PATHOS THAT ANY HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP HAS.”

IV. CONCLUSION

The Bengali filmmaker has influenced a majority of the sexual minority community through his films, writings, talk shows, and heroic sartorial statements. Ghosh’s films made a mark in starting a pungent critique of heteropatriarchy, often illuminating the reality behind apparently happy marriages, romantic relationships, and familial equations. He emphasized the notions of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. Middle-class Bengali, simultaneously conservative and well-schooled, a deadly combination, is obsessed with appearances and maintaining the status quo. He received recognition for his second feature film *Unishe April* which won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film. Having won 19 National Awards, along with his contemporaries Aparna Sen and Goutam Ghose, Rituparno heralded contemporary Bengali cinema to greater heights. Ghosh was also one of the openly queer personalities in Indian culture. Ghosh was influenced by the works of Satyajit Ray and was an avid reader of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore's work is frequently referenced in his films. He also made a documentary titled “*Jeevan Smriti*” on the life of Tagore. In his career spanning almost two decades, he won 12 National and numerous International awards. His unreleased Bengali movie *Sunglass* (also known as *Taak Jhaank*) was honoured and released at the 19th Kolkata International Film Festival. Films like *Dosar*, *Shubha Mahurat*, and *Abohaman* showcased Ghosh’s utmost talent and won awards and critical extol worldwide. In films like *Unishe April*, *Dahan* (Crossfire, 1998) *Asukh* (Malaise, 1999) *Utsab* (Festival, 2000) or invoked wistfulness for feudal magnificence in his period pieces, such as *Antarmahal* (Views of an Inner Chamber, 2005) and *Chokher Bali* (The Passion Play, 2003) Ghosh mostly restrained himself to the setting of the bourgeois living room. Ghosh died on 30 May 2013 in Kolkata after a heart attack and left the Bengali cinema world with utter darkness.

From the above content analysis, the hypothesis has been proved and it can be seen that his immense works had portrayed women in a more significant than before, and transgenders, equality of genders got utmost importance. He died while experimenting with his own body and we lost a real gem. Rituparno tried his best to talk about himself through the films and wanted to feel and experience what his soul wanted, fighting for that, he left us.

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