

Article

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## **Fragrance that Lingers: The *Rajnigandha* Way**



A young woman is cuddling some Rajnigandha flower branches within an unadorned chamber. She smiles to herself when she smells them and thinks about her lover, who stays in a different city. Her longing is evident in her eyes, the way she touches flowers, and the mesmerizing song she sings.

Does it seem plausible? Relevant even in today's busy, harried, instant coffee-noodle-dependent, hooking up, or taking a break from your kind of life? Can a flower genuinely live in a world filled with fleeting moments? persist, per se?

I long to return to those "Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Basu Chatterjee's streets in Bombay with fewer people and vehicles roaming around whenever I can. Men indulging in bell bottoms and women in little boards or polka-dot sarees, with gajras on hair bands and plaits, sometimes give the spectators of the distant future a quick acquittal from the distressed mundane.

In the meantime, amidst this sunniness—through the road, not by the side—comes the most fascinating—with bowed and sincere eyes—the solace of many tensed hearts—the wonderful discovery of Basu

Chatterjee—Amol Palekar. The absolute shy guy of Indian cinema (on screen) —I'd rather go back to those Bus movies only to ask him, "How on earth have you inscribed and inhaled that much purity in your body? That much gratitude and enchantment towards this universe!"

And Palekar, the reticent guy, like his mentor, would have replied: Seedhe aadmi ke liye pyar ka izhaar bhi Mahabharat ladne ke jaisa hae!

Noted Assamese actress Mridula Baruah has a striking screen presence due to her natural charisma. The audience never detects ambiguity in her performances, whether as the endearing heroine or the aspirant mother (Hiya Diya Niya, 2000). Her perceptive and endearing demeanour is reminiscent of the artists Basu Chatterjee has produced. The good news is that Basu Chatterjee's 'gharana' artists are still dazzling onscreen in their advanced years. Zarina Wahab in *Agneepath* (2012) and Vidya Sinha in *Bodyguard* (2011) are examples of this. In other words, director Chatterjee was flawless in his choice of artists. His intelligence in managing the undercurrent potential of actors and actresses was undoubtedly terrific.

There is a scene in the 1979 film *Mazjil* where Amitabh Bachchan and AK Hangal are conversing in a store. The character of Manzil is a realistic figure free from the heavy cover of the hero or saviour, in contrast to Amitabh's other tremendously successful films produced that year (*Kala Patthar*, *Mr Natwarlal*, *Suhaag*, and *The Great Gambler*).

A film is believed to reflect its creator's conscience and consciousness. In that case, Chatterjee's movies are romantic, progressive films featuring remarkable music.

If you have a pistol hanging on the wall in Act I, it must fire in the last act. (Reminiscences of A.P. Chekhov).

With this phrase, Anton Chekhov is undoubtedly talking about perfecting the unneeded components when producing stories. In cinema and theatrical production, “gun” refers to screenplays and property. Buffalo horns, weapons, and other props are still put on the walls in some Assamese theatre shows to represent the sumptuous residences of the wealthy. In some films, many musical instruments, paintings, and bookcases are included in the setting, adding nothing to the plot or characters. Instead, they draw attention away from the central topic. Basu Chatterjee's films have a Chekhovian narrative and presentation approach that is direct and concise.

Chatterjee was a known newspaper illustrator before transitioning to the film business. Perhaps this is one of the reasons behind his portrayal of life in a lively, sensitive, and modest manner in his cinema. Rohit Shetty's popular comedy *Golmal 3* (2010) was a remake of Chatterjee's noted approach *Khatta-Mitha* (1978). The recent movie demonstrates the exaggeration far from the family ties and forward-thinking that the last film was about, dripping with crude humour.

The mass audience frequently confuses Basu Chettaji, Basu Bhattacharya, and Hrishikesh Mukherjee because of their Bengali backgrounds, the slight similarity in their names, and the background of their movies, which are commonly set in North and

West India's middle and lower middle-class lives. The film directed by Basu Bhattacharya, however, is distinct from the other two. His storyline is intricate and melancholic in nature. His films expertly examine and depict the frailty and claustrophobia of modern marriage. *Anubhav* (1971), *Aavishkar* (1974), *Ghriha Pravesh* (1971), and *Aastha* (1997) are some remarkable examples of this. Films by today's well-known producer-director Anurag Kashyap, such as *Ugly* (2013), *Lunch Box* (2013), and *Manmarziyaa* (2018), clearly demonstrate Basu Bhattacharya's impact.

Hrishikesh Mukherjee was a well-known film editor (see Madhumati, 1958). He also assisted Bimal Roy as Basu Bhattacharya did. His films are different from the other two due to his technical expertise. The camera angles are elaborative, and the colouring is vivid and livelier than them. A famous song from his second film, *Anari* (1959), clarified the insight of his entire production and the philosophy of his creative self too:

Kisi ki muskurahaton pe ho nisar /Kisi ka dard mil sake to le udhaar/ Kisi ke waaste ho tere dil mein pyaar/ Jeena isi ka naam hai.

The immortal tunes that highlight the value of life either through lyrics or picturisation are prime characteristics of Mukherjee's cinema. His narrative explores life elements and shifting middle-class attitudes. The struggle between good and evil and right and wrong is depicted in his works, even though he avoids moral theory. Compared to Basu Chatterjee, he has a more extended speaking and performing approach. If not entirely, his idea and execution can be termed 'Dickensian'. For instance, how could the character of Ashok Kumar, a widowed father of four, have evolved if Hrishikesh Mukherjee had helmed *Khatta-Meetha* (1978)? With a few songs, some anxious moments, solemn discourse, and the adulation of ideals? Probably.

Even though Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Basu Chatterjee, and Basu Bhattacharya are regarded as the pioneers of the middle cinema between commercial masala film and parallel cinema, Hrishikesh Mukherjee's

works are remarkably similar to mainstream entertainment in terms of star cast, plot, and execution. The remaining two genres border on art movies, one of which has a complex atmosphere and the other has a witty one.

The audience has continued to read Mukherjee and Chatterjee's works in the same vein because of their taste in Bengali literature. The passion for Bengali literature has kept the works of Mukherjee and Chatterjee in the same lineage for the audience. Chatterjee's *Swami* (1977) and *Apne-Paraye* (1980) are based on the stories *Swami* and *Niskriti* by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. Mukherjee's *Majhli Didi* (1967) is also based on Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Mejh Didi*. Both directors have explored the inner world of women with their particular ways of perceiving. At a time when women's position in Indian cinema was merely a character sitting behind the hero's armour, women were surrounded by mobs and thrown stones to teach them a moral lesson (*Roti*, 1974). The female protagonists of Basu Chatterjee's *Rajnigandha* (1974), *Dillagi* (1978), and Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anupama* (1966) and *Anuradha* (1960) were far more courageous and truly existing. Moreover, Basu Chatterjee's female lead represents guilt-free modernity, similar to the self-conscious woman in Jane Austen. As a writer, Hrishikesh Mukherjee has a soft spot for larger-than-life characters. Shakespeare thus appears in a few of his movies, including *Anand* (1971), *Guddi* (1971), *Chupke Chupke* (1975), and *Golmal* (1979). The rise, fall, and conflict of the hero, Hamartia, added excitement to his storylines. His films are gripping and appealing to a wide audience because of the variety of mental behaviours they represent.

Some of the performers appeared to be favourites of both directors. The primary one is indeed character actor David Abraham Selukar, also known as David's uncle and David - the matchmaker.

Basu Chatterjee altered some of the basic components of Indian cinema. His films reinterpreted situations that were present or ahead of their time, praising human connections through the art of brief conversation and dialogues.

- Between the 1960s and 1970s, the most illustrious and famous female character was the goddess-like mother. Trapped between industrialisation and the Oedipal hero, she epitomised affection, tolerance, idealism, and hard work. Protector of the family's peace, leaving behind most of her humanly instinctive. On the other hand, Basu Chatterjee's mother figure was truthful at the time, sometimes nagging, overly protective (*Baton Baton Mein*, *Khatta-Meetha*, *Chitchor*), and occasionally affectionate but harsh. In *Khatta-Meetha*, when Nagis Sethna's new husband and four sons came over to stay with them, her three children objected. Mrs Sethna reacted only once to their rebellion: "Do as I said". And that seemed enough. This sort of command and attitude, devoid of sentimental conversation, makes Chatterjee's Mother cult exceptional compared to the rest of Indian cinema.
- Progressive consciousness fuels Basu Chatterjee's films. The rationale for marriage in *Khatta-Meetha*, which centres on widow marriage and the remarriage of older people, is the companionship and family-financial harmony essential in old age. Intense love, loneliness, or emotional trickery are not grounds for remarriage. The director shows the adequate sociological and psychological investigation of sensitive themes such as premarital pregnancy in *Kamala Ki Maut* (1989).
- The contemporary economy occupies an important place in his films. The majority of his storylines are propelled by money and work. The social standing of the hero is based on their income. When Tina Munim claims that Amol Palekar, her lover, makes "just Rs 300," her mother responds, "Rs 300! Is it a peon?" (*Baaton Baaton Mein*, 1979). His films represent the necessities of modern life—such as the financial struggles of Mumbai's lower middle class, housing issues, the regularisation of employment, etc.—as more alluring than romantic love. Examples

are *Kirayadar* (1986) and *Piya Ka Ghar* (1972). It is important to note that, unlike many of his predecessors and peers, Basu Chatterjee has not created an atmosphere of luxury about shortages and issues.

- There is hardly rapid and dramatic character development in his films. He has kept people of different tendencies as appropriate as possible. There are slight changes in the negative characters through the climax, but they are not emphasised in the script. Therefore, the film's climax seems to be sometimes rushed and sometimes chewed on. But it is certain that there is no place for melodramatic scenes in his movies.

His films are distinguished for their minimalism. He is not only careful with his words but also with his imagery. As much noise as possible has been eliminated from the speech, lyrics, background music, ambient noises, and even scenarios occurring in public places such as bus stations. (For example, in *Baaton Baaton Mein*, Rosie Perreira rearranged the minimal furniture in her drawing room since she anticipated a new guest with her daughter Nancy.) Hrishikesh Mukherjee's visuals are becoming more vibrant compared to his. Mukherjee's interiors serve as a record of the modern middle class's changing socioeconomic situations, aesthetic of life, and pleasures. Basu Chatterjee's wit appears in Mukherjee's films as humour at times and as a hilarious performance at other moments. Priyadarshan's films are well-balanced comic production influenced by these film producers.

- What kind of representation do minority communities typically receive in popular Indian culture? Isn't a Persian clad in white shown as a hulking comedic figure, a stupid man? Minority characters are still portrayed infrequently in drama, literature, and the arts today. *Baaton Baaton Mein* and *Khatta-*

*Mitha*, two of Basu Chatterjee's films about the Persian minority, have established the group as a vital element of Indian popular culture. The film *Khatta-Mitha*, according to the director, is dedicated to these individuals who have made significant contributions to the growth of Mumbai. Through the vocabulary, clothes, and demeanour of the characters, Basu Chatterjee popularised the ethnic and social backgrounds of the characters that are evident in films of the contemporary type (*Badhaai Ho*, *Bala*, and *Dum Laga ke Haisha*). Despite being a city dweller, the character maintained a solid connection to his region through his practical and regional expertise. Modern directors have hardly ever performed this characterisation of Chatterjee.

- Basu Chatterjee and Hrishikesh Mukherjee shared profound affection and admiration for Mumbai. In different ways, each has seen and explored Mumbai. Mukherjee has dedicated his celebrated 1971 film *Anand* to Mumbai. The camera's expansive frame from the opening credits captures the city's generosity. Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Mumbai's ardent admirer, appears to be the balloon soaring smoothly over the shore and into the sky, picturised in the song "Zindagi kaisi hai paheli hain."
- For his part, Basu Chatterjee has chosen to be solitary in his romantic relationships. The camera pans out from the massive skyscrapers to the city streets, with the characters coming and going.

Basu Chatterjee's calm countenance belies a sensitive and serious attitude towards the environment and people. His story prefers to be comfortable rather than great or rejected. The memory of the creator who enriched Indian culture with myriad melodies and unadorned lyrics is like a spontaneous whistle that can stir the heart of a lonely person.