

Article

Aparajita Pujari

**The Tempest Within: Through the Bard's Lenses**

Speech is highly dependent on the tone of the voice. The meaning of the same words can be different when uttered by two different people. If Al Pacino had delivered this famous dialogue from *The Godfather* (1972) instead of Marlon Brando, it might not have caused such a stir- "Revenge is the best dish served cold." The language of a poet who writes a song is different from the language of an experienced lyricist. Although almost contemporary, Sampuran Singh Kalra, aka Gulzar, and Javed Akhtar have different writing styles. Both of them are very popular and highly admired lyricists in our country. At the age of 74, Akhtar Saab wrote, "Apna Time Ayega (*Gully Boy*-2019), and the other one, at the age of 76, "Dil toh baccha hai ji" (*Ishqiya*-2011). Both the songs topped the chartbusters. While Javed Akhtar's literary manner is outspoken and elaborative, Gulzar is a minimalist of its kind. As a whole, Gulzar the writer denotes love, love, and affection for life, for

humankind, for Mother Nature, and the whole world. However, he always shies away from expressing his personal endearment, whether poetry or screenplay. To some extent, we can say that he is rather ungenerous in this specific matter field, likewise actor Girish Karnad's gesture in front of his heroine on screen. Karnad's craft and Gulzar's pen seem to follow the same thought: - Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, and therefore is winged cupid painted blind! It reminds me of *Anand* (1971), Hrishikesh Mukherjee's song of love and self-renunciation. But in the film, too, the protagonist's personal love is only "mentioned" once or twice. Gulzar Sa'ab wrote the dialogues and lyrics for *Anand*.

In 1975, this introverted and reticent man-made the much-discussed, controversial film *Aandhi*. He wrote unconventional, doleful lyrics that haunt the audience until no time-'Raat ki baat hai aur Zindagi

baki to nahi'. The song was lip-synced by two middle-aged characters. *Aandhi* was released on February 13th, 1975. Seeing the image of the heroine in the poster of the film, people started saying that this film is all about the Prime Minister of the country, Indira Gandhi, and her husband Feroz's story, it is!! See our Prime Minister on screen—the tagline in the poster did act as fuel to the fire. The opposition started to hue and cried that the smoking and drinking scenes of the heroine in the film were actually of the Prime minister herself. Meanwhile, the film was considered harmful to her image. *Aandhi* was banned but was re-released in 1977 after the new government took over. Though many people presume that 'Aandhi' is based on Indira Gandhi's personal life, there is actually another woman behind the making of the film: celebrated actress Suchitra Sen. In the mid-60s, there was hardly any actor, director, or producer who did not fall for Suchitra Sen's luminous screen presence, who didn't want to work with her. On one such day, producer J Om Prakash and actor Sanjeev Kumar called up Gulzar and announced that they had a story that Gulzar had to direct. But for some reason, that story did not go down well with everyone. So, Gulzar's job was to write a new story for the movie. At the same time, he was assigned to write the screenplay for another movie, *Mousam*. So, he went to Mahabalipuram along with noted writers Kamaleshwar and Bhushan Banamali to complete the scripts. But their merriment started going on so vigorously that a single script could not proceed. As a result, Gulzar flew directly to Delhi, checked into a small hotel named Akbar, and started writing *Aandhi*, the film which has given an exclusive volume to the brilliance of Suchitra Sen Sanjeev Kumar and RD Burman. In contrast to the glamorous look of a heroine often seen, the image of Aarti Devi was of an old, grey-haired woman clad in a faded cotton saree. On the other hand, Ms. Sen radiated an unbreakable spirit—"Yes, an actor has to burn inside with outer ease!

There are many emotional scenes in *Aandhi*. Surprisingly, Suchitra Sen did not have to use glycerin in any of the scenes to bring tears to her eyes. She only told Gulzar before the scene to let her listen to a specific stanza of the song "Tere Bina Zindagi Se"

for a short while. Gulzar played the song on a tape recorder. Shortly afterward, Aarti Devi, the goddess of melancholy, was caught on camera with tears in her eyes. The particular stanza played for her was— 'Tum jo kehdo toh aj ki raat chand dubega nahi; ... The character of Aarti Devi was overshadowed by Indira Gandhi and Tarkeshwari Sinha, a former political leader of Bihar. She was the country's first female Deputy Finance Minister. She had a good rapport with Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. After the defeat of the Congress in 1977, she withdrew from active politics.



In context, Satyajit Ray once said that it is not possible to make a real political film in our country. The film, dubbed 'political,' is usually a party-sponsored propaganda film. The so-called angry political film is a film that strikes a chord in places where it is really needed. From MS Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* (1974) to the recent Netflix venture *Thackeray* (2019), there have been several political films being made in our country. Still, there is barely any anger in them, as mentioned by Ray. Some political films have become popular from the standpoint of maturity and application, although contemporary political verity is hidden in most of them. All in all, a political film in India is a political story or a drama based on the life of a well-known figure in the Indian polity. Cinema has recently been restricted in India on the grounds that it is a far cry to make a political film, even if it means commenting on politics.

There is always a fear lurking of getting into the hands of lawmakers. Perhaps because of this fact, Indian cinema has lost its grip today. As a result, both the producers and the viewers have quickly become engrossed in sex- and violence- inducing crime stories.



In 1997, when Rabri Devi became the Chief Minister of Bihar, several parallel words were circulating in the media. Woman, illiterate, cowherd, dehati, and so on! The humiliation inflicted by Rabri Devi was far greater than that of Lalu Prasad Yadav's corruption and nepotism. While watching *Maharani* (2021), a web series on the OTT platform, the protagonist, Rani Bharti, reminded me of Rabri Devi. Even before, we have seen women as protagonists in various political dramas. Mentionable instances are *Satta* (2003), *Gulab Gang* (2014), *Indu Sarkar* (2017), etc. But the story, lead character, and statement of *Maharani* and *Madam Chief Minister* (2021) were so fresh and close to the actual characters of India's political way fare that the viewer did find it convenient to come to terms with the film. Both films manage to entertain as well as inform.

Did the British Victorian hysteria disappear from India as soon as the "British quit India" slogan was voiced out or at the moment of attaining Independence? Or did the education reforms and novation by the British wipe out all the other superstitions, including child marriage, at once? Which of the following novels, concretely, which of the characters in our stories was the first to draw a unique image of a woman? However, some of those most readable and moving characters of Indian film history are Charu from Satyajit Ray's *Charulata* (1964), Mrinal from *Streer Patra* (1972) (both are adaptation Rabindranath Tagore's *Nostoneerh* and

*Streer Potro* respectively), and Arati from *Mahanagar* and Aarti Devi from *Aandhi*.

In the last forty to fifty years, the scale and manifestations of feminism have changed. People have become more vociferous in the real and virtual worlds and on-screen. The physical movements of the actors have become more relaxed. But what has made the character, mood, and moments unforgettable, especially of the female characters like Charulata, Aarti, etc., were dialogues, visual direction, and performance as a whole. "Firangi Edith" applying lipstick on the lower-middle-class daughter-in-law's lips in *Mahanagar*, Charu's invincible body posture of peeking out of the house, breaking the middle-class rites. --- became the graceful symbol of women of self-esteem. Mrinal's husband questions the very utility of educating a woman. What happens when you read and write? Are you going to get the titles of Raichand or Premchand?' Exposed the hollowness of the reform movements, women's empowerment, and the *sanskari* aristocratic families of 19th century India.

We get to see the legacy of Tagore's Mrinal through the protagonist of *Pink* (2016), a powerful movie of contemporary Indian consciousness. *Pink* was directed by Aniruddha Roy Choudhury and written by renowned director Soojit Sircar. Both attempted to create courageous female characters in their respective films, which Tagore's humanism philosophy may have influenced. The heroine in *Streer Potro* was traumatized when her widowed cousin Bindu was forced to marry a mentally challenged man. Almost the same situation we can see in Maitrayee Devi's *Na Hanyate* and its film adaptation, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999), when Nandini, the female lead, confronts her father and raises her voice for the first time in defence of her cousin Anupama. We find the shadow of Mrinal (*Streer Potro*), the pretty and intelligent wife from an elite family, later in *Damini* (1993), a mentionable and infrequent effort by the director Rajkumar Santoshi amid the glitz and glamour of the chaotic 90s. However, a male saviour incarnated (incarcerated) all by himself in the middle of the road to secure the dignity of the "helpless" women, and he undertook all the responsibility on his (more than

two-and-a-half kilos) of shoulders. Thus, Damini's undaunted spirit was buried under the veil of a virtuous Indian wife.

Two introverted and devoted souls got together in 'Aandhi- Gulzar and Suchitra Sen. The rest of the two talented and ever-cheerful people, R. D. Burman, and Sanjeev Kumar were too engrossed by the aura of silence. The Martand Sun Temple, Pari Mahal, and the exotic valleys of Jammu and Kashmir were the backdrops of the song sequences of *Aandhi*. Like the middle-aged estranged couple, these dilapidated antics too carry their glorious past with them. The entire positioning and environment of the plausible song, *Tere Bina Zindagi se...*, is stagnant and lonely, resembling the inner pain of the couple who want to entwine with each other but are unable to do so; only the worn-out leaves around are moving here, spreading the fragrance of fond memories.

Although it is regarded as a political drama, *Aandhi* all the way is a love story; a story of two middle-aged lovers. From that perspective, the director's endeavour was quite an unafraid task. Two leading artists have played the roles of elderly people here. It is worth mentioning that the stories of the most popular films of that era chiefly centered around the heroes and heroines engulfed in the flames of youth. Prevalent examples include *Sholay*, *Deewar*, *Julie*, *Love Story*, *Khel Khel Mein*, etc.

With the help of prosthetic make-up, computer graphics, and bodysuits, it has become convenient for people of any age to embody the character of the aged or young. In spite of that, most of the performers seem reluctant to come to grips with reality due to a lack of oneness. Kangana Ranaut's recent film *Thalaivi* (2021) can be regarded as a clear example of this. But long back in the 80s or before that, such characterization could only be afforded through immense practice and prudent management. Sanjeev Kumar played the role of an adult in another Gulzar film, *Mausam* (1975), which was shot at the same time as *Aandhi*. Aggrieved, Harilal Jethlal

Jariwala, alias Sanjeev Kumar, asked Gulzar, "You made me a father in our very first film, *Parichay*." And now, in *Mausam* and *Aandhi*, you have again made me a middle-aged one! Do you wish I were dead at this very young age? " What can I do? You are born old! " Gulzar replied wittily. . (Rumours say that Sajeev Kumar's family members died at a very young age. So, to eliminate the inviolable "imprecation," he intended to play the roles of the elderly at his young stage.)



In one scene, Suchitra Sen stands in front of a huge portrait of Indira Gandhi and says to her father that Indira Gandhi was her idol. Often, the professional expertise of female politicians is taken for granted. There is no such thing as political legacy, choice, or even DNA traits for women in this field, which remains nothing more than a curse or misery. Under the purdah of that 'curse,' one loses her self-made dignity, accomplishment, and pioneering attitude.

At present, we are well fed up with all the information about almost all the individuals involved with *Aandhi*. The film has fulfilled 47 years since its release date. We are also acquainted with the political history of the country. In spite of all this, even today, we are astounded by the radiance of the film. This is probably not because of the inclusion in the billionaire club of cinema, propaganda tricks, or media hype constructed by PR agencies. It happened by virtue of its integration with art and life.

**Ms. Aparajita Pujari is a film-critic, poet and writer, contributing regularly on cinema, based in Guwahati.**