

Tribute to Buddhadeb Dasgupta

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I Dream, Therefore I Am
A Hauntological Note on Buddhadeb Dasgupta



I think that people who have no philosophy live a poor kind of life, no? People who are too sure about reality and about themselves. I think philosophy helps you to live... I think that philosophy may give the world a kind of haziness, but that haziness is all to the good...

Jorge Luis Borges (in a conversation with Richard Burgin)

1. 'How can we live without the unknown in front of us' – René Char

It is a spectral parade. Parades of the spectres at somewhere like a *non*-place. It is a non-place because it lacks the specificity one would tend to attach to any space as experienced usually. Still, a non-place is a veritable space – fluid, ubiquitous, and hence unreal, like all spectral spaces are.

One after another, the spectres enter the space, at the dead of the night, straight from where they've been and where they'll return eventually. Oblivion. They are the protagonists of several films made by a master filmmaker. Buddhadeb Dasgupta (hereafter Dasgupta).

Among them there is a journalist who wanted to uncover an ugly truth. A freedom-fighter who found it hard to trade his soul with self-serving forces. An artist who chose to stick to his art despite different types of spectacular distractions coming his way. A doctor who could not come to terms with the kind of life he was living. There is also a small congregation of people who refused to give their respective dreams up. The fact that the *normal* people might find those dreams impossible and improbable did not deter them. Nor did they choose to get normalized, as their society wanted them to be. On the contrary, the tyranny of the *normal* had them entrenched even deeper to their pursuit of the impossible/improbable.

It is rather customary to notice that this *non*-place would be diachronic. It certainly is. The characters gathered there have been witnesses to the chronicles of India as it unfolded during last forty odd years. The earliest of them *Dooratwa* (Distance) came in 1978 and the latest one *Urojahaj* (The Flight) in 2018. Again, it is customary to note that the *non*-place would in a sense be anachronistic in nature because the arrival of spectres marks a rupture onto the linear movement of time. Every time they appear, they only *reappear*, unleashing a veritable time-warp.

However, more radically it can be noted that this *non*-place refuses to conform to the chronicity as found in the known, systematized spaces in the world. While the canny logic moves with a clock-wise inevitability, the protagonists of Dasgupta emerging out of the negatives and hard disk drives go the other way, disrupting the homogenising movement. Being clock-wise is safe, offers insulation from several earthly hazards, ensures security and pleasure as well, but at the same time would prove to be hugely claustrophobic to those who refuse this deterministic configuration of the *real*.

Hence those persons go anti-clockwise. In the sense that the dreams they cherish are replete with a dazzling non-reason that undercuts the static and stratified reasonness of the mainstream. It is the non-reason flowing out of a type of inner subjectivity that does not engage with the *real* the way most of the *normal* people do. This inner subjectivity seeks to maintain simultaneous registers of one's existence (not any singular register, as is usually held). In the process it lays open the disturbing incongruities that remain in the interstices. So, it can fairly be argued that these dream-chasers, scattered in Dasgupta's films, seek to reconfigure the *norm*, the *normal* and the *normative*. And exactly this is what they demand when they are back as apparitions.

That something is rotten in the state of Denmark is what an observer found vis-à-vis the visitation of the apparition in an iconic Shakespearean play. It appears that these figures (or *non*-figures, who knows) hint at a sorry state of affairs that the society has been plunged into. Like the slain king, the father of prince Hamlet, these protagonists too indicate a hidden fissure on the apparently undisturbed façade of events.

What is that fissure about? It can fairly be assumed that such a return (of the natives, at different levels) brings an ethical question back into focus. Do the dreams (of the individual) need to conform to the dictum of the majority? Should the objective *real* (as fashioned by the majority) always predominate over the subjective reality (of an individual)? Do the incongruities lying in-between the layers of the *real* require to be ironed out?

With such a set of daring and disturbing questions these characters, straight out of the oeuvre of Buddhadeb Dasgupta, return to haunt the present continuous. In this essay I would like to offer a hauntological reading of the films of Dasgupta. As filmmaker he relentlessly portrayed situations that did not allow certain individuals to live as they wanted to. Consequently, they found themselves excluded from the mainstream, packed off to forlorn spaces (dream, death or desolation) — far away from the mostly inhabited (and grossly

habituated) reality. Nevertheless, the films of Dasgupta testify to the fact that non-dissolvable traces of those beings continue to remain. These traces are things that the *normal* (and *normalized*) people would find difficult to come to terms with. This is why this haunting parade of the spectres (or, the rekindled traces of the departed) would add to the discomfort of the calculative, majoritarian forces in the society.

Do these spectral characters want to make us feel the space we live in to be annoyingly haunted? Do they pass on any secret *a la* the royal ghost in the Shakespearean play? Also, like the murdered patriarch in Hamlet, do these characters reappear to exact any revenge on the reality they found utterly inhospitable? These are issues I would touch upon in this hauntological essay.

2. Be thy intents wicked or charitable./ Thou com'st in such a questionable shape, / That I will speak to thee – Shakespeare (Hamlet, 1.4)

The sardonic neologism “hauntology” was famously coined by Jacques Derrida in his much-celebrated (and debated) book ‘Spectres of Marx’. He had a rather specific investigation. How does the spirit of the Marxist ideals visit the contemporary (as in 1993, when the book was published)? Immediately after the disintegration of the USSR and consequently of the Soviet bloc; after the shattered pieces of the Berlin wall reverberating with the exuberant voice of Fukuyama yelling ‘the end of history’; after the neoliberal ideals and free-market economy triumphing over the socialist dream, can one really afford to expect Marx to make a revisitiation?

Derrida, in his answer, brings in the haunting (and haunted) opening sequence of Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’ in which the slain father of the Prince of Denmark appears as an apparition. Interestingly, this hauntology, as sketched by Derrida, is a double-edged sword that rips through all the apparent comforts of the contemporary. On one hand it marks the irrepressible return of our repressed *past* while on the other it sensitizes the *present* to engage with it. The apparition knows that engaging with it would lead to a moral predicament for the living one, yet he wants him to engage. For Hamlet, the living one, it is a Janus-faced quandary of addressing the wronged *past* and simultaneously rupturing the *present* and assessing the possible load of a botched *future* as well. Significantly, “the time is out of joint,” the famous lament of Hamlet has been used by Derrida only to point at the incoherent fragments of the time.

Similarly, when the protagonists from Dasgupta’s films reappear, they come with a double bind of signification. They conjure up a dismembered body of the *past*, reflecting back on the appalling experiences they went through. Also, they put into question the glossy façade of life being lived at *present*. Evoking the agonized face of the *past* leads to an unsaid yet inescapable probe into the networks of the *present*.

This probe has a distinct ethical turn for Dasgupta, since in his usual understated way he demands (from the spectator) retrospection, often informed with a deeper sense of remorse. It is not the remorse bemoaning the (usual) triumph of evil over the good. Dasgupta mostly does not paint the line that demarcates the territory of evil with such an emphasis as found in the works of some of his noted contemporaries. Instead, he prefers to operate in the grey region of ambivalence. He lets us know how profound the dream is and at the same time how fragile it might turn out to be. For him interestingly, one does not necessarily negate the other.

Dasgupta engages with his content material broadly in two separate ways in two distinct phases of his journey, each phase carrying its own set of operatives. The director himself explained the phasic division of his films:

My earliest films like Dooratwa, Grihajuddha, Neem Annapurna and Andhi Gali had an aesthetic different from the films I made later. I also write poetry, and after a point, I wanted to take my cinematic language closer to poetry.

He chose to have the first phase comprising the first four films he made. Post *Andhi Gali*, as he states, began a new phase of his film language that drew more upon poetic expressions than it had done before. Without contesting what Dasgupta himself said, it can fairly be observed that there is a thematic thread running through his films, though visibly the cinematic expressions underwent some visible changes after a certain point of time. With his noted economy of expression Dasgupta has always uncovered the fissures in the reality that, otherwise, is considered to be smooth, homogenous and sacrosanct. The erosion of dreams, to be encountered at levels both individual and collective, has intrigued him all through his cinematic journey. While exposing the ways the system seeks to contain the worker/dreamer, the films of Dasgupta reiterate the faith on the innocence and sincerity lying in their work/dream.

Here the reader would be requested to rest for a few moments more on a specific punctuation mark used above. The slash. I would like to argue that this punctuation mark denotes the amazing interchangeable-ness Dasgupta infuses between the pairs of words on either side of the slash: work/dream (both as noun and verb); worker/dreamer.

Usually deciphered to be opposite to each other, 'work' and 'dream' make a confrontational binary, in which one is (taken to be) the negation of the other. Dasgupta reconfigures this binary by having each of them being coterminous with the other, and thereby complementing the other. So for Dasgupta's protagonists, 'work' is 'dream' and something more. Also, vice versa. Even when he posits the protagonists in rough, unpleasant planes of reality, there are tributaries of dream remaining underneath in the wireframe.

The killing of Sandipan (*Grihajuddha*), the fatal, fateful fight of the tiger-dancer Ghanuram with an actual tiger (*Bagh Bahadur*) or the final incarceration of Shibnath (*Tahader Katha*) might appear to be the closure in the respective narratives. These three persons waged a lone battle against the power and had to pay the price by getting physically excluded (in the form of final termination of life or loss of individual freedom). However, even for those persons Dasgupta had work and dream imbricated into each other. In terms of stylistic treatment, *Grihajuddha* is way lot different from *Tahader Katha*, yet the episteme of work/dream is what drives both the narratives. So much so that one may dare to think that these two films can swap the titles. *Grihajuddha* is in a deeper sense *Tahader Katha*, the story of those excluded. Also, *Tahader Katha* has within it a raging *Grihajuddha*, or civil war that is literally restricted to the periphery of the household but rich in a much wider significance. The protagonists of both the films cannot afford to do without the dreams they cherish, they worked for. Their work and their dream stay like inescapable traces and slowly make their ways into the spectator.

In his early phase, Dasgupta had his focus on the individual embedded to a macrocosm. Hence, the macrocosm, or the larger societal network found its place in the textual construction. As his films started approximating the language of poetry, he shifted the focus mostly to the microcosm of the protagonists. As a result, the subjective portrayals of reality started getting foregrounded. Increasingly, what Dasgupta had himself drifted towards to is the multiple (and simultaneous) registers of the real. As he was trying to get his cinematic space abstracted to the periphery of a loner, the exoderm of the larger societal space began to make way for, as was mentioned above, the microcosm.

Certainly in *Phera* (The Return) a film stylistically of an interim, in-between phase, Dasgupta left some hints of the inward way his films would later tread on. Post that film, Dasgupta kept on honing his minimalism, the subjective microcosm came to the fore and the plight of the individual was made to reflect the crisis of the civilisation. As represented by Dasgupta, this is a predicament that is, in a sense, the conceptual extension of his 'work/dream' non-contrasting binary. 'To-be/Not-to-be' is the dyad wherein (for the protagonist who chooses to transgress) *to be* is tantamount to the pervading *not-to-be*. The line that separates the two being more and more blurred, the transgressing protagonist caught within the predicament

has only little or no respite. Also, *not-to-be* being the only available path (to them) to get their presence registered, this is what they tend to head towards. A third way, even gloomier, remains though. That is the absolute termination of the '*To-be/Not-to-be*' dyad itself. Neither of them having any meaning left within, the reiteration of the present is the destiny, ruefully stripped of any future. Such is the story of Nemai and Balaram, two fellow wrestlers working in a station in a far-flung district (*Uttara*, *The Wrestlers*).

However, Dasgupta's protagonists keep on transgressing the line, or the norm, in other words. Their personal world becomes a little mirror that reflects a larger crisis. Succinctly put, this is the directorial schemata: uncovering a larger crisis via a smaller representation of the predicament. Right from the disillusioned artist Shashanka (*Phera*), bird-catcher Lakha (*Charachar*), the failed husband (*Kalpurush*), the youth who decided to reside on a treetop (*Tope*) or the young mechanic obsessed with the dream of making an aeroplane (*Urojahaj*)— each of them, in their unique way, finds the existence being increasingly subsumed by a gnawing vacuum. Even if the protagonists would like to transfer their existence secretly to their respective dreams, their surroundings, mostly coercive, would hardly approve such flights to the non-real. What it leads to is a suffocating quandary. The more the dreams get rebuffed, more haplessly the dreamer seeks to explore them further, only to antagonise the prevailing mainstream to the extent of conceivable extreme.

Dasgupta does not offer any monolithic answer. He does not seem to have any either. He just seeks to problematize the countenance of reality that, till he intervened, appeared to be unwrinkled. Dasgupta's protagonists scratch it deeper and consequently rupture the neat imbrication of mutually profitable interests, operating at different levels of the society. The situation leaves the same sombre message as the one left by the royal spirit at the Elsinore: 'the time is out of joint'.

Till his final film Dasgupta remains, as he has always preferred to be, haunted by the dreams, by the impossible. The essay would now attempt an even closer look at this haunting impossibility that remains the kernel of the dreams the films of Dasgupta are fraught with.

3. I will be everything or no one. I will be that other / who I am without knowing, the one who has looked / upon that other dream: awakening... (Jorge Luis Borges; Dream)

Like an innocent (and hapless) subterfuge, dreams seem to be healing up the wounds inflicted by the *real* and also, in the process, become fresh wound itself. Clearly this (vivacious/vicious) circle of dreams plays a cardinal (and ambivalent) role in Dasgupta's oeuvre. Even dreams proving ineffectual in offering any escape, the person concerned is driven to implosion. He implodes within his phantasmagoria (the protagonists being overwhelmingly male, hence the masculine pronoun), but leaves a conundrum with the spectators. Dasgupta invites us to reflect further on the right of the individual to transgress, to pursue his dreams the extent of which would only be decided by the dreamer him/herself.

This is where, as I perceive, the idea of impossibility (vis-à-vis its conceptual twin *possibility*) gains currency. Not just because it becomes a password to the inner subjectivity of the protagonist(s) and a parameter to the level of transgression they are headed towards – but also because it serves to understand the specific configurations of the *real* the protagonists find themselves within. And these two are things that the protagonists of his films repeatedly seek to draw our attention to. The issue of the possible (or, impossible) vis-à-vis the structure of the real, one needs to note, is intertwined with issues of ethicality also. Should they do whatever they are doing, or should they not? Should they be treated the way they were, or should they not?

Here I would be making a little detour in the sense that I would like to borrow a line of thought articulated by Ted Toadvine on the issue of environmental ethics. I would like to get enlightened with the core idea of

the article that deals with a different subject altogether. In the article titled ‘The primacy of Desire and Its Ecological Consequences’ Toadvine made a significant point:

“(A)n ethical response to nature becomes possible only when we are faced with the impossibility of reducing it to the homogeneous, the continuous, the predictable, the perceivable, the thematizable” (Toadvine 2003:140)

Toadvine argues that the impossibility to reduce nature (to the level of a few usual and practised stream of action and consciousness) is a prerequisite to build up an ethical relation with nature. In other words, he demands us to place nature in its glorious irreducibility. Violating this contract (of maintaining it as irreducible) would rob us, as argued by Toadvine, of the prospect of figuring out an ethical liaison with nature. So, there is something that one should refrain from.

Similarly, I would like to put forward a thesis on the issue of ethicality vis-à-vis Dasgupta’s protagonists. We will be able to get at their ethical core only when we consider them to be irreducible to the grids of existence known to and practiced by the common people. Once we find it impossible to straitjacket them to the belief patterns of the majority, we will be able to strike an ethical chord with them. In this sense, their proposed irreducibility has within it interesting narratives of impossibility.

In effect, it is a multi-layered register of impossibility being visible here. In the cinematic narratives, the protagonists, in their respective ways, found it impossible to collude with the system. In turn, the system found it impossible to accommodate them within its perimeter.

Also, in the spectatorial gaze, we need to consider it impossible to reduce them to the level of compromised ethicality that we continuously make use of in our everyday existence. As a result, those protagonists remain vulnerable to exclusion. So, one should keep it in mind that should they be reducible to the hugely popular and mutually beneficial modalities of existence, Dasgupta’s protagonists would unfortunately get into the trope of what they would always loathe to be: “the homogeneous, the continuous, the predictable, the perceivable, the thematizable”.

As Dasgupta shows, the notion of impossibility is the rupture that marks those persons as odd-men—not-fit-to-be-recognisable (by the system) and simultaneously recognisable (by the spectator). However, as was noted above, to be able to recognise them requires, on the part of the spectator, a certain mode of cognition. It is the cognition that can distinguish someone as the *other*. The *other* is the one who is strange to the architecture of the self I (as in spectator) have, who is irreducible to my thoughts and being so, who remains magnificently impossible.

This is how one needs to approach the protagonists of Dasgupta. The idealist freedom-fighter Shibnath is the *other* whom his scheming politician friend Bipin cannot decipher. When he seeks some favour in exchange of getting him much-needed financial stability, Shibnath not only categorically refuses to oblige, but states that he feels like shitting whenever Bipin murmurs such advices. Neither Bipin nor Hemangini, the wife of Shibnath can make out the man who, despite being in penury, rubbishes the prospect of a better living and foolishly, as they perceive, sticks to the truth he believes in. They fail to get his point because Shibnath remains the perfect stranger to them and also to the larger crudely utilitarian society that they represent.

Apart from the type that Shibnath represents, there are protagonists who embrace dreams in ways that leave their private lives shattered. Those who find them illegible do not always con them. There are people who despite having an honest attachment fail to comprehend the incorrigible dreamer.

However, both these two categories of people –who have sympathy for the protagonist but find him illegible and who lack that sympathy and find him illegible – would never be able to read them because of a fissure in

between. It is what I would call the phenomenology of transgression. One who does not transgress would always fail to comprehend the alphabets of transgression and everything that can be elicited out of it. One who is anchored to the matrix of the possible would never be able to get at the (il)logic of the impossible.

Dasgupta, throughout his career, keeps on unravelling horizons of impossibility and he wants the spectators to appreciate (the possibility of) such impossibilities. He also wants the spectator and the society as well, to accept the *other*, namely the transgressing protagonists as portrayed by Dasgupta. However, as I would like to argue in the next part of this essay, there is something more to this ethicality vis-à-vis such transgressors than such acceptance. While making my argument I would return to the thread I began this essay with: the hauntological scene from Hamlet as recalled by Derrida.

4. In other words, it is not the normal and the abnormal that is fundamental and primary in disciplinary normalization, it is the *norm* – Michel Foucault (italics mine)

When Derrida remembers the scene, he brings in a dismembered body (of the wronged) who uncovers a truth. Also, as was mentioned earlier, Derrida recollects the famous saying of Hamlet “time is out of joint”. This is what he recalls from the iconic Shakespearean play, but evidently with a design. The design, as it appears, calls for a decision.

Derrida makes no bones about suggesting that the disjointed time denotes a political situation that is getting increasingly worse and hence needs to be salvaged. Taking his cue from Shakespeare, Derrida demands some decisive action on the part of whoever claiming her/himself a victim to this deteriorating situation. When he recounts the pronouncement of Hamlet, he suggests that there is a debt that needs to be settled. In that sense, Derrida re-describes a spectral plane on which one who watches (the Prince) owes something to one who appears (the apparition). It is an ethical bond that these two ends share. There is something that he who watches should promise *in situ* to the spectre that appears. It is, as Derrida perceives, a promise to be active with an intention to change the situation.

Likewise, I would like to argue that the spectral parade that was imagined at the beginning of this essay has a similar and distinct strain of ethicality. Like the royal apparition in the Shakespearean play, the protagonists of a number of films made by Dasgupta reappear to state that there is a debt to be settled. That they did not find the situation around them habitable enough is known to many. However, not many seem to be aware of the root of the malaise that remains within. The spectres arrive to let us know that the tyranny of the *norm* (and the *normal*) still prevails. Hence, the coercive processes of silencing and normalising still threaten the transgressor. Transgressing the norm, even without causing any damage to others, is tantamount to *abnormal* activity and hence a veritable sin.

The spectres hailing from Dasgupta’s films have a wide spectrum, their backdrops variegated, their dreams delightfully different but what they share is an intense desire to flout the diktat of the *real*. What they want the society to locate is what most of us either do not know or would just feign to be not aware of. It is the sheer fact that the reality is not something monolithic, but layered, fractured and contrary to popular belief, often incompatible to each other. Accepting this would lead us at least to acquiesce in the idea that the reality, otherwise held to be unilateral and massified, has swathes of disjuncture, craftily covered under the chimera of (or, the tyranny of) the *normal*. Once this is accepted, ways might emerge to ward off the supremacy of the normative and to accommodate the dissident other.

It is not a coercive universe that the band of spectres would want us to look for. They demand (and deserve) the multiverse that acknowledge the diversity of beliefs, thoughts and practices. Such a multi-valent space can accommodate the transgressing dream of any individual and therefore can recognize someone as *other* without excluding him from the prevailing mainstream. The spectral protagonists of Dasgupta demand that

the excluded *other* (in whichever form conceivable), the dissident transgressor left forlorn, needs to be taken into account.

5. (T)he ethical act proper is a transgression that, in contrast to a simple criminal violation, does not simply violate the legal norm, but redefines what a legal norm is. The moral law doesn't follow the good – it generates a new shape of what counts as good – Slavoj Zizek

The beauty of Dasgupta investigating life through his transgressing characters is a collapsing of contrasting dimensions onto each other. One is the sombre tale of the protagonists being condemned to their lone fight (and plight) rising against the system. The other part is secretly euphoric, restricted to the respective protagonists who transgress the all-too-sacrosanct boundary of the *normative*. This is the space that constitutes the most daring part of Dasgupta's cinematic experiments, his content being fused with the fantastical elements, mostly in the form of dreams, creating a signature meta-reality for Dasgupta's films. Since Dasgupta has been a veritable poet himself, these are portions in his films — distributed more or less throughout the narratives but often saturating in the culmination— in which he seeks to eke out his philosophy by instituting a blending of poetic and the fantastical. In that cinematic crescendo the prosaic reality dissolves into a philosophical concoction of the mundane and the impossible.

The making of such non-real imagescape is significant for more than one reason. Firstly, it is the crossroads intersecting several pillars of Dasgupta's films: one, philosophy (the crucial point concerning the nature of what, for him, constitutes the reality); two, cinematic representation (the visuality of his thoughts translated to images); three, the scope of language (both the semantic and the cinematic, and also where they intersect); and four, poetic interpretation of incidents (the impressionist techniques that fashion the fantastical text).

Secondly, it provides an interesting pathway to examining the unique contribution of Dasgupta to the Indian cinema as far as the construction of the philosophical and the poetic is concerned. It is beyond the scope of this not-too-long essay to get deeper into this, but it can certainly be observed here that such imagistic treatments mark a distinguishing feature of Dasgupta in Indian cinema.

However, the ways he treated these aspects in his films vary from stunning imaginative flights to reiteration of styles, somewhat contrived. There are moments when the triad of time, space and the persons concerned has packed such a density into the montages (of the dream-sequences) that they engage with the audience in ways that are abrupt yet unobtrusive, bringing up contents that are familiar yet defamiliarized.

Sometimes the film ends with the *real* dissolving into the dream (as in *Charachar*, *Lal Darja*), sometimes the reality keeps negotiating with non-real, i.e. dreams, mental constructs (*Tahader Katha*, *Kaalpurush*) and most significantly, sometimes the portrayed *real* becomes an intensely absurd extension of itself (*Bagh Bahadur*). To my consideration, Dasgupta's close encounter with the non-real reaches its peak in this third and the final category. He does not have to situate the non-real in any designated space but the film itself becomes a complex and enthralling interweaving of the real and non-real.

Certainly, there are films in which the suturing of dreams into the narrative has not been as smooth as he might have liked it to be. At times, he seems to have developed sort of infatuation with certain styles of framing or certain patterns of character. While those reiterative contents evoke the idiosyncratic touches of Dasgupta, the contents in turn run the risk of getting predictably, and irretrievably, formulaic. At times, sadly, they do.

Nevertheless, with his usual brilliance and occasional shortcomings, the identity of Dasgupta as a filmmaker remains constituted with differences – certainly of his own kind. He decides to belong to that rare group of filmmakers who prefers to make the meaning (of the movie) deliciously (and dangerously) plural and multi-

valent. While most of the filmmakers seek to organize the citadel of meaning located immovably in a closed territory, Dasgupta seeks to de-territorialize meaning. He lets the audience in, gets them involved into the processes of signification, which for him is a two-way process.

When he, on a sort of lighter note, said, “Put some dreams, some magic, some reality into a glass and shake it. That’s my cinema”— people, more often than not, tend to take it on simple face value. They tend to overlook the inner schemata of the director – the design to make a fluid structure of the *real*, instead of the usual closed, monolithic one.

What follows is an amazing journey in which the impossible hangs from a fine thread of the possible. This is a journey perilously close to the vortex where, with a little lack of balance, the entire processes of making meaning would have got undone and finally lost. Still, this is the path –unsafe and mostly untrodden – that Dasgupta as a filmmaker repeatedly wants to take. He does not prefer philosophizing only through words uttered by the actors. He weaves the semantic text with the visual one comprising human actors and the non-human and non-living participants like flora, fauna and the nature. What gets elicited out of such interdependent texts is a performative text, which in other words, is his cinema.

It is a kind of cinema in which the coding of meaning refuses to constrict the voice of the audience. They can decipher the meaning in whichever way they would like to. This plurality of the voice is what the spectres (of Dasgupta’s protagonists) demand. They would, on one hand, urge the filmmakers to leave the texts open-ended. Also, on the other, they want the audience to appreciate the layers of possibility lying in the text without pinpointing any singular one as *the* normal, normative and hence irreplaceable. In short, they want a de-hegemonizing of the cinematic space, both on the part of the director and the spectating society as well.

Now the auteur is dead. And as Foucault taught us, the author (of the content) is dead the moment the content reaches other people. Sadly, not many directors would want to build up any edifice that remains open to interpretations. Buddhadeb Dasgupta did. His films constitute, in a deeper sense, the chronicles of (his) death foretold. Each time it gets interpreted, it marks the death of the filmmaker. Also, this is what keeps him, and will keep him alive too.

This is what the spectres of his protagonists finally let us know. The departing of the (mortal remains of the) director is not a closure. He will keep coming back. He will put the reality of the real to question. He will outlive the death that only seemed to take him away on 10th June 2021.

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