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Sense of Existentialism in the River-centric Films: *Padma Nodir Majhi* and *Titas Ekti Nodir Nam*

Film Analysis

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Abstract

The present study deals with the cultural and existential viewpoints in *Padma Nodir Majhi*, a 1993 film directed by Goutam Ghose and *Titas Ekti Nodir Nam*, a 1973 film by Ritwik Ghatak. Both movies were made after the celebrated novels in similar titles, respectively, by Manik Bandopadhyay and Adwaita Mallabarman. Both stories were centred through the river-dimensional themes and cultures. The novels and the movies depict the river-centric traditional life of the fishermen's families. The study finds that the movies vividly show the poverty-stricken lives of the fishermen, hedonistic beliefs, rustic cultures, existentialism and the then lifestyle of the people of that area.

Keywords: Culture, existentialism, river-centric life, contemporary social panorama

1. Introduction

The film is a cultural artifact. It has a little time-capsule of the time and era and culture in which it was born. Films often make commentary on the times in which they are created. In this way, a film forever holds clues to the thinking of the era. We use films to reflect our emotions- we laugh, we cry, we get terrified, we worry, we hope. It can be a very cathartic experience.

The film is the most accessible of all the arts in many ways. Many people around the world may never visit some of the best museums, but nearly everyone may have seen a movie at some point in their life. The film allows us to explore the complexities of the human situation. Sometimes that exploration takes place in the dramatic, but sometimes it happens to be funny. A good film is a combination of emotions and feelings which mingle harmonies and miseries along with adventures and romances at the same time. Generally, a good film will look at one or two important questions or themes and spend some time exploring the answers. Great films usually do not reveal the answers- they just leave the mystery for the audience to decide by themselves. We often want to explore different lives and places and things than those that look like our own. Films tap into that very ancient art of storytelling. The film is just a very high adaptation of that craft.

However, this paper would focus on Bengali literature implemented in Bengali films through direct textual references and subtler assertions. Central discussion of this project would be *Padma Nodir Majhi* and *Titas Ekti Nodir Nam* to analyze other films. Padma Nodir Majhi (translation: Boatman of the River Padma) (1993) is an Indo-Bangladesh shared production feature film directed

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by Goutam Ghose from the novel of Manik Bandopadhyay of a similar name. This novel is also based on the sufferings and hedonic hope of the rustic people of Bangladesh. Then comes Titas Ekti Nodir Nam (translation: A River Called Titas), is a 1973 Bangladeshi film directed by Ritwik Ghatak. The movie was centred on a novel by Adwaita Mallabarman. The film explores the lives of the fishermen on the bank of the Titas river at Brahmanbaria in Bangladesh.

The current study deals with these two Bengali movies based on the famous novels of Bangladeshi literature to depict and represent the driver-centric culture and the lifestyle of the inhabitants in these areas who bear a deep sense of existentialism. The paper aims at bringing out the sense of existentialism that resides in every human being. The study will make out the existential panorama to represent the identities, communities, languages, hedonisms, and cultural issues of Bangladesh systematically before the nation by observing the films *Padma Nodir Majhi* and *Titas Ekti Nodir Nam* that are primarily based on legendary works of Bengali literature. The present study intends to portray the existentialism in both films vividly and to prove whether those films have utilitarian impacts and universal appeal upon the nation's life or not. The study also deals with whether those films are amply successful in characterization, plot, setting, and overall presentation, and whether any slight change or contortion occurred in making the films hold the strong existentialistic attitude or not.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted through the observation method. The authors analyzed all those movies critically and subtly. The study used the descriptive approach utilizing qualitative methods such as observational studies and analyzing existing information in the related field. The study depicts the situation as observed in harmony with the conceptual analyses of the researcher. The researcher finds out the balance between the celluloid and the realistic lifestyle from the selected movies. By using this method, the researchers go through different literary articles, critical compositions, and websites to find related study materials, to be acknowledged in the related topics and collects critical books, existing relevant information in the same field and journal articles from different libraries to have technical information on both the films and the literary works to compose the thesis in a more credible way.

3. Existential Perspectives in the Film *Padma Nodir Majhi*

The film deals with certain chronic and cultural aspects of typical Bengali society. The film emerged the basic everyday life in the slums of fishermen on the banks of Padma stream. *Padma Nodir Majhi* is centred around the life, occupation, language, culture of a specific section of people dependent on the bank of stream Padma of Bangladesh. The film has flawlessly portrayed the socio-economic existence of those people, their joys and sorrows, their likings and dislikings, culture and customs they follow, the ethical quality they group and the hardships they bear each day. This film portrays the intense poverty of the fishermen's society and their struggles for existence where limitation, restriction, love, harmony, and dream are blended together. The story doesn't just represent the fishermen's neediness-ridden lives but also draws a similarity like the ampleness of the river individuals also have selfless hearts. As the stream changes its conduct with changing seasons, people also have different shades of their life that might swing with time or circumstance (Biswas, 2011). The central character Kubir, played by Raisul Islam Asad, is a tall, lashing fisherman and his wife Mala. The husband, who is a fisherman, goes through extreme difficulties to make money for his family. Beginning arrangements portray the abuse of these hopeless people, where their well-deserved gets procure a wage at the market. Indeed, even inhabitants from the local remove fish from them without paying on a few events. At the point when a storm destroys their catch, most of them are constrained into penury. Hossain Miya and his associate offer further abuse in the pretense of help, and Hossain seems like a heavenly messenger in disguise. The island of Moynadeep, a representation and a myth discovered, created, and owned by Hossain, offers help to the fisherfolk when they are in a tough situation. He sees no difference amongst people dependent on strict

personality; however, Rashu and Aminuddin get back from Moynadeep broken and shredded, portraying a shocking tale of their experience on the island. Despite such conditions like the flooding tides of Padma stream his affection for his sister-in-law Kapila overflows the edge of his heart. Kuber is ignorant yet he realizes that he is in a forbidden relationship and will carry destruction to his family, however it is all a result of the ready youth and womanhood that Kapila possessed Kuber and made him drawn to her over and over. This film brilliantly pictured Kuber and Kapila's secret relationship that would sometimes bloom and sometimes shrink within the limits of society; however, they have never allowed them to drift away in it. One day a storm ascends in the Padma River and leaves behind a path of destruction. Kubir tells his wife "Padda amago joto daay abar totoi loy" (It is the valid Padma gives us huge, however consequently, it likewise takes a great deal from us). In the interim, Kubir's daughter's marriage shattered. Rasu proposes to wed her. Even though Rasu was near Kubir, he refuses the proposal because of the age gap between Rasu and Kubir's daughter. Here we can see existentialism as Kubir give words to Rashu but he denied and this incident turns the fate of Kubir's future. Rasu becomes enraged and takes steps to destroy Kubir. Existentialism greatly revolves around the absolute importance of the conscious subject over everything. Sometimes individual suffers from his internal failure to change and fit the world; sometimes external forces crush the individual and intensifies their crisis. Such was his affection for her that when close to the furthest limit of the story he was being driven away from Ketupur for Mayanadweep because of the intrigue plotted by Hussain, Kuber took his sister-in-law Kapila with him in a boat leaving everything after. The film has successfully picturized two aspects of the fishermen's life. One is the daily life and difficulty of the fishermen community of the ground, and the other being the conspiracy impressed by Hussain Mia to populate Mayanadweep. On the off chance that the latter is kept aside, we will see a detailed and sensible image of the social construction of the fishermen's society, their struggles, their felicity, the family bonds they group and the daily life they experience (Chatterji, 2021).

4. Sense of Existentialism in Ghatak's *Titas Ekti Nodir Nam*

Since the very advent of their training, Bangladesh is heavily dependent on its rivers for people's livelihood. Rivers are often referred to as 'mothers', providing everything for a living. Ritwik Ghatak's film *Titas Ekti Nodir Nam* wonderfully depicts people's reliance upon the rivers with their destiny linked to the rivers. Ghatak, in his film, uses powerful symbolism for the preface that the river played inside the characters and the manner of the civilization around it (Ray, 2021). This conflict of perception towards the river effectively emerges Ghatak's representation of the fishing community from their relationship with the river because it induces fear among the people of the community of fishermen to perceive the river as a formidable force, and its ways are arbitrary. Ghatak's film is one of the earliest cinematic examples where narrating follows an anomalistic style. It is a style of epic storytelling where several characters from seemingly unrelated stories appear in the narrative, roughly from one character's story to another. The movie, based on the autobiographical novel by author Adwaita Mallabarman, portrays the narrative of the Malo clan on the banks of the Titas River in Brahmanbaria, Bangladesh. *A River Called Titas* opens with a shot that portends the film's consummation of a dried, or drying, river bowl. Adjacent to the river, the real figures in the story are tragic couples.

In the first place, we see a girl as Basanti (Rosy Samad), who desires to marry Kishore (Probir Mitra), a fisherman. Kishore and his companion Subol set out on a fishing trip where Kishore **rescues** Rajar Jhi (Kabari Choudhury) and weds her, aiming to return her to his village. On the return journey, robbers despoil the young bride. She escapes into the stream, and Kishore thinks she is dead, and he goes mad. Kishor supposes that he will never see his married wife again, a woman he barely remembered because a fleeting night of intimacy was all they had. He returns to his village, a disturbed man living in the middle but isolated from society. Basanti ends up wedding Subol instead. However, she also has possible happiness devoured up by the river when Subol is sunken in a boating mishap on the day of their wedding. Ten years pass. Rajar Jhi, having been recently taken in by another town whose fisherman found her on the banks of the Titas, arrives in the town with her

young child, Ananta. They are looking for refuge. Rajar Jhi does not perceive Kishore, or Kishore also does not recognize Rajar jhi because he's still insane. She turns into a figure of conflict in that place since her situation conflicts with the customary thoughts regarding marriage and bringing up a child. Basanti becomes a close acquaintance with Rajar jhi, helping with supporting her and Ananta, against her own parents' desires. The two women make a friendship that is fortified in the implicit sense each has of their shared misfortunes (Loar, 2011). Human life develops depending on society. A river-centric film is one in which the river is the focus to influence explicitly or implicitly peoples, livelihood, life, trade, culture, economy, which preserves the picture of those livelihoods and lives or the provincial and spiritual feelings of human beings (Gope, 2016). The director has given an excellent visual description of the river Titas in such a dramatic way that it touches our spirit and mind. The vivid landscape of the river has been variously evident in the life of Malo people. As per the opinion of Adwaita Mallabarman:

> *"like the little gap between the two ends of a metal bangle such as village women wear, a small gap separates two ends of Titash, its deep arc in a similar circular shape… the sky that looks at its own face in the clear mirror of Titash's water" (Mallabarman, 2013).*

5. Conclusion

The film is part and parcel of our day-to-day entertainment in life. It reflects the real life of human beings. Films uniquely combine all other art forms into one shape. A film represents the literature, the visual art, performance art, music, and story and mixes them into one accessible space that speaks the real life. The two films mentioned in this paper also mirror the river-side people's stories, which develop based on the river-centric culture. The films *Titas Ekti Nodir Nam* or *Padma Nodir Majhi* tell us about the human stories behind ecosystem collapse. The story is highly pictured fishermen's eternal struggle against hostile nature, against an oppressive society, and irrepressible desires. Goutam Ghose and Ritwik Ghatak tried to sketch the problems of the fishermen's community and the social evolution of the fishermen's community came up from their real-life experience. These films are a wonderful presentation of the socio-economic and cultural lives of the river-side people with a deep sense of existentialism.

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