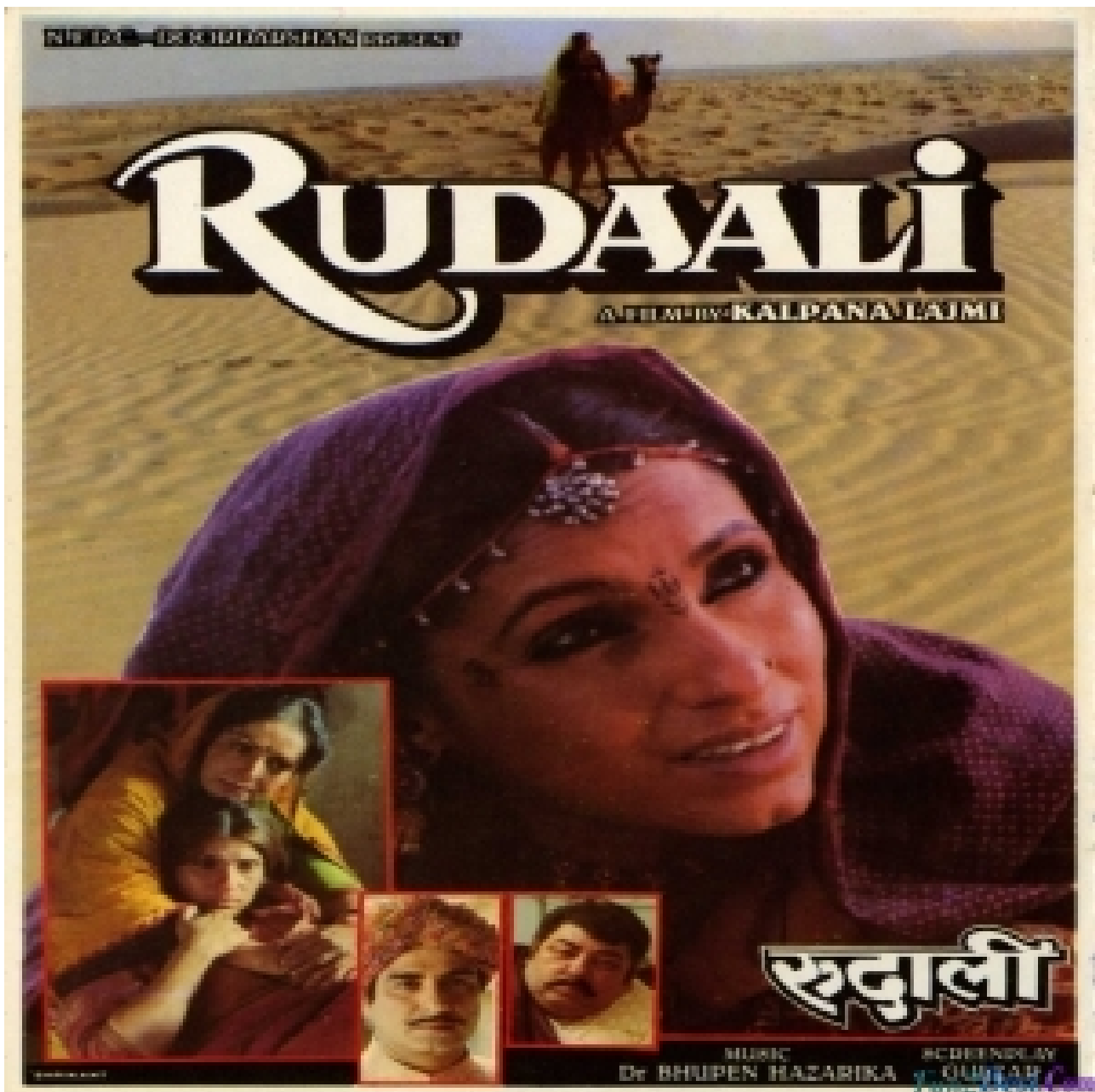


Folklore and Hindi Films



Folklore and Hindi Films

India is the largest film producing country in the world; it produces about 900 films annually. Indian films are not only seen in South Asia but also almost all parts of the world love to watch “the song and dance routine” of Bollywood. Indian films are popular in Russia, Canada, Australia, Middle East, United States and Mauritius just to name a few countries. Incidentally, Raj Kapoor a popular actor of the 1950s and 1960s attained the status of a folk hero in some parts of

Soviet Union. His film Awaara in 1951 was highly acclaimed and popular not only in Russia but also in Africa and countries like Turkey.

Cinema opens a new window into culture by studying it we get a deeper understanding of the customs, behaviour patterns, values and arts and crafts of the Indian people. Deeper insights into the complex process of modernization, colonialism, nationalism and freedom and status of women can be acquired through Indian films. Cinema not only mirrors culture but also shapes it. By studying Indian cinema we can see how they have in turn shaped and promoted modernization, westernization, urbanization, secularism and emancipation of women.

Folk ideas and folk motifs have also found its way in Indian cinema and have regularly been used in particularly in Indian film songs and dances. Several folk tunes for example songs sung by Latha Mangeshkar in the film directed by Gulzar Lekin, Yara sili sili and Kesariya Balama are based on popular folk tunes. S.D. Burman, highly inspired by the Baul singers of Bengal, also used several folk tunes of these Bhatiyali while composing music; this can be seen in a very popular song Sun mere bhandu re in the film Sujatha. One of the best and popular music composer, who has won the Oscar, A.R. Rehman is greatly influenced by folk tunes, (said to be composed by Ghazi Khan) that can be seen in his composition Limbuda in the film Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam. He also uses sufi music to large extent that is heavily popular not only in India but also the west.

Many dance numbers also borrow folk concepts and Saroj Khan the famous dance choreographer is heavily influenced by folk dance of India. This can be seen in the dance of the famous actor Sri Devi in Morni Baaga main boli aadhi raat ma in the film Lamhe. Hybridized folk dancing can also be seen in many other films like used in Jhanak Jhanak Payal Bhaje. Another form of dancing was also popularized by actor Vyjayanthimala

who in the film New Delhi combined Bharat Natyam dance steps with Kathak dance and Bhangra, a Punjabi folk dance.

By studying Indian cinema we can enter productively into the thought worlds and the performance worlds of other traditional arts such as the folk ones. Many Indian film directors from pioneers such as Dadasaheb Phalke to directors like Satyajit Raj, Ritwik Ghatak and Shyam Benegal have sought to employ creatively the visualizations and the colour symbolisms that can be seen in folk dance, music, mime and theatre. In the use of song, dance, humor, structure of narrative, the melodrama, the folk plays of Lavani, Tamasha of Maharashtra, Jatra of Bengal, Bhavai of Gujarat, Nautanki of northern India and Terukuttu of Tamilnadu have had great influence on popular Indian filmmakers.

Perhaps the greatest influence of folk in films can be seen in the genre of mythology. The first Indian feature film Raja Harishchandra directed by Phalke was based on the mythology from the Ramayana. Phalke was highly influenced by the film the Life of Christ and he decided to make a mythological film. His 50 minute film Raja Harishchandra became immensely successful that saw its influence on many other films based on the same genre. The myth has a strong cultural- religious tradition and the Indian mind is deeply attached to it. This can be seen in later films like Jai Santoshi Maa which helped in resurrecting a little known provincial goddess to a grand overpowering level where new temples for her have sprung up in all over the country. Among the most popular myths have been from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the countless tales connected with Lord Krishna. These have been repeated frequently and we can give a number of instances such as Shataram's Surekha Haran, Vijay Bhatt's Bharat Milap and the actor Dara Singh playing lord Hanuman in Bajrangbali. Many animation films like Hanuman and Return of Hanuman are also being created now to find the audience amongst children and keen adults.

Mythological themes like good fighting and destroying evil (Sholay by Ramesh Sippy,) brothers uniting (Kabhi Khusi Kabhi Gam by Karan Johar), reincarnation (Om Shanti Om by Farah Khan), sacrifice (Mother India by Bimal Roy) and tolerance (Bombay, and Roja by Mani Ratnam) can also be seen in films. Historical anecdotes and instances can be seen in films such as Mohenjadaro and Jodha Akbar.

Folklore legends about holy men and women (example Sant Tukaram and Savitri Satyavan), kings and queens (Mughal –e- Azam, Ruzia Sultana and Jodha Akbar) and even outlaws and dacoits (Reshma aur Shera by Sunil Dutt) can be seen in films. There are also stories about legendary love pairs who have lived and died for love which have been made into films such as Heer Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal, Mirza Sahiban and Dhola Maru. Fantasy based and magic films were made by Kikubhai Desai as early as the 1930s. Today we see that Subhash Ghai and late Manmohan Desai have raised this genre to the opulent levels of grand, multistar films, good examples being Dharam Veer, Amar Akbar, Anthony and Parvarish. Pure fantasy films have also been made such as Alladin, Alibaba, Sindbad the Sailor and Thief of Baghdad. By and large, all the non myth genres in films have functioned as mythological by products, existing in a supernatural miracle world and promoting old world beliefs and superstitions.

**RAMAYANA: FRACTURED, FIXED
AND FORETOLD Oglam
Presentation- Janardan**

Ghosh's Narration.

The Concept:

Ramayana has been told and retold over centuries but the difference lies in the way it is reiterated. Not with the perception of recounting a tale but with an intent to reinvent it to unleash the hidden secrets of this unbound narrative we attempt to retell again and again taking the artistic liberty that it affords timelessly to revisit it with an innovative perspective. The project is an enterprise to endorse the epic as a narrative that is much ahead of its times in its intrinsic potential to dislodge our linear interpretations of this colossal tale as a religious account of Hinduism. The endeavour is to re-evaluate the learn by rote method through which we have perpetually studied this epic; any change in the script is a larger than life or a utopian idea. In a country like India where the myth goes beyond the circumference of the story and becomes a 'sacred tale,' to conceive certain alterations in the script is a indeed a formidable venture. Yet, this redoubtable interpretation on our part has been an outcome of our humble initiative of making the narrative appear different and hence more thought- provoking as it raises questions on the fundamental aspects of human existence without tampering with the organic theme in a unique way. The Ramayana is fractured, fixed and foretold for an audience of today that's intelligent enough to accept variations in established Literature if it offers food for thought. This differently abled understanding of the epic cognitively sheds light on the of presence of the elements that demystifies the glory of this mythological narrative making it a poignant tale of a King's sacrifice, struggle and his confrontation with the ultimate evil that is insurmountably challenging. Accompanying him is the divine feminine- the motherly prakriti, his consort whose worthiness being questioned every moment despite her inevitability in life is a tragic disclosure. When Nature is

so serene and comforting, why do we exploit her? Is the question that resounds in every chant of the story teller who happens to have taken the onus of narrating the epic his own way without letting the cliché notions of propriety affect him. It is the kathavachna tradition that comes to the fore in the process wherein the kathavachak tries his level best to arrest the attention of the spectators who have gathered around him to witness his ability of telling a tale fascinatingly.

The alterations made in the tale are the result of an adaptation of the epic on which it is based. Nonetheless, the fact remains that these changes are made to inspire a generation of listeners to re-read the epic with an open mind without being influenced by the halo of divinity that revolves around it. This performance is towards giving Ramayana a form and shape that traverses the boundaries of conventions, religions and even Nations becomes a tale of global reality that surrounds human existence today. Our utilitarian approach towards nature, her exploitation under the garb of progress and development are universally undeniable truths that prevail in this tale of a magnanimous King who readily sacrificed everything in his life. His tales of heroism that prevail in our memory must not be confined to the deeds of valour but beneath there lies a purpose – to make the realization that the victory of good over evil comes with a price to pay. Divine Prakriti is insulted, hurt when the divine masculine shows his worthiness ascertains his valour and she ultimately chooses a silent retreat into the oblivion. Ramayana is indeed fractured at this juncture but the fact remains that it has to be fixed and again told for the generations to come and the Kathakar takes up this responsibility. Everything we see is an illusion, it is just a dramatization of a popular tale but it aims at restructuring and reframing our often erroneous understanding of the tale as synonym of dictation of certain principles. It is therefore that often every time the tale adopts a new form and incidents do not coincide with the

actual epic. Shoorpanakha becomes Mareecha and Sita Swayamvar takes place after the exile of Rama and Laxmana in the forest; only to make us comprehend that the kathakaar's choice to tell a tale remains uninterfered which opens up newer possibilities of engendering a CREATIVE PIECE- retold with a purpose: to enlighten. This is Ramayana – Fractured, fixed and foretold.

The Performative aspect:

The finer aspects of the kathakar's(Janardan Ghosh's) stage presence are intrinsically interwoven in the tale so inseparably that his gait, the gestures, the postures the expressions all depict a conceptual assertion of the Ramayana. The fluidity of the narration is indelible and the intonation is deliberately controlled to suit the parameters of excellent dialogue delivery which ought to have a thunderous proclamation of the epic coupled with a subtle yet effective volume that's verbose and yet aptly restrained. There is a performative glory inseparably blended with the musical beats of a folk rendition that invites the onlookers to participate in the performance. The Kathakar's splendid stage presence with his enormous voice modulations make the characters live in stage; needless to say- male or female. There's a quaint androgyny that Janardan Ghosh establishes on stage with his one man army – himself who appears as a reservoir of actors essaying different roles evocative of the Bahurupi artists that are used to playing diverse roles and yet one at a time. Slow and steady wins the race is the strategem that the Kathakaar deliberately adopts when he narrates simultaneously playing varied roles- Rama, Sita, Shurpanakha and above all the colossal Ravana. The entry of Ghosh defines folk narration that's charming endearing and at the same time prudent in its discretion of becoming stern when the narration becomes the somber from the recreational. It is a folk teller whose telling of the tale exploiting all the assets of performative aspect become more than conspicuous. He cries and groans and shouts and screams and laughs and proclaims and sits and

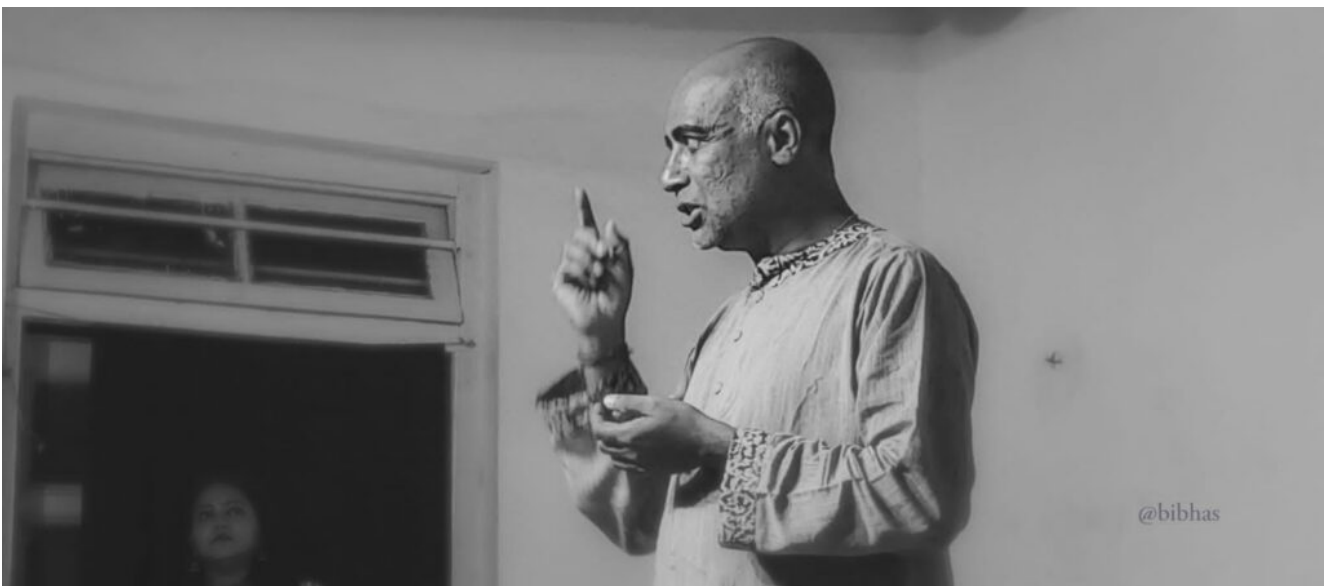
stands and jumps and circumambulates the stage as if capturing it from all its directions. Yet he releases the stage equally well and comes back to himself as he knows the tale will speak for itself. The brilliance of a learned actor becomes visible in Ghosh's choice to be Indian in his compassionate and anxious mannerisms of flourishing a folk tale of his nation and yet intelligently global in his approach towards narrating it objectively putting up a universal concern: Eco feminism. A subject matter of relevance for all across ages, Sita... a woman of education he so confidently he says and ends it so poignantly saying and in the end she immersed herself in the earth. And we automatically question " Why? Why do we hurt her – the one who nurtures us so fondly? The divine feminine. Ghosh brings the ties together: Of Sita's separation from Rana and of her being deserted in the end: Both are aligned. Whether she got accidentally separated from him when Ravana abducted her or when he sent her away, in both cases, she is the sufferer. The performative narration impresses upon re-reading the epic independent of the notions of divinity attached to it.

Dr. Payal Trivedi

For comments(if any) please use the comment box given below.









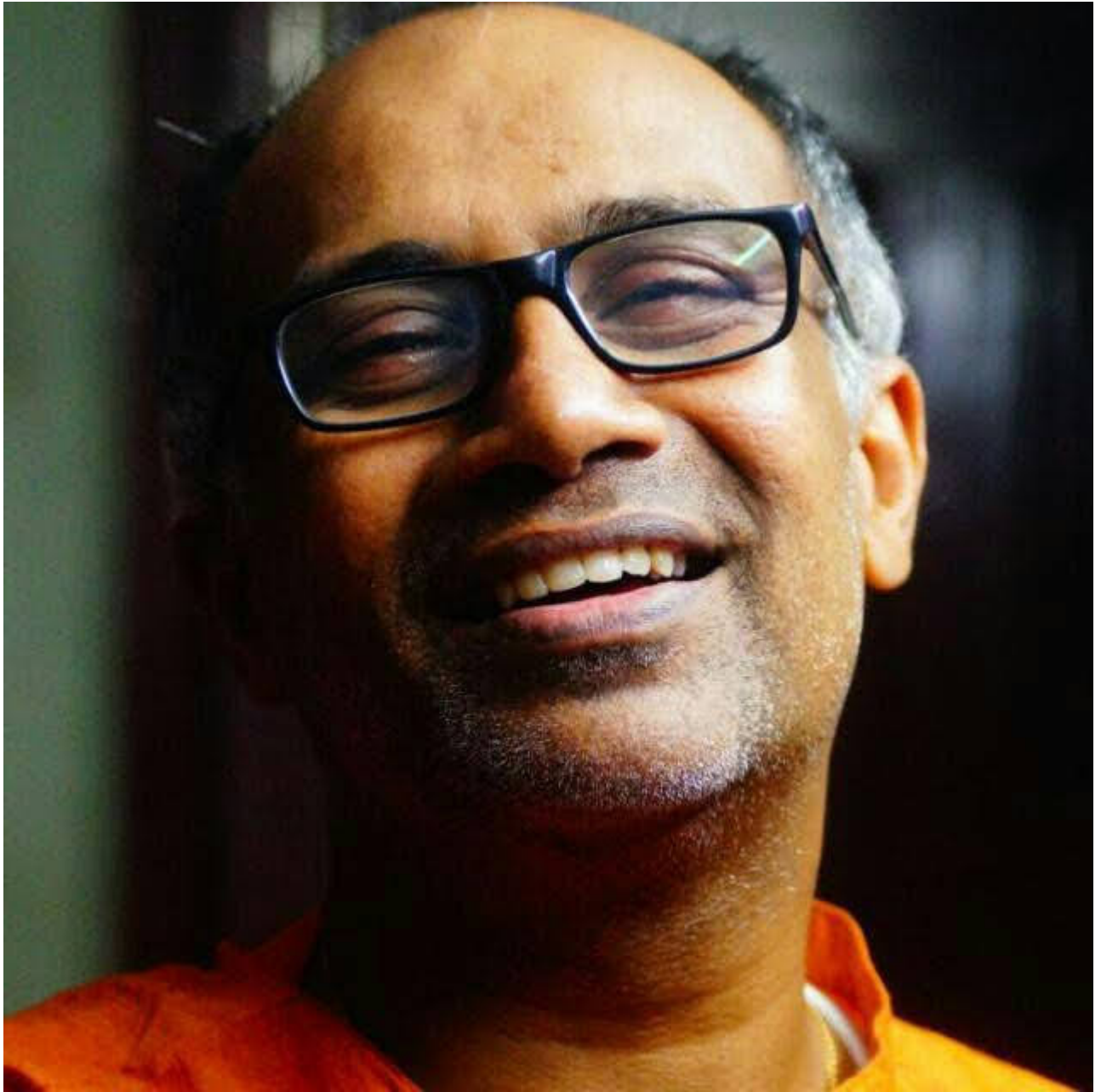
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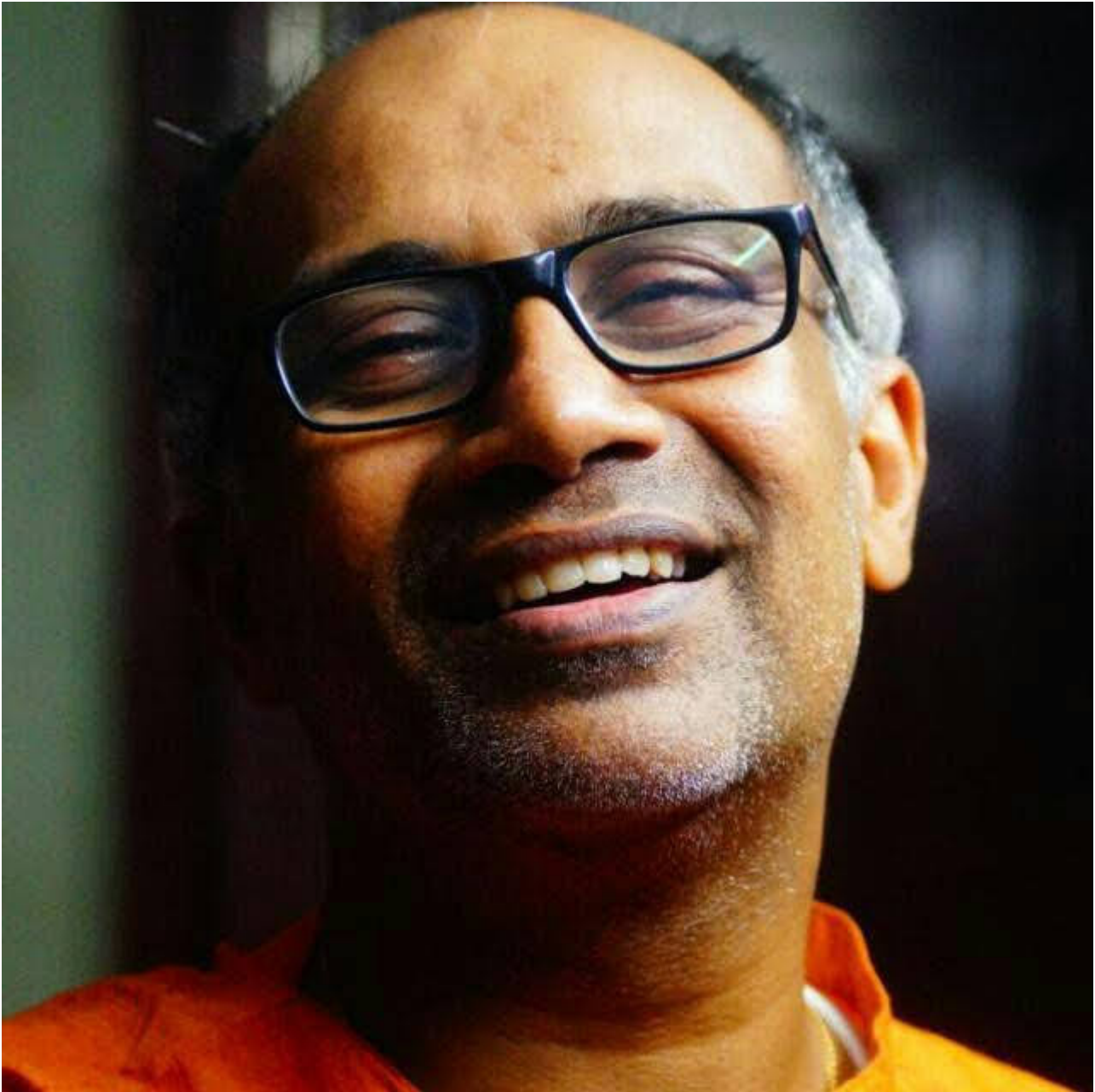


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Janardan Ghosh's Kayantar – Towards the need for Transformation



KAYANTAR- A film co-directed by Rajdeep Paul & Sarmistha Maity

The lead actor in the film, Dr Janardan Ghosh, is really versatile and multi talented. He is a performing artist, academic, theatre director, film actor, playwright, performance coach and storyteller (Katha 'Koli, a new art of storytelling) whose practice includes the use of traditional theories, contemporary performance vocabulary, and interactive media. His research-based work engages the indigenous practice methods in urban spaces exploring the perspectives of historicity, spiritual consciousness, intertextual dialogue, and body-space dynamics of myths, tales and gossips.

Kayantar- is a poignant tale of religious discrimination that leads to repenting circumstances for those that are forced to quietly endure and hence implicitly exploited to endorse conformity to the extent of losing their identities and eventually their lives. Moreover, it is a tale that has a subplot dealing with the pathos of the Bahurupi artists who beg in front of the people for their survival; their art not being recognized as a respectable profession but being condemned as a demeaning activity, pursued by those that are financially underprivileged and become nomadic thus imploring in front of the people for alms in order to make both ends meet.

The film is heart-wrenching as we see how the Bahurupi Muslim artist (played by Dr. Janardan Ghosh) dressed as the Hindu Goddess Kali appears in front of his two children; only to consecutively become crippled and hence forcefully passing on his legacy to his son who dislikes pursuing his father's profession. The son has a point. He being a Muslim roaming around in the apparel of a Hindu Goddess is disparaged by the religious stalwarts of his community, is mocked at by the children of the village and is boycotted by many conservatives as 'Bhikhari' – a pauper. These facts reiterated in an overtly painful and innately stark undertone are enough evidences to make the pangs of the young man believable and evocative of the viewers' empathy for him.

That the innocent youth who has not acquired this profession by his own choice and it has been rather forced on him comes as a harsh and undeniable truth that grills our thinking capacities to the extent of questioning all our modern theories of global indivisibilities of culture and religion. When the young lad takes an anomalous decision to choose a girl of the rival community and loses his life because of being engulfed in the holocaust of communal riots that take place in his village, our conscience gets stirred and we as viewers of the film are compelled to revise our notions of living in an industrialized, progressive world. We are made to

rethink whether the circumferences of culture, creed, race and religion only exist on national borders or are they still prevalent somewhere within our psyches and we are only ignoring these under the pretext of being the civilized community.

Within the framework of a story that so effectively becomes pertinent with the theme of universal relevance as we still find the world divided into castes and communities and people identifying themselves through their religions, there is a very intriguing story of Asia, the young girl who wishes to adorn herself as Kali and pursue her Bahurupi father's profession with confidence and dignity. The tale comes as an pleasant surprise when Asia is founded engaging herself in painting her body coal black and rejoicing to see herself in the gruesome look. It seems a woman's reclusive identification of the other dimension of the divine feminine that exists within her apparent demure image of a meek girl.

That Kali chooses Asia's body to be her abode is also a fact that demands our prudent understanding of the fact that religious differences prevail only on the superficial level as the Bahurupi keeps singing "Apanar Apni fana hole shei bhed jana jai"- Means that realization comes only when the distinction between mine and yours gets erased. Such an indubitable truth of the oneness of divinity is fondly repeated as a backdrop of the entire film makes the theme of the movie apparent- It is not by dividing but it is by uniting that humanity can realize in the oneness of this universe wherein every entity is the fragment of that supreme energy that we call God. The philosophical context in the film does not let the film lose its ties with an integral theme of gender discrimination.

Asia takes the permission of her father to dress up as Kali and pursue her profession as a Bahurupi. Nonetheless, the Bahurupi, her father, gets annoyed with her and says that he cannot allow his daughter to wander on the roads as a

prostitute. Why the man who has earned a living with the same profession disallows his daughter to follow his footsteps? The film gives us a jolt when we hear these words of the Bahurupi. If it were such a demeaning profession, why on earth did he adopt it? Was he also forced by his family to adopt it and with great reluctance he went on from door to door dressed up as Kali and asked for money from the people? The film does not answer these questions but raising these queries in our minds the film acts as a thunderbolt when we see a Muslim girl adopting her father's profession ultimately when her brother dies in the communal riots and she has to earn a living for her home ultimately as her father is crippled and is unable to do anything to make a living. Though she finally opts to become Kali, the intimidating figure of the bloodthirsty goddess who is so venomous becomes the most pensive image of pathos; she has to become Kali only to support her family and this time her father is helpless and cannot stop her even if he wants to. She walks on the railway track fearlessly continuing her journey on the route that has her brother's remnants that remind us of the gruesome ending that the young boy faced due to his unfortunate choice.

Diluting the conformist image of Kali as a fearsome goddess, Kayantar presents another facet of hers as a sad feminine figure who wanders helplessly for recognition. When she walks on the road men do not fear her ghastly appearance. They in fact dare to tease her which undermines her ferocity only to expose the truth that a woman's frightening exterior cannot dismantle the atrocities meted out to her in a man's world. She may be regarded as an epitome of Kali and the goddess may have chosen her to manifest her form but the fact remains that she is an ordinary woman confined within domestic sphere that does not allow her to operate according to her will and discretion. Her life is what a man wants it to be. She may dress up as Kali but she will never be regarded equal to the formidable goddess of the temples and the cemeteries. She will remain as an ordinary woman. When the Bahurupi tries to

disclose the truth in front of her thus refusing her to wander on the roads as Kali, it is this harsh reality that he tries to explain to her which remains unadulterated truth pertinent to all times.

That a woman is exploited under the pretext of granting her equal rights and overt sexual violence and tacit manipulation are indeed a part of this so called man's world even today are not hidden realities but are undeniable truths. Kayantar shows that if Kali wanders as an ordinary powerless woman Asia, she will be shamed. The film aptly demystifies the wrathful image of Kali and extracts the ordinary femininity in her that seeks recognition till date.

When the goddess Kali accidentally stepped on Kala- Lord Shiva as per the mythical account, she was unhappy and wailed for the fact that she had made a grave mistake of putting her feet on her husband's chest; a sinful conduct for a woman as per the conventional theories of Hinduism. It is not Kali's pathos that is underpinned in the temples when we worship her as the mother goddess. It is her ire that is being continually recognized and the red tongue that lolled accidentally out of her mouth due to her unconscious act of putting her feet on Shiva's chest is ironically regarded as a mark of her fearful image. Kayantar shows the other aspect of this horrific Kali and that is – Kali as the one that resides in the domicile of an artist who earns his morsel of food by emoting her from door to door. When the Kayantar takes place and the Bahurupi allows her to possess him, the possession is just on the level of the exterior. There is no internal possession because the artist cannot afford it. He is supposed to be submissive and not exert his redoubtable image in front of others. He is a beggar.

The film talks about the pathos of the village artists that pursue their profession only as a means of earning the basic necessities in life. With the advent of complex technologies in the realm of entertainment, these artists are deprived of

their due recognition. Kayantar – the transformation is of the body and not the soul but this is what the film seems to have intended. The ardour of transforming one's soul is explained through the restraint that the Bahurupi imposes on himself and his son who both dress up as Kali only because they have to earn money to win their bread and butter. There is no philosophical enlightenment in the process of transforming themselves. It stays at the superficial level even after the Bahurupi keeps singing the song 'Apnar Apni fana hole shei bhed jana jai- which talks about the need to escalate beyond the boundaries of time and space to realize divinity.

The song remains merely a song and the spiritual message ingrained in it is only a matter of speculation. In the end, the Muslim girl Asia adopting Kali's image does undermine religious discrimination but it does not become prominent because; the extremely painful state of a girl who takes up a vocation on account of a drastic change that occurs in her life of losing her own brother is a telling tale that completely dilutes the fury in the image she adopts and brings out the agony of an ordinary woman incarcerated in the prison of conformity that she is unable to challenge or disown.

All in all, Kayantar is a film that stimulates us to understand religion beyond the confines of the right and the wrong and urges us to revise our cliché associations of Gods and Goddesses as intimidating figures of the temples who possess their disciples that invoke them in the temple rituals. It certainly is an eye-opener to the fact that the transformation of our soul is needed but is often occluded by our senses governed by selfish motives that thwart the spiritual awakening which engenders the realization of truth.

For comments on the article please write in the box given below:

AND...THERE COMES A FOLKTALE

There was a Queen. She killed every 4th husband of hers. None knew the reason she spared 3 and killed the 4th one. One day, a mantri asked her the reason. The Queen replied, " Every 4th MAN reminded me of my mother's 4th husband who killed her. Mantri decided to stop the Queen. He brought a commoner for the Queen on her command to marry the 4th time after she killed her x 4th husband. She killed him. The mantri said, " I consulted a sage. He said this man was the incarnation of your mother's 4th husband. Now no longer is the need to kill anyone else."

The atrocity stopped after that.

The commoner who was last killed was the chief of the Queen's enemy who had encroached upon the territory to kill the Queen.

Since then every 4th day of the month, the people of the village offer 4 things to the Queen's soul who happens to be their deity now and organize a festival in her memory.

It is that it is a day when everything 4 in number is honored. The fourth house, the fourth child, the fourth wife...and anything less than 4 is destroyed. Thus, those that have four houses, destroy the previous three, those that have three children, discard the 1st three and so goes with the wives. Three of them are divorced and 4th one remains. The Queen blesses this ritual. As she likes HONORING FOUR.

For comments, if any, please write in the box below:

Breaking barriers: How Purulia Chhau artistes came together to reimagine Tagore for our times

Encouraged by the response to performances of Tasher Desh in Kolkata and Santiniketan last month, the team is making efforts to organize shows in other parts of West Bengal, Delhi and Mumbai

Folk Theatre of India: Jatra

Sri Chaitanya, a prominent saint during the Bhakti moment is credited to be the inventor and the promoters of this music enriched form of theatre. It is widely believed that the first spectacle of the play was also done by Sri Chaitanya wherein he played the role of the Rukmini in the play, Rukmini Haran (the play was based on a story in the life of Lord Krishna).

Folk Dances of India: Jhora

Jhora folk dance is native to the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand where it is celebrated with all pomp and show

during the springtime celebrations by the locals. Jhora folk dance finds its root in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, historically known as Uttaranchal.

Folk Theatre of India: Bhand Pather

The word 'Bhand' means the traditional and the age-old folklore entertainers from India, Nepal, Pakistan. The form had thrived and grown manifold during the peaceful times in the valley. However, with the rise of anti-societal elements, the art form has given the theatre form a huge setback. Society must progress towards peace and let the lost theatre form regain its formal glory.