

Tribute to Buddhadeb Dasgupta

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Flight to Eternity*(Charachar/ Shelter of the Wings)*

“You can look at life through the window of death, your Majesty.....”

Protagonist Sashanka recites this beautiful monologue almost at the end of the film ‘Phera’ (The Return).

Can this line be considered as the elegy of the poet-filmmaker Buddhadeb Dasgupta?

Today as I am trying to track down the first shot in my memory film of Buddhada, his fifth film ‘Phera’ returns to me again and again. The primary reason could be that I met him for the first time in 1987/88 in his Salimpur apartment, in connection with ‘Phera’. I was invited for a ‘look test’ for casting me as the central character of the film but he found me too young, if not too good-looking for the role; however, he offered me some other character in the same film but I was not convinced anyway. From that very day, a relationship developed with the celebrated director that lasted for three decades. Secondly, ‘Phera’ signals a shift from the old

Buddhadeb Dasgupta to the new, from the anxious young director engaged in interpreting the socio-political state of the ‘post-emergency India, focusing more on the city lives; to new Buddhadeb Dasgupta retuning to the countryside of his fade-away childhood where the clear blue sky meets the gray-green hills. Birds fly freely over the limitless horizon. Nomadic performers display their skills. Magicians bring out colorful pieces of stuff from the empty boxes. Wrestlers struggle but fail to win. Old dilapidated houses whisper lost melodies. The window- a recurring image- where the waves of Mediterranean break-in at the school in the remote

village of Bengal; – a spurt of lyrical imageries, fantasies, boundless landscapes, adorn his frames akin to Bruegel Canvass. As time progressed these images become more and more part of the narrative sub-plot but the main plot deals with the inner lives of the characters in the background of a contemporary rural-urban society with all its complexities.

We also see a perceptible change in the function of dialogue in later films; much more reflective than earlier films. As in 'Phera', when Sashanka resolves to return to his creative life again, he continues his earlier monologues - '*Your majesty, death is not the last word, it's the life that is the last word*'. The use of alliteration is noticeable.

In another sequence in the film, Sashanka's helping hand 'Rashu' tells him that '*Babu, you are hanging on the ground, I sit atop a tree. From here I can see...the sky, the stars, and Kalyani's face.*' Kalyani is Rashu's wife and 'Rashu' has sheltered himself on top of a tree after the cruel death of his dumb wife, but sitting on top of the tree he can see his wife's face in the Moonlit light. These clusters of

words suggest director Budhhadeb Dasgupta's universe and his idea of transcendent. Words play an extremely significant role in the telling impact of captivating images of Dasgupta's films. There are ruder lines in all his films which taken together create a field of sublime density that offers a unique vision of cinema and a view of life which may be termed as 'Budhhaesque'.

In 'Charachar' (Shelter of the wings), when the central character Lakha sacrifices his wife to another man, his wife asks him, '*how will you live your life now?*' '*There are plenty of water bodies, the lakes, the sky, the birds, they will take care of me*', Lakha answers nonchalantly. If we define art as something that proposes a new idea into the world; that idea we may accept or reject but if it touches the chord of truth then that becomes a part of our field of reference. Budhhadeb Dasgupta was a dreamer, a poet, a filmmaker; he blended all three elements seamlessly in his cinema.

Budhhada has taken a flight to eternity but left his "Magician's sack", to break the mystery of his art.

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