

Ritwik Ghatak; - Impact and Influence

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Abstract

Ritwik Ghatak, a legendary personality of twentieth century, was an outstanding contemporary Bengali film-maker, along with Satyajit Roy and Mrinalsen. Life was a challenge and film-making was a passion to this man of fervor. Just before the time of 1943 Bangladesh Famine, Ritwik, like other millions of refugees came to India, when men were striving for a piece of bread and shelter. The division of Bengal and the sufferings of the entire human race were beyond description. This man, with an enormous love for his fellow beings, started writing stories and directing films, in order to express his protest, anger and grief. One after another extraordinary creations emerged and the creator remained silent. This silence was more powerful than making a vibrant noise. Ajantrik, Meghe Dhaka Tara, Subarnarekha, Titas Ekti Nadir Nam and many other incredible works illuminated the film industry with a light of realistic idealism. Life was so difficult at that time and death was even easier, this truth was a painful realization of this legend. Trough out his career Ritwik was a diverse personality, to whom, film was not an entertainment, a source of money making procedure, but a medium, that can express the root of the inner diseases and dissatisfactions of individuals and the society as a whole. The modern world, its deep rooted social inequalities and the discontentment of each and every individual are compelling us, sadly, to remember the problems, depicted by Sri Ritwik at the time of the second decade of the twentieth century. Let us remember him for at least once more if we sincerely want to recognize our faults and rectify them for the benefit of the people world-wide.

KEYWORDS-Refugee, Famine, Suffering, Creation. Melodrama, Reality, Discontentment

Introduction—

Literature and films always depicts the socio-cultural phenomenon of a society. So when we try to evaluate any society and discuss its historical and socio-political background its literature and culture help us a lot. Even the analysis of a particular individual also needs a typical socio-cultural background. Here I tried to portray the impact and influence of Sri Ritwik Ghatak, a man with unparalleled genius, on Indian culture and society. Actually this man was one of those millions of victims of the division of Bengal in 1947. His feelings and experiences of life are an authentic evidence of those tremendous griefs and miserable situations that the people of Bengal and other parts of India experienced at that time. Ritwik Ghatak lost his childhood, his belongings, and his fellow men at his early age. A tremendous trauma and agony made him understood the real reality of life. Pain and pain only was actually the fact which he experienced at that moment. So we see when he started making films his own sorrow and loss got a channel to reveals themselves. Many criticizes Ghatak for his melodramatic cinematography and a stereo type film making. But Ghatak himself admitted that a man with broken roots cannot give a constructive thinking and a smooth manufacture. In all his films Ghatak then showed the sufferings of unhappy

families, the diseases of human societies and the uncertainty of human life. We see in his films the socio-political and socio-cultural status of those days Bengal which has been displayed properly and analytically. His films never gives us the flavor of commercial films and the enjoyments it provides, but we can see the reality and limitations of human lives here. We can experience the inhuman man-made incidents which destitute the whole life of an individual in particular and the entire society as well as a country as a whole. In this paper my humble attempt is to show the real man behind a renowned film maker and to seek the real background of Sri Ritwik Ghatak, an unforgettable and extraordinary personality of twentieth century Bengal.

Full Paper --

This is, on my part, I really think, a difficult, as well as a desperate attempt, to say something or discuss exactly what the man, the legendary personality, Sri Ritwik Ghatak originally was, and what fabulous his contribution is, in the field of Indian Cinema. But at the same time, I think, though not scholarly approach, a sincere attempt must be made to realize and appraise this extraordinarily talented filmmaker, writer, artist and above all a person, who, all through his life, tried to portray the terrifying miseries of the millions of his fellow being, who were the victims of the painful partition of Bengal. He earnestly tried to revive the lost cultural unity of Bengal, by remembering us, the real value of our heritage, our family bonding, and the sacrifices of our ever forgiving and extremely forbearing mothers. Above all, he made us conscious about the disastrous state of our beloved motherland which was a reverent place of rich philosophy and religion, with all its magnificence and glory in the earlier period. In this attempt I will try to discuss the impact of the Partition of Bengal on Ghatak's entire life and on his various films, and also, the underlying psychological set up of Ghatak, that worked as a latent force behind his every creation, to make them unique and worth remembering forever. Though this task is not very easy, let us try our best to recognize and realize Ghatak, in order to share his unspoken grief which, he had tolerated till the date of 6th February in 1976, when he breathed his last.

Ritwik Ghatak was born in Dhaka in 1952. He spent his early life there, in a well to do family. But the Bengal Famine (1943-44), World War 11 and finally the partition of Bengal in 1947 forced him to come to Calcutta, a new place with new people and in an unknown disconcerted future. "As estimated ten million people, Primarily Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, were forced over the next months to abandon the homes that they had lived in for generations and to migrate. Muslim fled to West and East Pakistan, Hindus and Sikhs to India. Families were divided, friends and neighbors were left behind, and an immense mass confusion developed as to where to go and what to expect when they got there. All of these factors created tremendous tension which led to the religious hatred. Riots and murders that ushered in India's independence from Britain and the birth of Pakistan." (The Article "Woman" and "homeland" in Ritwik Ghatak's films: Constructing post-independence Bengali cultural identity" by Erin O'Donnell). Ritwik joined the IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) and the CPI (Communist Party of India), those days, as history says. Afterwards, he left both of these two, for some controversial reasons. Primarily he acted in some group theatres and in films but the process of building up himself as an eminent filmmaker had been started already within him on those days.

Ghatak's first film Chinnamul in 1952 was not published due to some superfluous reasons. In 1958 he made 'Ajantrik' and in 1960 'Meghe Dhaka Tara'. In 1961 came 'Komol Gandhar' and in 1965 'Subarnarekha'. 'TitasEkti Nadir Nam', Ritwik directed this film in 1971 and in 1974 we got 'Jukti, Takko o Goppo'. In all the said films, Ritwik in his own style, tried to convey the reality in its actual form. He never imitated the so called Bollywood like commercial cinematography. In his films the audience always experienced something real that somehow coincide with the sufferings and deprivations that they had been experienced before or were still then the victims of those happenings, provided by some unavoidable political and economic instability in the country. Life was not a bed of roses for Ritwik. Actually the Partition of Bengal in 1947, snatched away his childhood and adolescence from him compellingly. He lost his basic foundations of life, and this scarcity, led him to the world of discontentment, agony, unrest and uncertainty. He, in his interview said once, that it is not possible to create something valuable and worth remembering, without being attached with one's own root. Actually, he wanted to mean that, a man, who had lost his own land and everything that was intensely near and dear to him, which was his soul and substance, that particular individual could never be able to create and show the life as it really is. He pointed out that at the beginning of a new creation, if someone, lost the precious treasures of his life behind and cannot incorporate his priceless experiences of life with the present scenario, then, though he or she may be able to imagine an indistinct future but the absence of the forgotten past never provides him the material that is necessary for practical maturity.

Ritwik Ghatak was exclusively different from his other contemporary film directors. Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen somehow were also different from him in making films and directing the same. Sometimes they also criticized Ghatak in many respects. Here we will find, what psychological, as well as philosophical ideal Ghatak already had in mind, which really, in fact, worked as a vital force behind his unique as well as distinctive mind set, because without this fundamental basis our judgments, regarding Ghatak's uniqueness will not be reasonable and satisfactory.

Ritwik was a blind follower of Carl Gustav Ewing, the famous psychologist. There was a time when Ghatak was a sincere follower of Karl Marx. But there is no reason of deriving the conclusion from this that Ghatak ideologically switched to Ewing from Marx. On the contrary he tried to show that these two personalities actually had cultivated two different aspects of human life, and so, there is no inherent contradiction between them. Ghatak said in one of his interviews that; collective unconscious rigorously affects the unconscious behavior of the human being, and the entire class structure determines the conscious behavior of an individual. So, if we want to analyze unconscious, such as dream world, we must consider Ewing. The theory of Ewing is Analytical Psychology. The basis of his analysis is unconscious mind. His autobiography, 'Memories, Dreams, Reflections', starts with this line, "My life is a story of the self-realization of the unconscious." ('Memories, Dreams, Reflections', Carl Gustav Jung, Fontana Press, 1995, P-17). Ewing believed that collective unconscious is the main source of our behavior, not the individual unconscious, as depicted by Freud. Ewing proclaimed that a hereditary factor of primordial origin engraved in the living organic system of the man, an imprint of 'archetype' of all the ancestral experiences. For example, everyone carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman but a definite feminine image. This image is fundamentally unconscious. Here it will be very relevant to quote these lines from C.G.jung, "In every individual, in addition to

the personal memories, there are also, in Jacob Burckhardt's phrase, the great "primordial images," the inherited potentialities of human imagination. They have always been latent in the structure of the brain. Here it is a matter of the manifestation of the deeper layers of the unconscious, where the primordial universally-human images are lying dormant." (The personal and the Impersonal Unconscious, Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology, C.G.Jung, Second Edition, Edited by Dr.Constance E.Long, London, Bailliere Tindal And Cox, 1917, P - 410).

Ritwik Ghatak's trilogy, 'Meghe Dhaka Tara', 'Komol Gandhar', 'Subarnarekha', categorically evoked the creator's inner beliefs, and Ghatak himself was of the opinion that in these three extraordinarily unique films, three women characters were actually the outcome of his inner subconscious image of eternal womanhood and that they represent the whole class of women deprived, oppressed, sacrificed for the welfare of a family or a society or sometimes for the whole system. Nita, in 'Meghe Dhaka Tara', Anasua in 'Komol Gandhar', Sita in 'Subarnarekha' are the feminine images through which Ritwik tried to reveal the 'eternal woman' who sometimes approach as sister, sometimes as wife and sometimes as mother. This was, no doubt, an ever new approach. In Bengali Cinema Ghatak introduced a new era which the Bengali audience never had experienced. In these films, Ritwik depicted the nostalgic image of pre-partition Bengali families, their values, their bondings. But at the same time, the Partition of Bengal and its terrible consequences which he himself had experienced, led him to feature the instability of those families, the ridiculous and tremendous selfish human characters and the insecurities of individual life and society as a whole. Some says that Ghatak had introduced melodramatic feature films, most of which may be criticized as not having a constructive way of representation of the genuine problems that were actually prevalent at that time in India. But these criticisms are also not the last words about Ritwik. He is far beyond of these critical analyses, for, he created legends, and that and we have realized this truth after his demise.

Ritwik once went to Bangladesh, as the Bangladesh Government had requested him to make a film over there. It was 1971 after Bangladesh achieved independence. He decided to make a film on the novel 'TitasEkti Nadir Nam' by Advaita Mallabarman. He (the writer) was 'malo' by race. Ritwik made that film. The main theme of this film was the life of the 'Malo's' who were once the happy inhabitants near the bank of the river Titas. In this film Ritwik showed, how, in the course of time the river Titas dried up and the Malo people became homeless. The place, at last, got captured by the so called industrialists and landlords. The ill-fated people lost in the darkness of poverty and despair. Here the social, economic and cultural life of the said race had been depicted truly, and in genuine sympathy. 'Basanti' is the prime character in this film and as usual Ritwik constructed her, in such a way that, in this character we again can discover the eternal image of womanhood. So, here also the influence of Ewing is very prominent. Some says that in this film also Ritwik could not give a strong and prominent story just like he had failed to construct a solid narrative in his other films. But the director was of the opinion that the later Bangladesh was so scattered and different from the previous one, in the lap of whom he had spent his childhood, that the pain didn't allow him to compose a film that can give the audience a smooth feeling of a fairy tale. Ritwik was really shocked and throughout his life he wanted to overcome his shadowy past, but he failed. In many of his films he tried to emerge a society and construct a family full of happiness and optimism. The reason is nothing, but he always wanted a completely novel society, he wished to see India, his country,

with full of ecstasy and elegance. The destruction and separation of the country was so painful to him and heart-breaking that, people like Ritwik, were get ruined from inside. So, we see, though in his films 'melodrama' is prevalent but it had sufficient reasons. We must try to understand with apt compassion, the real background of Ritwik's life and creations. If we do this sincerely, we will be truly eligible for reviewing Ghatak's contribution in the period of 1960-1976 Bengali cinemas.

The last but not the least, 'Jukti,Takko o Goppo' the final creation of Sri Ghatak,'(Arguments and a Story'). In his interview which is depicted in 'Chitrabikkhan', he once said that everyone is fond of story or novel and so he is giving them a story. It was actually some arguments, and was completely a political film. Sugata Sinha in his book,'Jukti...takko..Ritwik' has quoted these lines in their original language, in Bengali.(p-39). In this film Ritwik has discussed political issues in details. Nilkantha is the prime character in this film. With Bangabala, whom he gave shelter once in her distress and Nachiketa, his companion, an engineer Nilkantha was roaming in various parts of the country for a secure shelter. Durga, Nilkantha's wife had left him long before with her child Sattya. At last Nilkantha took shelter in a terrorist camp. Here, we got a long conversation between Nilkantha and the terrorists regarding the political ambiance of the state. Lots of arguments put forward there, in search of a favorable political situation that may bring peace and solidarity in this country. But no definite conclusion came out till the end. At last Nilkantha died with other terrorists in a police encounter. In this film Ghatak could not give any specific decision regarding his preferred political idealism. Ritwik said that he himself was totally confused as what condition or system could be just or perfect for the Indian society at that time. This was the story of 'Jukti,Takkoogoppo.'

Such was Sri Ritwik, our favorite Ritwik Ghatak. We must feel proud for having such a genius with us. We, the Bengalese are really fortunate that Ray, Sen and Ghatak like directors have born here in Bengal and made this place a worth remembering one. Ritwik was a man who witnessed a lot of social, political as well as economic ups and downs that took place in Bengal in particular and in India in general, at a certain period of time. His experience was profound and ample. His analysis and observations were a class a-part. "Ghatak was out spoken concerning India's Independence and Partition. In response to an interview's question regarding what personal truth had inspired his films, stories and plays, Ghatak replied, 'Being a Bengali from East Bengal, I have seen the untold miseries on my people in the name of Independence-which is a fake and a sham. I have reacted violently towards this and I have tried to portray different aspects of this [in my films]'. " (The Article "Woman" and "homeland" in RitwikGhatak's films: Constructing post-independence Bengali cultural identity" by Erin O'Donnell).

Ritwik truly gave us a distinct thought, a novel idea and an extraordinary way of making cinematography that was completely different from the so called popular and commercial cinematography. He had no lust for wealth, no greed for recognition and fame. He struggled for his lost existence all through his life, shouted like Nita in "Meghe Dhaka Tara", who was asking for a mere valued life. He wanted to live in Bengal with other fellow being, in a peaceful ambiance. He loved Bengal, his fellow brothers and sisters sincerely and hoped for a prosperous, graceful India. His pain, his hope, his talent and everything what he had, is now a history. But his splendid creations are with us even today, and will remain forever, which are sufficient enough

to make us feel proud of this great fellow, with due respect, for the generations to come.

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