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Marginalised “Other”: Translated Version of Tagore’s Works in Rituporno Ghosh’s Films

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Abstract

If we illustrate the term “women Empowerment” as a simple process of empowering women in every aspect of the society-we should be brave enough to say that the goal is not achieved even today. Need of this hour is a deeper understanding of the term women empowerment then only women will be free from the clutches of their marginalized identity.

*Media and specially film is a strong medium to unveil the vulnerable reality of the so called empowered women. Rituporno Ghosh an eminent filmmaker has efficiently translated few of Tagore’s writing into films. Here is an effort to scroll down from Tagore to Rituporno Ghosh’s work to get a brighter view of the reality and women’s condition in it. How much a woman can be empowered is an agenda of understanding both in Tagore and in Ghosh’s works. With a keen and sensitive presentation of women protagonists in many of his award winning movies Rituporno Ghosh has proved that there are many layers and shades of truth in which a woman has to lead her life. Through the visual presentation of Tagore’s works like *Noukadubi*, *Chokherbali* and *Chitrangada*-Ghosh has created a benchmark in revealing a whole new shed of women characters which talk a lot about the essence of the term “women empowerment” clarifying their status as “other”*

Key Words: woman empowerment, marginalized identity, other.

“Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by an ymbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.”- Laura Mulvey.

Women empowerment or if we say it in a different way the need of empowering women is a much talked about issue of present time. At such a period of time when political parties include women related agenda in their party manifesto , popular TV channels highlight such issues to earn TRP, movies are termed as women centriccan we celebrate with terms like women empowerment? Question arises regarding the present status of woman – whether they are still marginalized or have revived their image as the ‘other’ in the society. Literature often reveals this subjugated reality of the woman folk in our society and whenever these literatures are adapted into films a visual image of those imagined characters literature can be confronted from a different angle all together. With all technicalities of film making process, written words are cinematized - creating a charismatic effect on the viewers while making a new statement on the position of woman in it.

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* asked for a kind of seclusion of women. Women and their existence carries a lot of untold aspects which can be realized with a deeper understanding of the term women itself. When the term women is explained in literature its appearance gets shaped with the imagination of the writer and when the same is projected in screen with visual and sound effects it appears a bit different for its audience. In the process of adaptation when literature is translated into films – literature is retold in a cinematic projection and specifically if we talk about women characters it is definitely a variation of sight. Therefore, here the intention is to understand those issues which force audiences to realize those realities which deliberately tag women as “marginalized other”. This process of tagging woman as ‘other’ involves a whole range of symbolic connotation when it is served by this noted film maker Rituporno Ghosh.

Indian film industry has touched great height due to the mediation of a number of writer directors who are recognized for their excellence in their creativity. In Bengal the avenue began with creative talents like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and many of their contemporary imaginative and revolutionary film makers. This creative legacy is efficiently handed down to many imaginative and efficient individuals, and Rituporno Ghosh is one of them. Ghosh is a meticulous writer-director who is known for his art of cinematizing crude human emotions on screen. In his brief career he has made many award winning films. Winner of national awards for several times he is recognized for giving his images that strong voice which can reach directly to the contemporary and modern audiences. Along with this strong and vital voice his films often include poetry proving his inclination towards literature – basically Tagore. His philosophy and his fantasy is shaped with his reading and his understanding of Tagore and his works. For this inclination towards Tagore, he is enthusiastic in making films based on literature which ranges from short stories to dance dramas. In his hand Tagore and his literary creations come alive. His enthusiastic move towards literature justifies what Andrew Davies, screenwriter for four masterpieces Jane Austen films said in an interview - “I used to teach Jane Austen, and in a way doing what I do now is a bit like doing those lectures in which I say ‘This is the way I see it. Don’t you see it like this?’ [Now, as a filmmaker] I have got millions of dollars’ worth of visual aids and actors to prove my point.” It is therefore through Rituporno’s eyes that audiences “see it” – a process of seeing Tagore’s ideas and his stories fleeting before the eyes of every viewer. His never ending effort to explore and roam into the layers of Tagore’s creative world is concretized in those films which are best known as his adaptation of Tagore. Rituporno Ghosh’s main adaptations on Tagore’s works are- *Chokherbali*, *Noukadubi*, and *Chitrangada*. In all these films Ghosh has elaborately dealt with issues which will cover the binary situation where femininity is revered in one point of time and in another it is worshipped. These films aptly criticize gender issues which are usually over looked in visual media. In each of these films Ghosh places his woman characters in an alternative visual frame work visualizing their life and dilemma. His creative perspective has always forced him to reconstruct the traditional image of woman shown in the silver screen, therefore his woman characters are not merely a presence of beauty just like many other filmmakers who often use woman characters to enhance the glamour of their films. Adaptation of Tagore’s novels gave him the scope to work on characters like Binodini, Ashalota in (*Chokher Bali*), *Chitrangada* in (*Chitrangada*), Hemnalini and Kamala in (*Noukadubi*) – leaving a storehouse of those experimentations which will enable spectators to rethink and reconstruct the image of that woman who are capable of setting themselves free from seclusion and even of those who can never move away from being simply the shadow of their male counterpart.

To start with one of Rituporno’s adaptation of Tagore is very difficult. Still *Noukadubi* can be the best novel of Tagore and the best film of Rituporno to start this journey of rethinking the position of woman first in Tagore and then in the film of Rituporno. In Rituporno’s *Noukadubi* the story is set

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in 1920's and opens in a setting where lamps, furnitures, curtains, piano accompanied with Tagore's song is creating an ambiance of an upper class Bengali home. Annadababu, the father of Hemnalini- an educated and cultured girl who is in love with Ramesh who eventually marries someone else to keep his father's promise. Kamala comes in the scene as a replacement of Ramesh's newly wedded bride, and here begins a set of confusion through which the director asks questions on the social outlook on the position of women where she is the property of her father before marriage and the property of her husband after it. The victimized existence of women in our society asks for a change in our outlook. Here Ghosh has cinematized the shadowed identity of Sushila in such a way that it justifies Tagore's story by pinpointing the uselessness of the concept of marriage and home for a woman as it costs her identity. Ghosh's attempt in this adaptation asks for a change in our acceptance of a different social norm which may provide woman a much larger space. Rituporno's conscious effort drags the attention of viewers in a global platform towards a liberal identity of woman away from that identity which is validated only through the institution of marriage.

Chokher Bali – another brave venture of the master creator Rituporno Ghosh. In this adaptation of Tagore's novel by the same name Binodini appears to be a rebel against those oppressions which are imposed on women by the name of marriage. Rituporno insists, "the rebellion she puts up is symbolized by the repetitive use of the colour 'red'. 'Red' is not just the colour of passion; it's also the colour of revolt in *Chokher Bali*."-Said Rituporno in an interview with Kaustav Bakshi. Binodini – a beautiful, educated and young woman trapped in widowhood obeys her forbidden hidden passion to come closer to Mahendra who is already married to Ashalota. Her love for Behari, Mahendra's unmarried friend is another unexpected move for a widow living in a society where women are considered dead after the death of their husband. In Rituporno's *Chokher Bali* Binodini's perspective is emphasized to show how feminine subjectivity is stabbed in to protect masculine orders of a given society. Whether it is the rebel Binodini or the submissive Ashalata space is much limited for both of them. Where for Binodini it is her body that has given her the chance to assert her feminine self against her social identity as a widow- Ashalata's self-identity somehow vanishes. Apart from being the wife of Mahendra, Ashalata cannot manage to break the confinement of the social identity of a married woman. In this brave attempt of Rituporno female gaze, especially that of Binodini's is emphasized to reevaluate the associative link between body and desire. Through the eye of camera this female gaze is angled for the audiences while creating a thrilling effect. It is an enthusiastic effort on the part of this master narrator to play with the critical aspects of gaze making a statement on the presence of feminine desire beyond the limits set by the male dominated society. Here Tagore's feministic approach has moved towards a different level all together. Rituporno has cinematized this story of love, passion, betrayal, confinement and desired freedom with such efficient hand that it has fruitfully connected with the twenty first century spectators. Apart from this he has managed to present the central character (Binodini) of this story *Chokher Bali*- in such a manner that it has been rescued from simply becoming a villain, the vamp, or the "fallen woman" of the society. Rituporno has efficiently positioned the character of Binodini in a much safer pedestal where her moves are arranged to justify her actions. Ashalota's charm, her simplicity, her inability to understand the critical calculations of life is balanced in Binodini's intellect, and understanding of life. At one point of time it appears that Binodini and Ashalota are the two sides of the same coin, and the value of that coin can be measured in a single term that is 'woman'. Therefore, it can be stated that women characters of this Tagore's novel and their marginalized identity is cinematized in Ghosh's films with a telling effect to justify with the present experiences of this neglected section of society.

Chitrangada –the Crowning wish is a strong and vital statement on the term 'gender'. While Tagore's *Chitrangada* was a dance drama, here it is a story about this drama in preparation. Rudra the Protagonist of this film opts to go under the knife of a surgeon to change his identity as a homosexual male so that he can adopt a child of his desire. The stage presentation of Tagore's dance drama by this talented director is somehow interlinked to the questions of identity – body –and sexuality faced by both Rudra and Chitrangada. Here also the gender issues are raised in a complex and intricate mixture of the two interconnected stories of Chitrangada and Rudra. When Chitrangada had to change her identity because of Arjuna, Rudra is in the same direction of changing his identity because of Partho the percussionist of his theatre group. In a deliberate projection of the life and its never ending question of a homosexual living in a society which is prejudiced and cultured with acceptance of heterosexuality. Apart from this Chitrangada's character is considered here as shadowed with the same process of societal manifestation leading to a complete neglect towards her own desired identity. For viewers this film is a visual pleasure which has the capacity to challenge the existing norms of the society. Such adaptations are crucial to raise untold issues of gender discrimination of our society.

After much discussion and analysis it appears that there is a tradition of translating literature into film .In such adaptations viewers get a new taste in the old story – this is the truth with adaptations of Tagore's *Chokher Bali*, *Noukadubi* and *Chitrangada* by the much acclaimed writer director Rituporno Ghosh. Here as we are concentrating on the women characters in such adaptations, we must acknowledge that Ghosh has done a deliberate effort to dig out different layers of the marginalized identity of a woman through his adaptation of Tagore's works into films. When we are dealing with Rituporno Ghosh's films we are simply going through the crafted work of a policy maker who is known for putting strong statements on any gender related issue and while working on Tagore he is correct in his proportionate judgment of the authors works. Tagore's feminist ideas are dealt with proper concentration and observation in Rituporno's adaptations and when it has mingled with his technique of presentation the outcome is a masterpiece.

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