

**CULTURE AND SEXUALITIES IN VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS: A
STUDY OF THE “QUEER TRILOGY” IN BENGALI CINEMA**

ABSTRACT

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SUDIPTA GARAI



CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS

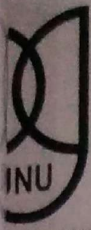
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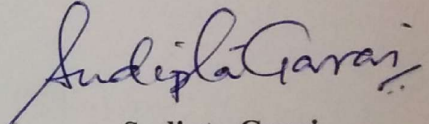
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DECLARATION


I, Sudipta Garai, declare that this thesis entitled, '**Culture and Sexualities in Visual Representations: A Study of the "Queer Trilogy" in Bengali Cinema**', submitted by me, in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, has not been previously submitted, either in parts or whole, for any other degree of this or any other university and it is my original work.

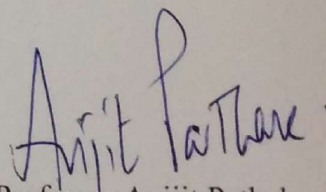

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CERTIFICATE

This is to state that Sudipta Garai has worked on the thesis entitled, '**Culture and Sexualities in Visual Representations: A Study of the "Queer Trilogy" in Bengali Cinema**', for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. We recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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Sudipta Garai

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To the queerness of life.....

INTRODUCTION

Joey: Milk¹ is not about fucking. It is about human rights.

His friend: Fucking is a human right.

Atafeh: Here anything illegal becomes politically subversive.

Shireen: Political acts aren't that romantic.

(Circumstance: 2011, Iranian, by Maryam Keshavarz)²

This conversation is a part of a discussion where four young 'queer' Iranians plan to dub two American movies -*Milk* and *Sex and the City*³ in Persian. This chosen text remains specifically interesting as it reflects various aspects of culture, films, political movements and sexualities within just these few mentioned lines. The Iranian American director Keshavarz predicts that this film which not only shows some bold scenes exhibiting sex and sexuality between two lesbian lovers but also questions the authority of the religion, would probably be banned in the country, but she hopes to connect with the audience through the language 'Persian' in which the movie is being made. There were various controversies that this film faced in its process of making and release, questioning on the authenticity of the story based in Tehran as the director herself stays outside the country. Dubbing the film *Milk* in Farsi might be a metaphor as to how power and sexuality of the West are being perceived by the 'others' of the world and seen as the way of 'coming out' which might be inappropriate to do without the cultural contextualization of certain unique experiences and concerns of the particular individual and space of belonging. There can also be an alternative explanation that language should not be a limitation or a hurdle in expanding the feeling of solidarity in something which

¹'Milk' is an American biographical film on the life of Harvey Milk, made in the year 2008 by the director Gus Vant Sant. The film sets back in the year 1970, which was also Milk's fortieth birthday, and thereafter shows his journey through life and politics till he meets death because of his long struggle as a gay activist.

² Maryam Keshavarz. 2011. *Circumstance*. Iran. 107mins

³ 'Sex and the City' (2008) before being made as a film by Michael Patrik King was a much talked about television series broadcast from the year 1998 to 2004. In 2010, a sequel of the film was also made, 'Sex and the City2'. This romantic comedy is about four women friends sharing lives in the city of New York with frank discussions on romance and sexuality. It also faced criticism as being vulgar and shallow in its content which could also be a reason of the openness that these characters of Carrie Bradshaw, Samantha Jones, Charlotte York Goldenblatt and Miranda Hobbes portrayed through their characters.

remains very 'personal' yet so much political in its existence. Thus the transnational circulation of ideas should always be there in order to have a greater movement towards humanism and solidarity of humans beyond borders.

However, these are just two different ways of looking at the same text, here specifically, a visual text, but there can be multiple interpretations and perspectives that can be involved in reading a visual cultural text. Not going into the details of the film, it remains important to mention that cinema as a form of artistic institution can never be a neutral mediator of information and representation rather is an obvious product of the political and the social dispositions of the creators involved. A cinema which is called as 'queer' could be said to have the potential in creating an alternative space or a 'counter culture' through its cinematic visualization extending its imagination in constructing a space of resistance, though no cinema can be boxed in one category and weaving a definite interpretative format of explanation.

Prof Siras: Mere khilaf sajish thi!

Reporter: Aap gay hai isiliye?

Prof Siras: Koi mere feelings ko teen aksharon mein kaise samajh sakta hai. Yeh ek kavita ki tarah hai. Bhavatmak. Ek teevra iccha. Jo aapke kaabu ke bahar hoti hai. An uncontrollable urge.....tum ish (lover) shabd ke piche kyun padh jaate ho...kabhi love ko bhi samajhne ki koshis karo...it's a beautiful world. You're making it sound like a dirty word. I have a problem with that. (Aligarh, February 2016)

Based on a real life incident, this film *Aligarh*⁴ by Hansal Mehta puts forward an array of thoughts towards the audience about love, sexuality, right to privacy and also political rights, going beyond the issue of homosexuality in the Indian context. The narrative shows the struggle of Prof Srinivas Ramchandra Siras of Aligarh Muslim University, who was suspended on the grounds of morality. His right to privacy was in

⁴ Hansal Mehta. 2016. *Aligarh*. India. 114mins

question when some local TV reporters entered his house and forcibly recorded him in an intimate moment with a rickshaw-puller. The violation of the Professor's privacy was ignored by the University and 'morality' became the grounds of his suspension. He was a man who did not really associate himself as a 'gay' or a 'homosexual' and thus initially remained reluctant to fight against IPC Section 377, which was then decriminalized by the Delhi High Court (2009) and thus gave him a strong ground of opposition. However what made him more concerned is his right to life and privacy and his own expressions and meanings of love and expressions of sexuality. The above quoted lines say that he is the person who believes in love and compassion and would not like to be bound by certain categorization or narrow meanings and terms that the society tends to define.

In our society, strangely 'love' and 'sexuality' seem to walk hand in hand, and in case they don't, the love becomes 'platonic' and 'sexuality' becomes illegal. It seems that Indian culture justifies and legitimizes sexual acts in the cover called 'love', whereas, ideally these two words have different meanings in their independent contexts. Societal norms bind them together so strongly, that sexual satisfaction or expressions, between consenting adults, seems like a 'sin' when it just stand as an act of natural urge. This film *Aligarh* to me is a beautiful story of Prof Siras, to whom sexuality is just an uncontrollable urge, and love is much greater which probably remains indefinable and vast in its nature. It is not just a story on homosexual rights, as he remains a man of patience and dignity, who is much bothered about his personal space and freedom and thus reluctant to prove himself in front of the society. Sexualities become meaningful to study, when contextualized in specific societal expectations with meanings, rituals, practices and beliefs that they are practiced through.

Cinema as a text thus could only make sense when studied together with its inter-linkages and the politics that operate in its construction and reconstruction of ideas and imageries. Narrowing down to the scope of this study about the chosen Bengali "queer" trilogy, I would like to read and re-read the texts, not only from the perspective of a sociology student but also trying to locate views and ideas of the different 'audiences'. Before I start contextualizing and conceptualizing the study, I would like to give a brief

overview of the same which might be more meaningful as we proceed with the different chapters.

Sociology as a discipline starts with an idea to ‘debunk’, to question, to look beyond. Films to me remain an interesting field of enquiry. It is not only a story- telling medium with the aim of entertaining individuals, rather it always remained a space to think, learn, understand and question. The chosen films as well put forward some intriguing questions that lead me in doing a research of this kind. In *Arekti Premer Golpo*, when the protagonist asks his lover, “*what is more important? The way we actually live our lives or the way we want to?*” is not just a question within the cinematic representation, but to me, it needs much deeper questioning of our own selves and gradually to ‘others’ and the society, state etc. In the same movie, another predominant question that arose is what makes an individual or the society decides on what’s ‘normal’ and what’s ‘not’? In *Memories in March* when Arnob, the main character in the narrative expresses his discomfort about a fish tank where lives are being caged, also towards the end of the movie questions whether he should decide about the lives of others at all. He thinks that may be these fishes in the box have made this their base of existence without which they would die. Categories and tags are a human social creation which at times becomes extremely dominant and hegemonic, but again without which a social life would lack its meaning and communication would not be possible. This contradiction is life and to find answers is the journey. At the end, it’s not that we find all answers to all questions in life but to question with an urge to understand is what research is all about. In sociology or social science research, there are various theories and researches that happen, but with the aim to understand, to explain, interpret and explore the social structures, practices, symbols, rituals, categorization, domination, so on and so forth, but which is already an existing social life independent of our enquiry and understanding. Thus to me, a research is more about enquiry within and without on a ‘field’ of our choice to interpret, to theorize, to critically assess the implications and meanings that apparently might not be evident. *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*, makes me question as to whether it is really possible for one to experiment with ones physical self, that is the ‘body’? If the technological growth and science can actually through operation have a successful gender transformation through reassignment surgery, is it then easy for one to

live their life of choice that lead the change? Starting with these basic questions in mind, I started the journey of this research, but through the process there were different other issues that emerged during conversations, sharing and learning as experiences and curiosity. The chosen ‘Queer trilogy’ where Rituparno Ghosh, plays a dominant role of the queer protagonist, intrigued me in reading the texts from multiple perspectives.

‘Three’ is a magic number. It symbolically contains the beginning, the middle and the end. It interestingly also remains the sacred number for most of the religions like the Trinity in Hinduism—*Brahma* (the creator), *Vishnu* (the preserver), *Maheswar* (the destroyer). Likewise, the mind, body and soul and birth, life and death are three major journeys in human life. Even in respect of time, past present and future becomes three very integral system of categorization. ‘Trilogy’ refers to a group of three with common or related themes, be it plays, novels, stories, films or any other cultural manifestations. In Bengali cinema, the concept of trilogy has appeared time and again, for example, the ‘*Apu Trilogy*’, comprising of *Pather Panchali* in 1955, *Aparajito* in 1956 and *Apur Sansar* in 1959, directed by the world famous director and writer Satyajit Ray, based on two novels of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay which won various awards and made the director even more famous with his new innovations and experimentations in making the films. Ray also presented the ‘*Calcutta Trilogy*’ with the films *Pratidwandi* (1970), *Seemabaddha* (1971) and *Jana Aranya* (1976) which reflected the anxiety, anguish and despair about unemployment that the ‘youth’ were facing during that period of time. The system of traditional values was in question and the social space was in a state of chaos. During the Seventies, Calcutta went through a state of turmoil and political upheavals through refugee crisis, unemployment which also led to the Naxalbari Movement killing thousands especially the youths of that time. These films were a portrayal of the educating youths facing crisis and compromises in order to live their lives. Mrinal Sen’s Calcutta trilogy, with the films *Interview* (1971), *Calcutta 71* (1971) and *Padatik* (1973) also had a similar theme of the frustration and mishaps but in a more politically charged way. Sen, being an active member of IPTA⁵, was deeply associated with the communist

⁵ IPTA or the Indian People’s Theatre Association is a leftist cultural forum which was formed in 1942 as a medium of expression of rights and cultural awakening among the masses across the country. Ritwik Ghatak, was one of the important members in the group as well.

ideology which has been reflected in his films. Ritwik Ghatak, an avant-garde film maker made a trilogy on the issues of partition. He, being deeply affected by the man-made famine, the Partition and homelessness of the refugees used his films as a tool to communicate with the masses making those a potential agency in his political activism. The films *Megha Dhaka Tara*, in 1960, *Komal Gandhar* in 1961 and *Subarnarekha* in 1962 could be termed as the '*Partition Trilogy*' reflecting on the hopes and aspirations to live even after the struggles and breakdown that the masses went through. Rashmi Doraiswamy, (2009) mentions that "*Ghatak combined realism with the rituals of the everyday on the one hand, and of the archaic on the other*" which in a way creates "*geological images that encapsulate within themselves many time frames, archaic and contemporary, mythical and achingly real*". Rituparno Ghosh, born in 1963 was deeply influenced by Ray's work. He was also a part of two sets of trilogy, one of the Tagore's novel based films, *Choker Bali* in 2003, *Noukadubi* in the year 2011 and *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* in 2012, which he directed and the "queer" trilogy as in *Memories in March* (2010), *Arekti Premer Golpo* (2010) and *Chitrangada: the Crowning Wish* (2012) where he acted in the role of the protagonist. These "queer trilogy" are the first among the full length Bengali feature films, depicting 'alternative' genders, are being extensively discussed in the following chapters with a critical discourse analysis and sociological enquiry of the same.

Films or any other visual or motion pictures, produced as a means of communication or entertainment are not something which stands outside the whole societal discourses, rather is also an apparatus in the hands of the few, who through their 'power' of mediation, mostly reflect a hegemonic ideological representation and manifestations which do not deviate much from what the society expects us to conform with. In spite of its certain limitations in representations, it does reflect a critical eye which remain significant in understanding the social reality. The society, we live in has certain prescriptions for its inmates; it not only sets the rules and regulations but also creates an ideological discourse along-side. There are certain signs, symbols and codes which are formed through the societal discourses over a period of time. Neither the art, architecture, writings, sculptures nor any other creative endeavor, is a product which is created outside of the 'social'; thus are all a reflection of the societal way of thinking and

perceiving. In the process of growing up, we as individuals live through a plethora of ever changing discourses from family, to school, to workplaces and various other agencies of the society and the state, which in turn, shape our identities and the way in which we identify our own selves. This in a way introduces us to what is ‘normal’ and what stands as ‘deviant’ trying to give a meaning to our existence. Within cinema, lies a great possibility of change due to its fluid nature and its expanded reach. Thus even when films are produced within a society, they as well hold the seed of critical thinking, unsettling the audience hoping for a ‘difference’ in certain spheres of our lives.

In this present technologically advanced world, media through various networks, advertisements, news, films, telefilms etc has crossed the boundary of the living room. The power of media has changed immensely with time. In spite of the state control over the release of films and videos through the process of censorship, there are various other mediums like YouTube,⁶ Facebook,⁷ and WhatsApp⁸ where videos are shared and publicized. Though in a popular level, films still go through the censor board⁹ formalities before being screened in public in the cinema halls or multiplexes, the space of media has extended with multiple technological innovations and distributions. There might be a debate on how the whole culture of cinema-goers has changed with the decline of the single screen movie theatres and the mushrooming of the multiplexes, and how these huge screens have actually now being reduced to a small screen in the mobile phones where a movie can be easily downloaded or easily available online with an undeniable reach of the media penetrating in diverse spaces of human lives, extending its influences to a much higher significance from a community viewing to a much private, individualized phenomenon.

It is not only the reach of audience that has evolved, but also the whole process of film making has become more democratic in a revolutionary way, as now even a small camera which is not hard to find is also being able to capture realities or shoot a film for that matter. The change from the analogue to the digital systems not only makes the

⁶ An American video sharing website launched in 2005

⁷ An American social networking site, an online social media service which was launched by Mark Zuckerberg along with Harvard College Students in 2004

⁸ It is a cross-platform computer software for instant messaging service in the smart phones.

⁹ Central Board of Film Certification

process of distribution easier, but also makes the process of filming easier where an SD card¹⁰ can be used repeatedly and the technological advancement makes the editing and storage, a much more easier and cost-effective process. This makes media democratic, as it is much fluid in nature where it enters into different spaces without much hassle. Literature as cultural texts remains very important but the glamour and the reach of films exceeds its specific targeted audience, as the visuals in contrary to written words travel with much more ease. The entertainment quotient of cinema is just one part of the various importances that it holds within itself. It brings the world within the spaces of bedroom with such an ease that even without moving an inch, through television we come to know various narratives, stories and information through it.

Critical reading of the imageries and representations in media thus remains quite relevant in sociological research as these texts are loaded with meanings and symbols influencing the masses which needs a critical eye to look beyond the ‘taken for granted notions’ of its portrayal. While reading these texts, the aspects of power and agency become crucial as cinema is not only a collective form of art, it is also a collective phenomenon (mostly) when it comes to the viewer and the very process of viewing and thus, the positionality of the film-maker and also the audience becomes significant. The multiple ways of ‘text and talk’ are controlled by the elites, who enjoy a certain kind of resource and power creating a marginalization within the masses providing a limited space for their contribution in the existing discourses. At times when films represent the ‘marginalized’, it becomes even more important to look at as they hardly have any role to play in their own representations in the mediated texts. There come the invariable questions over the basis of the narrative and what is the process of its construction. Thus to understand the discourse of the ‘other’ in the society also becomes necessary where the voices from the periphery could be heard in understanding the mainstream ideological underpinnings. The influence of films in family, marriage, community and other institutions of the society thus need to be analyzed in the process of understanding the same.

¹⁰ Secure Digital is a non-volatile storage card developed in 1999 by the SD card association, for use in portable devices.

To talk about sexuality or sexual desires in public is not very common in a moralistic society like India. Patriarchal norms seem to dominate and control the various form of sexual desires and expressions. It is not only the power of the 'penis' that could grasp the seriousness of the problem, rather attention should also be given to the way in which the whole issue of sexuality is being dealt in the society with much secrecy. On the one hand, the norms of the society continuously try to control the sexual behavior of the women, and on the other hand it portrays women in the films (or media in general) as sexual objects through a man's eye. For example, I am reminded of the lyrics of the popular songs like in the Salman Khan film *Dabangg2*¹¹ where Kareena Kapoor is seen dancing, saying "*mein toh tandoori murgi hoon yaar, gatkale saiyan alcohol se*" (i am tandoori chicken, have me with alcohol) is one of the many where women are portrayed as an object for men's pleasure which with time gets reflected in the way men starts thinking about themselves and about women in general. The patriarchal ideology is penetrating through all means of socialization to make the situation worse for women and other marginalized gender groups.

One of the recent Bengali film maker Q states, sex is about something carnal in people's existence which cannot be denied. In his films and his quest for an identity, the idea of sexual identity thus becomes extremely relevant. I am mentioning Q in this context (who has consciously changed his name from Qaushiq Mukherjee as he could not associate himself with his social or the passport identity) because through his films he has set a trend of subversive sexual representations. He believes that his own identity becomes a subtext for his films which is about jumping and swapping identities.¹² His film *Gandu* (used as a 'slang') was not primarily released in theatres (having issues with the censor board) rather came to the public domain through several film festivals in Yale University (2010), South Asian International Film Festival in New York, (2011) Berlin International Film Festival and at the Osian Film Festival (2012) in India due to its

¹¹ *Dabangg 2* (2012) is an action comedy directed by Arbaaz Khan starring Salman Khan, one of the leading actors in Bollywood and Sonakshi Sinha, where the above mentioned song is said to be an 'item number' by Kareena Kapoor. The item number songs do not really have any direct connection with the movie narratives but comes as an extension of the entertainment factor.

¹² This idea of Q about himself and his work was a part of the TBIP Tete-a-Tete series of interviews that is an in-depth and intimate interview with the film makers in order to understand their work. This interview could be found in the link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCriW9URVRI&t=1227s&spfreload=10>

content which has scenes that came as a shock to many. It portrayed sex and nudity as it is, which might not be soothing or comfortable in an Indian social life where sex exists behind the doors or in darkness. His film *Tasher Desh*¹³ had put ‘*Tagore in acid*’ in his words which was produced by NFDC¹⁴ (with others) is also an example of how he actually deconstructed the most popular children’s play of the Bengalees and put it up in a new light in the year 2012, which was a significant year in the celebration of the completion of Tagore’s 150th birth anniversary and the same year of Rituparno Ghosh’s *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*. Q says that “*I don’t like Tagore. I am not a big fan of his. But I can’t ignore him because he is all over me, around me, all over Bengal, like a huge black cloud which is his ‘alkhallah’ (robe) and the flowing beard being the benevolent figure*”.

It is very interesting to note that how both Rituparno Ghosh and Q had their own approaches towards the notion of sexuality and thus the representations onscreen. Ghosh portrayed sexuality with much grace and mostly as an emotional journey, within the confines of the family, whereas Q has put the audience with a sense of shock dragging them from the middle class values and morality that the Bengali society is holding on to. However, it is also true that these blatant representations of sexuality in Q’s films could not really become as popular, in Bengali society as Ghosh’s, more because for us as a society, change of perspective comes over a period of time and our choices are shaped through our learnt system of values, where these new forms of experimental cinema might take a little more time to be received, as it creates discomfort and provocation. Ghosh, as a film maker was well aware of the ways to draw attention and interest of his audiences through his films and how to portray his narrative through a definite language with substance and subtlety that actually worked in favor, making him a household name in urban Bengal.

Language shapes the discourse in any given society. It remains very innate to everyday life, where the use of words, phrases, proverbs becomes a reflection to the way of thinking and living. It not only shapes the socio-political and cultural formations, but

¹³ Qaushiq Mukherjee. (Q) 2012. *Tasher Desh*. India. 114mins

¹⁴ National Film Development Corporation

also reflects the social order, through the various interactions that happen in the social sphere. With time the language changes, as in the previous era of Bengali literature, especially in the works of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, we find the use of '*sadhu-bhasa*',¹⁵ which was treated as the refined language (with the Enlightenment era that influenced the Bengali society to a great extent), to be used while writing, unlike the '*cholit/cholit bhasa*',¹⁶ the language used while talking or in everyday use that gradually overwhelmed in the Bengali writings with the change in life and thoughts. The language of films also changed with time and context where forms now have become of much importance than the narratives. However when we think about sexuality and the words related to it, it's very interesting to see that there is hardly any word that means exactly the same of the word "*queer*" in Bengali. Though the translated versions sometimes suggest it as '*bichitrokami*' '*Jounota*' means sexuality and '*opor jounota*' means alternative sexuality, where as the fluidity that we understand through the word 'queer' is still unavailable in the Bengali vocabulary when it comes specifically to the context of sexuality. '*Somokami*' or homosexual is a broad term, but terms specifically for gay, lesbian seem missing. '*Kothi*' however could be said as an Indian term for effeminate men which is also used as '*durani*' in Kolkata, but mostly within their own 'community' rather than something which is understandable by the society as a whole. In India, though the representations of various and diverse manifestations of sexualities are found in different spaces of art and sculptures, the theorization was never done very meticulously. It is the terms and vocabulary of the West that have more or less become a part of the Indian culture as well. There are many words in Bengali however which cannot be directly translated in English, for example the words like '*oshleel*' (though termed as indecency), '*ador*' (an expression of love), '*obhimaan*' (an expression of anger woven with love) and many others. When I say, 'translate', I mean the meaning with the essence of it. There might be words which could be put in order to mean these terms but the actual meaning that comes in mind while one speaks them in specific context, the subtleties of the implied meaning remain missing.

¹⁵ It is a sanskritized form of Bengali language which is used only for writing.

¹⁶ Standard Colloquial Bengali

The language in cultural context is not devoid of the politics of power and knowledge that defines and shapes its existence. It is interesting how there are different spaces of different language in academics, politics or queer and other socio-cultural spaces of lives, which could be seen as the ‘shared knowledge’ of that specific community forming a ‘culture’ or a ‘counter culture’ for that matter. There is a difference of language even in urban and rural spaces of India, specifically in Bengal, and not only so, there are diverse languages even within these spaces. In this study I have focused on Kolkata as the fields of my study as the chosen ‘queer’ films were not being released in the rural spaces of Bengal and the target audience was the Bengali middle class among whom Ghosh already was a known face. Ashish Nandy (2001) points that “as city became the epicenter of new forms of adventure in ideas and creativity, it also offered to open up the opportunities of defying a conventional, pre-formed life and experiment with new cultural experiences and with refashioned or extended selves”.

When we talk about ‘self’, it’s an abstract understanding of how one defines one’s own ‘selfhood’ through the notions of social and cultural forms. Body becomes the space of manifestation of the self, though the perception remains psychological. Body thus becomes a process of cultural self address and self-interpretation. The origin of the modern body with the developing processes of distancing and disciplining, the visualization of the inner self and self observation, the willingness for knowledge and power has become important aspects in understanding the questions of technologisation, fragmentation, sexuality, performativity of the body with many others. The understanding of the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ in sexuality discourse develops the idea that human sexuality is not as natural as it is perceived to be. The materialization of sexual body happens through active processes of experiences and interactions in the societal spaces. The various idea of body that comes up in the South Asian cultural contexts are that of subtle and gross bodies, social bodies, the transformation and transgression of the body and the sacrifice as a body or the body as sacrifice. The subtle and gross bodies could be understood with the philosophical underpinnings of the *Karma*¹⁷ and *Moksha*¹⁸. With the laws of Karma, the individual becomes a gross body and subtle matter is the material

¹⁷ *Karma* means action or deeds.

¹⁸ Spiritual release from all *karma* (the bindings of the *samsara*).

from which the rebirth and thus reincarnation takes place. The 'social' body means the body where the society feels to have a right in form of parents, relative or close ones. In the film *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* there is a scene where the mother of the protagonist Rudra states this right over her son's body which she took care of at some point of time. The notions of 'right' and 'wrong', 'purity' and 'impurity' associated with body also remains a part of the social manifestations. A menstrual woman who is not allowed in a temple is also about the social perception of the body and its mechanism. The transgression of bodies again is extremely important when we talk about sexuality where the body itself becomes the space for transgression. Lastly the body as sacrifice and the sacrifice as body is something which could be understood through religious interpretations. 'Body' thus is not just an existence rather is loaded with meanings and interpretations in its existence of culture and society.

'Body', interestingly is not just an individual and social self but also very much a political issue. It is not only trained to behave according to the customs and practices of the society, but also restricted by the legalities of the state power. Foucault and Agamben have dealt extensively on this idea of how our very personal body actually turns to a political object of the state, which I have tried to look in the following chapters. However, what becomes more intriguing is what then is 'personal' and 'political'? Can we at all distinguish these two as different spaces? The personal 'choices' that we think we make is even a product of the social expectations and socialization. 'Needs' are being created everyday with the whole process of globalization and corporatization. Thus the whole curiosity of how 'normal' or 'natural' is the 'normal? Ritualization is not reason of normalization. It is always the perspectives that creates truth, rather could be said, versions of truth. Body becomes such an integral part of individual's existence that at times when the innermost feeling doesn't match with that of the 'social' body, there happens a major clash which also lead one to change their body from male to female or female to male. Manabi Bandopadhyay for example, was the first transgender in Bengal to have a Ph.D degree in literature and also be to appointed as a principal in a government college in Krishnanagar (Women's College). She was born as Somnath, till she became Manabi in 2003 undergoing a sex change operation. Born as Somnath in a middle class family in Nadia, West Bengal she had her own struggles just because her body did not

match with the feelings she experienced within, which was that of a woman. In an interview in *“India Today: Woman Summit and Awards 2015”*, she says that Mahabharata was a continuous inspiration for her where there are instances of sex change, which made her belief stronger. She was also deeply inspired by Tagore and his songs, where especially she remembered Tagore’s *“jodi tor daak shune keo naa ashe/tobe ekla cholo re”*. This actually says that as in our culture and society we face different ‘stigmatization’ and trouble in not conforming to the ‘normal’, it is in culture that we also look for alternatives, we try to locate in spaces where there is a space for the so called ‘deviants’ or the ‘different’. It is both constraining and also liberating, again on the perspectives we look into. However, coming back to Manabi Bandopadhyay, she states that she is not sure about her identity. In educational institution documents she was Somnath, though in her Ph.D certificate she was mentioned Smt. Manabi Bandopadhyay, but yet there were moments when she faced immense troubles within these switching ‘social’ identities. She mentions that in her Voter id, Ration card, Bank documents she was known as “Manabi”, but then when she was buying a flat in Kolkata, after getting a job in a college in Jhargram, she did not get her loan sanctioned from bank because the college documents identified her as “Somnath” and the EMI was supposed to be deducted from her salary where she was still with the name her parents assigned. It’s very interesting to see how our identities are actually formed, is it through one’s body, one’s assigned name and gender or the way one think about their own selves in relation to the society where they happen to be in. She also mentions that in the college she worked in Jhargram, she was not allowed to use the women rest room and was told to use the man’s toilet inspite of the fact that she changed her gender by then and was a woman. In the same interview, when she was sharing about how she felt in the women’s compartments in the train, which was a suffocating experience for her, she says that women are expected to be shy, soft and with feminine traits in ways of walking, talking, looking and eating but she was not like them as she is different in all those traits, having a harsh voice and a tall figure and a different body language. She mentions that her postures and gestures were different as she is unisexual. This again drew my attention in thinking about body, identity, culture and sexuality as once she mentions she feels like a woman in heart and thus she also went for a sex change operation certified to be a

woman, but again she mentions herself as a unisexual given the difference of postures and gestures of a girl, that the society expects. This clash of identification that not only is done by the society but also internalized and practiced by us in real life is not an easy task to get over with. Manabi believes that it is education which would change the situation for the transgenders, but it is also sad when we came to know that in December 23rd, 2016, after one and a half year of service in the college as principal, she was even forced to resign, but ultimately continued her job. She says that she was fed up with the gheraos and agitation against her by college teachers and some students. She was going through a tremendous mental pressure due to this non-cooperation and thus decided to leave the job. She felt defeated. The story of Somnath to Manabi is just one example of a transgender who even after being highly educated is still facing a life of struggles and hardships, even after her wish to become a woman became fulfilled; she is still fighting for a life of dignity and equality continuing her job as a principal.

In this research these personal experiences, dilemmas, understanding or reactions come together to understand films as a text. The questions that arise out of the cinematic visuals and dialogues extend towards the voice of the ‘audience’ in understanding culture and sexualities with a deeper understanding of the same. In the following chapters I try and understand in more detailed discussions on ‘culture’ and ‘sexuality’ in terms of both a sociological reading and also from the location of the space of these films.

The first chapter gives *A Brief Outline of the Research*, with certain conceptualization and contextualization. The ‘taken for granted’ notions like ‘media’, ‘culture’, ‘sexuality’, ‘love’ and ‘eroticism’ are tried to be seen from different sociological analysis. It is interesting to see how sexuality has emerged in Indian context specifically in different texts and traditions. On the hand I have discussed the various ways of looking at different forms of sexualities through sociological theories, mythological stories and sculptural creativity, and on the other I have tried understanding culture from multiple perspectives referring to signs and symbols that play a dominant role in our socialization, the ideology that exerts a form of power within social structures, technological developments that expanded our understanding of cultural norms. In reference to this, how culture, state and individual comes into play is also tried to be

focused on. Finally, there are discussions on the methods and techniques which were involved in doing the research.

The second chapter *The Culture of Films* focuses on the question as to why we study films in a sociological research, the significance or the importance of analyzing an art form in a social research. It also looks through the understanding of films specifically in an Indian context where the society reflects on the socio-political and economic state of the art it is produced in. I have also tried looking at the queer films in the larger Indian context and gradually narrowing down my study to specifically in Bengali society and the chosen films, with the different phases of Bengali cinema, sexual representations in Bengali cinema and ultimately Rituparno Ghosh, as a film maker and actor and beyond that one who identifies himself as ‘different’ when it comes to the hegemonic gender divisions.

Chapter three, titled *Queer Trilogy* closely looks at these three films, which are *Memories in March*, *Arekti Premer Golpo* and *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*, and try reading them not only from their content but also from the narratives and interviews that I did as a part of my field study. It thus is not just a representational critical sociological analysis but also a version that came from the ‘field’. It goes beyond the space of cinematic representations and sociological discourses in reading the narratives to the ‘voices’ in the field.

The fourth chapter, *Reflections* deals with the understanding of the social dynamics of these films, actually relating certain issues with broader reality and experiences of life. The issue of ‘identity’ remains the centre of this thesis as it’s after all about the identity and identification of self that we are trying to locate and understand from different perspectives. Then the issue of ‘democracy and law’, which is again unavoidable in a state that claims to be the largest democracy but restricts its citizens when it comes to the expression of their choices and wishes, even when it’s something that is supposed to be very personal, as the sexual choices. Lastly I try looking at the notions of ‘love, marriage and society’, as in a space like India, the hegemonic heteronormative ideology of patriarchy tries to justify the existence of an institution like family through its reproductive quality which essentialize the relation of love to be

between opposite sex. Then how are we negotiating with these spaces with the 'alternative' sexual choices and marriages.

This is how the discussion proceeds with understanding and re-understanding of certain ideas, notions, and theories where through a process of learning and unlearning, I conclude the writing with my own observations, reflections and experiences of doing this research. Research is never a finished product, rather a starting point of a lifelong journey where one seems to start their own search not only for a problem outside, in the society but also through various conversations and debates with own self, within.

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

“Cinema is one of the most contested cultural sites in India today...” (Bharucha: 1998)

Media through its portrayal has always constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed our ideas and images of identities, values, lifestyles and the world-view going beyond certain boundaries mediating easily into our inner thoughts and consciousness. It holds the power to generate new thoughts, constructing new images altering the existing book of knowledge which might also lead to a change in the way of looking at things, whereas it can also be a deliberate attempt to reinforce certain hierarchical and hegemonic norms of the society through its representation. Cinema however has always been a powerful and popular mode of narration in relation to the questions of melodrama, realism and the idiosyncratic articulation of thoughts. This research aims to look at critically the questions and notions that are taken for granted in reference to gender and sexuality that needs questioning at every level of its existence and normalization. It is an attempt to understand and examine the complex dynamics between culture, gender and its representations through some chosen Bengali films in the context of the current socio-political situation of India. Reading of cinema¹⁹ in reference to how it is being influenced by the changing social trends and the ‘popular’ art culture remains an important field to explore with the influence of cinema on the society and its people and their imagination.

The three chosen films have a strong Rituparno Ghosh influence. *Memories in March* (2010) had him as the story and script writer, *Arekti Premer Golpo* (2010) was directed by Kaushik Ganguly but the presence of Rituparno in the leading role had its own influence and lastly *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012) was a directed and acted film of this wellknown director. Before being an actor, Ghosh as a filmmaker was being able to become a household name in urban Bengal. His films *Unishe April* (1994), *Dahan*(1997),*Subho Mahurat*(2003), *Abohoman*(2010) to name a few had already made

¹⁹ The term ‘Cinema’ and ‘Film’ are used interchangeably in this work. Cinema to me is much of a social term whereas film is more technical. Cinema concerns with public viewing of ‘films’ that is the motion pictures.

him a celebrated filmmaker who with his creativity, understanding of subtle emotions and his keenness for Tagore in his imagination made the stories loved by the audience. This audience however has always been the Bengali middle class as most of the stories dealt with the culture and ethos of this particular educated class who could very well associate themselves with the representations of either the stories or the characters.

It is interesting to note that Rituparno as an individual or a film maker in his initial films never really talked or reflected “queer” characters in his cinematic representations, though women were an integral concern. With his acceptance and fame gradually he came out with his so called queer identity. It is only in the later phase that he started ‘dressing differently’ as he wished, wearing kajal, jewellery or attires so to mention a few. These films however were a production of his later phase which could be a probable reason of the emerging context of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) when it became highly debatable as to whether homosexuality has to be legalized in India and became a hugely discussed controversial issue in the socio-legal arena of this time. The films of these kinds could very well be said as the call of the time. The other reason must have been his personal choice and interest to portray characters through which he could also affirm his own identity in media and otherwise. He beautifully used films as a means of self expression and a medium of protest against the established rule of the society in terms of sexuality. In one of the interviews with ‘*The Times of India, Mumbai Mirror*, October 2nd, 2009’, Rituparno says in reference to ‘*Arekti Premer Golpo*’ that “*the film makes us realize that taboos about sexuality have not changed that much. This film will lead to a very important cultural conversation. One cannot sit complacently and wait for a change in society....I want my roles to reflect my beliefs and ideologies*”.



This picture is an instance of how his way of style and dressing also influenced many “queer” individuals in Kolkata.



A picture of Rituparno Ghosh, after his death in a pride walk, Kolkata (Source: Internet Images)

Though *Arekti Premer Golpo* was released some months ahead of *Memories in March* but if we try to understand these films in a sequence of a trilogy, it could be seen as a personal journey of an individual. In *Memories in March*, the character Arnob was a gay lover of Siddharth who passed away in an accident and it is the story of a mother coming in terms with the identity of her dead son and the negotiation she goes through in re-discovering her own child. It is a simple story of love of two men and a mother's journey in accepting her gay son. *Arekti Premer Golpo* was a story of a documentary film-maker making a film on the veteran *jatra*²⁰ performer of the then Bengal when male performers used to play the female roles on the stage. The story unfolds with the character of Chapal Bhaduri and his crisis and dilemmas, a man who feels to have been born in a wrong physical body and thus feels trapped to have performed the given roles. The filmmaker as well could associate with this character with the move of the camera and emotional crisis. It is a story of a crisis where one feels trapped in the gender he/she is born with and feels an immense discomfort and struggle in living their lives. Lastly, *Chitrangada* is a story of transformation and a hope to change the given sex to that of one wished to be. It is indeed a bold representation when Rudra decides to change his sex but ultimately calls off the operation till the end of the film. If we see these films as a journey, it reflects that how an individual goes through a continual struggle within and without when there lies a difference between the given sex and the prescribed gender. It also narrates that even the most educated parents finds it difficult to accept their sons or

²⁰Folk theatre of Bengal. The epistemological meaning of 'jatra' is a 'journey'. It was said to have started from Chaitanya and Bhakti movement, but changed its form and content with the Bengal Renaissance in the end of the 19th C becoming a form of entertainment with on stage performances.

daughters to be ‘gay’. Ultimately when one chooses to change their physical attributes with a hope of change, it not only becomes a painful process of medication but also a similar painful process of negotiation with self and society.



These are three pictures from the three films, the first is of *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (as advertised in one of the supplementary of ‘The Telegraph’), the second is from *Arekti Premer Golpo* and the third from *Memories in March*.

I. Conceptualization and Contextualization: A brief about culture and sexualities in relation to “queer” identity

The question of ‘identity’ remains very important even in the age of ‘blurring the identities’ and looking beyond own spaces, one, because it becomes more relevant for oneself to hold their identity strong in the rapid changes of cosmopolitization and the other due to the insufficiency or the inability to cope up or associate with the philosophical implication of the term ‘global’ citizen or simply as a citizen of a larger nation-state for that matter. The categories of ‘woman’, ‘dalit’, ‘muslim’ or ‘homosexual’ often lead to a discourse on ‘subaltern studies’ which also direct us that the citizenship or the right to vote does not really guarantee a democratic space of being, rather becomes a majoritarian political falasy where ‘minoritization’²¹ becomes a process in democratization. However, interestingly the expressions of minority are always understood in relation to the larger society which colloquially is said as the “main stream”. ‘Minority’ or the politics of one’s own identity is not an isolated self-phenomenon rather an intersection of much more complex situational existence. For

²¹‘Minoritization’ is a process which on the one hand is thrust upon by the state and society on them who doesnot experience the same as the hegemonic majority, but on the other hand, individuals also affirm their own identity as ‘minority’ in order to get the protection of the state towards their development.

example an employed woman would have a different notion of her existence than that of a lower class unemployed woman and both of their identity will definitely differ from that of a woman in north east and so on and so forth. Thus it's not a simple situation of existence rather an interplay of ones positionality, experiences and worldview. Therefore when there is any discussion on culture and sexuality, it has to be understood in relation to the other shared spaces as well. Different spaces have a different culture, some of which get established and becomes the 'normal', the 'practice' whereas others exist in their own ways without much recognition and dominance.

A. Understanding 'culture'

Philosophically, it's not really wise to believe in purity of cultures or looking at them in discrete wholes. Cultures take their shapes through the complex dialogues and interactions with other cultures. It is the multiple human practices of signification and representation of organization and attribution which are often internally driven by conflicting narratives. The idea of culture has been approached from various perspectives with the process of time and space. It extends in almost all parts of our social life and experience, sometimes making it even impossible to distinguish between what we call as our social life and cultural life.

Culture is a broad term, which encompasses anything and everything that we could feel or see around us, everything in a way becomes a part of the 'shared knowledge' leading to 'culture' in various forms. This knowledge however in itself becomes the 'power' which at some points is being manipulated by the 'powerful' for their own selfish needs. The mainstreaming of a particular form of knowledge and in the process sidelining others makes it a really complex system. Knowledge of intuition, feeling, predictions which trivialize the 'scientificity' are not the forms of knowledge that is thought to produce some great results whereas the knowledge of using guns, experimenting with bombs becomes important. However there is a 'shared' form of knowledge that lies in the everydayness, in the interactions, conversations and expressions without which human race would not have existed in the first place. Again these shared knowledge differs through time and space, at places there are less categorization of identities whereas in some there are more, but that does not mean that

those missing ‘categories’ of identification does not really exist in the space where apparently it has no existence because there is no language to express them. The best example would be the word ‘queer’, which as a concept might not make sense in many places on earth, but it does not mean that there is no ‘deviations’ from the experience of the ‘mainstream’ heterosexuality so to say. Though media has helped in the sharing of cultural knowledge through its capacity to reach in different corners of the world creating a continuous flow of ideas, yet its reach also gets constrained. In India, there are instances where the historical walls of architecturally creative religious spaces and mythological stories expressed ideas of multiple desires centuries ago, yet there were no specific categories or terms in expressing these ‘other’ desires and sexualities. We develop categorization for our own interest and understanding which also is responsible in a historical moment of cultural and social experience. ‘Queer’ as a term developed initially in the West to mean something strange, weird, not normal, but with time it became an idea of representation and association of the different sexualities travelling across the globe as a sense of collectivity and freedom. However, before we go into a detailed understanding of sexuality, we will engage with the various interpretations of culture in order to discuss them as an interlinked process.

‘Culture’, according to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009) is “all that in human society which is socially rather than biologically transmitted, whereas the commonsense usage tends to point only to the arts. Culture is thus a general term for the symbolic and learned aspects of human society.” In Oxford Dictionary of English words, Culture is said as i) *the customs, civilization and achievements of a particular time or people*, ii) *the way of life of a particular society or group*. The Bengali term for ‘Culture’ is ‘Sonskriti’ which means ‘*somyok rupe korshon kora*’– “*sikhya ba obhyas daNra lobdho utkorsho, Kristi*”, which means something of ‘high quality’ which is attained by practice or learning, to cultivate deeply. The dictionary meanings of culture, though gives us a general framework of the commonly thought perspective, however would be clear as we discuss the sociological way of looking at this term. This dictionary idea of ‘culture’ was that of Matthew Arnold who in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) would see culture closely linked with aesthetics and which does not belong to everybody rather to some and thus there is something ‘high’ about the sense of culture. In the contrary E.Tylor

mentions culture as a complex whole including everything like beliefs, knowledge, customs, religion, habits which one acquires being a part of a community. In *Primitive Culture* (1958) he says that everyone who is the part of the society also have its culture.

i) A sociological reading of culture

The discussion on culture has been as long as the understanding of society and its existence. Understanding human relations without cultural underpinnings is almost an impossible task. Durkheim²² in his *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1982) explains ‘culture’ through the process of how a community represents itself through their specific ‘totem’ through which a collective consciousness is formed that also maintains the solidarity of the group in the process. In *Division of Labour in Society* (1893/1984) Durkheim talks about how the simple society operated through a ‘mechanical’ solidarity amongst themselves where individuals had similar tasks to do, unlike the industrial societies where there is a division of labour and thus the solidarity became more ‘organic’. Being a functionalist in his view Durkheim explains that a society is interdependent and interconnected with all its practices and norms and through ‘social facts’, he tries to capture the totality of the social structure through its norms, practices, ideas and living. ‘Social facts’ to him is ‘sui generis’ comprising the ways of ‘acting, thinking and feeling’ that are independent of any individual intervention that is external in its existence and thus also holds a coercive power in order to control or maintain the stability of the community. According to him, rituals or religion were the actual spaces of a ‘collective effervescence’ where the community comes together and experience a commonality sharing their sentiments and reaffirming their identities to the group they belong. It is when someone act ‘deviant’ to the accepted social norms that these social facts which operates could be felt as coercive and its presence could be felt as something external to the individuals existence. This view remains truly significant in understanding

²² Durkheim’s understanding on the functionality of the society always felt very relevant for me when I discussed ‘homosexuality’ either with the ‘queer’ or the ‘non-queer’, because the idea of ‘deviance’ could not be thoroughly dismissed in the way society looked at ‘homosexuality’. The act of reproduction remained a focus point as to how it seemed as a necessity in an act of love making or a love relationship. The ideas of solidarity and a collective feeling of groups also become relevant through how Durkheim must have seen communities operating in any society. It is not only the collective feeling that is formed among the ‘majority’ but also holds very similar to the group of ‘minorities’ probably because of the human nature to live a collective life.

our present culture and the way it operates to include everyone according to its prescribed norms through ‘punishment’, ‘labeling’ and also through the rationale of medicine and psychiatry.

Max Weber (1922/78) on the other hand views culture through the lens of interpretation relating primarily through his idea of ‘social action’. It is through the subjective meanings that the social actors attach to their own actions and also while understanding the action of the ‘others’ in a specific socio-historical context, remains the base of the communication in which the society operates. Social actions through meanings could establish the causal relationship between its occurrence and its effects. To explain the same he discusses in detail that how Protestant ethics of hard-work, economic success actually leads to the ethics of capitalism. Culture operates through these meanings of actions that are subjective and thus needs to be understood through the process of ‘verstehen’ empathetic understanding in order to understand the social world. Weber believes that there is always an orientation towards human action that eventually leads to a new culture of practices and habits. For instance, goal oriented action leads to a culture of rationalization leading to a system of bureaucracy and state control.

Karl Marx’s (1977) idea of culture is very different from both of these classical thinkers. He would see the society in terms of the mode of production and the relations of production. He believed that economy determines the relationships of the individuals which in the process lead to two major ‘classes’, the haves (bourgeoisie) and the have-nots. Economy lies in the base of the social structure and everything else as the part of superstructure. Thus culture also is a part of the superstructure that depends on the economy that remains in the base. Thus the powerful with the state apparatus hold all the power to manipulate and operate the other system in the society, be it social, cultural or political. His idea was later relooked by Gramsci and Althusser who extended this whole discussion of ‘power’ and culture to a way forward making a great contribution in the study of culture and its influences in our social life.

Marx interprets culture as a consequential phenomenon where economic practices remain responsible for the culture it produces. Weber remains more intrigued to understand the logic behind the social processes through ‘social action’ and motivation.

Durkheim on the other side focuses culture through a way of living becoming a powerful structure in itself.

ii)The symbolic domain of culture

Culture being so closely related to the social life of the individuals could not be ignored by any sociologists or anthropologists who studied society. The variations are their own perspective of looking at it. Clifford Geertz, did an extensive ethnographic study on the societies of Bali, Morocco and Java interprets culture as an “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life” (1973:89). It is either latent or manifested in our ways of behaving, thinking, looking at things and most importantly our creations of knowledge or any forms of art. Man is always in search of these symbols in form of myths or rituals through which they find meanings of their actions and feel a part of the larger system. Geertz was largely influenced by Max Weber and was more interested in the cultural aspect and interpretation of these symbols that operates in a society through various means and agencies. His main concern was how the symbols present in the society actually make the individuals to see, feel and express themselves as the vehicle of cultural facts.

Signs and symbols are so much integrated in our thought process that it gets produced and reproduced in productions of art, culture and knowledge. It modifies itself with newer interpretations in its continuous productive forms with deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings and understandings. The culture of *Baul* songs has its own legacy in Bengal, but when it got used beautifully in the film *Arekti Premer Golpo* as the background scores, it not only remains a song, but extends its cultural imagination within the narratives giving it a new meaningfulness. Similarly, the reference of *Chaitanya* or the writings of Tagore are being creatively referred with a new interpretation of an already existing symbol of integrity and freedom. Mythological stories and architectural creativity also makes sense through various symbolisms.

This idea of symbols and symbolism was extended by Victor Turner²³ who was much influenced by the works of Durkheim. He tried to understand whether really the signs and symbols through religion or through myths and practices actually influence the behavior of its inmates and if so, then how does it create a sense of collective meaningfulness. His idea was to understand the operations of the rituals and practices in the society and how these rituals are also a transmission of cultural identification. His fieldwork in Ndembu in Zambia actually attracted his attention towards the study of rituals. Culture to him is in a constant state of change and negotiation with the common beliefs. He explored 'liminality', the term used by Arnold Van Gennep²⁴ as a threefold system of pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal phase. He added saying that this phase of liminality is actually the state of ambiguities, a state in between, of seclusion and what he calls as 'communitas' (where all members are equal) through the 'rite de passage'. There might be a manifested meaning of the rituals which could be easily observable but there lies a latent or a hidden meaning that could only be made sense of through the unconscious and subconscious mind of the individuals who practice them, because it is through the meanings that they give to their actions remain important in understanding the function of the same (exegetical) with the operational purpose and the positionality of such rituals in the whole context of the rituals. Turner talks of a change which seems much peaceful that starts with a crisis but however through the process of liminality followed by certain ritualistic practices ultimately reaches a state of reintegration, which also makes him greatly functionalist in his outlook. Though Turner views liminality in reference to religious ritual but it's also reminds me of the 'liminality' one goes through during a process of sex change or gender transformation, but there the question remains whether they are at all reintegrated in the social system after overcoming the phase of confusion and ambiguities.

The cultural sites are very much a constructions of our own manipulations of meanings and constructions and thus in no way a predetermined cultural space which is 'given'. The word 'cultural' remains a space of contestations and negotiations of specific

²³ Deflem.M.1991. Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 30:1. pp 1-25

²⁴ Turner was specially influenced by his idea on *The Rites of Passage*

interventions, inputs and collaboration. Arjun Appadurai would point it as “the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics”; culturalism is invariably ‘hitched’ to certain ‘prefixes’. (Appadurai 1997:15) “Cultural” in reference to “culturalism” becomes even more complicated and therefore a challenging task not just to find and interpret meanings of cultural terms, rather how meanings mutate and metabolize in the course of their transportation, translation and specific uses in other cultures. Though the term “multiculturalism” was not much popular in the early 20th C, and left out the representation of many marginalized groups, but now the assertion of different alternative gender groups, caste and classes has made us aware of the space we are in which expects us to be more politically and socially aware and sensitive.

The questions Rustom Barucha (2000) poses to himself and his readers to reflect on more critically as to what extent have times changed? Is it a self deception, a politically correct reflex on our part that is not substantiated by any significant alteration in our respect for others? For whom have they changed? In which constituencies? Certainly there is more “cultural differences” than before, but is it really making a difference to the shaping of a multicultural society? Has the largely academic production of new alterities succeeded in the crossing of borders across class and race, or is it reinforcing new insularities embedded in the rhetoric of cultural difference? Do we cross some borders only to close others? It is sometime very important to extend beyond the art form into the actual vulnerabilities of engaging with the “other” not as a tokenistic presence or as a nice foreigner, but as a person with whom one can dialogically redefine the world. These questions are something very intriguing to be dealt with while to deal with any cultural form and its influence over the people.

Thus, when we are studying culture or its forms in a so called post modern era where the idea of ‘fluidity’ cut across all the social arena of life, the question of ‘change’ still bothers us. On the one hand, we are talking about equality, freedom, liberation, crossing certain boundaries, but on the other we are actually falling in a new trap of social capitalistic order of life. It continues to concern us as to how we are thinking of

altering ourselves and the life around in order to bring a transformation going beyond the narrow ideological sense of 'self'.

iii) Culture and ideology

A society is a complex coexistence of its people, their thoughts and their creations. Unity in diversity is thus not that a simple affair as it seems like in a society where exists different cultural forms, as hegemony enters to the scene and turns 'culture' as a contested issue. 'Culture' is no longer a less political term in the discourse of Indian politics. The issue of cultural 'identity' and the whole politics of indigenous-alien culture, minority-majority culture can in no way be overlooked as it also lead to 'culture-clash'. Bourdieu²⁵ would say that even culture is a form of 'capital' that one holds and thus it is not only the control of the resources of economy and political that comes into the scene of 'power', rather also very much in the manipulation of the cultural meanings, symbols and expressions. Bourdieu tried to see 'capital' in reference to material, as well as socio-cultural inheritance which forms the basis on which various social agents act in various social field for example the religious field, state field, literary field. The language we talk in for example is also an example of the cultural manifestations which comes from ones location and identity and thus cultural capital is embodied, institutionalized and also objectified which forms not only a source of identification but also power one holds in the hierarchies of the social cultural forms. While understanding literary works and artistic endeavors the position and the position taking of the creators remain quite relevant to understand the subjective and distinctive element that the occupant occupy in the constituting 'field' in relation to others.

“The space of literary or artistic position-taking, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field—literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc.—is inseparable from the space of literary or artistic positions

²⁵ In India, caste being one of the very many factors which operates at all levels of understanding a social life; cultural capital mostly was a disposition of the upper caste who was the ones who had the whole responsibility to hold knowledge. However, with modernization and changes in the economy, this feudal system has seemed to have changed to some respect, though not solely. The patriarchy which operates is very closely linked with the system of Brahmanism. Thus to understand 'culture' as a 'capital' in India, both caste and class plays a very important role with other factors of religion, creed, language, location etc.

defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital. The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces.”(1993:30)

Culture is not only to be seen as a ‘capital’, rather with the changing questions of modernity, post-modernity, the concept of “ideology” and hegemony which from the mid-1970s until the mid 1980s anchored the field of cultural studies within the field of Neo-Marxism mapped out by Althusser and Gramsci. Gramsci,²⁶ the Italian Marxist who could not be stopped by the Fascist regime of Mussolini, would say that it is not only through the ‘coercive control’ that the force of power gets manifested but also through the threat of that force which eventually looks like a consensual control of the individuals in the formation of the hegemonic power through willing assimilation and voluntary cooperation. The ruling class tends to appropriate the ideas, values and norms of the rest of the society through its various means of control. ‘Ideology’ cannot just be seen as a simple process of ideas; rather it’s much than that which involves a ‘spontaneous philosophy’ which operates on everybody in the society in forms of language which is not just a set of words rather a set of ideas that are being communicated where the available vocabularies mark the discourses that are formed and the limitations that at times discourage the alternatives which remain much needed to locate the source of discomfort. Ideology is even present in the so called commonsensical knowledge that is the conventional wisdom and also the ‘good sense’ knowledge of the empirical content. It is there in the popular religion which includes the whole set of beliefs, opinions, superstitions and the whole process of looking at things with the actions which in collectivity could be said as the ‘folklore’. (Lears:1985) This whole ‘cultural system’ that is formed might be a system of the collective, which legitimize the process but even then there are groups which facilitate themselves through this system of legitimization of such cultural practices. In this structure of hegemonic culture, it might be anywhere between

²⁶ Bates.R.T. 1975. Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony. *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Vol 36. No 2. University of Pennsylvania Press. pp 351-366

closed to open, in the spaces of open it might give one to project a counter culture with the act of resistance and in the closed spaces one doesn't even find a language to express the discontent. This negotiation is a dynamic process in the society which is obviously again dependent on the specificity of time and space with the historicity of experiences.

Thus to study sociology as an art form remains an expanding field of study in recent times, both to understand the ideological representations and reinforcement and also as a creative way of protesting. It has expanded its gaze from the search for meanings in the text towards the sociological play between images and between different cultural forms and institutions. Along with ancient architecture, literature, poetry, cinema thus remains an important agency of expression and thus cannot avoid the hegemonic ideological frame of reference in its existence. Althusser did a detailed study on the functions, practices and processes of culture. 'Culture' came to be redefined as the processes which construct a society's way of life producing meanings and consciousness through the representation of media and other systems which give images their cultural significance. Culture thus is a system of interconnected meanings and films holds a specific importance in producing and reproducing cultural significance. In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus* (1977), he gives an account on how 'ideology' is produced through the established social structure which enforces its control and moulds human subjects through it in the process of self reproduction. For him, ideological state apparatus is different in nature than that of the coercive force of the state apparatus that operates through police, military, government.²⁷ It is not by coercion but by the implicit acceptance of the prescribed norms and ideology that the ideological apparatus works through family, school, forms of art, media. School remains an important institution in the process as it holds the agency to work with the young minds influencing the thought process according to the established order. Althusser defines 'ideology' as 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence', which has a

²⁷ The state and the government apparatus has been a sole operating force in a social space. The laws which come from the system and also the law protectors like the officials and police have a major role to play as to how they see these laws vis a vis the violation of the laws. State laws and regulations changes with the ideologies of the ruling government, for example, the Leftist ruling party might have certain agenda of operating which can actually be much different than that of Bharatiya Janta Party, which centers around 'religion' as a basic principle of their ideological system of work. Thus ideology of the ruling party influences the laws that are made and operates over its masses.

psychoanalytic interpretation that individuals are born in the system which eventually becomes a part in their growing up and ways of living. Ideological state apparatus thus in a process 'interpellate or hail individuals as objects' through which it operates. In his *A Letter on Art*, he talks on how ideology and art are so closely related. He mentions that art as a form does have an influence on the ideological apparatus of the state, but then there is the 'authentic' art which through its critical perspective might hold a power to question distancing it from its position in the same. It gives us the understanding from within and makes us conscious about the ideology that operates in the system. He at one point remains hopeful about the work of art being an agency to produce something meaningful being reflexive and critical of the established order but then again he does not forget to mention that even the art institutions as museums, media houses, recording companies also operates as ideological state apparatus themselves in reproducing the representations of the ruling class.²⁸ In the present scenario, the presence of a censor board proves how the state through its agencies intervenes in cultural reproduction to regulate or justify the ideas according to the ideology of the state and its constructed sense of nation and nationalism.

iv) Culture in the times of technology and market

It is indeed interesting that now the ruling class does not remain within the limits of the particular state, rather as well extends to the capitalistic classes holding immense power over the masses throughout the world. It's interesting how commodity of consumption becomes the master through its manipulator through mediated imageries. Herbert Marcuse in his *One Dimensional Man* explains how human with the development of technologies and science instead of being liberated are actually falling in the trap of its own creation. It is creating man with absolute conformity and consensus who is happily manipulated in the system of the market and technological spectacles in the name of the choices and advertising in media. The way of life now starts being immensely influenced by the media and technology and starts judging themselves with the parameters of a good life.

²⁸ Leitch.V.B. 2001. *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.New York.WW Norton & Company.pp 1476-1508

Marcuse would say that

“Contemporary industrial civilization demonstrates that it has reached the stage at which “the free society” can no longer be adequately defined in the traditional terms of economic, political and intellectual liberties, not because these liberties have become insignificant, but because they are too significant to be confined within the traditional forms. New modes of realization are needed, corresponding to the new capabilities of society”
(1964:06)

He would distinguish between ‘true’ and ‘false’ needs. To him, false needs are the created needs which are imposed in order to gratify certain social interest and these are the needs which create an unequal system with injustice, misery and aggressiveness. The mass media creates euphoria in unhappiness. Individuals remain in the illusion of being autonomous and independent; having the freedom to choose things of their choice, life of their choice which indeed remains an illusion as they are continuously manipulated and indoctrinated by the produced thoughts and ideas of the mass media. The technological control appears to be the very embodiment of reason. The false consciousness of rationality becomes the true consciousness, which leads to a progressive stage of alienation without the conscience of critical thinking and understanding the basis of the oppression leading to a way of one dimensional thought and behavior. Humans become powerless in the hands of its own created apparatus with a mindless consumption of technology. The creation of the repressive needs has become a part of socially necessary labour without which the established mode of production could not probably be sustained.

Culture now is appropriated by various capitalistic agencies in order to make profit and a business, which could be seen as a ‘culture’ in the system of cultures. The commercial character of culture reduces the difference between ‘culture’ and practical life as Adorno (1991) would mention which also loses the aesthetic semblance of the same. The power of capital and technology has the liberty to present culture with a sense of awe and excitement that captures the minds of the mass and transcends into mass culture. ‘Reality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful

duplication.’(1991:63) Imagination is replaced by a mechanical control which determines the latest image of the ‘reality’ concerned. In a process ‘art’ becomes a material which is reproduced like any other ‘things’ in a social space. This form of art again is not devoid of the ‘ideology’ that the producers hold on producing and reproducing them with a profit motive. Adorno probably is concerned about the nature of art that would be mechanically produced when it is much beyond the individual effort and becomes a phenomenon instead with mass production through various technological developments. The audience becomes mere consumers and thus as objects. The work of art was supposed to be a force of construction, but the factory production of it ultimately turns it into a fun product with a fetishized character which serves the need of the consumers similar to a goods ‘packed and dispatched’ for use. There is a whole ‘culture industry’ that is formed which with its capitalistic motive subdues the imagination, freedom, autonomy and creativity of its people with its spectacular and attractive show. ‘Choices’ which is thought as personal also is actually manipulated by the anonymous power of the mass media and the technological society that operates and actually govern the likes, dislikes, needs and emotions of the individuals.

“Advertising becomes information when there is no longer anything to choose from, when the recognition of brand names has taken the place of choice, when at the same time the totality forces everyone who wishes to survive into consciously going along with the process. This is what happens under monopolistic mass culture.” (1991:85)

Jean Baudrillard in his *The Consumer Society* says that the present society is surrounded by a ‘conspicuousness of consumption and affluence’ with the huge expansion in material goods, services and other objects. A man who has economic capital is now surrounded by an array of goods rather than human beings. There is celebration of multiple choices and celebration of various objects in the market through advertising with the proliferating ways of media messages and therefore it has become a space of ‘psychodrama’. The present logic of exchange is hardly on humanitarian grounds, rather now is a circulation of goods and material objects, where the exchange has also become hugely materialistic and a game of profit production. There is an overabundance of

choices, which leads to the attraction of possession and the humans gets caught up in this system of 'consumerism of signs'. Cultural centre becomes a space of display of consumables which lead 'culture' to become 'culturalised'. A shopping mall for example holds various centers of culture as a book store, a movie theatre, auditorium, clothing etc. According to him, "...the 'art' consists in playing on the ambiguity of the object's sign, and sublimating their status and utility as commodity in a play of 'ambience.'" (1997:365)

In the time of 'post-modern' era, when 'fluidity' becomes a norm, culture as well travels through various presentations and representations in different mediated flow of knowledge. Its presence now expands from the mundane everydayness towards a broader social world. 'Culture' gets created and shared through Facebook, Whatsapp and other social networks becoming an industry in itself. In spite of this huge world of cultural practices and imageries films still remain a popular creative medium of expression. It has always been a powerful agency in reinterpreting texts, understanding of social phenomenon, construction and deconstruction of thoughts. It as well holds a possibility to be a part of the dominant ideology that it is a product of, but again there is a chance that it talks about an alternative perspective of the same being critical about its social grounding.

Ritwik Ghatak, (1987) one of the pioneers of 'art' movies, who used films as a form of protests, suggests that it's the most versatile medium of exchange in comparison to any other art forms where language might not act as an hurdle and thus reaches the masses easily and have the capacity to bring a change in the mindset of the people or communicate thoughts and ideas more than through texts and novels .It remains a strong medium of expression which also in many cases used as means to protest/change or at least to put forward certain issues that we don't talk and discuss much in our everyday life. It's a two way process between the 'spectator' and the 'spectacle', and thus the study of the films in a particular context becomes important when we try to critically look through it from the audience's reactions and also the specific ways of representations and the ideas of the "represented".

In this specific study where the 'queer' experiences and narratives remain the major concern, through films and society, culture needs to be understood also in lines of

the multiple interpretations of sexuality, specifically in the Indian context. The cultural practices of India is diverse, and it is set as an example of unity in diversity, making one curious whether it also holds the multiple manifestations of sexualities within its practices and forms.

B.Understanding Sexualities

Culture constitutes our way of living, thinking and acting. Thus it remains a question as to whether ‘culture’ as well remains responsible as to how sexualities in a society are defined or practiced. Is it to be seen as a natural psychological physical phenomenon of the specific individuals? Or it is cultural and social? In sociological understanding discourses or discussions on gender and sexualities came much later than the theory of power, practices, culture etc. Rather when it was discussed, it tends to be associated with the discussion on moral codes or living practices of the society. However, in Indian imagination the present of a text like *KamaSutra*²⁹ proves that sexual eroticism was being in the East integrated with a moral dutiful life of an individual. The text sees the act of sexual affairs with physical pleasure and restraint very much as a part of other social practices, rituals, political, economic and social life. Through various mythologies of different culture, sex power and money were seen to be very closely linked. Sexual affairs have been a part in individual’s life since time immemorial, but to understand it as a social act with the different notions of taboos and practices attached, brings it also in the domain of the ‘public’ analysis. Celibacy is seen as a power whereas sexual attraction as a sin.

With the idea of democratic individual choice sex became an integral discussion in the ways of modern life. Sexuality as a drive or a natural urge or a social act, came much later in reference to the advent of the sociological understanding of social systems and its practices. Much later again the multiple sexualities as a practice came to the academic discussion where anything except the hetero-sexual acts were seen as an ‘aberration’ of the functional system of the society. The different kinds of sexual claims

²⁹ Kamasutra is one of the very ancient texts, in Sanskrit Literature, written by Vatsyayana. It is thought to be written around 400 BCE and 200 CE, as mentioned in J.Sengupta. 2006. Refractions of Desire, Feminist Perspectives in the Novels of Toni Morrison, Michele Roberts, and Anita Desai. Atlantic Publishers & Distributors. pp 21

in relation to the mainstream sexual culture actually makes us see the unstable and contested spaces within it, and it also through the aberrations that the society understands the power of its hegemony or establishment. Sexual identity now becomes a serious concern and how the society tries to control it in various ways as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ sexuality. The so called ‘good’ or the reproductive sexuality is then again gets appropriated by the capitalistic development.

Sexuality became a central issue in European modernity and thus in the colonized societies, sexual behaviors were seen as ‘passionate unreason’ and ‘unruliness’. It was believed that the religious and the belief system justify a ‘loose’ sexual practice among the colonized.³⁰ It was the rational incapability of them that is mirrored through their sexual practices which reflected to their incapability of ‘self’ rule. Sexuality holds a system of knowledge within it, which was also tried to be controlled and manipulated by the colonizers in order to systematically rule over its subjects. It could be looked at in a way that the commonality of practices between the colonizers and colonized actually threatened the cultural superiority of the rulers and thus they found it an urgency to differentiate between the two. This was an important background to which Indian Penal Code drafted Section 377 stating and defining that anything against the *carnal intercourse against the order of nature* would be punishable. This period of colonial ruled lead a clear picture through their vocabulary as to what can be said as a ‘healthy sexuality’ and what then is ‘obscenity’ and gradually grew a market centering this idea of ‘obscenity’. Hardik Biswas (2013) tries to understand that how through certain ‘erotic’ print cultures of the then Calcutta, the colonial obscenity was defined influencing the ideas of the ‘modern’ Hindu woman and the discourses on gender, sexuality and desire. He speaks of a region ‘*Battala*’ in North Calcutta which was a space of many publishers, but was also seen as a source of cheap ‘pornographic’ booklets. Through satires, scandals, drama, the Battala prints engaged with various question of the nineteenth century ‘woman’ through their unique ways. Written in a language (different from the language of the ‘elite’ which was in its making during that phase of time) which was

³⁰ Levine, Phillipa. 2006. ‘Sexuality and Empire’, in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp-122-42

understood by the urban lower middle class and migrants of the city it became extremely popular. It was a way in which the culture of the *bhadraloks* and the reformists were ridiculed often through a critical eye on the portrayal of women as ‘both self destructive and deleterious to society’. These discourses which could probably be said as alternative systems of representation actually questioned several hegemonic ideologies that were created within their booklets. To understand how ‘sexual’ bodies are formed and perceived in the social space, we would try and look at some of the interpretations around the formation of the sexual self.

i) Sexuality through a theoretical lens

The common sensical knowledge might have an impression that the physical attributes of a ‘male’ or a ‘female’ sexual organ define the ‘genders’, which is a socio-cultural construction in the first place. A sociological understanding would probe us deeper into the analysis that what it actually means to be a man or a woman, or may be neither of them. It is majorly through the meanings that the society attaches with the bodies on a binary basis forms the hegemonic mainstream idea of gender and sexuality.

Freud (1905/1962) in his essays on theories of sexuality gives a psychoanalytic view of gender identification mentioning that it is of general belief that sexuality as a feeling or experience starts during the phase of puberty, which might not be true, as the impulses that a child experience during his infantile growth does affect his life and personality that he becomes with the course of time. He puts all the emphasis on the ‘presence’ or ‘absence’ of a ‘penis’ which determines whether the individual is a girl or a boy. It is the presence or absence of the penis that he thinks is symbolic in understanding the masculinity or the femininity that an individual experience. It is around the age of three to five that a boy feels threatened by the ‘father’ figure by his discipline and autonomy, fantasizing that he would remove his penis. It is mostly on an unconscious level that the boy child realizes his father to be a rival (Oedipus complex) of his mother’s affection, accepting the father as a ‘superior’ being and also associating and identifying himself as a male in the process. On the other hand, according to him a girl child in this case experiences a ‘penis envy’ (Electra complex) and identifies with the mother, taking a submissive role and being the ‘second best’. This phase teaches the child to repress erotic

feelings till they reach the stage of puberty when the sexual feeling starts affecting them in a direct way. This stage to him is the period of 'latency' when the same sex peer groups are one of the most important associations of the individuals. 'Thumb sucking' as an act in the infantile stage becomes important for Freud as he views it to be an act of physical pleasure and pleasure sucking which in later years leads to masturbation. It is the phase of autoeroticism where the sexual activity as an impulse is not directed to any 'other' person but with their own body and its actions. Then there is the stage of sexual inhibitions where the child learns about morality, cultural norms, shame, esthetic demands which come through socialization and education primarily. With the puberty the individual starts realizing their sexual urge (sexual excitation) and finds a sexual object (attractions) with the most visible changes in their genitals which were missing during the infantile stage. This theory of Freud seems problematic from various levels where he basically talks from a Victorian morality giving the male figure the ultimate autonomy and power and thus 'penis' to him becomes much more powerful than that of vagina. He also emphasizes the child's close association with the genitals which might not be a case in the reality, always. However, it does give us a way to think that sexuality is not only something which is only physical but also associated with the conscious and unconscious thoughts and desires of an individual as they grow up. Nancy Chodorow gives an alternative view of Freudian outlook.

In her book *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow (1978) argues that the idea of identity of a male and female in a child happens with close association with their mother, being the sole responsible agency of their care and emotional support. It is through the break from this attachment that makes the individual conscious about their own sexual identity. She mentions that the process of growing up for a male and female are quite different as the girl child remain close to their mother, being able to continue kissing and hugging her and thus later she develops a sense of self which is more continuous with other people. Her identity is more likely to be merged with the mother and then the man in her life which produce a more compassionate, emotional sense of self for the girls when they grow up. Thus a women's lack of close association might lead to a problem in her self-esteem. On the other hand the boy child faces a radical rejection from the closeness that he shared with his mother, learning that it's not great to be 'mummy's

boy' or 'sissies', developing a more analytical way of looking at the world. This separation makes the man unconsciously endangered about his close relationship associations with the others. This is the reason that she cites to the reason as to why men suppress their emotional feelings and focus more on achievements. There is also criticism about the way Chodorow looks at the way sexual consciousness grows within male and female, as femininity as well might carry feelings of aggressiveness and assertiveness. In the present scenario there might rise more questions regarding the whole idea that women are no more dependent on someone else rather are more autonomous and there might as well be some role of the father in the socialization which cannot be totally ignored. However it does give us a very different view of that of Freud and a new perspective of looking at how sexuality might be experienced in male or female children as they grow up with their close association with their parents primarily and then schools, peer groups, family, society, state etc. The phase of realizing one's own sexual changes with visible identifications is one aspect of sexuality, whereas the interactions with the society about sexual feelings and realizations remain another major space of understanding. It starts with our families. The ways we are supposed to behave in order to be a 'good' girl/boy is first defined by our parents and relatives and then in school which as a process continues through various other institutions and people, developing a pattern and discourse out of the repeated practices and events.

This relationship between mother and infants is also explored by Sudhir Kakar (1978) who would say that initially a child remains unintegrated with no differentiation between the conscious and unconscious self, it is through the mother's interaction that they first get introduced with the 'other' in form of the social reality and a journey towards selfhood. It is through the touch of a mother's body, her breasts, her arms that the child starts sensing and perceiving. However his relationship with the 'mother' does not make a child totally helpless or passive rather it is the way he is introduced in the world of social. Kakar explores that it is through mythology, folk tales, cultural construct, which is after all man-made, does create a feminine identity in India which in turn is introduced as a world view to the infants in understanding a Hindu social life. A Hindu woman is never seen as independent but always dependent on parents, husband and then son, and thus it is the parent son relationship which becomes much more symbolic than

that of a parent daughter. For Indian woman motherhood itself becomes an identity, more so when she is a mother of a son. The upbringing of a daughter is done with the preaching of the ideals of 'seva' and service whereas a son is indulged and pampered which does follow an identity that both of them develop in turn and performs.

ii) Sexuality and the dynamics of culture

A study on discourses is about the analysis of the deep rooted thoughts, practices, ideas, images, symbols and signs which actually constitutes culture. Foucault however would say that discourse are more than just the ways of thinking and production of meanings and thus, the relationship between culture and sexuality through the idea of Foucault's power-knowledge nexus remains intriguing. The predominant body of knowledge in the society gives us the dominant ideologies to abide by and thus tries to regulate our ways of living in its terms which eventually give rise to certain identities and imaginations within us. Foucault directs that an individual's consciousness is not only guided by their biology and social structures and positionality rather also through discourses which is formed through ideologies and are reflected in the ways of seeing, describing and perception of things.

Foucault, unlike Freud looks at the repression of the sexual urges that an individual faces is because of the society and its norms and forms through a discursive process. The primal institutions of modernity are the units of micro power which operates in sustaining the system through surveillance and discipline. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault³¹ mentions that through seventeenth and eighteenth century the European culture developed a system of domination according to the utility of its system. He says an individual embodies the sense of power within their own selves in order to become a good citizen and worker in the system of the societal practice. The whole system of

³¹ Foucault becomes very much relevant in understanding how the individuals actually internalize the 'given' or the 'established' and operate as oppressors not only to others but also to themselves. An individual for example when experiences differently than what they see around them in terms of their sexual feelings towards the same genders, it is not only the society who questions it, but it does take a quiet amount of time for an individual also to come out of the 'closet' and speak about their own feelings to themselves and then to their family or society. Parents for instance taking their children to psychiatrists or doctors in order to treat the disease of 'homosexuality' also remain a very common practice of 'disciplining' the 'deviant'.

discipline thus creates 'docile' bodies which could be appropriated with the logic of economy.

"The historical moment of the discipline was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful and conversely." (1979:138)

Power engulfs us all which can only be prominently seen in institutions like prisons or asylums. It is through the discourse that 'truth' and knowledge are being created which forms the 'social world' and the language that we express ourselves in. He would go back to the 'archeology' of the process of knowledge production to understand how with different 'epistemes' that is the different phases of history and epistemological age, the forms of production of knowledge changed with its social context. Power operates in form of sovereign power, institutionalized power and through governmentality, the state powers. These forms of power actually generate knowledge to facilitate its functionality which is manifested in our ways of life. Culture thus is not something which is understood outside this mechanism rather it is also a hierarchical system which actually leads to inclusion and exclusion of individuals in its system of performing. This system of power is not only a state activity rather also is reinforced through media, educational system and even family as an institution. Interestingly power is not only a negative and coercive force in the society rather can also be productive and positive. The knowledge and the truth that is being produced is a form of this system as well. Sexuality is one among those identities or desires which is also controlled by the social norms and the established knowledge system. Sexual union is a natural practice which cannot be termed as bad. This give rise to the ideas of 'normal' and 'deviance' where normal is the so called accepted form of ideas and deviance is something which is not normal and thus 'punishment' is a way in rectifying them and bringing them in the stream of 'normal'. About sexualities, so to speak, anything other than the 'heterosexual' form of sexuality is thus clubbed with 'deviance'. In the society of reproductive heteronormativity, homosexuality automatically becomes an action of punishment and

deviance which don't abide by the rules of dominant knowledge of sexuality. Knowledge is not something which is outside the arenas of power and thus the regimes of knowledge production and distribution has its own regulative mechanisms of propagating beliefs and ideals in a particular society.

Butler³² however agrees with Foucault to some extent but extends her explanation into a deeper level where she sees sexuality as a discursive phenomenon. For her, it is something of the fluid nature which flows and thus any one desire in particular should not become a dominant identity or so to say define ones sexual identity. Everyone of us are performing a certain gender at different times of the day, more or less like wearing clothes and changing them in due intervals. As the societal norms have gauged its periphery with its established knowledge of heteronormativity, it tries to dominant over the other experiences of desires tagging them as 'abnormal'. However when Butler says 'performance' and 'performativity' she distinguishes between the two, pointing that in a performance, the role player impersonate a character or a role that they are playing but in 'performativity', the subject is produced by the process of impersonation.

“[A]cts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires creates the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.” (1990:136)

Role playing is crucial to the gender as it is supposed to present our identity as whom we are through the ways we behave, act, walk or speak. Thus gender operates in the consolidation of pressure to be a man or a woman. Butler actually tried to question

³² Gender as a performance as an idea became much clearer to me when I saw one of my informants Guddu, who calls himself a *kothi*, would remain dressed a boy when he is working in his workspace or even when he is going back home, but in a programme which in his words is a 'in community' celebration, he would actually wear a sari, put lipstick and kajal, sometimes wearing a wig which to him remains a space of comfort and self expression. It might be his wish as to when he wants to 'perform' his gender according to the spaces that he is negotiating in his life. Individuals adapt or negotiate with the given hegemonic practices according to their own possibility in order to perform their own genders. A male to female transgender Raja would say that '*it is only when I go out with my friends that I can wear what I am actually comfortable in, which is not possible in my home or the locality I live. My time with my friends is my free space*'. Performing genders, in most of the time is seen as a given phenomenon with certain expectations to be fulfilled, but in that constraint as well, different genders could be enacted according to the agency that the individual possess and the way they negotiate with it.

this innateness of gender performativity saying that gender binary is being created through the production and reproduction of certain practices over a period of time. No one is a gender from the start and thus one who is gender different lives in the threats of power be it informal kinds of intervention from the state or family or society and also the institutionalized power such as psychiatry to ‘normalize’ the variations. She focuses gender to be culturally formed but also is hopeful claiming that it is a domain of agency of freedom and most importantly to resist the violence imposed by the idealized forms.

“If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity.” (1990:136)

The more there will be cultural acceptance, cultural discourses, media presentation and more proximity with different experiences of gender the possibility of realization of the repressed fantasies or partial unconscious wishes will find its space to come out of the closet. Troubling gender thus remains extremely important in order to mobilize the subversive confusion through the proliferation of various genders. Thus gender cannot be a definite form rather is an expression and thus gender is about what one does and not what one is. A gender ‘drag’ thus is a gender with perpetual gender displacement, “constituting a fluidity of identities that suggest an openness to resignification and recontextualisation, and (...) depriv(ing) hegemonic culture and its critic of the claim to essentialist accounts of gender identity”. (1990:338)

She suggests that there always remain a space to move the space of the binary gender division that the society prescribes to one from the time of birth till the end, where there might be some who falls out of the system. Even though we submit to the norms of the society, there still is a possibility that stays of the other ways. It seems that inspite of the power and control of the dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality, the experiences and identities of the individual might not be very certain. There is always this gap between the expected, the ‘ideal’ type and the practice, the everydayness of the individual and this gives the possibilities of the variations of gender experiences and narratives.

“Sexuality is made through the networks of social power; sexual choices are constrained by economics, by social pressures from many directions, by habit, convention and expectation. Yet, despite these many pressures, sexuality retain this possibility of play and magic—a space where dreams can be negotiated, if not fully realised.”³³

In a democracy, the state becomes the ultimate powerful apparatus to decide over the societal norms and rules and thus in a way perpetuate the dominant ideologies peripheralising the ‘other’ forms of existence which in a process gets marginalized. Through the laws it thrust upon us its own discretion where individuals are only left with the ‘agency’ to protest. Agamben (1998) however quite interestingly points out how a democratic state is turned into a totalitarian state through the execution of ‘bio-politics’ where the mere existence of the ‘bios’ (bare life) is not possible without the political assertion and association which leads to ones identity. It is the documents of the state which holds the ultimate authority on ones recognition as an individual reducing one into a mere citizenship holder, affiliating them to a particular sense of nationalism and affiliation. The bare body turns into a field or space of the political representation where the ‘personal’ blurs away its existence in the grand phenomenon of the ‘political’. It is the rules and laws of the state which makes one a good individual a perfect law abiding citizen. Foucault would also mention that it is through the exclusion and derogation of marginal groups and luminal experiences that the identity of dominant groups has been maintained.

As individuals too we reinforce the enforced and existing laws and till the time we keep doing that, we don’t get to feel the pressure which is upon us. It is only when we try to go beyond the rules and expected ideas; we feel the dominance of the dominant. As Durkheim also mentioned in his discussion on social facts which consists of the ways of acting, thinking and feeling but external to the individual, and invested with a coercive power by which they control over them. It is only when someone dares to do something against it; they get to know the immense power it holds unlike its easy presence.

³³ Bhattacharyya.Gargi.2002.Sexuality and Society:An Introduction. Routledge. London and New York pp-10

'Deviant' are punished and kept into prisons, asylums in order to be rectified and to bring them back to the established social order. Foucault would discuss about the actions of punishment and the disciplinary actions to 'normalize' them in details in his book *Discipline and Punish* where the mention of the homosexual comes as one of the groups of the 'deviant' cult. The norms of the society are not just inculcated upon the body, but actually find its meaning when the individuals live with the norms through its 'habitus'. 'Habitus' as Bourdieu would describe is the idea that bodily identity is not natural, but involves the inscription of dominant social norms or the 'cultural arbitrary' upon the body, where it becomes a generative structure. It is a praxological field where dialectics of freedom and constraint in subjectification permits the emergence of a concept of 'agency' which is understood through the idea of 'regulated liberties'.

So, in a way, it is the advent of the modernity and the intervention of the state in the bare bodies of the individuals that makes the issue of sexuality as a public decision which otherwise broadly is supposed to be one's own choice. The sovereignty of the state as Agamben would say is decided through its population and the individuals involved rather than the territory. Thus the sovereignty of the state intervenes in the lives of the citizens curtailing the sovereignty of the body of the individuals. The body remains in constant surveillance of the state where in cases of the so called 'exception', the state also has the power to kill a person. The state becomes the ultimate power with its power to even kill a person where even self-sacrifice is prohibited and illegal. This however makes us think about the democracy which we call 'freedom' as an illusionary idea where the subjugation to the system of the state and its apparatus becomes a normalized phenomenon.

In the present day, it's not only the power of the state but powers also intervene from other powers, like capitalism or imperialism. We also cannot ignore the whole discourse on imperialist powers which influence us through different ways of capitalistic interventions in our life. The process of imperialism has become a phenomenon in the globalised space. The 'west' and the 'east' now are not two divorced geographical categories, as Edward Said would mention in his writings on *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) rather could only be understood in relation to each other. In spite of differences in

experiences of history, narratives it after all shares the same space where the East is always perceived as lower to that of the West. Similarly when sexuality and the alternative sexualities as a discourse started to be discussed in India, it was majorly believed that it is something which came from outside, the West. In that context the different notions of love, eroticism and relationship which make a long tradition of history in the Indian cultural imagination seems quiet colorful.

C.Indian traditions on Sexualities

Ronald Barthes (1972) discussed on how the signs in form of images, words, music and objects actually create a deeper implications of meanings in the culture and societal practices which might not be always apparently seen. The whole concept of 'myths' to him forms the basis of the naturalization of the ideological representations in the media. Mediated images and narratives are not something which is out of the control of the hegemonic ideas and thus it's interesting to see how even the mythic stories are being gently handled in the creation and the reinforcement of the dominant practices and ideological beliefs. A broad range of representations and narratives has always been present in the Indian imagination in different scriptures and religion, literature, sculptures, paintings, songs etc. India does hold a variety of religious scriptures and stories within it, but I became particularly interested to explore the Hindu construction (though Hinduism as a religion did not develop till there were other religious belief and thus a need to define themselves and also the colonial necessity to define) of these myths as it goes beyond the belief of one god, one life extending itself as a way of living. It believes in presence of several gods and goddesses, there are different life times that are talked about, where past and future emerges within its construction of imaginations in a cyclical form, the demons remains as important as gods and thus the periphery it constructs is a total deconstruction of an unified system of beliefs and practices, which is a paradigm shift from an 'absolute' construction of religious and cultural representations. These myths create a relation between the universe, the society and the individual with diverse and complex structure of its stories and most importantly, they differ in interpretation in different time and space. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are told in different ways in different spaces of India which indeed is fascinating.

Myths in the cultural realm of Hinduism is seen by Sudhir Kakar as a symbolic manifestation of any culture among popular songs, plays and other cultural forms. It is in “one sense, individual psychology projected onto the outside world...myths not only convey communal versions of the repressed wishes and fantasies of early childhood, functioning as a kind of deep freeze for socially unacceptable impulse; they also reflect the nature of an individual’s interpersonal bonds within his culture”. (1978:04) Thus it is not only a social and cultural construction but also very much psychological which creates a collective memory of historical events with a codification of religious rituals interwoven with a dramatic social conflict creating an overwhelming form of cultural spirit within individuals. Vijay Mishra (2002) points out this influence of mythological narratives and codes in Bollywood films mostly of which is drawn from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Mostly the construction of women roles as beautiful and with inner strength is also something which in a way is a construction through the roles of *Sita*³⁴, *Draupadi*³⁵ and others. However, ‘queer sexuality’ remained missing from the popular cultural constructions, though Hindu mythological stories are rich in its content when it comes to diverse sexual desires and manifestations. Thus in a way it could be said that these socio-cultural constructions happens through a patriarchal and a distorted way.

i) Sexuality through mythic discourse

Transcending gender notions are not a new concept that is usually thought to have travelled through the Western world. The stories of *Mahabharata* about Shikhandi and Mohini and the temple sculptures of Khajuraho and Konark are some of the common examples of the numerous others. Vanita and Kidwai (2000) examine the uncharted territory of the Indian archive on homoerotic love. Queer scholar, Ruth Vanita’s work on Indian sexualities is both prolific and covers a wide range of queer representations, from historical to the literary and popular culture. It is only after the introduction of the Section

³⁴ Sita is the central female character in the Hindu epic Ramayana, the wife of Lord Rama. She was the daughter of ‘earth’.

³⁵ Draupadi is the central character of the epic Mahabharata, she was the daughter of Panchal king and wife of the five Pandavas. She was born out of ‘fire’.

377³⁶ in the Penal Code in 1861 which criminalized homosexuality, laying down stringent punishment of fine and/or life imprisonment for sexual acts against ‘the order of nature’ that heteronormativity became a hegemonic norm.

In the ancient Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, Krishna³⁷ and Arjuna³⁸, frequently referred to as ‘the two Krishnas’ (Vanita and Kidwai, 2000:3) reflecting their intense bonds of friendship which goes beyond marriage and procreation. In fact ‘Krishna clearly states that Arjuna is more important to him than wives, children or kinsmen- there can be many spouses and sons but there is only one Arjuna, without whom he cannot live’ (*Ibid*:5). Iravati Karve in *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch* mentions that Arjun inspite of marrying Draupadi, Subhadra, Ulupi, Chitrangada was in most sincere and constant love with Krishna.

In Indian context, “the concept of previous births serves to legitimize actions perceived as improper in the present life” (*Ibid*: 28). Rebirth makes several social constructs and divides less important and love between two people of conflicting gender, class or caste seem involuntary as a result of their past life. In Somadeva Bhatta’s *Kathasaritsagara*³⁹, Somaprabha falls in love with the beautiful princess Kalingasena and attributes this love to her previous birth. ‘*I am sure she and I were female friends in previous birth. My mind which is overwhelmed by affection for her, tells me so*’ (*Ibid*: 86). In this case the two women belong to different class hierarchies and are of the same gender but by attributing their attraction to their previous birth, their same sex desire is legitimized.⁴⁰

Same sex desire amongst women is also found in the Bengali text *Krittivasa Ramayana*⁴¹. In the text, the sage Bhagiratha’s birth is ascribed to the sexual union

³⁶ It says that *whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life or with imprisonment of either description for term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.*

³⁷ Krishna was believed to be the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

³⁸ Arjun is the son of *Indra* and Kunti, but adopted by Pandu and is known as one of the Pandavas. The character of Arjuna and Krishna plays a dominant role in the compilation of ‘*Bhagvata Gita*’ alongside *Mahabharata*.

³⁹ *Kathasaritsagara* is a eleventh Century collection of folk-lore, legends, stories, fairy tales retold from Devnagari script to Sanskrit by Somdeva, a Shaiva in his belief.

⁴⁰ Vanita R & K Roy. 2000. Somadeva Bhatta’s *Kathasaritsagara: Kalingasena and Somaprabha* (Sanskrit) in Vanita & Kidwai (eds) *Same Sex Love In India*. Palgrave Macmillan. New York.

⁴¹ *Krittivasa Ramayana* was written in 15th Century by Bengali poet Krittivas Ojha.

between two females. Bhagiratha's father King Dilip had two wives but no children and died before he was conceived and his birth was only possible through divine sanction of the god Sankara, 'You two have intercourse with one another. By my blessings one of you will have a lovely child' (Ibid: 101) But the child was born boneless, and only had bone after sage Ashtavakra blessed him.

The story of Shikhandi is also quite interesting to note in the tale of Mahabharata. The story starts with Amba, who with her sisters were abducted by Bhisma of Hastinapur for his bother Bichitravirya but Amba requested a rescue as she wished to marry Shalva. But when she went to Shalva, he did not 'accept' her as she was taken by Bhisma. In rage she invoked Lord Shiva who blessed her saying that she will be the reason of Bhisma's death but in her next life. Bhisma being celibate got the power of choosing the time of his own death. However, Amba was born as Shikhandi a daughter of Drupad. She much like the character of Chitrangada was brought up like a man as even King Drupad was blessed by Shiva that he will always have a son. Shikhandi grew up as a man and a great warrior. He then was married to the daughter of King Hiranyavarna, but his knowing her as a woman, her wife goes away and her father plans to take a revenge invading Panchala. Then Shikhandi goes to the forest where hearing to her sad story, a yaksha named Sthuna lend his manhood to her for a day in order to prove to his wife. Shikhandi then performs the duties of a husband. Later when Shikhandi comes to return his organ, pleased with her integrity, Kuber, king of yakshas grant her the manhood till she wishes to keep it. This change of sex of Shikhandi remains extremely relevant in reference to one who cannot associate with their own socially constructed genders and ultimately changes their sex in order to live their lives. Shikhandi is seen to be the reason of Bhisma's death in the proceeding story of Mahabharat.

Another story of King Yuvanashva of Ikshavaku is where he has several wives but no children. It is then the sages prepared a magic water which had the power of making his wives pregnant. The king accidentally drank that water which made him pregnant. Aswini, the divine physician cut his side to pull out the baby and while nursing, Indra the king of devas cut his thumb to feed the child with milk. It is believed that humans have blood in their blood vessels whereas gods hold milk in them. It is also a

reason it is believed that children suck their thumbs to comfort themselves. However, Mandhata a great king was born from the body of a man. (Pattanaik:2008)

It's also quite interesting to note the divine intervention in changing their sex. The Hindu deities were multidimensional and fluid in their form and one of their remarkable features was 'their multiplicity and variability' (Vanita, 2000: 58). Thus a deity might appear in any form- male, female, neuter or even in a nonhuman form. Vishnu, one of the three primary Vedic gods in the Hindu pantheon was also known to take the form of a beautiful woman- Mohini. Shiva, another of the three principle gods, on hearing about his beautiful female form approaches him and asks to see it. Thus he is aware of the ambiguous nature of Mohini's gender and becomes attracted to her and 'followed her as a lordly elephant would a she elephant' (Ibid:71). The ambiguity in gender here acts as the agency through which same sex desire between the two gods could be realized. Shiva here is not deceived or unaware of Mohini's true gender but knowingly desires and pursues her. The story of God Ayappa being born to Shiva and Vishnu (female form) is also quite an interesting story in this regard.

The Bhakti movement opened up new possibilities of reframing and discarding orthodox rigidity of sects and religion. A number of texts in the fourteenth Century, in Sanskrit and Bengali negate this dichotomy of genders transcending its boundaries. Through a process of domestication, by making the deity a lover, new forms of intimacy beyond the confines of marriage and family were discovered. It also went beyond the rivalry of sects that existed within Shiva, Shakti and Vishnu. Lord Ayappa was thought to have born from Shiv and Vishnu in the form of Mohini, and thus was also a deity which brought the two sects together. Queerness is something which did break the fixity of genders and also to some extent the boundaries of religion, sects and practices. It opened up new spaces of understanding love, devotion and reproduction.

ii)Sexuality in religious imagination

In India, Bhakti movement is one of the mentionable waves that actually went beyond the worship of God as an image, rather was about crossing the boundaries of the devotee and devoted with a deep sense of love and mysticism. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

was one such proponent of the *Vaishnava* school of *Bhakti* who united in three aspects with the Krishna as the ecstatic devotee, inspired teacher of the love of Krishna and Krishna himself in the inseparable union with Radha. Jagannath Das and Chaitanya was said to be lovers and overwhelmed in love they embraced each other and also stayed for two and a half days. Chaitanya also mentions Jagannath as his '*sakhi*'.(Kidwai: 2000:104) According to Kidwai, many sufis also insisted same sex love relations as they believed that it won't distract them in their path as a seeker.



A picture depicting Chaitanya with Lord Krishna

Joydev was the king of wandering singers who wrote poetry to express the deep and sensual love between Shri Krishna and Radha. In *Geet Gobinda*, the intense love towards Krishna is reflected through all the verses which are extremely sensually passionate. In a verse Radha expresses her longing towards Krishna and says:

*“.....I am shy when we first meet.
 He coaxes me with his flatteries
 I answer in soft sweet smiles
 He pulls the skirt from my thighs
 Friend, find the proud demon-killer
I rest on a bed of fern shoots
 He lies on my breasts at last
 I embrace him, kiss him
 He clings to me drinking my lips....
my eyes close languidly
 His cheeks are tense with desire
 My body is moist with sweat
 He is high on the lust of passion....*

*...I murmurs to him like a cooing cuckoo
He conquers the subtle secrets of love
My hair is heavy with wilted flowers
His thick chest is marked from my nails....*⁴²

The Bhakti movement of the Vaishnava cult also merges with the ideas of Sufism where the god is not something out there, not treated as something supreme, rather was seen within or as lovers, friends, spouse etc. This actually opened up fluid intimacies and fluidity in the structure of gender.

Meera's love for Krishna was again one of the instances which actually takes us beyond the daily understanding of love and sexual eroticism. Though 'love' and 'sexuality' in discussions might join their hands, but it is always not true that each depends on the other. For example, the Bengali word '*milon*' which means 'union' or 'coalescence' is actually used in both contexts making the meaning more complicated. The folk song, '*milon hobe koto dine/ amar moner manush er o shwone*'..., expresses the urge of one to 'unite' with the loved one but this 'union' might not always be physical rather at times might also have deeper philosophical implications with the emotional urge of togetherness with the loved one. The love of Meera (1498-1547) is no less a story of deep and passionate love, but here the love is beyond the physical and the material. She is said to have combined religion and devotion with ritual and eroticism. Her religious poetry/ songs were equally romantic and sensual. She was married to (sold in marriage) to Rana Kumbha, a Rajput. After his death, she defied the custom of 'sati', dedicating her life to Lord Krishna affirming him as her husband. Her dedication through songs was extremely passionate, intimate and erotic crossing the limits of sexualities into much higher level of love and praise. Meera's songs are mostly a part of the oral tradition and thus it is not very easy to establish the authenticity of her poems or songs.

*"My greedy eyes are caught and won't come back.
They look at every hair of his body from head to toe
and avidly long for him.*

⁴² Miller, Barbara Stoler (translated) 1997. *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Geet Govinda*. Columbia University Press.

I was standing in my house and then Mohan came by.

He showed me his moon face, smiling a little.

My family forbids me to see him and says all sorts of things about me.

My eyes are restless and will take no curbing

they are sold into another's hand.

If the people say good or bad of me, I bear it all patiently.

Mirabai says: Without Giridhar Nagar, I can't live for even an instance"

(Pada 20, pp 106)⁴³

The idea of 'pativrata' woman with the utmost sacrifice towards husband and family, however doesnot go in line with a woman 'bhakt', as it indicates the fact that she has dedicated her life beyond the familial limits to an authority 'outside' the domesticity. Meerabai was also a deviant of her times where he came out of the structure of the family and its bonds dedicating her mind and body towards Krishna.

In this context of 'prem' and 'bhakti', I am reminded of Tagore's collection of songs which were segmented in 'porjai' as 'prem', 'puja', 'swodesh', 'bichitro' etc, but which is noticeable is that the segments of prem and puja merges. For example, this song is from the segment of 'puja' but is not less a song of love--'kotobaro /bhebechinu apona bhuliya /Tomaro chorine dibo hriday o khuliya/ Chorone dhoriya tobo kohibo prokashi/ Gopone tomare sokha koto bhalobashi'.⁴⁴ The word 'sokha', which means a friend, actually reminds us of god not to be an imaged body 'out there', rather between and in relations of the human kind.

However, love and sexuality in these cases applies in a very strange way where ones love with the Almighty is seen as divine and asexual, whereas to love God, one even sacrifices their personal sexual life which is seen as mundane or at times sinful. The story

⁴³ Index: Mahfil: A Quarterly of South Asian Literature.1964.Six Padas of Mirabai.Vol 1, No.4.Asian Studies Centre. Michigan State University. pp-23-26

⁴⁴ This is a reference from Rabindranath Tagore's 'Gitobitan' which is a collection of 2232 songs. The first edition was published in chronological order in three volumes in the year 1931 and 1932

of Renuka, in Mahabharata, narrates that she was so chaste that she could pour water even in an unbaked pot, but one day when she had adulterous thought after seeing a king making love with his wives, she was punished by Jamadagni, her husband. Jamadagni's son Parashurama was said to behead her as a punishment to her sexual thoughts of an 'other' man. At one level sexual thoughts and urges are seen as sinful or its renunciation remains the way to reach God, on the other hand the temples of Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh or Konark in Orissa, says a different story.⁴⁵

ii) Sexuality in art and architecture

Coming back to the main discussion, India is said to have a history on different dimensions of sexuality since the Indus Valley civilization. Though the expressions changed with different rulers and their beliefs on religion, but the various expressions on sexuality remains fascinating when it comes to this country. Defining sexuality in definite terms is not really possible as it is more of an expression with a sense of choice and preference than a rule of law. Though 'sexuality' and the expressions on art, architecture and literatures were never really an issue of 'identity' as it is now, but the presence was never related with hush-up silences and a sense of shame. The 'nudity' that is there in the walls of Ajanta and Konark temple of Orissa says that it was never tagged as a 'taboo', rather was taken as a part of life and thus got reflected in various cultural manifestations.

Wendy Doniger (2009) in her book *The Mare's Trap: Nature and Culture in Kamasutra* gives an account as how this text (Kamasutra) of the third Century actually was much advance in its thoughts compared to the recent times. It is supposed to be a book for men, but it seems like a text for women where parts of it give detailed accounts on how virgins should find their husband, wives should satisfy their roles and also the courtesans for their self satisfaction. It mentions that women should be treated tenderly as to satisfy them, and if forced upon them without will and trust, they will turn to be sex-hater, which is contrary to rape and women violence that is rampant in present scenario. It also dismisses the association of sexual act with fertility and focuses on the enjoyment and fulfillment through the process of love making.

⁴⁵ Pattanaik.D.2012.*Tales, Symbols, and Rituals from the Heart of the Subcontinent*. India. Inner Traditions



Architecture on the walls of Konark Sun Temple



A sculpture of 10th Century representing Ardhanariswar, presently found in Gwalior



Walls of the Khajuraho temples

The walls of the ‘Western Mandirs’ in Khajuraho, made by the Chandela dynasty, holds almost ten or fifteen percent of its sculptures representing the sexual life with other representations. This also signifies the ‘normal’ expressions of eroticism with other tasks of life and existence.



This is a sculpture found in the walls of Khajuraho temples where two men are being seen in a very intimate posture.

Sources: Self

The most ancient text of Hindus in India (Hindus who was believed to be a part of the 'sanatan dharma, which is a way of life), the Vedas also mentions that in a life-fold of an individual, one should perform four religious duties, that is 'Dharma', in the search of truth and religion, 'Artha', the material need and fulfillment for sustenance, 'Kama' as the obvious need of the sexual life of man and 'Moksha', the last and the phase of salvation. 'Kama' was never seen as a phase outside the natural works of man. In *Vishnusharma's Panchathantra*⁴⁶ it was mentioned that one needs to be healthy in order to be able to have a good mindset and a fulfilled sexual life. Sheik Nafzawi's Islamic text of the fifteenth Century, *The Perfumed Garden* was one of the old texts which expressed sensual love and desires. In the walls of Khajuraho it is actually the lifeworld that is being craved all over the walls of the temples that now has become the spaces of tourist attraction where it's not 'all' about sexual eroticism but the obvious presence of it in our lives has not being avoided, rather is shown with great care and effort.⁴⁷ Women have been an integral figure depicting their equal excitement in the process of love making and

⁴⁶ Some stories of Panchatantra is believed to have existed prior to the time when Vishnu Sharma, a scholar and author had put them together into a collection in Sanskrit around 1200BCE to 300CE.

⁴⁷ Meyer.J.J. 1953. *Sexual Life in Ancient India: A Study in the Comparative History of Indian Culture*.London. Lund Humphries.

sometimes as the initiator to a sexual process. Monogamous relationships was not seen as a norm as seen through the creative figures.

Quite strangely though, but inspite of this rich cultural heritage, the situation of India in recent times is hostile which force them to be within their closets and not to speak about their choices and sexualities freely in the fear of being victimized. The fiery protests against Deepa Mehta's lesbian film *Fire*, and strong denunciation of Karan Razdan's film *Girlfriend* were symptomatic of this hostility. Literature in this genre, which as mentioned earlier is rather scant, is sought to be suppressed, as was Ismat Chughtai's first lesbian story *The Quilt (Lihaaf)* in Urdu published in 1941, which was considered obscene and a case was filed against it, as has been done in recent years to Shobha De's novels, viz., *Strange Obsession*, (1992) *Starry Nights*, (1991) and *Snapshots* (1995). A mainstream novel by Manju Kapur, *A Married Woman* (2003) is one of the recent lesbian novels, which inscribes and at the same time outlaws lesbian experience in order to validate patriarchal social structure of family and prioritize heterosexuality. It must also be mentioned here whether in films or literary works, the representation of gays/lesbians projects them as borderline bugs, criminals, mentally sick, or deprived of heterosexual coition.

Media texts are also full of meanings and codes which propagates a particular form of ideology and knowledge. Their meanings are not just a simple narration of events or sequences rather are well chalked out through definite rules and conventions almost like the grammar in the language that we use. Understanding and analyzing these texts actually might help us to understand the 'power' which operates within the texts and how the power relations are reflected through its representation and also the exertion of power over its viewers in the form of entertainment or information. Ideological values, knowledge and beliefs are also an innate motivational factor within the texts of the media as well as it's the most powerful media of construction and representations of meaningful texts in a comparative easily understandable and comprehensible manner. Through these processes we also can read the change and continuation of the social affairs and system in which it operates and also in turn propagates its ideas among the masses of the society.

D. Culture, State and Individual

In India, since the colonial time, homosexuality was banned in Penal Code 377 where anything against the peno-vaginal intercourse is subjected as a punishable offence. Though this law ideally constraints the 'alternative' means of sexual pleasure of heterosexuals but however it targets the homosexuals and "queer" people through different sorts of stigmatization and ostracization. In 2017, when India is supposed to be toward its modernizing process the law seem to remain constant. In 2009, the Delhi High Court verdict however decriminalized homosexuality in India but the law of the colonial times seems to be victorious in the 2013 Supreme Court Verdict where the homosexual love relationships are again made a prohibited act keeping the colonial hegemonic heteronormativity as the norm. Indian colonization started with the Portuguese and the Dutch, however very less information about their laws and policies are available and thus it could be said that the major implementation of laws actually came from the Britishers. Thomas Babington Macaulay, who was the notable designer of the system of education in the British period, made it a point to be learnt that sodomy is something which is unnatural and thus an offence. This is how the creators of our knowledge system tend to exerts their power and unknowingly the learners are trapped as their subjects of the exertion of power. Partha Chatterjee (2004) mentions that due to the colonial rule in India, the social life of the Indians had a distinct division of the domestic and the outside, that is the private and the public. The private was always seen as a traditional and indigenous with the feudal structures at different level. The public on the other hand has a strict sanction of rulers with the 'fragmented' reality.

Culture encompasses our ways of living, our systems of knowledge, our practices, our habits that grow, the ethos, ethics and various other systems that binds the society and even the systems that are tagged as 'deviance' which forms what in commonsensical understanding forms the so called 'counter culture'. However, why something called 'culture' and something 'counter culture' is has its own power dynamics in the system of the society. Likewise, there is always a 'culture' representation of the powerful and the other is of the 'margins' which is not much heard of in the whole suppression and domination of the hegemonic and established system of power. 'Subaltern Studies' which

started in late 70s and early 80s, created a space for the voices unheard, the voices from the margins and 'from the below'. It started with Ranajit Guha's extensive writings on *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* that gave a new book of knowledge on this emerging field of study, specifically looking at India.⁴⁸

The idea of 'subaltern' was more or less weaved with the idea of colonialism and the class struggle that Gramsci and Marx talked about. Interestingly, the study of the subalterns if not in the categorized name, started with various upsurges, rebellion, revolts and protests of peasants, farmers and working class that started since the time of colonialism. Thus, before subaltern studies as an academic endeavor started, there were several studies of the working class, feminist groups, peasant groups which were growing up alongside the hegemonic literature of studies. E.P Thompson's book *The making of the English Working Class* in 1963, Eric Wolf's publication in 1982, *Europe and the People without History* and also various literatures on tribal and peasants movement in India were in growth even though not under the direct shade of 'subaltern studies'. However, it is an attempt to rewrite the discourses of the people outside the hegemony of the knowledge/power structure which gave a subversive cultural scenario and a liberating alternative from the oppression of the powerful.

Gayatri Spivak's, *Can Subaltern Speak?* remains an important text in understanding this discourse of 'subalterns' to a great extent, where she tries to look at the cultures and histories from below through a feminist, Marxist and the perspective of Deconstruction. The word 'subaltern' was a Gramscian influence which refers to them who are unrepresented in the society. In India the situation becomes even more complex with the various distinct identities of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, language and so many more which people associate themselves with. Spivak argues that "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (1988:287) Her idea was that even though the subaltern speak, the elite culture of knowledge hardly have spaces for them to be heard and communicated.⁴⁹ The element of 'noise' in form of various social, economic, racial,

⁴⁸ Guha.R & Gayatri C. Spivak. 1988. *Selected Subaltern Studies*.USA. Oxford University Press

⁴⁹In a country like India with so much of diversity in language, caste, creed, ethnicity, genders there are various voices that remains unheard. Not only so, but this whole discussion on the 'voices from below' also

political factors the voice from the below can actually not reach to the upper section of the society, and whatever reaches at the end is the distorted voice, lost in the process of communication. Spivak gives the example of how Sati was being practiced as a sacred ritual, (according to Rig Veda and Dharmashashtra) without much question and even the women saw it as a sacred performance, than an act of suicide. This is one of the instances that how individual themselves become the perpetrator of the overwhelmingly dominating system.

Subaltern Studies has a close link with post colonialism as after the colonial rule, it was indeed a task to retrieve literatures and histories which so long remained behind the doors or was 'closeted'. Homi K. Bhaba in *Nation and Narration* (1990), approached to understand nation through his critical questions as to what it means to be a 'nation' and how is it that it expresses itself with the existing literary thought. In a multicultural space, how do the so called 'majority' and 'minority' associate themselves with the idea of 'nation' which is supposed to be a collective feeling of association, existence and imagination. In that scenario, the cultural diversity should as well have a space for the 'other' voices, the minority narratives, with the majority narrative that in any case define its 'nation' and claim a collective imagination. However, looking at the alternative stories not only remains significantly relevant to understand the cultural spaces of a nation rather also are a political necessity. He encouraged a rethinking of the notions and understanding of nation, nationalism, its representations and its resistance to understand the 'hybridity' of the cultural presence. The supposed commonality through shared history thus needs a serious rethinking as to how a mainstream culture or history can actually define the emotions of such a diverse population who identifies themselves with different notions which might not be a nationalist shared feeling. In *The Location of Culture*, (1994), Bhaba tries to locate the 'liminality' of groups or cultures that remain in

makes me question as to what exactly are we referring when we are saying voices of the unheard or the voices from the below. Doing a research on understanding the culture and sexual variations, I in my own humble way am trying to give a small interpretation of my understanding of certain ideas which also to some extent tries to capture some of the voices of the unheard,' queer' individuals, but then again as I as a researcher have my own location and subjectivity, it might as well seem as a distortion in itself which is being heard via some other agency of communication. Thus this debate remains as to then only the insiders perspective matters or remains valid or it can as well be empathetically studied and understood by the 'outside' in order to try to reach to the voices that was so long were neglected or were not shown much interest to be heard of.

between various historiographies in different periods and within different critical constructions. He tries to interrogate spaces which remain undefined, 'haunting', marginal and to some extent 'unhomely'.

The idea with which subaltern studies started was to give a different perspective from the mainstream, an alternative to some extent, probably with a new way of thinking. It was the concern about the masses that always remained 'silent' was the matter of concern, interrogating whether that silence is from within or it is something which is dominated by the powerful. If women were the ones who were in double trouble when it came to their situation to speak, it actually worsens with the people whom the society in the first place doesn't 'accept'. Anything other than a man and a woman can be only thought as a hijra, as the traditional Indian society could only perceive of. The matter of 'choice' was never a concern, or it could be said that society tagged them 'deviant' whomever wished something else than what the society expects them to expect as individuals or society. Individuals with 'queer' 'identity' or 'choice' are yet to be heard of. Though very few voices could be heard, but socially they are still to be accepted with dignity and respect when it comes to a collective recognition or incorporation. It has not changed much from what Freud would have defined them as 'aberrations' of sexual experience and activity.

Freud in his *Contributions to the Theory of Sex* would actually speak from the Victorian moral system focusing on instincts which play an important role in the development of human personality and character. He believed that psychoneurotic illness can never happen with a perfectly 'normal' sexual life. According to him the 'sexual impulse' is like the poetic fable of a person divided into man and a woman who struggles to reunite themselves through the process of 'love'. Thus for him it's surprising to think about man who fantasizes man and not woman and a woman who feels attracted towards the same gender could be said as 'contrary' individuals or also as 'inverts'. Discussing on different forms of inversion he points that men with the longing for men is not a normal sexual act and miss on all pleasure of its performance who could be tagged as absolutely inverted. The second is the amphigeneously inverted, that is psychologically hermaphroditic whose sexual objectification may belong indifferently to either of the

sexes lacking the character of exclusiveness. The other are the occasionally inverted who acts abnormally in certain external conditions, mostly in the scenarios when they lack the accessibility of the normal sexual objects. This is more of a passing phase of gratification. He also thinks that the 'inverts' manifests a judgment in support of their behavioral variation and take the inversion as a matter of course, just as the 'normal' person would regard his 'libido', demanding similar rights to that of 'normal'. Freudian way of thinking sexual impulse thus distinguish very clearly between the normal being the heterosexual and the absolute inverts or abnormal as the homosexuals. He also mentions that these inversions in the behaviours can also be manifestations of specific periods in the development of the normal behavior. There also remains a chance of change in the 'libido', after the experience with the normal sexual object. Inversions can be congenital but at times can also be acquired through the sexual impulse. He would see that problems in early affective sexual impressions in many cases caused homosexual inclinations which are actually a form of 'perversion'. Freud's understanding of sexuality is male centric and extremely patriarchal where there is almost no sense of agency in the part of the individuals about their own desires and everything seem to be in a binary distinction of sexual impulse and emotion. Freud tried to analyze through 'science' and psychoanalytical explanation defending his ideas on 'oedipus' complex. However, India carrying the colonial legacy of Victorian era could not go far from this kind of an understanding when it came on the issues of sexuality and to be specific homosexuality.

India after independence was under the Nehruvian secular socialist ideas which in 1970s were disrupted by Indira Gandhi's drastic steps initiating emergency which created a disjuncture between the masses and lead to the growth of the Hindu nationalist party or the Bharatiya Janta Party. (Nandy: 1998) Ashish Nandy says that "it was colonial India....still preserving something of its androgynous cosmology and style which ultimately produced a transcultural protest against the hyper masculine world-view of colonialism in the form of Gandhi." (1983:45) This view of Nandy is a strong political statement for someone who is regarded as 'the father of the nation' yet through his views and lifestyle was an alternative portrayal of the colonially established hyper masculine image of the said heteronormative society.

Culture, State, Individuals and its representations can never be differentiated in water tight compartments rather could only be made sense of if studies together as an interrelated process. The Indian culture and heritage has its roots in deep historical and Vedic knowledge system which seems to be more modernized than the existing claim of the modernized knowledge discourse. The arts and architectures, songs and paintings of the bygone days actually give us a different picture of India than its existing rules and norms. Transcendence of gender was never a new idea in India as the texts and historical representations informs us. Early India in the contrary to the West seems to be more democratic and all embracing them the hegemonic West claiming to be the supreme power of science and reason. As Spivak would say, reason can never be judged only through the scientific calculations of the West, rather the suppleness and the everydayness of the common mass (who now are also a part of the subaltern) should be incorporated to make sense of the intricacies of living and rational judgments.

Culture however, socializes us since the time of our birth, through the names we are given by our elders signifying our genders and then comes the playing objects, schooling and the whole process of learning of the 'presentation of the self'. There starts the expectations of the society and repetition of performance, as Butler would also mention which ultimately becomes our 'self'. The individuals who seem to adapt with the socialization and the expectations becomes the part of the normal stream whereas who cannot adjust with their inner 'self' and the forced outer 'self' starts questioning the notions of 'normalcy' and gradually deemed as social deviants. It is the time when the so called 'others' from its ritualistic performance of the societal roles seem to take up their innovative gender performances, the state and society starts entering in their lives with the motive to regulate and discipline them, to make them 'normal'.

The categorization of 'identity' (ties) happens in the way individuals understand themselves and are understood by others. The concepts of the identity determine and are determined by the prescriptions and proscriptions that structure and structured by social existence and repeated practice. The term "queer" is now used with great familiarity and in many cases used alternatively to the word 'gay'. The casual practice of replacing "queer" with the word 'gay' however ignores some important theoretical explanations of

the representational limitation of 'gay' and the comparable representational richness of "queer". 'Queer' sexuality is understood only in reference to the hegemonic heterosexual identity where one stands as 'normal' and 'natural' and the other as 'deviant' and 'abnormal'. Categories of sexual identity are unique to the cultural contexts through which they are defined. In many cases, individuals identify themselves to homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual simply because there are not apt and fitting categories present in order to fit their own selves. Mary McIntosh introduced her article named *The Homosexual Role* in 1968 was one of the earliest theorization of homosexuality.

There has always been a clash between the centre and the periphery. The gradual shift in categorization from 'homosexual' to 'gay' to 'gay and lesbian', on to "queer" shows a fine attempt not to fix identities or to adhere to any one given term, not to assume their ideological liabilities rather to transgress and transcend them to a certain extent. Their mode of functioning as Teresa de Lauretis would say is "both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference, demanding political representation while insisting on its material and historical specificity."(1991:iii) The term "queer" is more amorphous which speaks of a resistance to the binary normativity and attempt to transgress, subvert and disrupt including not only the gay, lesbians but also including cross-dressers, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. Though this term lacks the definite boundary but it does hold the strength of the collectivity of expressions and identity of the "others" in respect to the mainstream hegemony of thoughts in respect to sexuality. However, due to the limited scope of the research, I narrowed down "queer" voices to that of gay men, lesbians and transgender(s).

II. Purpose and Scope of the Research

The aim of this research is to read the chosen 'texts' of cinema and 'talk' about those cinema in the context of personal experiences and opinions with certain groups of people of different age and different sexual orientation in particular. Thus it could be said as a critical approach of studying "text and talk" which remains an important aspect of the critical discourse analysis as well. Though this study doesn't emphasize much on linguistics and semiotics but it does try and question the dominant ideologies, beliefs and

practices trying to understand the power politics that play at every level of human existence. It is not a purely verbal approach rather also have an aspect of studying films, pictures, music and dialogues with the communicative events. I basically have tried to understand the established structures of dominance and resistance in the existing societal relationships with emphasis on the question of identity, democracy, love and marriage, in reference to the idea of 'choice' and 'rights' to live a chosen life.

Though critical discourse analysis primarily focused on language and society, but Van Dijk (2009) extends its implications in reading texts, and the way it is produced and reproduced in socio-political contexts. He focuses on the inequality and abuse that is created through various dominant 'discourses' and penetrated through the system of practice. Critical discourse analysis this explicitly tries to understand, question, challenge this social inequality that is legitimized through various agencies of the society. 'Text and Talk' to him is a method of deconstructing a particular text in order to critically reinterpret the 'given' system of knowledge. He mentions that rather than thinking it as a qualitative or quantitative method it could be said as an approach to rethink and reinterpret a specific problem. It is a way in which the study tries to make one aware of the problems evaluating motivations that remain hidden in others, as well as our own selves. It is not a way to arrive or solve problems with definite answers but with ontological and epistemological questions within the structure of the 'social'. It is thus a way to demystify ideological systematized power which remains in spoken, written or visual system of language through a reflexive approach. Approaching to understand a specific problem makes it an interdisciplinary methodological way of looking.

In the context where same-sex relationships are still not a norm in our society and heterosexuality remains in the fore-front, the homosexuals remain in the marginal group causing the IPC 377 a much debated law. Contextualizing this scenario of differences, I wish to see the impact of the selected movies dealing with the said themes on the different age-group of audiences in order to have a multiple perspective. It would be relevant in understanding whether movies at all play any role in changing the 'thoughts and perspectives' of its audience through narratives of these kinds. Studying these 'representations' and cinematic texts from the perspective of the so called 'sexual-

minority' remains one of the major interests of this study. Does it at all give them a 'say' in a public forum and acts as a platform which gives them a space to speak out their inhibitions about their own 'selves'? These movies which don't 'conform' to the hegemonic societal norms and bring up these issues which are among the 'deviant' does speak of a language of protest to some extent and how the silent protests of these kinds have enhanced the societal positioning of the people concerned are also an arena that I would like to enquire into. I would like to understand that how individual's agency in respect to their 'will', 'choice' and 'freedom' operates with and against the 'collective', the 'established' and the 'hegemonic', which also form the legal apparatus. It also questions the idealization of 'love' and 'marriage' as something that could probably happen between a man and a woman. I would theoretically try to critically understand the term "queer" as it has been a term of great contestations. It literally means 'strange', 'unusual' which was not taken very positively in the early 20th Century, and gradually changed its meaning to a sense of empowerment. The meaning that we perceive from a term "queer" thus still remains very important to be analyzed, mainly by them, who would categorize themselves as so, and their perception and experiences about the system of 'language'.

Categorization has been a human construct since the dawn of civilization, but in the modern state of democratic governmentalization, in reference to these categorizations, the individuals rather than being free becomes the subject of oppression and suppression by the state mechanisms through its intervention in almost all spheres of human life. Culture in this study not only looks at the dominant cultural ideologies which affect the ways of living and thinking of the society rather also has a different fold through its analysis of representation through (three particularly chosen Bengali) films which are not the so called mainstream movies, in reference to the subject matter, speaking its narratives through the different experiences of sexualities and its reactions from the society.

Through these chosen films this study is a humble attempt to understand the 'popular' representation of this transcendence of gender binary and the so called 'alternative sexualities'. Unlike the film studies research, though the entry point of this

study tend to be through three selected Bengali films but the focus of study will be more on the socio-cultural representations of the marginalized gender groups in reference to their identity assertion struggle in these films and the societal reactions and reflections on the specific issue. The notion of 'choice' of an individual and their 'space' to exercise their own freedom which quite often is being questioned by the state and society is also to be critically looked at. The whole notion of 'individual' choice and 'agency' lacks its meaning being gazed and surveillanced continuously by the moral policing of the state law and societal interference. Foucault would say that we live with certain notions of 'banal' sexuality which is defined and constrained by different system of rules and prohibitions. Historically sexuality has always been seen as constant and thus the 'desire' or the 'subject' of desire was never taken into account in the study of sexuality. The 'desire' of an individual was judged according to the prescribed body of knowledge prevalent in the popular consciousness to be termed either as 'natural' or 'fallen'. Thus sexuality always had a moral domain associated with it. There was an association of 'evil' in sexual activities between individuals of the same-sex, whereas there was a glorification of self-restraint and the rule of procreative monogamy was the norm. The fear of 'stigmatization' was always there within those who would deviate from these so called normative accepted notions of 'body', 'desire', 'sexuality'. The ideal code of conduct was either the conjugal virtue or the power of restraining oneself from the untimely enjoyment and sexual abstinence.

Foucault (1984:18) notes, "in nineteenth century texts there is a stereotypical portrait of the homosexual or invert: not only his mannerisms, his bearings, the way he gets dolled up, his coquetry, but also his facial expressions, his anatomy, the feminine morphology of his body, are regularly included in this disparaging description. The image eludes both to the theme of role reversal and to the principle of a natural stigma attached to this offense against nature." The society measures an individual as an 'ethical' subject with the reference in relation to its moral conduct and his/her mastery of own desires. One however tries and follows the tradition as they intrinsically imbibe the responsibility to carry forward the spiritual tradition one is subject to. Foucault would also clearly state that he is not supposing these codes as unimportant but when it creates subjugation there might be a sense of trouble. The whole question of Foucaultian 'biopolitics' becomes

immensely relevant in this context to understand one's social and political power over one's own self and 'body'. Agamben however extends this discussion and identifies the state of exception with the power of decision over life. "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious." (Douglas: 1966). The series of questions posed by Foucault still stands significantly relevant to reflect on, in reference to the exercise of the power, the mechanisms which operate as repression in many instances. Prohibitions, censorship, denial are the forms in which these powers operate and was there really a rupture between the age of repression and the critical analysis of repression?

III) Method, 'Technique' and Interpretation

As the entry point of my 'field' was through the films and the questions it arouse, I chose the urban space of Kolkata as the primary space of work where the release of these films happened. I did my fieldwork during the period of 2014-2015. Entering into the so called 'field' to talk to the 'queer' informants was not an easy task for me as I had to build up a rapport with my informants and ultimately to be friends with them where they feel free to share their life experiences with me as someone whom they would tag as 'outside' their community. I tried to keep myself flexible with time and went to meet them whenever they wished, walked around the city with them, shared food to gradually become friends with them.

Though in 'queer' film festivals and Pride-Walk celebrations, people do showcase various sexualities with an extravaganza, but talking openly about different sexualities is still something not really practiced in India specially Kolkata. I myself am from West Bengal but to start with I did not have any known person so to say who admitted themselves as "queer". So my entry point was the Max Mueller Queer Film Festival (2014) where I started talking to people randomly and gradually got introduced to their friends. Thus the sampling method I used could be said as purposive and snowball. The other way for me was to visit different NGOs who work with gay, lesbians or transgender and gradually make contacts with my informants. I visited two of these NGOs, one working with lesbian issues and the other with the transgender, *kothi* and gay. Though my concern in this research was not about 'hijras' who stayed with their gurus and were a

different cultural group altogether, yet I did went and conversed with them in the road-signals, where they do *challas* (begging) to earn a livelihood also introduced me to their known ‘transgender’ and ‘kothi’ acquaintances.

In order to make sense of the struggle, the “queer” goes through, I took around 7 (seven) in-depth interviews through the process of narrative collection which includes *gay men*⁵⁰, *kothi*⁵¹, *male to female transgender*⁵², *female to male transgender*⁵³, *lesbian*⁵⁴ and one who called herself “*queer*”⁵⁵ in order to make sense of the ambiguous identity struggle that they goes through. A focused group discussion was done with around 12(twelve) “queer” individuals. As I was trying to get multiple perspectives and viewpoints about the films both from the so called ‘legitimized’ sexuality, that is heterosexuals and homosexuals (LGBTQ)⁵⁶; I also conducted interviews and did focused-group discussions with college students (aged 18-22) with around (6-7 students) mainly from two colleges, Presidency College and Asutosh College. I also conducted personal interviews with some of them. Attempts were made to talk to the people associated with Rituparno Ghosh and his film making journey, but much was not possible as they were quite hard to be contacted and talked to due to their busy schedule. However, interviews and opinions of the directors and actors are being collected through newspaper articles and television interviews, which I collected through internet videos. Lastly I talked with some of the aged people, around 12 of around 50years of age, to understand their ways of looking at these films and its content. This group was specially chosen thinking their views to be important as “queer” as an issue was not much in discussion until some years and thus their perspectives on issue of different sexualities was thought to be relevant. I interacted randomly with this age group in the ‘*Nandan area*’⁵⁷ and sometimes in front of certain schools and colleges. Incorporating all age

⁵⁰ A homosexual man

⁵¹ Effeminate man

⁵² Who is born male but feels a woman

⁵³ Who is born female but feels like a man.

⁵⁴ Homosexual woman

⁵⁵ ‘Queer’ as she was still in a state of confusion to decide whether she belongs in any strict category.

⁵⁶ It is an initial of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer

⁵⁷ The Nandan area is a vibrant cultural and social space where people of different age group meet, and the culture of ‘adda’ defines the nature of the space. ‘Nandan’ is the government sponsored film and cultural space and the nearby Rabindra Sadan and Academy of Fine Arts makes this place of special interest.

groups here in my research was not possible as it would have become time consuming and even more extensive, thus there remains a scope for further extensive research on the same. However my idea was basically to understand the views and opinions and way of looking of the “queer” and the so called ‘heterosexual’ people in reference to these films majorly, but it’s also mentionable that while discussion, the conversations however did not only stop in films or Rituparno Ghosh, rather on various other experiences and conversations on love, life, politics etc which to me remains extremely enriching.

As my research have two simultaneous aspect of both reading of cinema as text and then analyzing the cinema with the collected data from the field, their real experiences, pain, pleasure, love and betrayal, opinions and observations and so on, thus the analysis of the contents of the films as well remains a major part of this study. A qualitative study of this kind might have contestations about the validity of the interpretations, but a purely objective method would possibly not be able to grasp the essence of the study and reduce the scope of imagination. These chosen films were not released in the rural spaces of Bengal and was in theatres in Kolkata majorly, so my informants were also restricted to this space of Kolkata, where I did not have much privilege to limit myself within a particular class, though most of my respondents would mark themselves to be from ‘middle class’. Class as a sociological category is an amorphous classification which is very hard to be defined in terms of one’s economic status, rather the aspects of values, lifestyles and education does comes into play when we discuss on the ‘middle’ class which is also believed to be one of the main agency to change being closely related with neo liberal economic developments and intellectual standards. The individuals I talked with mostly belonged to ‘middle class’ and ‘lower middle class’ because of their value system and the expectations that they hold from their childhood to be educated and be in service. However, here it is mentionable that among the ‘queer’ respondents, around 5 (five) did not finish their graduation studies due to the trouble they faced in their families and colleges inspite of believing education as a means of emancipation and larger mobility and freedom. In spite of the educational limitations, none were unemployed and were engaged either in NGO (non-governmental organization) related works or services in small private firms. Among the other professions there was a school teacher, a chartered accountant, a research student, make-

up artists and service holders. All my informants (homosexual and heterosexual) practiced Hinduism as a belief system, though they did not identify themselves much on religious terms or caste. However, further studies could be done with specificity of class, religion, caste, ethnicity, but here I have particularly concentrated myself on ‘audiences’ who are a part of this urban culture in Kolkata and their experiences and ‘say’ on the representations and interpretation of these movies, where I did not categorize them in further definite boxes. The names of the respondents are being changed for their own wish of keeping themselves unrecognized.

Interviews mostly unstructured and informal⁵⁸, focused group discussions⁵⁹ and narrative collection through life story⁶⁰ are done with an attempt to look into the dominant ideologies in relation to the so called “deviant”, “subaltern” view to understand the forms of control and power that exercise even in our daily interactions and conversations with each other in families, schools, offices, markets and so on and so forth. Participant observation was also an important method through which I happen to get information about their ways of life and practices. I had spend time with them in roads, trains, buses along with parks and the space they call as ‘*cruising points*’⁶¹ of the gay community. Narratives, in this research in particular has two different aspects, one of the story in the cinematic visuals that the director and team produces or develops according to their script and the other is the stories of life, the real tears and laughters that one goes through. Ronard Barthes (1977) would say that in every age narratives has been there like life itself and those are numberless, oral or written, moving or fixed, it is there in myths, history, legends, epic, painting, cinema, news and almost in all other forms of expressions. With the emphasis on subjectivity in social research, narratives also became a significant mode of qualitative research, where not always the structural collective is looked into, but also the lives of individuals which becomes an enquiry. Interviews are a process where I as a researcher had certain questions in mind, and the discussions started

⁵⁸Unstructured and informal interviews are mostly free-flowing conversations. Even though there were a list of questions that were there to guide while the process, but however it went like an open discussion.

⁵⁹Focused group interaction is when there is a group of people with similar interest to discuss about a specific topic.

⁶⁰Narrative of life history involved intensive account of one’s life, through depth interviews and in this specific research the respondents showed personal photographs at times in narrating their own story.

⁶¹Specifically the regions of Lake Gardens, DumDum metro station ‘*chottor*’, Nandan ‘*chottor*’ and Subhas Sarobar, Beliaghata in the evening.

in lines to those queries and continued with different other discussions related to the issues. Narratives, unlike interviews, were little different where the informants agreed in sharing their lives with me since their childhood, the emotional and the physical journey of their lives, at times even very personal moments of crisis and happiness.

Firstly I planned to see these chosen films together in order to have a discussion, but as field is a space where predictions and planning does not really work, so certain negotiations are continuously made. Due to their busy schedules of work I could only show certain clips of these films and narrated the story to initiate the discussions on these films particularly but gradually the conversations went on to different other spheres of life where not only they but even I were asked personal questions continuously. At certain points I did feel strange and uncomfortable with the questions coming from them and their continuous curiosity of my life, my sexual preferences and so on, but then I realized that at times there is even need to share some of my experiences in order to make them comfortable of the situation. Thus this struggle of reminding myself as a researcher and the ethics of research are continuously at play, though it's better to say that the field decides the situation rather than something I as a student of sociology research learnt through texts as the methods and methodology of research doing. Just because I happen to chose them to share their stories does not make me an irrefutable authority to speak behalf of them. I would say my fieldwork had different layers, but that might not be enough of grand generalizations. However I have tried to understand and study the aspects of culture and sexuality through films where obviously certain insights are gained with this spectrum of reading films through the eyes of the represented and the 'spectators'. However it's important to mention that the methodologies, methods and ethical principles might be important tools to learn which might as well form a supportive guideline to facilitate the process but can never be applied mechanically in the messy world of phenomenon that we are studying. The fixed methodological rules and criteria of choice of methods vanish in reality. The 'field' in itself emerges as a learning experience and to some extents also alters us as human beings.

The first experience of the 'field' is to unlearn many of the learnt theories and methods which were taught in the classroom. It is a space where we constantly have to

adapt and adjust with the necessities and the requirements of the situation. It is a space of self realization, self reflexivity, and thinking deep as the work proceeds. *Culture and Sexuality in Visual Representations: A Study of the Queer Trilogy in Bengali Cinema* being the topic of concern, the field intrigues into the lives and narratives of the so called 'queer' people with the discussions on films, culture, family, marriage, love and so on and so forth. 'Fieldwork' in the present scenario is not something exclusive to the academic knowledge production rather is also a part of many social agencies, NGOs and organizations. Consequently, I had to also explain my position and the nature of my work. There has been a constant query on how at all these studies will help in making their lives better and bring a change in the society. I as a researcher fail to answer these questions as even I as an individual is on a constant search for answers, yet I try and defend myself saying that we can at least hope for a change and moreover speaking about certain things are much better than prolonged silences.

The 'other' in the field is no more silent in behalf of whom the researcher speaks; rather there is a constant negotiation and conversation that makes the interaction possible. The researcher is continuously judged, questioned and observed through the eyes of the researched. Many informants are of the idea that these academic researches would bring no differences in their life and position in anyway but would earn the researcher a high rank job reproducing their lives into papers and publications. The anthropological 'other' is not only the element of the research but also the factor continuously transforming the life and consciousness of the researcher. In a space where a heterosexual female researcher enters the field for researching the so called alternative sexualities, there is a sense of detachment as they continuously speaks of a community of their own where the researcher is not a part of and thus it remains a little challenging. With time however, there grows a bond of friendship with some of them. To be friends and to be part of their stories and tensions of life, when they called for suggestions from me, I got puzzled as in how to reciprocate. It is obviously of no question that I as a researcher would have my politics of location and motive of research. Thus the perspective I would speak will necessarily be different from someone from a different location be it caste, class, race, gender, historical, personal and social world and so on and so forth.

While studying different cultures and valorization of cultural diversity, it is important to point out and examine the unequal nature of social relations in any culture which is known as the 'critical humanism' in the anthropological discourse. 'Critical humanism' (Plummer: 2005) as a process engages one with different research ways in a research to interact with the 'informants'. It is a process of knowing their feelings, emotions, actions, bodies, as they move around in the social space and experience the constraint of material world of inequalities and exclusion. Rather than claiming a grand generalization, a study of this sort gives an account of close familiarity with engagements.

In this context, the so called people of alternative genders had a 'community' of their own where they felt comfortable in being their own selves, as they liked to be. For them, the heterosexual genders are outside their community. In spite of their lives in their family, schools and colleges yet they only feel the sense of community with the groups and friends of their own sexuality where they are free to express their interests, love, dress the way they wish etc. It is the sense of sharing and caring for each other that bonded their friendship with each other and served as a 'latent function' as Merton (1949/68) would say. It is the space where they gain confidence and the power to live of their choice rather than remaining closeted for their life.

In that context, locating myself as a female researcher intervening in their lives to know about their personal experiences and narratives is not an easy task. There was always an 'eye' on me as to why is that I want to know about their lives, how is that important to me and how will that in return help them. There was no less curiosity on their part to know and observe me which made this process a mutual learning process to some extent but also there was a continuous need from my part to be more sensitive with the way I approach them and the words I use in order to interact and collect personal stories and thoughts.

In research of this kind, the methods we use often let us speak to or interact with them who are fluid, unstable and perpetually in the process of becoming, so at times it does get difficult to gather data from these tenuous 'subjects' and more in the process of writing. It thus also raises the question that what meanings does these data hold when it is

at times only momentarily fixed and certain, though however its always not the case but this constant struggle of expressing in the 'just' way remains on the researcher while expressing both verbally or written.

A cultural analysis reveals the way a dominant ideology is structured into the text and into the reading subject and those textual features that enable negotiation, resistance and oppositional reading of the same. It becomes interesting when the ethnographic studies are located in the historically and socially generated meanings contextualizing the predominant system of culture. Texts are produced within a political economy and thus the constructions of representations and the discursively constructed textual social world however require an engagement with the social structuring of practices in order to get a broader perspective. The structured social differentiation and their historical transformations could make sense with the multiplicity of experiences and views of the people living in similar social conditions.

In the critic of the Archimedian nature of reason, the anti foundational philosophers very rightly suggests that the formulation of a, a-historical and a-cultural 'truth' involves a radical misunderstanding, and thus to study the human social life it remains quite necessary to explore the relationship between human thought and human existence. Though the anti foundational philosophers and the phenomenologist does not question about the existence of objective knowledge, they do question its relevance for the social sciences. The new type of objectivity that Manheim would suggest about the 'critical awareness and control' of evaluations and assimilations of different and multiple viewpoints transcending a particular point of view becomes more relevant for us in the present scenario. He interestingly focuses on the fact that in a production of knowledge, the socio-historical situation of the researcher remains extremely important because all knowledge are socially conditioned and thus the perspective and location of the researcher needs to be understood while analyzing the produced knowledge. The ideal of objective knowledge, that is knowledge defined as free from interpretations and social conditioning remains a false ideal that neither the social sciences not the natural sciences should and could aspire to. Thus the approach of all means of study should be 'hermeneutic' and interpretative.

I am also reminded of Gadamer's (1975) idea of carefully understanding the prejudice and the values both in part of the interpreter and interpreted while talking about the process of knowledge production. Not only the position of the researcher and the researched but also the meanings of any given text and knowledge is only to be understood in reference to the specific time and space and therein comes the role of 'reflexivity' of knowledge with a 'historical process of self reflection'.

Criticizing Marx, Manheim (1936) suggests that more than ones class interest and class position, the underlying historical and social reality would be more relevant to understand ones motivational interest and existential determination. The sociological category of 'class' according to him is quite a narrow framework that bypasses individual perceptions and reactions. The exploration of meanings and understanding is one of the basic ways in exploring into cultural sciences. The notion of the absolute truth remains questionable, and rather than looking for absolute truth, truths are to be searched as products of modes of thought. Inclusion and combination of different 'perspective' or the 'conjunctive' knowledge as it reveals the perspective of its author and its group from which the author comes gives a 'larger' kind of truth. It also throws light to the qualitative element in the structure of thought.

A researcher should thus never be apologetic about taking a definite stand point. There are different levels of objectivity possible in different levels of cultural knowledge. When observers have different perspectives, objectivity is obtained by transcending one mode of discourse into another. Objectivity thus, is not being non-evaluative rather being inter-subjective. This 'perspectives' which structures knowledge is collective rather than individual which Gadamer would call as 'effective historical consciousness'. This in a way is an epistemological break and a move towards a new epistemological basis for cultural sciences. The hermeneutic way of reading multiple meanings, the scope of multiple interpretations and self reflexivity are thus some of the basic things to reflect on before we go in the field of doing research in a socio-cultural space of human existence.

The shared meanings and prejudices of both interpreted and the interpreter establish the meaning of the text creating a 'fusion of horizons' of the interpreter and the text.⁶²

The space of study that I am looking at is diverse as the way of looking or interpreting a process of discrimination which was so inside the system of beliefs and practices in our society could only make sense when I try to understand the different ways of looking at the same phenomenon of 'alternative' sexualities. Thus I tried to interact and communicate with different age group of people with different thoughts and ideas. On the one hand the 'queer' narratives were tried to be understood in context of the films, but in order to have 'multiple' perspective of thoughts or ideas, it was also necessary for me to interact with the so called heteronormative majority of the society and thus I chose to talk to some college students and the older generations to have a view on their idea of culture and sexual orientations and practices. Though it is also true that through limited informants, I as a research student may not be doing enough justice to the multiplicity of ideas that is intended, but I think the process of engagement does give us newer avenue of thoughts to understand or locate the problem we are trying to make sense of. This 'fusion of horizons' of different individuals from different locations does give us a broader perspective of the whole social phenomenon which does have its own significance in understanding a reality from the lenses of an 'oppressor' or 'oppressed' for example.

'Reflexivity' however ranges from self-reference to self-awareness in reading of a text. In Bennett Berger's view (1981) "reflexivity promotes self awareness and serves to establish role distance between ethnographer as the member of the society and the ethnographer as analyst so as to undercut any noncognitive cathexis of the object." Bourdieu points three biases a researcher must be alert of in doing a research, the social origin and coordinates like class, caste, ethnicity, gender that is the social situation and position of the researcher from where the basic biases arise. The good way to keep that in

⁶² In this study, that I have tried to incorporate the different voices of college students, NGO activists, elderly people or the so called 'queers' is because I wished to get a multiplicity of thoughts and reactions from the audiences to understand or read the text from various perspective. Nothing gives an absolute interpretation of any text or can be said as ultimate. What as researchers we can try and do is to understand the different dynamics that work within the society, in this study, when it is about the 'different' sexual experiences or practices.

control is mutual and or self criticism. In the concept of 'reflection' however, there is also an autocratic position as the thinking technology in critical thought. Haraway (1997) says that 'reflexivity' refers to the optical concept of 'reflection' which denotes a situation where light is send back, rather than which 'diffraction' would be a more critical mode of expression and interpretation, which makes up a better thinking method. "Diffraction is the production of difference patterns in the world, not just of the same reflected- displaces- elsewhere" where the phenomena of study could be interpreted in a multifaceted way with also a possibility of bringing a change in the system through its critical analysis. The second is the academic position of the researcher concerned and the field of power associated with that 'academic' space. Lastly, the 'intellectual bias' where the researcher constructs the world as a spectacle to be analyzed and interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically where we risk practical logic into the theoretical logic. However, the construction of the object should be constantly scrutinized in reference to the scientific unconscious embedded in theories, problems and categories of scholarly judgments.

Being trained to look beyond, questioning and critically looking at the taken for granted notions, it is almost impossible to go to the 'field' with an empty mind. In the time when one is in Ph.D, and carrying out a research of their own 'choice', it will be naïve to think about absolute 'objectivity' in the approach of study, rather I would say it becomes the story of diverse subjectivities that comes into play before going to the field and after. However 'field' is the space where we learn and unlearn many of our biases and understanding in the light of the different knowledge that arises in the space. For example, when a kothi or a lesbian starts narrating their own life narratives, it is almost impossible to just be an outsider in listening their struggles and dilemmas of life. There becomes an emotional bond between the researcher and the informants in the exchange of lives which can no way be avoided. Though while I entered the field, the initial identity of mine was as a female Ph.D scholar from JNU doing a research on Ghosh's movies and the 'queer' lives, but gradually the relationship crossed its boundary while sharing food with them, walking through the streets in their busy world of earning a life or just spending a day in midst of the group discussions and interviews. On the other hand when I approached the college students, they initially were interested about the JNU life and

system of education, and the prolonged conversations that went along with the subject of my study and their reflections on that. The formal and informal discussions overlapped each other in making a meaningful interaction and conversation. While conversing with the elderly people, I had to give a much more detailed introduction of my world in order to make them understand what I am actually looking at. Many of them was surprised, some disgusted and some with no such reactions as they had just no views to share, as the 'queer' and the 'alternative sexuality' was however not even a part of their life world. The various reactions that I received while studying in the field and the way I tried to negotiate with the different informants were spontaneous, as the research methodology books that we actually read remains unable to deal with all our queries or difficulties that we as researchers experience or enjoy, more because as the topics we are dealing with are so diverse, so as our fields and our experiences with the informants. There cannot be just one way of approaching, rather it's everyone's individual's creative way of dealing and experiencing the social world and a social phenomenon in their unique way which become important.

Understanding a social phenomenon is only possible in its unique and historical concreteness. Gadamer would point that reason exists "in concrete, historical terms, ie., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates."(1975:249) The 'historicity of understanding' which refers to critically assess the modes in which the human being exists and the manner in which things are encountered around, the 'fore-structure of understanding' directs that the prejudices and biases are not arbitrary rather to be examined and validated through the fore-meanings present in the researcher. He would distinguish between real and false prejudices, and it is the task of the hermeneutical philosopher not to merely and passively accept the prejudice rather to understand the 'tyranny' of those hidden impediments. (1975:239) The idea of 'historical consciousness' of the researcher, that is, his/her awareness of the prejudices governing their own understanding is also similar to our understanding of reflexivity, which remains one of the most important aspect of any subjective qualitative research process.

Gadamer, however expands this term as the "range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point". (1975: 269) He also points

out that in human sciences the object of inquiry does not exist in itself, but is constituted by the motivation of the inquiry. (1975:253) Gadamer's hermeneutics is however not a mere social science tool, rather has a broader meaning in understanding what social science is all about. Donna Haraway (1991) points out important aspects of 'site' and 'sight'. She emphasizes that our 'siting' that is our localization and position actually does influence our 'sighting' that is, the ways in which our vision and optical system are crafted in technological, ideological and bodily biological senses. We remain "in the belly of the monster" and thus participating from a distance remain a myth ideally, rather a researcher could be said as a story-teller of some kind where he/she narrated a story where they are a part of rather than trying to give some objective depiction of the world.

The dialectic of the question and answer that Gadamer would mention in reference to the hermeneutical understanding is that, for a text to become an object of interpretation, it must ask a question of the interpreter. In the process of doing so, there should be a discussion of the nature of the hermeneutic experience, an examination of the essence of the hermeneutic experience, openness, an analysis of the structure of openness, question and answers and lastly, a consideration of the foundation of the relationship of questions and answers, conversations. To understand the basis of these conversations, language thus remains important to be looked at. Understanding a text also calls for an interpretation and interpretations could only happen through language. A world is re-presented through the language. If language gives us a world, then even the world gives us a language to have a common shared knowledge system as the basis of our culture and existence. Language thus remains the sharing of a common meaning. This language however in certain cases also dominates us in thinking and reproducing language in a certain way, as Foucault would talk about. Gadamer would also say that language speaks us rather than we speak language. Thus reading a text is not as simple as it may seem, rather there are different levels of understanding that should be taken in account before the researcher takes the responsibility to 'interpret' it. The text interpretation thus is implied through one's orientation towards the world, with the understanding and deciphering the meanings of the text which is very much like encountering with the reality for the interpreter. While Gadamer would say that the 'fusion of horizons' between the 'author' and the 'interpreter' gives the meaning to the

text, Hirsch would hold the author solely responsible for the interpretation and the meaning of the text concerned.

Inferring from all the ways of interpretation of texts and more so when it's about moving images, it's fair to say that the ways of looking at these texts at some point remain very individual. My location as a Bengali and a woman, my vocation being sociology where I am made to learn and debunk and question the givenness of anything that is around, I have my own 'site' as Haraway says of 'sighting'. I would not disregard my own vantage point of looking at the concerned films, its music, dialogues and symbolic interpretations of certain pictorial depiction of cultural androgyny which I have tried to read and analyze with my book of knowledge and understanding. There might be various other ways that I might miss and not touch upon, but I as a researcher would try my best from my position and context to look through these films and do a critical discourse analysis in order to make sense of not just the films and its representations, but also the 'democratic' society that we are in.

There are different ways of looking at a particular film, through the lens of popular culture, the documentation of the events done in proving a point, or a sociological or anthropological way to see or read a film. Films in a way present us with raw social data which has to be processed through critical analysis to make it sociologically relevant. A movie of contemporary times like novels, drama, magazine, newspaper opens up newer pastures of social events and facts which is not something to only enjoy but also to discuss, to analyze, to think about, something that might be taken as a point of departure towards greater theorization and appreciation. In the present world of media-rhetoric, we hardly are conscious about the continuous influence of 'mediated' images in our minds and our behavior. We keep accepting and adopting with values trying to imitate behaviors and live up to the projected notions, adapting the linguistic range of expressions catching up with the buzz words and so much more to count. Films could one way be also treated as rhetorical manipulation. The special visual devices intrinsic to film could actually be seen as an argumentative prose. The interesting difference between a novel and a film is that a film creates an image which leads the audience to perceive it in a definite way whereas the novel gives that free space of

thinking and imagination. Thus these visuals needs a deep thought being rhetorically manipulating. It is thus very important to focus the progress of the film shot by shot and the way it makes sense to its audience with the gradual narrative phenomenon. The dynamic movement of narrative through these oppositions is caused by rupture at one level which again in the next level is covered by symmetry and repetition. The organization of images into a narrative was one of the important ways that film was seen as a language. Thus to study a film it's not a simple process of just looking at it rather a complex phenomenon of reading its characters, voices, music, structure and the progress of the plot and the narrative which ultimately carries the story to the next level and ultimately gives a new perspective to its audience or conveys its intention to its viewers. In sociological study not only the relationships and structure in the film stand relevant but also the way in which it is perceived and also the influence of the messages that these films as stories/narratives carries with it.

Lauraine Leblanc (1998) in *Observing Reel Life: Using feature films to teach ethnographic methods* makes an interesting point that feature films might have been explored to analyze with a critical perspective sociologically, but films has been hardly used or explored systematically as a methodological tool or a method of sociological research. Films have always been an important context when it comes to study content analysis. However in his own class he experimented with feature films as a valuable pedagogical tool in exploring qualitative research methods. He mentions that unlike quantitative tools of research quantitative methods are more abstract which cannot really be taught inside the classroom. It rather depends on one's ability of observation, interaction and analysis. Infield experiences of qualitative processes are more labor intensive than training related. However to give a small practice of ethnographic study he showed certain films to his students and directed them to take notes seeming the presence of the students as researchers in the field projected in the field and observe. "They were encouraged to make note of particular details and incidents and to quote or paraphrase dialogue in support of their analyses." However, he also stated that

"I cautioned students that some aspects of subcultural behaviors and rituals would occasionally be misrepresented or exaggerated in these films.

Students were therefore instructed to compare these depictions with those represented in the more “real” world of their readings. This gave rise to an additional benefit: these contrasts stimulated critical discussion concerning media representations of subcultures and deviance. We were also able to discuss the role of cult films in contributing to the construction and dissemination of subcultural style, an interesting blurring between film and reality.” (1998)

Demerath (1981:71) mentions, that film actually provide narrative documents bridging a gap between the world of lectures, theories and textbooks to the world that matters. A good film can provide emotional immediacy and probing insight more than just an illustration which actually encourage one to develop the skill of critical thinking and imagination. Maynard (1971: ix) mentions that films are not merely visual aids rather are as legitimate as books in the curriculum of studying sociology. Films are not only the narrative which portray social conditions but also tap the conditions of individual viewers. Thus studying films needs a reflexive and a hermeneutic process of interpretation which automatically concerns a deeper understanding of the ‘culture’ and ‘society’ that those are based on. A film maker captures the surrounding from his/her specific positionality which remains the raw material that he/she selects rationally and subjectively with the objects, locales, people, speech, view-points carefully chosen and represented to serve the progress of the story where creating the reality remains the part of the creative process. Thus, the task of a sociologist is of ‘double hermeneutics’ where not only reading the social meanings and symbols of the films remain relevant but also the social position, power and capital that the maker possess in the making of the film to get a better understanding of the narratives. The sociological viewing, analysis and interpretation of films require an understanding of the relationship between historical context, social structure and individual experience. The theoretical framework of the study remains on the questions of inquiry in the film, be it symbolic, conflictual or textual analysis. Mediated images and information become part of the material that supports or contradicts our notions of what is ‘real’ in the social world. (Sutherland: 2010) Films provide us a way to explore our social world and also those who share it with us. It is our belief that sociology offers the tools to interrogate and change the conditions that produce

discord in relationships among individuals, communal, national or global. Feagin thus comments that there remains our hope that with our sociological understanding we will be able to contribute to the necessary change and a space for the better future. (Sutherland: 2010:17)

Film is not one discrete system of signification, as writing. It has a host of different technologies and discourses of the camera, lighting, editing, design and sound, everything of which plays an equal role in producing a meaning through it. Unlike the written languages, there is no formal rule of code and syntax in the films. Thus to read a film, we have to locate it as a signifying practice. We make sense of films not as autonomous cultural events but in relation to inter-textuality and inter-subjectivity. When we study a film, both the textual and the extra-textual factors will come into play. The meaning of any film is not simply fixed with the particular arrangements of elements; rather its meaning is produced in relation to the audiences. There is a multiplicity of 'meanings' than a single autonomous 'meaning' of the text as fixed and unchangeable. Dealing with films as texts thus eventually calls for multiplicity of meanings, the contextualization of the director and the movie as the text and the researcher or the reader's own socio-historical position as the interpreter, and as Gadamer would suggest, there should be a fusion of boundaries of the interpreted and interpreter in order to get an interpretation happen. There also will have to be a textual and contextual explanation in the process of reading of the meanings. 'Ideology' is something which could not be read off while reading of these texts. The culture's ideological system is not a simple phenomenon, rather it is composed with competing and conflicting classes and interest, where all fight for their own dominance and recognition. Films both from the systems of representation and as narrative structures are thus sites for rich ideological analysis. Thus in the following chapter, I would interrogate 'films' in sociological research and look through the journey of Bengali films in lieu of understanding and contextualizing the chosen three 'films' of study in specific.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CULTURE OF FILMS

“We, the practitioners of the various arts, are called intellectuals. That is, we are practitioners of the intellect. But the question will arise if ‘livelihood’ is intimately connected with ‘intellect’? Can the latter advances as it will? Or, in all fields, will the intellect be guided by the necessities of ‘livelihood’? And particularly in the field of films, where a colossal amount of money is needed, will there not be vigilance on the ‘intellect’, either direct or indirect?” (Mrinal Sen: 1977)

Through different phases of socialization since birth, the agencies like families, schools, colleges, universities, peer-groups, work spaces and media continuously trains us with cultural norms in order to guide us according to the ‘expected’ ways of behaving. We internalize culture reproducing it with daily habits and practices, but when some of them exert too much pressure on us as individuals in our existence, we even try and alter them accordingly. In the previous chapter we tried to see how culture is viewed through different lenses and how with time and complexities of living it goes beyond the simple ways of thinking, acting and learning becoming a form of ‘capital’ and also a system of ‘hegemonic’ knowledge.

No culture is static. It is in continuous move with inventions of technology, flow of information and rational thinking of human beings. As culture and social domains in our living becomes such an intertwined process, it sometime becomes difficult to distinguish between the two. Yogendra Singh (1973) while talking about *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, mentions that the domains of social and cultural should be understood in specificity when it comes to understanding the changes of Indian traditions. Both should be treated as independent spaces of concern. He looks the cultural structures in respect to ‘little’ and ‘great’ traditions and the social structures in ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ structural systems.⁶³ The cultural changes happened through internal dynamics (orthogenetic) of changes and also through the external factors (heterogenetic) like

⁶³ This is a conceptual framework that was introduced by Robert Redfield while studying Mexican communities. Singh was influenced by this model in understanding Indian culture and its complex systems of change. Redfield however did not discuss much about these cultural dimensions, which was later done by Marriott and Singer while studying Indian villages.

globalization and westernization. Marriott and Singer would differentiate the social structures broadly as the peasants' community or the village folks and the elites. The little traditions are a part of the village folks whereas the great traditions are a part of the elites.⁶⁴

While we probe into the space of culture and its forces of change or to say adaptation with newer spaces of culture, globalization as a process remains a significant process. The process of globalization not only happens through a free flow of economy but also through the overwhelming influence of the media. It is through media that 'culture' becomes 'popular' which goes beyond the little and great traditions of cultural dynamics. Culture through the screens, now are redefined and consumed according to the 'commodity' of information and entertainment that are delivered to its consumers. Though media is not the only way that the process of consumerism has spread in India but it obviously becomes the most important one being the easiest way to reach a large mass of people. The number of newspapers has increased with the growing number of television channels and it has reached in the remotest corner of the country. In the recent times, computers with an internet connection are also replacing the Television sets to some extent with its capacity to a much larger spaces of visualizations and communication. New technologies of TV are even coming up with smart technologies to connect internet through WiFi⁶⁵ connections even in our television sets. Information is now presented to us in nicely packaged forms with images, videos in order to attract the reader towards it. However, not going in details about the tide of ways mediated images are now produced, I would rather focus on films as a medium which is not very new in the market of cultural productions, but remains market dependent to a great extent since its birth.

Films, as a cultural medium is a 'popular' form of recreation and entertainment. Singh viewed films as a crucial agency in developing various reformatory and educative

⁶⁴ The little traditions are the system of beliefs and practices which are very local in nature and that operates within the groups and communities according to their own mechanisms. The great traditions are those of classical Sanskrit texts, the stories of Ram and Sita, characters from the epic Mahabharat that also decides the roles and statues of women specifically in the society and also other ideological principles which come through these texts and traditions.

⁶⁵ Wireless local area networking.

values. He was also concerned about its form and content and its regulation to some extent which is necessary but is a challenging process. In the time of globalization and post colonial times, the free exchange of films as a form of culture has also become an easy process throughout the world. Films not only from the Bollywood⁶⁶ (which is the most popular film industry of India) but also from various regional industries of the country now goes to International film festivals for its screening and are also available in different websites which could be watched in the click of a button. There has been an increased number of private channels that has developed in the cable system through television offering the audience with greater choices of different films in different channels, be it regional, Hindi which is generally taken as national and also international, mostly English movies throughout the day. Media with the scope of greater investments for the business houses also becomes an easy and quick process in spreading film messages through the country. Thus a detailed discussion on films as a cultural agency reflecting on our social life remains a relevant discussion to understand why and how films becomes one of the sociologically relevant spheres of study in the recent times. As the reference of this study is the chosen 'queer trilogy' of the Bengali Cinema, the following discussions on films as a social phenomenon will be looked at through the lens of Indian cinema, specifically looking at Bengali cinema and how it has evolved with time which in a way reflected certain social realities it passed through. The history of narratives of films in a way thus as well holds the capacity of telling us the history of the times it is made of. It reflects the social scenario in a form of a narrative with immense potential of factual knowledge which remains implied or it is impregnated with.

I. Studying 'films' sociologically

While studying culture, media plays a dominant role in understanding the creation and destruction of many cultural ideologies and practices where films have its own importance. Though the discipline of film studies is dominated with the perspective of aesthetic analysis where the art form was studied through its reproduction and arrangements of sounds and images particularly, but gradually during 1980s and 1990s,

⁶⁶ Bollywood is the Hindi film industry located in Mumbai, Maharashtra and is well-known to produce the most number of films from any other industry in India. Though, Hindi is just one of the official languages spoken in India, yet the appeal and audience of these films stretch throughout the country.

came the interpretation of films as narrative, as a cultural event, to study the social practice through its production and consumption, the reading of its meanings with the factor of entertainment and understanding. In sociological research, one dominant aspect of enquiry was of the 'field', the physical space of doing ethnography, of collection of data visiting the ground etc. The other aspect which also remains equally intriguing is the literary and the creative world of the 'social'. The art and architecture, the paintings and graphiti, the novels and writings, the films and media which makes the so called 'cultural' world of the society and attracts the attention of the sociologists to look the society through these means with a critical and analytical outlook. Sociological research has always been open in its approach from various perspectives which has actually enriched it as a discipline or a school of thought.

i) Art in the field of 'social'

Nisbet's (1976) *Sociology as an Art Form* discusses certain junctures of social history which could be made sense of through the artistic endeavors of the time. He mentions that though science since the 19th Century grew up with the idea of rationality and science and thus concerning more on reality unlike the arts which is thought to be eye-pleasing and mostly aimless and abstract, it is also to be noted that no creative endeavor can actually be very far from reality, rather any serious form of art be it paintings, poems or novels are first and foremost grounded on the 'reality'. It not only throws light on the reality but also communicate it with others. He mentions that both the scientists and the artists are actually driven with the desire to understand, interpret and communicate their understanding to the rest of the world.

Sir Herbert E Read in *Art and Society* mentions that

“The essential nature of art, will be found neither in the production of objects to satisfy practical needs, nor in the expression of religious or philosophical ideas, but in its capacity to create a synthetic and self-consistent world: a world which is neither the world of practical needs and desires, nor the world of dreams and fantasy, but a world compounded of these contradictions: a convincing representation of the totality of experience: a mode therefore of envisaging the individual's perception of

some aspect of universal truth. In all its essential activities art is trying to tell us something: something about the universe, something about nature, about man, or about the artist himself ... It is only when we have clearly recognized the function of art as a mode of knowledge parallel to the other modes by which man arrives at an understanding of his environment that we can begin to appreciate its significance in the history of mankind.” (1937: x-xii)

Eugene Rabinowitch, distinguished chemist and science editor mentions in his *Integral Science and Atomized Art* that

“The voice of the artist is often the first to respond. The artist is the most sensitive individual in society. His feeling for change, his apprehension of new things to come, is likely to be more acute than of the slower moving, rational, scientific thinker. It is in the artistic production of a period, rather than in its thinking, that one should search for shadows cast in advance by coming events, for prophetic anticipation. I do not mean the forecast of future events, but rather the revelation, in the frame-work of artistic production, of the mental attitudes which only later will become apparent in other fields of human endeavour. Thus the impending breakdown of the existing order of things, of the generally accepted system of values, should be--and often is--first recognizable in a revolt against the values and canons that had dominated artistic creation; a revolution in art precedes the revolution in society.” (1959:64)

The basis of ‘art’ is thus not a creation in vacuum, rather something which strongly is based on the times and space on which it is created or develops. Thus if sociologists study the human relations, the complexities of the social values and norms, the organizations and institutions in studying the society, the monuments, the literature, poems, stories, folklores, mythology, pictures, films that talks so much about the society also remains an enriched ‘field’ of enquiry in understanding its culture and symbols.

Pierre Bourdieu (1993) in his writings on *The Field of Cultural Production* claims that literature, paintings, text can no way make sense in isolation rather can only be in

interpreted and understood from the social context of their production and the position of their producers within their specific universe. He views the world of art as the 'field'. "The space of literary or artistic positions is defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital. The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces." The meaning of the work be it philosophical, literary or artistic, changes even when the 'position' remain identical but there is a change in the 'field' within which it is based for the reader or the spectator. His idea on cultural production is that no cultural production is a simple formation rather needs to be understood in reference to the position of the creator, the logics of the production and reception, and the 'field' of the art and its relation to the other structures of power and class relations. The cultural field thus remains a space of double hierarchy and power where the 'art' itself remains a site of struggle with the one who is creating it. Bourdieu⁶⁷ was both critical about just focusing on the 'charismatic ideology of creation' which puts the limelight on the internal structure and form alone and on the other hand he was also skeptical about the deterministic view of the Marxist who viewed a piece of art in terms of ideology and as a reflection of the bourgeoisie interest and power. He would rather focus the creation of art in the social conditions concerning with his ideas of 'habitus', 'field' and capital, leading to the theory of 'practice'. An individual who is creating the work has his/her own dispositions and position and a social context of understanding and socialization. The position is actually determined by the 'habitus' in which they grow up and understands the reality and the 'capital' they hold in lieu of their own position. This in turn actually creates the competing subfields of large scale production and restricted

⁶⁷ In this study, Rituparno Ghosh, the well-known director and actor in Bengal films is a significant concern in this study as the chosen trilogy portray him as a protagonist, who experiences different sexuality than that of the established binary system. He is also one who came out from his closet, though quiet late in his life, and was accepted by the middle class urban society who associated him more with his films than his 'alternative' sexuality'. However, he became a face for the 'queer' population of Bengal, specially Kolkata. In many social interviews he openly supported this idea that Rituparno Ghosh, being a wellknown personality having a good amount of social and cultural capital today could enjoy the liberty of wearing kajal or jewellery in public with flamboyance, which might not be possible for a humble transgender for example. It is through his great capability of making films that he earned this 'cultural' capital and social status and recognition and also that his father was a documentary film maker and mother being an artist already provided him with some form of 'capital' that he enjoyed since birth.

production, one in which economy becomes the dominant criteria with the profit motive of its creation leading to a 'popular' culture. However, this is why the whole process of the cultural production and its field is seen by Bourdieu as the 'economic field reversed' where art is created in the logic of the economy and its distribution.

ii) Art of films and the logic of economy

When the practice of 'art' became a means to livelihood, the market appropriated it according to its profit motive. An instance which comes in mind in this respect is the commercial Bollywood films creating a havoc in the box office success vis a vis the so called 'art' films which remains in film festivals and among its small territory of thinkers, intellectuals or people who holds the power of appreciation. The 'success' here is seen to be free from the logic of the market. Adorno (1991) mentions, the restricted field unlike the 'culture industry' depends more on its symbolic capital where the creation is more about the appreciation and importance from an audience of like-minded people. Discussing on the logic of distribution of 'art' the views of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno⁶⁸ are extremely relevant as they present an almost contradictory logic of art with two very different perspectives.

Being extremely influenced by the spirit of Soviet films and of its experimental nature, Benjamin in his book *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical*

⁶⁸ In Indian context, both Benjamin and Adorno seem relevant when we talk about the mainstream production of 'art'. Being a country having a hierarchical complex system of operation, there is different system of oppression that happens. The few in hold of 'power' and 'capital' are the ones who get the suitable space for their creation and enjoyment of 'art', be it films, poetry, literature etc and thus it is sometimes needed to be decentralized that everyone could enjoy it at their own disposition, specially films as it doesn't one to be 'literate' to understand it unlike literature or poetry. Benjamin thus remains very optimistic about the mass form of art which is accessible by all. But at the same time when the producer of the film (for example) who gives funds become the most important part of making a movie, there lies a serious problem that needs to be thought about, which probably Adorno is hinting on in his discussions. There is another complexity which often arises in a country with so much diversity which has different forms of art at its disposal. There are so much of folk and tribal forms of art, than only the 'elitist' version of the same, like the Gond paintings of the Gonds, the Madhubani paintings of Maithili village in Bihar and so much more indifferent parts of the country. One the one hand, the process of globalization and industrialization does gives a space, if not a significant one, for these arts to be represented, but on the other hand in the business industry, the capitalists and the middle man are the ones to make profit out their creations giving them very less money for their hard work. The creators remain in the sad condition even though their production of art makes a high profit in the world market. It could probably be seen with a Marxian perspective, where the labour of the tribal's or the 'haves-nots' is being appropriated by the 'haves' in order to profit maximization.

Reproduction(1936), emphasizes on the destruction of the ‘aura’ and the authenticity that traditional forms of art has always hold and projected. Mechanical reproduction destroys that exclusivity. The criteria of authenticity on artistic production diminish, shrinking the space of ‘rituals’ which it was a part of and now enters into the domain of politics. This process initiates ‘democratization’ of the process reaching out to a larger number of its masses. The ‘cult’ value now gets replaced by an exhibitional potential. The increased participation in the sphere of mass changes its nature and makes it accessible to all. About films specially, Benjamin was very optimistic as he posits a tendency of progress in the medium itself but not much in the sense of newer endeavor, but much on the grounds of breaking ritualistic practice of art just by the few making it reachable to more people through its mass production. He says,

“So long as the movie makers’ capital sets the fashion, as a rule no revolutionary merit can be accredited to today’s film than the promotion of a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art.”(1936:231)

Adorno on the other hand takes a different stand and becomes extremely critical of the materialistic production of art making it an industry losing its true aesthetics. He suggests that the commercial nature of art actually starts to blur the reality that it projects. “The borderline between culture and empirical reality becomes more and more indistinct”. (1991:53) He says that even war has its own poetry but the mass culture seems to have replaces a ‘new world’ (Neue Universum).

“In cinema this misalliance between photography and the novel, such pseudo-poetry becomes complete, it is now so present in every detail that it no longer even needs to express itself as such. It is solely the power which stands behind this everyday poetry today and impresses us with its colorfast and lavish presentation that can still deceive adult human beings about the extended childhood that is only prepared for them so that they might function in all the more ‘adult’ a fashion”. (1991:53)

Reality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful duplication. He supposes the actual nature of art to be critical, holding a sense of purpose and identity. Refereeing to the nature of poems he says

“.....a protest against a social condition which every individual experiences as hostile, distant, cold and oppressive; and this social condition impresses itself on the poetic form in a negative way: the more unrelentingly the poem resists, refusing to give in to any heteronomy, and constituting itself purely according to its own particular laws...Protesting against these conditions, the poem proclaims the dream of a world in which things would be different.” (1974:58)

Mechanically produced art doesn't hold any power to negate, to question giving its potential to its mass production and in hands of few capitalists' industrial production. Thus, there remains a need to critically engage with the forms of art, films specifically in this study, to situate the context of the film understanding the various capital and motivations that might have lead to its production and making.

iii) In search of sociology through 'films'

In anthropology, the use of photographs of 'visuals' started with 'fieldwork' where the anthropological 'body' extended through photographs or artifacts filling this gap of an invisible object of study in the fieldwork. Though the preliminary pictures gave a distinction of cultures between the 'civilized' researcher and the 'native' researched, but gradually this differentiation diminished with time when the visuals were being read as filled with cultural meanings and symbols. The same pictures started giving a new perspective where it was seen as the people being close to nature and their self sufficient way of living lives. With time, photographs itself became a major source and medium of doing sociological and anthropological research.

Gradually, with the advent of moving pictures and then the concept of sound in it gave a new perspective in the sphere of studying pictures and visuals. However, Thomas Edison, an American who was one of the pioneers of moving films emphasized on its domestic information, based usage rather than the mass culture of entertainment. He believes that when something is introduced in the society its use and consumption no longer remain in the hands of its creator and takes its own shape through the interest of its time and space. Films always speaks about something even if apparently it speaks about nothing, the films are an experience in itself.

For Metz, (1974) all films are texts which have a finite, organized discourse intended to realize communication and sometimes a more programmatic avant-garde deconstructionist perspective of the text. Textual analysis has a great sense of hermeneutics and philology, a close reading of the text and a new critical analysis. The matter of cinema can be divided into images, dialogues, noise, music and written materials which were essentially 'seen' by the 'spectators'. As most of the earlier films in India and the West were narrowly circumscribed by the preference for modernistic, abstract films which bore more similarities with the literary works than the present commercial feature film entertainment, as it was seen to be analogous to literature. With time it was however realized that the audience also wanted the dreamlike separation of everyday life from films and this creation of the luminous images on screen. It thus becomes evident that films in our culture go well beyond that of being simply an exhibited aesthetic object or phenomenon. It provides us with the pleasure of its spectacular show of representations onscreen in recognition of the stars, styles and genres and also with the event of going to watch a film.

Films thus becomes a social practice for its makers as well as its audience, in which the narratives are meaningfully interpreted through the shared knowledge of the society, as the culture makes sense of it. Though there has been a debate that films are no longer the product of a self-contained industry, rather now has become a range of cultural commodities, where the 'spectacle' exceeds over the 'narratives', but yet reading the films as a set of texts representing our social practice is a quite vibrant field of study as it still talks about a reality, probably a imaginative reality but not something beyond the social world that we live in. However, as Walter Benjamin would say that films with its system of repeated production has become an easy commodity of consumption losing the 'aura' of the previous sense of art. There has been a magical effect of the previous forms of art with its sense of 'authenticity' which made them distinctive whereas photographs or films lack that sense of 'uniqueness' and the 'authority' that the so called 'art' previously had. Films seem to contemplate more on its audience rather than being contemplated and the camera seen to give a reality which mostly is fragmented unlike a holistic picture of a painting or a novel.

Though films always has a market orientation so to say but now it has become a cultural commodity reflecting the hard industrial fact that films no longer are the product of self-contained industry rather a range of cultural commodities produced for business rather than the magical narratives for audience to think and reflect. Cinema has always been tried to be oppressed by the vested interested of the people either funding it or in the power in order to justify their position in the society. The ‘ideology’ that seem to operate within the space of making cinema can no way be avoided and also as Bourdieu mentions the ‘habitus’ of the creator in creating the piece of art, and also the power that holds control in its viewing and distribution. For instance during the British rule, the capitalist classes however supported the film industry in promoting nationalistic thoughts but as soon as the working class issues came up in movies like *Mazdoor*⁶⁹ based on the story of Munshi Premchand, they started banning them and ultimately movies of these kinds were erased from the film archives and the memories of the popular masses. Though compared to the colonial times, after 1947 the journey of Indian cinema was smoother but yet the fractured Indian society remained shackled to its colonial past.

II. Studying ‘films’: Indian Context

India with its diverse geographical, social and linguistic spaces makes it interesting as well as challenging. Without getting into a controversy of the multi-linguistic Indian culture and the multiplicity of languages and dialects films are being made, I would rather focus on the Hindi films trying to understand the Indian history and the cultural politics .It stands as the most vibrant film producing industry popularly known as Bollywood, producing more than 800 films each year and screening for more than fifteen million people a day. (Viridi: 2003) Interestingly Hindi as a language transcends its lingual boundary within the nation and also creates a sense of diasporic nostalgia for the Indians outside the state.

i)The nature of Bollywood Cinema

There has been a gradual change in the content of films even in Bollywood but what remained an attraction to its audience is its larger-than-life appeal. This might be a

⁶⁹ Mohan Bhavnani.1934. *Mill (Mazdoor)* 142mins

simple generalization, but Ashis Nandy views this peculiar hybridity of Hindi Cinema as a deliberate refusal of ‘authenticity’ and ‘realism’ as expected by the Western audience. He views this as a symptom of protest and resilience against an alien culture of modernization. (1995: ix) The Hindi cinema with its national film industry also inherits and circulates notions of the ‘imagined’ community creating a sense of collectivity as a nation producing certain markers as family being the primary trope to negotiate with caste, class, ethnicity, gender etc. Nandy suggests that commercial cinema retains the traces, however distorted, of affiliation to forms of community, cultural languages and moral concerns endangered by the homogenizing imperatives of modernization. (ibid)

Much to a similar tone Vasudevan (2010) in *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema*, mentions that the cinema in India could be seen as a hybrid dimension of a modern cultural form, where the ‘popular’ integrates with the ‘local’ forms of visual, oral culture and traditions, redefining itself into a phenomenon of a new kind. On the one hand, it critically engages between the modes of reading and spectatorship and on the other, the social and political positions and citizenship. He gives a new perspective on the third world cinema vis a vis the chauvinist homogenizing impulse of Hollywood where he focuses on the fact that Indian cinema, specifically Bollywood Hindi movies, does hold a space where different voices of “class, sub-or counter nationality, ethnic group or gender can find a voice”. The Bombay film might have an over exaggerating tendency of portrayal and also has a special role in stereotyping the figure of a North Indian Hindu majority where anyone from Bengali, Parsi, Muslim are seen as subordinates or exceptions, but yet there lies a huge possibility of construction of the national identity. This cinema constitutes a ‘national space’. All cinemas are after all an abstraction, but this does have an effect on the construction of the national identity.⁷⁰

The national narratives play an important role in its construction of imageries. Bollywood works within logic of moral, kinship, family conflict, melodrama and the

⁷⁰ When Vasudevan says ‘national identity’, he not only refers to the pan Indian nature of it, rather also points towards the regional construction of the national identity. Bollywood always portrayed a language which is of its own rather than being influenced by the Hollywood way of telling it. While doing this it reaches to the foreign markets representing an abstraction of the Indian identity. It is also to be remembered that abstraction forms a kind of stereotyping and exaggeration which is reflected in the films.

tremendous influence of coincidence which stands very distinct from the logical articulation of representations in the Hollywood. In this context the spectator of Hindi popular cinema is generally thought as immature, romantic and unrealistic,⁷¹ which was also the debate of the so called ‘art’ film makers, who believed cinema to be realistic and the audience to be ‘serious’ in their viewing. Vasudevan views this as a character of the transitional society where “melodramatic mode was grounded in an anti-individualistic ethos, it would undercut the rational, critical outlook required for the development of a just, dynamic, independent nation” (1995:308) He would focus on the fact that these films should be viewed in the light of cinematic tradition, where it cannot be just dismissed for its exaggerated content rather the different visions of psychology, class and the nation that it portrayed should be understood with its dynamics of social transformation.

Indian context is quite complex with the mythological narratives it has within her, the colonial rule that it had been a part of and also the multiple subjectivities it holds in its diversity. It is a mixture of the sacred and the secular, the mythical and the realist which has to be emphasized while reading the films. It was only after the fall of the major old studios like Bombay Talkies, New Theatres that the content of the film was made to a spectatorship in order to earn a good amount of profit putting dance numbers, actions and sensationalizing plots within it to draw the attention of its audiences. However through these cinemas, the cultural domestication was always prioritized with the patriarchal male Hindu figure of the North, and through this standardization and typification it holds a larger potential to the different variations and an enlarged identity to its spectators.⁷² It

⁷¹ There was also the factor of class that often came in while talking about audience of these popular cinemas in relation to realistic cinema, where the working class who are seen as unsophisticated and uprooted are speculated as the primary audience of these films.

⁷² When Vasudevan on one hand says that, there has been a standardization of the hero or the dominant character as the Hindu male of the North India which also gives a space for an enlarged and transcendent identity, I am reminded of the Weberian ‘ideal type’. It seems as if the Bollywood films creates a kind of representation which gives a particular and most dominant kind of an imagery and personality which through its actual practice deviates from the ‘ideal’ image that has been there expanding its space towards a larger identity. Though Ravi Vasudevan discussed this in reference to the films of 1940s and 1950s when after independence there was a great cry for identity and nationalistic feelings and thus the making of an ideal moralist figure seemed necessary, but even in the modern context, though there came different variations in the re/presentational aspect, yet the moralistic patriarchal figure of the North Indian male holds the dominance even in the very present times.

also reshapes the different concern and remaps the identity suppressing many more severe or complicated problem of gender, religion or nation for example.

Discussing on *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* Madhav Prasad (1998) says that Bollywood is not an imitation of the hegemonic Hollywood, rather a way to capture the style and mood of the 'social' which might not be very close to realism. The 'popular' Hindi Cinema cannot be only understood with its textual dimension, but with larger questions of internal and external relations of various elements of the society, economy and ideological dimensions of its cultural context. It can also be an agency to understand the transformation of the Indian national identity in reference to the global or NRI markets. Prasad on the one hand tries to understand the dynamics of economy that works in its production where the songs, item numbers or dance sequences, dialogues are crafted with special attention in order to draw business beyond the local markets. On the other hand he views that how the 'feudal family romance' still dominates the popular narratives with its ideologically traditional system of regulation of social relationships.⁷³ He would also argue that the film industry saw the FFC/NDFC that is the Film Finance Corporation or the National Film Development Corporation of India, which is a government sponsored body that intervention by the state as a source of establishing 'parallel' industry with an alternative aesthetic programme and met challenge through segmentation by taking over its aesthetics of authenticity and simplicity to create a middle class cinema. He identifies two broad drives of the cinema of and about the middle class⁷⁴, one is the orientation towards asserting the national role of the class, and the consolidation of middle class identity around issues that dealt with threat to the class, particularly around the susceptibility of women, post marital tensions, the problems of urban space and the difficulty of privacy for young couples. (1998:123) This trend of the middle class brought about two major dimensions of the Hindi cinema, one through the

⁷³ Prasad elaborates on how kissing on screen was not a trend in the previous years of the cinematic history which marks a sense of sexual freedom and liberty with an infringement of the feudal control over sexuality and subjecthood, of women specially.

⁷⁴ Directors like Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Basu Chatterjee, Gulzar created a different discourse than the model of the 'popular' films which approached the social or individual conflicts in a developmental realism. For example in the films like Mani Rathnam's *Roja*, 1993 or 1992 Raj Kumar Santoshi's *Damini* are instances of a new form of romantic narratives that was rising with a new kind of social transformation and national identity beyond the notions of populist symbolic characterization.

New Wave Cinema of Mani Kaul, Shyam Benegal⁷⁵ and others, and other of the commercial cinema of the mainstream. According to him, Indian Cinema became visible through the critical analysis of its popular formats, diasporic perspectives collaborating social experiences of the Indians and the sense of nation and nationalism. However, the primacy of family ties and obligations was seen as the vital point for posing, processing and resolution of problems arising from romantic choices and socio-cultural differences. (Uberoi: 1998)

ii) Art vs Commercial Cinema

Chidananda Das Gupta, one of the founders of Calcutta Film Society views the popular cinema as irrational and pre-modern and focuses on the 'art' or the parallel cinema in defense of rationalistic and enlightened attitudes in its representation. The non-individualistic characters of the popular films is perceived as the lack of the critical subjectivity of the individuals in the mass-films whereas Nandy sees it as a tradition against the overwhelming atomizing modernity and an enactment of a cohesive society and an expression of self exclusion from the culture of instrumental rationality. (Vasudevan: 2000)

Indian films were seen to be more or less centered on classicism, folk forms and realism, whereas art cinema was seen as the more complex narrative causality with psychological realism. For Vasudevan, realist films became a dynamic sphere and a privileged form of art due to its immense power to influence and its representational aesthetics for 'prescriptions by governing elites and an arts intelligentsia in fashioning policies and priorities in the arts'. (2010: 69) The sphere of academic political and cultural theory however goes to the extent of suggesting that this realm of aesthetics would initiate a civil-social discourse and a public sphere of rational debate and

⁷⁵ Mani Kaul was a student of Film and Television Institute of India and a student of Ritwik Ghatak. His first film was 'Uski Roti' made in the year 1969 and 'Duvidha' was one of his award winning movies made in the year 1974. Shyam Bengal was another film maker who with films like 'Ankur' in 1973, 'Bhumika' in 1977 portrayed serious issues of exploitation be it economic or sexual questioning various issues of patriarchy in the search for a newer world and identity. The New Wave cinema is one range of cinematic expression which led to the so called 'art' films, but sometimes could also be called as the 'middle' cinema which brought a new grammar in making and brought a different dimensions of ideological criticism and newer avenues in the same. Several film makers like Aparna Sen, Mani Ratnam, Rituparno Ghosh did add their contribution in this similar lineage of making films

discussions, whereas the commercial cinemas were mostly filled with creative social and political discourse in Indian scenario. Art Cinema was thought to be premised on 'social differences'. Ray (1976:6) says in relation to the Calcutta Film Society as the group to disseminate film culture amongst the intelligentsia. Ritwik Ghatak always saw films as a serious endeavor not only for the makers but the audiences. He would like to see films as an agency to unsettle its audience creating a curiosity and questions among themselves, rather than an entertainment. It for him is a tool to make people conscious about the reality. It might be a fragmented reality, but the issues should be so real that the audience needs to reflect and think about the narratives they view in the films.

Vasudevan (2010: 96) while talking about the early 1950s films of Bollywood, mentions that it "communicated a popular democratic perception which worked through some of the rationalist and egalitarian approaches" of the liberal-radical intelligentsia, but on its own terms. One very important argument which he forwards is that "rather than oppose different types of audience disposition on the ground of genre and subject matter, one needs to explore how forms of address may set up certain similar problems in constituting spectatorial subjectivity, whether this is played out or within the domain of the mythological or the social".

There can be various approaches to view the cinematic significance in our society where some like Nandy would view the social signifiers in the trend of populist cinema, whereas many would focus on the realist parallel 'art' films portraying the contemporary reality which are supposedly thought to be more 'serious', with a critical eye on the social structure, oppression, ingrained violence of gender, caste relations and the repressive patriarchal norms with its abstraction and stylization. However the various ways of looking at films become relevant because of its multitude of meanings and symbols that's it carries beneath itself. It's not only the meanings that are been given by its producers or makers rather it is continuously read and reread with new interpretations and understanding by its audiences. Nandy says that the Hindi cinema is more of a spectacle than that of an art. In a spectacle, he says "black is black and white is white- emotionally, motivationally and morally; all shades of grey must be scrupulously avoided. Not because greys doesnot exist in the world but because they detract from the logic and

charm of the spectator.” (1981:89)⁷⁶ The spectacle that is being created is melodramatic and obviously an exaggeration and an overstatement. It is not because of an expected story that the popular cinema works, rather a predictable climax with accidents, coincidences that lures the audience. The issue of plagiarism doesn't work in the space of this cinematic world, because most of the films have a more or less similar themes and stories. The director is not in any aim of making something very different from what is usually available; rather the same thing is being retold in a newer way. Thus successful and unsuccessful films don't have much difference in them in the terms of its content, but it might be the star value or the presentation that makes the box office successes. The popular Hindi films as viewed by Nandy are synchronic and a-historical. The hero for example will be a hero in presence of its contradiction, in form of the villain. When there are films which shows inter generational narration of stories, the main characters remain the same with similar crisis and problems that the previous generations faced. There is an obvious continuity that is being drawn and most importantly the good has always to be over the bad. Nandy focuses on the fact that inspite of its so called irrational and dramatic presentations of the stories, which he even compares with the epic mindedness of India, however could also be seen as an alternative system or form of logic having different sets of coordinates. There rises different 'types' of cultural notions for example, he says

“The angry, conservative, loud mouthed father of the heroine may have an upper caste name like Mr. Verma or Thakursahib, the local drunk may speak with an identifiably Bengali or Tamilian accent, and the night club manager may have a typical Goan Christian name like Mr. Pinto, but the hero will simply be Mr. Rakesh or Mr. Raj or Mr. Ashok—surnameless and, thus, regionless, casteless, ethnically non identifiable and ultimately ahistorical”.

(1981:92/93)

It portrays an alternative universe, like a *Puranic epic*, where the hero and heroine are kept unidentifiable like the residual category in the universe of myth. The other

⁷⁶ In this reference, he also cites an example as if a hero is a dacoit, the heroine is bound to find the 'goodness' in him and prove that he became 'evil' because of the circumstances and misfortune. Ultimately the journey is of goodness and rediscovering him the 'good' at the end of the narrative.

characters with certain typical traits are the subsidiary one.⁷⁷ He also mentions that in this universe of presentation of narratives, specification would have been self contradiction to the self sufficient nature of the myth.

To me art or commercial films as categories are like the ‘ideal types’. It can be seen as a tool to understand the nature of the cinema where in reality most of the films are mixtures of both in varying categories. It depends much on how the audience perceives to what is shown in cinematic visuals. In the present times, another new category has emerged as ‘experimental’ cinema, which claims to experiment with the forms and content of the visuals and making. In the times when Satyajit Ray chose actual locations for shooting his films, it was a great move, an experiment. Experiment comes with innovation and every film maker in some way or the other tries to innovate new ways of portraying. Nonetheless categories are created by us to box something, but here in films whose meanings are so fluid in nature, as it continuously changes with its watch that it cannot have a water tight compartment for it. It emerges with time. It moves with change and it transforms with innovations and technology. Even in the exaggeration, Bollywood films do talk about a ‘social life’ and a social history. If not very seriously like the so called ‘art’ cinema, but does remain a vibrant field for sociologist to look deeper into as its implications lies deeper than just the colorful portrayal of characters and plot.

iii) Trends in Indian Cinema

Cinema, as a cultural practice has its own significance in relation to art, entertainment, technology, industry and ideology which make the process of cinema a meaningful medium of expression or entertainment and eventually also as a source of study and research. The films be it popular or parallel is a powerful reflector of society reflecting on the social transformations, cultural tensions and new emerging trends of the society and also adjunct the ‘public sphere’ moulding views, attitudes, opinions of the movie-goers. The relation between cinema and the Indian social imaginary also remains relevant as Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher would see ‘imaginary’ as the elusive

⁷⁷ Residual characters are the independent characters of plots whereas subsidiary are the ones which are somehow dependent on the residual plot in its occurrence or appearance in order to carry the narrative forward.

set of self understanding, practices and horizons of common expectations that are not always explicitly articulated, but it gives people a sense of shared group life. Cinema thus gives people a sense of shared self through the portrayed character on screen and the association with the narrative life and also by the process of the collective film watching. Though with time the spaces of film viewing has become a complex affair extending its wings from films-spectator relationship to the various other objects of music, fashion and imageries, yet interpretation holds the foremost importance through which cinema has circulated in the sphere of public and popular discourses. Films as an object of human lives need more attention to its history, sociology and economics with the audio-visual structuration which actually act upon its audience. It is through interpretation that all these links could be attached making a meaningful structure of thought.

Akbar Ahmed (1992) on talking about *Bombay Films* mentions that the life and art of South Asian Society seems to have merged with each other rather than imitating one another. “Political philosophies, social values, group behavior, speech and dress in society are reflected in the cinema and like a true mirror, reflect back in society”. Though the history of Cinema in India could be traced back in 1913 with Phalke’s “Raja Harishchandra” but after Independence in 1947, there has been a change in India in terms of geography after the partition, the breaking down of structures of law and feudal social order with a rapid growth of the middle class and a new sense of values with the culture of the ‘urban’ and the imagination of a new ‘nation’. This idea of the new nation which was infused by the idealistic optimistic ideology of Nehru was very much noticeable among the films of the time. The films of the earlier times were mostly mythological, folktales, legends or literary based. The retelling of those stories which were known through oral tradition was the basis of its success. The films after independence had self conscious heroes, usually brave talking about ‘*naia zamana*’, ‘*naia roshni*’, that is of new times and new light. They spoke of ‘*pyaar*’, that is of love, the struggle against ‘*zulm*’, oppression, injustice, *Satyagraha*, non-violence, peace and duty. These were the key words and concepts of the new nation, ‘*Bharat Mata*’ (Mother India) and they ran through the dialogues in the films.

The wellknown directors like Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Mehboob Khan during 1940s to 60s dealt with these issues. *Do Bigha Zameen*⁷⁸ in 1953 talked about the conditions of the poor and the exploitative nature of the landlords. *Mother India*⁷⁹ was the story of sacrifice and honour. *Boot Polish*⁸⁰ in 1954 was the survival story in the big city, *Sujatha*⁸¹ in 1959 is the tale about untouchability, *Mr and Mrs 55*⁸² talked about the changing role of women, *Shree 420*⁸³ in 1955 was on the theme of urban and rural morality and so on. The films of this era basically talked about love and tolerance, identifying the hero representing the ‘good’, ‘honest’ man and condemning the ‘villian’ as the man with flaws and evil natured. This message of solidarity and brotherhood with the dream of a collective nation was a necessity in the struggling days after the partition in the country.

The Indo-Pakistan war in 1971 was a turning point in the cultural idioms of India. Indira Gandhi with Emergency in 1975 and the technological experimentations with arms and nuclear tests there arouse a system of anarchy and fragmentation very unlike the time of Nehruvian era. *Bobby*⁸⁴ (1973), *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*⁸⁵ (1978), *Sholay*⁸⁶ (1975), *Deewar*⁸⁷ (1975) are some of the films which were all based on the pursuit of pleasure and the materialistic needs. Thus there came a new image of the hero as ruthless, tough, physically strong man. *Roti Kapda Aur Makaan*⁸⁸ was a film that showed the increasing unemployment, the dismal future, student unrest and a loss of hope. Initially women were mostly idealized as passive, victimized, sacrificial and resilient. Though women are seen to be doubly subordinated by a nationalist patriarchy and a sexist film industry, but yet after 19th Century the model of Indian womanhood was recreated in the popular imagination in response to colonial rule. Art, literature, drama, and poetry amalgamated to mould the popular vision of the ‘new’ woman which was actually the reinvention of

⁷⁸ Bimal Roy.1953.*Do Bigha Zameen*.India.142 mins

⁷⁹ Mehboob Khan.1957.*Mother India*. India.172mins

⁸⁰ Prakash Arora.1954.*Boot Polish*.India.149mins

⁸¹ Bimal Roy.1959.*Sujata*.India.161mins

⁸² Guru Dutt.1955.*Mr & Mrs. 55*. India.157mins

⁸³ Raj Kapoor.1955.*Shree 420*.India.168mins

⁸⁴ Raj Kapoor.1973.*Bobby*.India.169mins

⁸⁵ Raj Kapoor.1978.*Satyam Shivam Shundaram*.India.172mins

⁸⁶ Ramesh Sippy.1975.*Sholay*.India.204mins

⁸⁷ Yash Chopra.1975.*Deewar*. India.176mins

⁸⁸ Manoj Kumar.1974.*Roti, Kapda Aur Makaan*. India.161mins

the modernist tempered by the mix of the dominant Victorian and Upper Caste Brahmanical values. *Purab and Paschim*⁸⁹ in 1970 draws a very nice picture of the western woman and the Indian cultured woman whose rare jewels are supposed to be 'lajja' and 'sharam'. Basu Chatterjee's *Piya ka Ghar* (1971), *Rajnigandha* (1974), Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anand* (1970), *Guddi* (1971), Basu Chatterjee's *Anubhav* (1971), 'Katha' (1982) are some of the notably relevant films of those times.

Shoma A Chatterjee (1998) views the Bollywood Cinema from a feminist perspective where she points that women majorly are seen depicting decorative roles not having a very strong voice against the injustice that seem to happen against her. Hindi cinema has portrayed women in different brands at different point in time. 'Mother India' shows that how a woman inspite of being in the bounded territory of marriage and motherhood actually rises to be a mother figure of the nation. She says that during the times of Meena Kumari or Madhubala, (in 1950s) women were seen in with the focus in the face which changed with time when the 'body' became an integral part of women roles. Geeta Bali was seen as a diversion from the image of a 'good' or 'ideal' woman. Sadhana, or Sharmila Tagore were the ones who brought about a change in style in the mainstream portrayal of characters with their tight salwar-kameez dresses or different hair-do(s). It is through Rekha, Madhuri Dixit and others that women character started changing its dimension with strong dialogues, sexual aggressiveness and overtones. It is with gradual transformations that now women issues have changed even in its representations, where eroticism, adultery or sexual expressions does create a stronger appeal through its narratives.

During this phase of Indian Cinema there was also a strong alternative wave of cinema that was developing. Ira Bhaskar (2013) while talking about 'The Indian New Wave' mentions of the film *Ashad ka ek Din*⁹⁰ (1971) which was screened after forty years of its making is not only a good example of a radical or experimental side of the Indian cinema but also shows us the similar destiny of many films of the time. However, the films which were considered 'new wave' had a new form of narration and a cinematic

⁸⁹ Manoj Kumar.1970. Purab Aur Paschim.164mins

⁹⁰ Mani Kaul.1971.*Ashad Ka Ek Din*.India.114mins

realism in both its form and content. Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* (1969), Basu Chatterjee's *Sara Akash* (1969), M.S. Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* (1973) are just few among the many of these kinds which clearly was connected to its concern with aesthetics but was equally bothered about the seriousness of its intention and to the representation of social issues with a drive towards an understanding of reality in all its complexities, contradictions and ambiguities which was believed necessary for the society. It was also not true that there were no auteurist⁹¹ cinema which also gave a picture of the social reality with much exaggeration before as Shantaram, Guru Dutt, Raj Kapoor since 1950s did make films with much social concern of the times. Other than that Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, (which I will elaborately discuss later in this chapter) with Shyam Benegal did gave us some extremely sociologically relevant pieces of films. Films like *Ankur* (1973), *Nishant* (1975) sets in the village of Andhra critiques feudalism, foregrounding economic, gender and caste exploitation by the feudal elite. The issues that these films make a thought on was about the humiliation and violence on women with their underlying vulnerabilities, the power and corruption and the inability of the state to act on or counter the violence of this feudal oppression. The 'ideology' and the 'politics' of the maker did become an important factor in the way these films were being portrayed with so much simplicity and the sense of 'reality' rather than in some make believe sets. It's very interesting to note that *Manthan* (1976) was a film which was funded by the five lakhs farmers in Gujarat each contributing Rs. 2 towards making the film. It was a film about the milk cooperative movement happening in 1970s in Gujrat. The cinematic intervention not only focused on the oppressive patriarchal Brahmanical power or the prevalent feudal system rather was also concerned about the lives of the Muslim minority in the country and a confrontation with the forces of communalism. Rajinder Singh's *Dastak* (1970) and *Garam Hawa* in 1973 are very relevant in understanding the struggling lives of the Muslims after the event of partition in the country.

The 'new wave' or the alternative cinema actually played a very crucial role in making political statements at a crucial junction of our national history. It created a cultural movement rejecting the values, forms, performances and styles of mainstream

⁹¹ Auteurist Cinema are those where director's strong influence and creativity makes him/her the author of the film narrative.

commercial cinema that privileged entertainment values and the spectacular display and melodrama. It actually gives a vision to the art form with a new form of inspiration and a sense of connectedness to the wider and larger society extending itself from realism to modernism. Chidananda Dasgupta comments that a missionary zeal was obvious in the work of a lot of the Indian New Wave directors who focused on the ills of Indian society, poverty, social injustice, the inherent violence of the social structures evidenced in the modalities of entrenched feudal power, the oppressive stranglehold of the orthodoxies of tradition, and the brutal subjugation and exploitation of lower castes and women.(1982:16) The political concerns of the new wave can now be seen in Madhur Bhandarkar's *Chandni Bar* (2001).

The ownership of televisions and cables in the Indian household brought a change in the popular imagination of the cinematic experience. The gradual advent of NDFC, Doordarshan and some overseas Television companies in the Indian society during 1980s does affect a lot in the phenomenon of media. Uma Chokroborty,⁹² suggests that the rise of Hindu nationalism has been related to the transition which occurred in television programmes in the same period. The '*Hindutva*' ideology was also enhanced with the then cinema emphasizing the Hindu nationalist viewpoint. After the post Mandal commission, after 1980s, the issues of caste, gender and reservations became an important aspect of "identity" assertion being also reflected in movies. However, with the change of the political powers in the rule, the ideologies also changed and gradually came globalization and capitalism with the "consumer" society. However, the cultural values and traditions are always stereotyped and reflected by the media as extremely patriarchal which in a way also reinforce the hegemonic ideologies. The women were represented as a respectful and traditional character where 'marriage' for them remains the destiny. Liberated and educated women were a threat to the family solidarity. The male in the popular films were mostly young, fair, handsome, eligible, romantic, mother-fixated, upper-caste and preferably rich or atleast till the end of the movies they end up being rich. This was also the time of the "Khans" who still dominates the Indian popular

⁹² Chowdhury.K.2011. *The New India: Citizenship,Subjectivity and Economic Liberalization*. Palgrave Macmillan pp 82

cinema. In 1988, *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*⁹³ by Aamir Khan, *Maine Pyaar Kiya*⁹⁴ (1989) by Salman Khan and Shahrukh Khan's *Baazigar*⁹⁵ in 1993 became 'popular' films among the youths. Soon after, in 21st Century, there were massive growth of multiplexes and digital cinema theatres and it was termed as an "industry" by the Government of India. The recent concerns of films which seems to be coming up other than the love stories are films like *Bombay*⁹⁶ (1995), *Roja*⁹⁷ (1992) on Religious fundaminism and the situations of riots, *My Brother...Nikhil*⁹⁸ (2005) on issues like HIV AIDS, *Salaam Namaste*⁹⁹ (2003) on live-in relationships, *Fashion*¹⁰⁰ (2008) criticizing the 'industry' itself and so on. The changes are not only seen in respect to technological advancement in spaces of media or entertainment but also in the philosophy of life as reflected in the narratives of the films.

iv) "Queer"ness in Indian Cinema

Though popular cinema or the cinema at large in India has lacked the explicit narratives of 'queer' or so to say homosexuality but the sudden references has always been present in bits and pieces but mostly in form of mockery or laughter. Till 1990s, the queer themes in Bombay cinema could be said as almost missing, inspite of some representations of deep bondings and love of two friends in *Anand*¹⁰¹ (1970), *Namak Haram*¹⁰² (1973), *Main Khiladi Tu Anari*¹⁰³ (1994) which gives one also a space to think in lines of homosexual affairs. In *Anand*, Rajesh Khanna was represented as emotional and feminized man while Bachchan as intense brooding lover. The heterosexual love was seen as a sub-plot and finally the death of this loving man in the arms of the other holds possibility to read the text in terms of homoeroticism. Though I fear if that would be

⁹³ Mansoor Khan.1988.*Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*.India.163mins

⁹⁴ Sooraj.K Barjatya.1989.*Maine Pyar Kiya*.India.192mins

⁹⁵ Abbas-Mustan.1993.*Baazigar*.India.182mins

⁹⁶ Mani Ratnam.1995.*Bombay*.India.138mins

⁹⁷ Mani Ratnam.1992.*Roja*.India.137mins

⁹⁸ Onir.2005.*My Brother...Nikhil*.India.120mins

⁹⁹ Siddharth Anand.2005.*Salaam Namaste*.India.159mins

¹⁰⁰ Madhur Bhandarkar.2008.*Fashion*.India.165mins

¹⁰¹ Hrishikesh Mukherjee.1971.*Anand*.India.123mins

¹⁰² Hrishikesh Mukherjee.1973.*Namak Haraam*.India.147mins

¹⁰³ Sameer Malkan.1994.*Main Khiladi Tu Anari*.India.184mins

completely justifies in doing. However, representation of “forbidden love” has always been there in films but among heterosexual relationships.

Since 1991, when the Congress government came up with its new strategies in globalization, privatization and liberalization the space of media like all other industries got and experienced a bigger world than before which also in turn transformed the cultural outlook and practices of the urban middle class. People started reacting to it with encouragement and criticism and this wide spread mediated images became an easy available commodity in the dining table and drawing room discussions which also consequently in time brought a need for censorship, ban and state legislations. With the changing times and the rise of concerns of many so called controversial issues of modernity, even the stories of films has gone a change in its content.

Shohini Ghosh comments that “popular cinema has a multi-discursive engagement with the larger conflicts played in the world outside. Therefore transformations in film narratives are shaped, among other factors, by cinema’s reciprocal relationship to the audience who, on their part, accept some images while rejecting others.” (2007:417) When communities go under represented spectators may compensate through what is called ‘analogical identification’, the structure of filmic identification across social, political and cultural situations through social perceptions and historical experiences. Andrea Weiss would see the queer representation in films with the viewership as a love hate affair which involves “anticipation, seduction, pleasure, disappointment, rage and betrayal”.

A number of films like *Daayra*¹⁰⁴ (1997) with the representation of cross-dressing, *Darmiyaan: In Between*¹⁰⁵ and (1997), *Tamanna*¹⁰⁶ (1997) showing the issue of eunuch did hint on sexualities which were non-normative to some extent. In 1998, Deepa Mehta’s *Fire*¹⁰⁷ became a controversy which portrayed the love between two married sister-in laws. The poster(s) which was so long dominated by the heterosexual lovers’ imageries was now shared by two leading actresses, Nandita Das as Sita and Shabana

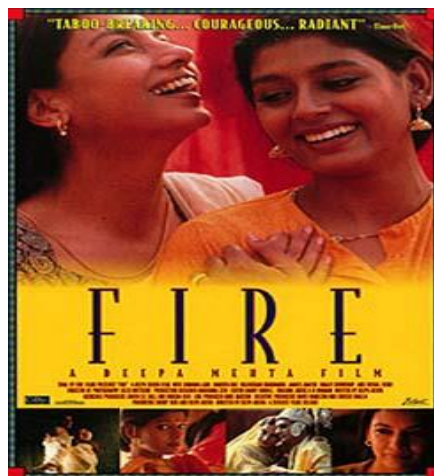
¹⁰⁴ Amol Palekar.1997.*Dayraa*.India.107mins

¹⁰⁵ Kalpana Lajmi.1997.*Darmiyaan:In Between*.India.128mins

¹⁰⁶ Mahesh Bhatt.1997.*Tamanna*.India.127mins

¹⁰⁷ Deepa Mehta.1996/1998.*Fire*.India.108mins

Azmi as Radha. The film was set in a Hindu household where these two women were married to two brothers, Jatin, who is having an extra marital affair whereas Asoke the elder brother is practicing celibacy being influenced by Swamiji, a local preacher. However the film shows Sita's and Radha's relationship explicitly which transgressed the space of Hindu traditional patriarchal heteronormative values and ethos. The film was attacked by the Right Wing Fundamentalist being against the Indian Hindu culture. On 6th December 1998, in front of Regal Cinema a peaceful protest happened in Delhi against the claim of banning the film which was seen as a threat to the traditional married lives of women with their lesbian acts. This event not only culturally but also politically created a stir in Indian mindset. The name of the protagonist being Sita and Radha also hold a mentionable significance which is the characters in mythology known to be self sacrificing women.



Poster of the film 'Fire' Source: Internet

Nitin Advani and Karan Johar's *Kal Ho Na Ho*¹⁰⁸, 2004 mentions the issue of homosexuality as a means of laughter and also as something which is not "normal". The film is a story about Naina (Preity Zinta), Aman (Shahrukh Khan), and Rohit (Saif Ali Khan). It is through the funny sequence that 'Kantaben', a Gujrati housekeeper confronts Rohit and Aman in 'weird' postures and dialogues which made the audience to laugh at the misinterpretation of Kantaben as both of them as gay lovers. In a conversation with Rohit and his dad that the issue of 'normal' comes in though in a very light mood while

¹⁰⁸ Nikkhil Advani.2003.*Kal Ho Naa Ho*.India.188mins

discussing about love life of Rohit which also lead to a mockery. This instances where the audiences were invited to laugh at this misunderstanding of homosexual desires and thus leading to homophobia also came up in the 2004 Indra Kumar's *Masti*¹⁰⁹. The main plot of these films was not on alternative sexual desires, rather was on extramarital affairs of the husbands and at last their reconciliation with their wives through the intervention of a man who teaches the three cheating husbands a lesson through his tricks with help of the wives. However, Amar (Ritesh Deshmukh) and Prem (Aftab Shivdasani) was wrongly thought to be homosexual by a homophobic sexologist played by Satish Shah and they both are aware of it makes fun of the situation for their mistaken identity. Amar was also seen flirting with a transgender in the film. In 2008, Tarun Mansukhani's *Dostana*¹¹⁰ was released which again hinted on homosexuality but almost in a similar light of funny incidents and sequences.

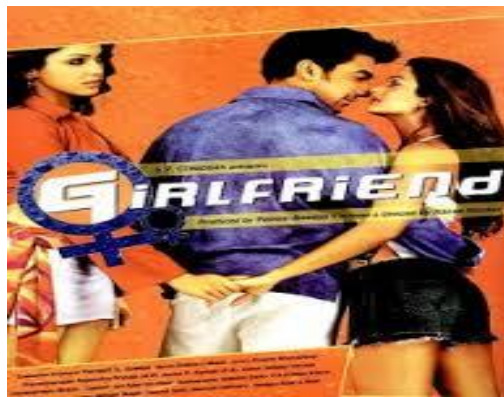
This is how in most situations Bollywood has thrown light on this issue of homosexuality which on the one hand remains important that atleast its mentioned in the text but then it also affect the audience with the funny gestures and situations which calls for homophobia which leads to laughter and aggressions than to emphasize with this social marginalization. The heroes' reaffirmation with their masculinity does talk a lot about 'queer phobia' to a great extent. The film *Girlfriend*¹¹¹ released in 2004, directed by Karan Razdan was again the film after *Fire* where homosexual acts were shown explicitly and called for a protest from the Hindu fundamentalist groups where the protagonist Tanya (Isha Kopikar) at last calls herself a lesbian though in *Fire*, the protagonists did not find a suitable name for their relationship and kept nameless. However, *Girlfriend* was taken by its audience with multiple meanings and thus it did not only raise a protest from the Right Wing but also from the feminists groups. On the one hand the Fundamentalists thought it to be promoting homosexuality specifically 'lesbianism' but also on the other the film was read very problematic and extremely homophobic by the feminists. It is a story about Tanya and Sapna (Amrita Arora) and Sapna's boyfriend (Ashish Chowdhury). Tanya was shown as an individual with

¹⁰⁹ Indra Kumar.2004.*Masti*.India.166mins

¹¹⁰ Tarun Mansukhani.2008.*Dostana*.India.139mins

¹¹¹ Karan Razdan.2004.*Girlfriend*.India.120mins

obsessive and jealous behavior who almost behaves like a man which is again a typical thought in a lesbian relationship, signifying one as 'butch' and the other 'femme' which characterized Sapna being dependent on Sapna for money, support and protection. These two girls were seen living together and it is after the relationship with the man that the history is revealed where Tanya and Sapna once has a sexual relationship but Sapna justifies it as a 'mistake' for being drunk that night to her boyfriend and she claims that she did not remember anything at all now. The story forwards with Tanya's wish to break the relationship between Sapna and Rahul but ultimately dies because of her own possessiveness and violence thus reuniting the love of Rahul and Sapna. The reason that the film also tends to give to Tanya's being lesbian is because of her problematic childhood, and an abusive father thus pathologizing her hatred for men. But what the film does is to show two explicit love making scenes between the women. Interestingly, both the scenes were through the eye of Sapna and Rahul who were the heteronormative lovers and also by their conversations prove to be homophobic, viewing the act as a 'mistake' and a 'nightmare' respectively. Thus homophobia becomes the gesture of homoeroticism.



Poster of the film 'Girlfriend' Source: Internet

However, the film *Shabnam Mousi*¹¹² in 2005 by Yogesh Bhardwaj seems to portray a real life story about a hijra who joins politics and becomes a member in the Legislative Assembly. The film narrative goes as such that Shabnam as a baby was taken by the community of hijras and there are certain events that progresses her life towards politics. Some of the dialogues remain mentionable as when Shabnam says that it is much

¹¹² Yogesh Bharadwaj.2005.*Shabnam Mousi*.India.142mins

better to have a body of a hijra than to be ‘mental’ hijra who are paralyzed to think and protests. Here which is interesting is the mention of the body of a hijra as ‘dysfunctional’ in reference to the ‘functional’ body of a male or female. Again in her conversation with her ‘mother’ (guru) she says that god never makes mistakes rather as there is air between the sky and earth, there is a eunuch between man and woman. These conversations are quiet strong but it is also mentionable here that the hijras as a community was much easier to accept by the Indian society and their imagination rather than the homoerotic behavior between a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’ who is seen as individuals having the natural behavior of sexual interests to opposite sex adhering to the images of marriage and family. In the film *Iqbal*, who is biologically male falls in love with Shabnam but ultimately had to leave her in the pressure of the family and get married of someone chosen by the parents. Shabnam also goes in the wedding to bless the couple. Here which remains poignantly important is that of the ‘roles’ we are supposed to play in society which does gets reinforces through media and the repeated practices within the community we stay in. However it cannot be denied that the film does redefine the codes of gender and questions some of the pertinent beliefs of the Indian social norms.

Another film which needs mention in dealing or hinting the issue of homosexuality strongly was *My Brother Nikhil*¹¹³ which becomes very relevant in discussing the queer discourse of the Hindi cinema though it was majorly based on the issue of HIV AIDS. It is a film directed by Onir in 2005 with the inspiration from the life of Dominic d’Souza, a Goan AIDS activist. It is the story of Nikhil (Sanjay Suri) who is a swimming champion but after being tested with AIDS he and his entire family experience ostracization from the society. The parents were turned out of a social club; nobody wishes to share the pool with Nikhil and it thus stands as a story of intolerance, stigma and homophobia. Nikhil was abandoned by his parents and was also arrested by the police where his only support was Anu (Juhi Chawla), Nikhil’s sister who is the narrator of the story to the audience. The relationship of intimacy, love, care and companionship between Nigel and Nikhil however remains a soothing sight. This film had drawn

¹¹³ Onir.2005.*My Brother...Nikhil*.India.120mins

attention by many queer organizations to be showcased in film festivals because of its take on homosexuality and AIDS, which often is strongly associated with each other.

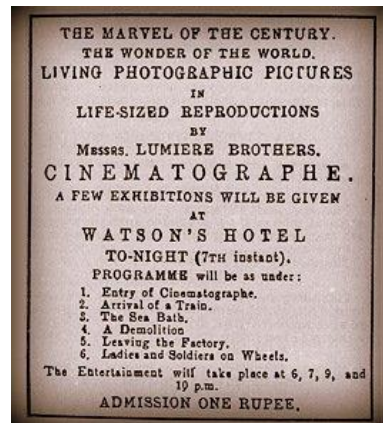
In 2011, film *I Am*¹¹⁴ was made by Onir which was a bunch of four stories. It was said to be based on real life stories, where it shows insecurity and the feeling of fear in all the four protagonist, Omar, Afia, Abhimanyu and Megha. The story of Abhimanyu played by the actor Sanjay Suri, was of a character who was abused as a child and then his continuous dealing with his own sexual identity, his struggles and fears. However the story of ‘Omar’ played by Rahul Bose as Jai, and Arjun Mathur, as Omar was a story of a casual flirting who had a physical intimacy with each other inside a car in a public space. They were then caught by a policeman who threatens them of Section 377 compelling them to pay a lump sum bribe. When Omar went taking the ATM card of Jai in order to withdraw the required amount, the policeman forcibly tries to have sex with Jai. Omar comes back with half the amount needed, and was taken to the police station. Later when Jai with a lawyer goes to the police station he understands that Omar was also a part of the whole extortion prank. It is said to be a real life experience where gay men are being looted through various plotted game. As the law criminalize ‘gays’ or ‘queer’, it becomes even more difficult to lodge any compliant against the harassment that happens with them and also when even the police turn into arbitrator of violence, the situation becomes even more worse.

Speaking about queer films Janet Straiger (2000) argues that the context of the film is very important in reference to its viewers as a text. She says that not only the sense data of the film but also the interpretative strategies used by the spectator to view the film because in turn these influence the aesthetics, preferences, knowledge and the pre conceived notions that the viewers hold prior to watching these films. This actually becomes extremely relevant in construction and reconstruction of the ideas of ‘self’ and how meanings are created with this intersection of text and the mindset and ethos of the spectators.

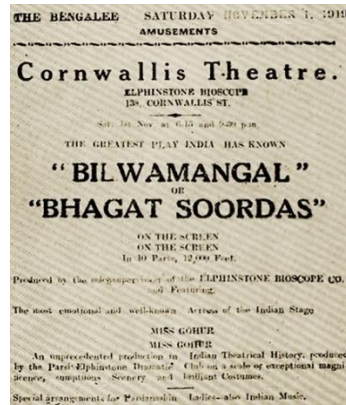
¹¹⁴ Onir.2011.*I Am*.India.110mins

III. Tracing Bengali Cinema with time

Calcutta, being the capital of the British India had the privilege of showcasing the first cinema just a few months after the Lumiere Brothers' Cinematographe in Bombay in 1896. Also being the growing metropolis and commercial capital of eastern India, Calcutta port (in the later phase of 1920s) became the entry point for a films, stock, equipments etc. At this time, theatre, *jatra* and circus were the popular means of entertainment for people which gradually was replicated in the creation of films. 'Tollywood' is the one of the very first hub of film production which imitated the name of Hollywood in its making in 1932.



As Tom Gunning (2007) notes that the early years in Bengali cinema was an attraction where the film showed was in nature of add-ons boosting the theatre industry. However in 1900s and 1910s cinema started to be established as a separate industry and by 1920s film watching became a familiar leisure activity for the Bengalis. In 1917, the first feature film *Satyawati Raja Harishchandra* was made by a Bengal studio named Madan Theatres, based on the famous Urdu drama, *Harishchandra*. Till then mostly the films from the west and some mythological based creations of Bombay like *Mahabharat*, *Ahalya-Uddhar*, *Shiva Ratri* were being regularly shown in Phoenix Picture Palace in Chitpur, North Calcutta, Cornwallis Theatre and so on. The first 'Bengali' feature *Bilwamangal* based on a play by the famous Girish Ghosh and directed by Rustomji Dotiwala was also produced by Madan in the name of Elphinstone Bioscope Company in 1919 which was showcased in Cornwallis Theatre as well.



Source: Internet

It's quite interesting to know that the early productions of the Madan Theatre like *Harishchandra*, or *Tehmuras and Tehmuljee* were mostly the film versions of the popular Parsi theatre plays and the reproduction of the Parsi theatre ethos. Thus, which becomes evident is the various sorts of images and cultural ethos that the audience (specially the upper and middle classes) started getting in the cinema theatres ranging from the Hollywood Films, Hindu mythologies, Persianate adventure romances and social dramas.

The Hindi cinema made in Bombay needs a special emphasis while studying cinema even in Bengali as it had an 'all India' appeal to its audience and its creation of a 'popular culture'. D.G. Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* as the first full-length Indian feature film was made in 1913. Jyotika Virdi (2003) rightly mentions that though Hindi is a regional northern language, but the audience of the Hindi cinema does transcend its lingual-regional boundaries within the nation, making it an all India phenomenon. It is after then that the regional film industries grow up in Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam and Bengali and gradually in all other languages and regions. Francesca Orsini (1996) in her book *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, suggest that a Sanskritized Hindi was constructed through its language and literary genre which in a way did lead to a nationalized identity and the ideological imagination of Hindi as the national language in India reducing the influence of Urdu and Persian prevalence in Northern India and also subsequently the other regional languages.

i)The rising 'bengaliness' in Bengali Cinema

Bengali Cinema however gradually did differ from the Hindi-nation construction with its production of an idea of 'a cultured Bengaliness' thus consciously creating its own subsumption within the culture of the Bombay Cinema. For instance the cinema created by Satyajit Ray or Ritwik Ghatak had a modernist vision of the newly independent India with its crisis and competence but with a specificity of context which did stand significantly different from the 'popular' culture creations of the Bombay industry. The Bengali cinema thus emerged as a imagination of new forms of self-assertion and identity with the prevalent thoughts of politics, culture, religion and the existing regional dynamism which became a signifier of the 'Bengaliness' and the Bengali cultural supremacy which was also a product of the colonial rule in Calcutta for a long period of time and the associated nationalist movement and some of the famous writers, leaders, teachers whose ideas grew very strong during the period of 1910s. The trajectory of Bengal in the socio-political front and its creation of 'communalization' and "regionalization" since 1920s and mostly after independence in 1947 does have a great influence in the imagination and creation of its art and culture at that point of time. It was specifically during and after independence that Bengal started getting marginalized from the national politics with a sense of decline and disillusionment witnessing an erosion of the Bengali life and its culture of '*bhadrolok*' that was a product of the so called '*renaissance*' in nineteenth century, with the refugee crisis during the Partition, the growing unemployment and the food shortage and famine as the dominant problems among many of its kind. It was then that Bengal formed a newer consciousness with the village bursting upon the city spaces as a nightmare and the severe dearth of food and existence that created a moral crisis among the thinkers which gradually as well lead to its own brand of regional politics and later the radical politics in 1960s among its youths and later the prolonged communist rule from 1977 to 2011. The socio-political context of Bengal thus remains important in understanding its representations in the art forms of any kind be it in Durga Puja, theatres, paintings, writings or cinema so to say.

In the turn of the nineteenth century, the Bengali public were exposed to a variety of cinema, but the 'culture' of viewing cinema and a simultaneous critical enquiry and

involvement with it started in the period of mid 20's and 30's. The writers and commentators started conceptualizing film practice as a modern endeavor ultimately leading to the prospect of internationalism and universalism. The early films were mostly based in the adaptation of Bengali literary texts and classics like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (*Bisha Briksha*, 1922), Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (*Andhare Alo*, 1922) to attract audience by showcasing the literary culture of the said audience. However, the criticism was also done by the same class that these adaptations in films are spoiling the originals. As early as 1933, a journal *Chitrapanji*, in its issue of Sravan, mentioned that how the literary attachment is revealingly reflected in the curious usage of Bengali cinema which was not only seen in the early films but also persistently exists even today through the recent films of *Bomkyesh* series of Sharodindu Bandopadhyay and *Feluda* series of Satyajit Ray with other many novels or story adaptations which again justifies the referring of movies as '*boi*'. With mythological adaptations, gradually also came the comedy films like *Kelor Kirti* (1928). The Dhirendranath Ganguly's film *Bilet Ferot* in 1921 is mentionable as it is one among the first films to satirize the anglicized Bengali class of elites. Bengali producers also attempted certain adaption of historical events like Dhiren Ganguli's *Kamaner Agun* in 1930 which was based on the legend of Padmini of Chittor, Panchashar (1930). 1931 was the year of the first talking pictures, though silent films continued to be made in Bengali and the last silent film made was *Niyoti* in 1934.

By 1930s the Bengali intelligentsia started taking in making films with the influence of the West and wanted to have a rich heritage of their own. A film library started in 1931 where Abanindranath Tagore presided the inaugural sessions; Rabindranath Tagore himself took interest in making films. A number of journals as *Naachghar*, *Bioscope*, *Chitrallekha*, *Dipali* started their issues. So long the Madan Company made much of the Bengali productions but now that also started to be criticized as not 'bengali' even though the actors, photographers and directors were so as the directives came from the Parsis and the presentation thus lacked the genuine 'bengaliness' into it. Sourindramohan Mukhopadhyay, who was a constant writer in the film magazines then and was a critic commented that films should be treated as an 'art' and thus the productions should come from them who have certain idea and knowledge

about the subject rather than seeing it as a mere money making strategy. Thus the ‘mahajans’ or the bankers should not be the ones to make films. However gradually the Bengali critics thought for an idea where art and commerce could merge to make it a progressive entrepreneurship. By then there was a consciousness of ‘good’ cinema and ‘bad’ cinema and also an urge to find the ‘bengaliness’ through this art form.

In the period 1931-41, came New Theatres Ltd, established by Birendranath Sircar, an engineer turned producer, tried to keep the Bengali interests in mind and also the art and entertainment in its productions. By this time, the ‘talkie’ revolution has happened with the moving pictures making this art more complex and attractive. *Alam Ala* (1931) was the first full length Indian talkie. *Chandidas* released in 1932 became a successful Bengali movie by the New Theatres, and then was *Devdas* in 1935, an adaptation of the Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay’s famous novel by Pramathes Barua. Gradually *Grihadaha* in 1936, *Bardidi* in 1939 became some of the hallmarks which were also based on Sarat Chandra’s novels. These films had a worldview which reflected social reformation with the Bengali ideals of ethical life, platonic love and social good with a self sacrificing nature. Gradually the art of film making and the role of film critics and actors became significant. Satyajit Roy and Ritwik Ghatak became important names in the Bengali Cinema. In 1947, the Calcutta Film Society was founded by Chidananda Dasgupta which was indeed a good move in the arena of cinema and the culture of film watching and critiquing. Probably this was the period when the distinction between cinema as art and cinema for entertainment started to distinct itself.¹¹⁵

To say ‘art’ movies as necessarily an art and entertainment films as not so sophisticated to be called an art remains a point of contestations even in present times. However, art films are supposedly independent films at times, *avant garde* generally dealing with a serious issue and most importantly not aimed at a mass market rather a niche market. But it remains debatable as how to draw this line of difference. Commercial movies thus by its name is understood as market oriented and thus has to fulfill the expectations of the masses with its entertainment quotient. Popular films may

¹¹⁵ Gooptu.S.2010.*Bengali Cinema: An Other Nation*.Routledge

lack the high culture status, and could be thought as not so good / low art, but that does not stop them to be called as art- works as all films have a choice of acting, presenting, shooting styles and so on. Noel Carroll, an American philosopher however suggests the ambiguity that remains between the films which can be called an art and which not. However he points that artworks generally belong to a narrative description which is complicated and something 'new' comes out of the complication. For Bordwell, (2007) the characteristics of art films could be summarized as a description which is ambiguous and lack clear goals, mostly concerned about realist issues and shot in real locations unlike the mainstream. It also has a distinct style of representation of its directors like Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray and later on Aparna Sen, Rituparno Ghosh and others. In spite of the characteristic difference between mainstream and art cinemas which also tends to be iconoclastic and anti-establishment to a certain degree, which challenge more than to entertain, what becomes interesting is that these films are also aimed at large audience and thus are released in mainstream theatres as well. Thus the clear distinctions gets blurred and characteristics merge at some point where the audiences intended might extend itself in certain time and space and sometimes otherwise as well.

ii) The 'popular' cinema of Bengal: Times of Uttam-Suchitra

In Bengal, the era of 'Uttam-Suchitra', from mid 50s through 60s became the 'golden period' in regard to its popularity and the associated business that it did in the Bengali market and became extremely popular. Suchitra Sen and Uttam Kumar as a pair onscreen took the Bengali silver screen to a different level. They had a tremendous mass appeal through the period of 1950s. The romantic tradition which was established through the legendary pair of this duo is still loved by the Bengali audience cut across spaces which survived the struggles of the political and the social struggles of Bengal. The mostly love stories and melodramatic representations, sometimes hit comedies which were aimed at the family audience and were the dominant genre of the time. This was also the time when the Bengali cinema also competed with the booming Hindi films in Bollywood with its factors of romance, songs, dances, spectacle and most importantly the "star". In spite of the deficiency in finance, Bengali cinema went forward with the support

of the Bengali middle class and their addiction to the film watching experience and their love for Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen.



This is a picture from the film “Agni Pariksha” (1954) which was their first ‘hit’ film together.

In most of the films, the feminine persona of Sen holds an attraction and the love story proceeded with the romantic couple who were arbiter of their morally legible universe and are empowered to make their own choices and decisions rather than the overwhelming authority of the family and society. The couple remains sovereign and supreme in their existence and their own decisions that progressed in the events through the film. Dulali Nag (1998) in her *Love in the time of Nationalism* points out how the character crafted for Suchitra Sen in most of the movies actually stood contrary to the logic of nationalist patriarchy, but at the end it however couldnot succeed in its deconstruction, rather fell in the trap of establishing the essence of the same. After the independence and the partition when Bengal went through a painful phases of recreating spaces with the refugees and homeless people, the idea and imagination of the ‘jati’ and a collective imagination of the rural past with the fight to adjust in the urban spaces, these movies in many ways acted as a sense of relief with its fictional resolution. Suchitra Sen as a ‘modern’ educated and intense woman represented the idea of the modernist nationalism, and Uttam Kumar as the counter force, though always not in the direct representation of the rural or traditional background was seen to calm down the forces of the overarching modernity. In the modernist agenda of nationalism, the position of women became ambiguous as she was both expected to fulfill the expectations of the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ sphere which she has thought to have attained through her education. This ‘androgynous’ character of both femininity and masculinity could only

become accepted for a women if she was being able to perform her so called duties in the sphere of home, in the structures of the family and marriage. This issue of ‘cultural androgyny’ was handled in a popular way through the cinemas of this duo to a great extent. Their first film was *Sare Chuattor*¹¹⁶ (1953) which expanded through various films like *AgniPariksha*¹¹⁷ (1954), *Sagarika*¹¹⁸ (1956), *Harano Sur*¹¹⁹ (1957), *Pothe Holo Deri*¹²⁰ (1957), *Indrani*¹²¹ (1958), *Saptapadi*¹²² (1961) and many more. The songs like “*eei poth jodi naa shei hoi tobe kemon hoto tumi bolo toh/ jodi prithibita swopner desh hoi tobe kemon hoo tumi bolo toh*” (if the road never ends how will it be like/ if the world is like our dream country how will it be like) from the film *Saptapadi* (1961) is one of the most relevant and popular song of this duo. This is one of the examples of the many ideas of the better world that they have put forward in a way which was easily receptable by its audience. From the film *Bipasha*¹²³ (1962), the song “*ami swopne tomai dekhechi mor nishitho basoro sojjai/mon bole bhalobashi/ ankhi bolite pareni lojjai*” (I have seen you in my dreams/ my heart says I am in love/ but my eyes can’t speak being in shame) expresses the duality of expressions when the woman falls in love and dreams about a man being an independent and educated ‘agency’ but then she is also expected to fill coy, shy and shameful in expressing the same which are thought to be the qualities of a female character. The songs in Bengali cinema were extremely important which not only drew people to theatres but also was one of the devices to underscore the moods and dramatic situations of the narratives which carry forward the story. The songs were thus subject to the film’s style, purpose and structure. The realist cinema however lacked this medium of music in their narration of stories or may be at times, the songs of Tagore or Nazrul in expressing the Bengali cultural essence in the films. However the popular songs of Bengali cinema were very much a product of the films created for the mass entertainment. The Bengali cinema at that time was facing the double struggle of the inner loss of partition and the trauma and also the invasion of the Hindi films which was

¹¹⁶ Nirmal Dey.1953.*Sharey Chuattor*.India.1953

¹¹⁷ Anupam Ghatak.1954.*Agni Pariksha*.India.120mins

¹¹⁸ Agragami.1956.*Sagarika*.India.121mins

¹¹⁹ Ajoy Kar.1957.*Harano Sur*.India.162mins

¹²⁰ Agrodoot.1957.*Pathey Holo Deri*.126mins

¹²¹ Niren Lahiri.1958.*Indrani*.India.114mins

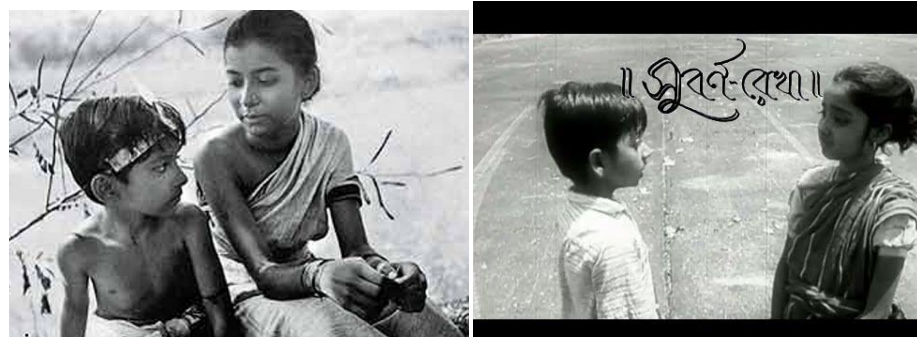
¹²² Ajoy Kar.1961.*Saptapadi*.India.163mins

¹²³ Agradoot.1962.*Bipasha*.India.133mins

growing fast with its formula of romance, songs, dances, spectacle and the 'star'. During this phase what has hold back the audience of Bengal were the films of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen. They became the matinee idols conquering a sizeable number of audience.

iii)The culture of 'art' cinema in Bengal

The contemporary was Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen's movies which mostly reflected the crisis of individuals and complex relationships in the time of the Partition in 1947, famine, the crisis of modernity in the early years of our freedom and Nehruvian modernity and also certain individual crisis to adapt oneself in this period of rapid change and social crisis. These were the films which were more appreciated in film festivals and among the elite being in the genre of 'realist' cinema. Sen, (1977) says that whether in arts, business or politics, the establishment exerts a form of power in order to exist and grow within a system of prescribed rules for the application in the movie materials, techniques and even audience reactions. In regard to the same he hopes that the new forces which defy the rules should be more welcoming. "...let there be no compromise with the laws of the establishment and let there be desperate efforts, as in 1955, to create new artistic conventions". (1977:6)



A picture from Ray's 'Pather Panchali' A picture from Ghatak's 'Subarnarekha'

In 1952, the first International Film festival was held in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras which obviously opened the space for watching more cinema of the world and the movie makers got a boost in their interest. In 1955, Pather Panchali was made which actually gave a new turn in not only Bengali cinema but of the worlds living best where Ray captured the very usual pond, running locomotive and other visuals of the village life with the simple camera and no extra gadgets and most importantly the actors were not at

all experienced and were not professional which was a very different scene from the other studios of Bengal and the result was extraordinary till date. Sen in his views of Cinema said that Ray defied the Establishment and the rules in 1955 with the new forces and desperate efforts when a new creative endeavour happened with aggressive infiltration and opening up horizons even for 'insiders'. Ghatak's film like *Nagarik* (1952) which talks about the growing unemployment and despair, *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, *Subarnarekha* was film with partition as the background and its struggle aftermath. Though these films also turned the idea of cinema but during his lifetime Ghatak was not fulfilled in his dreams of reaching out to a great number of audiences which was his main cause of making cinema. Through Mrinal Sen's movie we also get a picture of the crisis of 70s that went through in Bengal through his films *Interview* (1970), *Calcutta-71* (1972). His films were influenced majorly by the leftist thoughts that were swiping Bengal with the growing Naxal Movement and a dream for a better society. Mrinal Sen mentions that whether in art, business or politics, the establishment holds a power in its process of growth and existence; it has certain rules to be abided by which ultimately influence the mechanism of movie making and also holds a say on audience reaction. Thus to make a movie which continuously questions and criticizes the social norms, structures are the one which also faces a struggle in their making and thus, the expression of those narratives become similar to silent movements.

While making cinema as well the question of objectivity and subjectivity arises where ones love for the medium remains essential and then their sensitivity to the world around. One might be totally detached and the other being thoroughly involved, but it is more important to see how the medium is being used with consciousness and sensitivity. Cinema being so widespread in its nature is an instrument of social change and also with its new experimentation achieves a new dimension of its life. Ghatak in his film making journey made eight feature films and some unfinished projects, which might not be seen as a great contribution in the life of a film maker. Through Ghatak's cinema we not only see how he minutely deals with the crisis of the partition from different aspects but also his film technique was something quite creative to ponder upon. He himself was a refugee, and was an active member in IPTA, but however found cinema was more far reaching and thus started making cinema with very less funds and sometimes spending

from his own pocket just to communicate the alarming situations of the individual and the society that it was going through in its time. For him, film was a personal statement but a collective art. He was among them who would say that a hodge-podge served with entertaining images may serve as a good entertainment but might have lacked the artistic pleasure. Film is not just a form rather has forms. The special attraction of the cinematic images should be approached from the side which leads to emotions and intellectual thoughts as the end product as it is afterall created 'for' the people. The film maker for him should have a commitment in their creation and should be aware of the reality from the vantage points of the past and the future with a desire of change in the reality. He says that "I donot abhor abstraction, scientific or otherwise. I believe in organizing my filmic elements....and portray the very flow of life itself" (1987:18). He through his films did not try to create 'entertainment', rather used it as a medium of expression of his pangs and agonies about the suffering of the people. He believed in thinking deeply about the universe or the world at large through this form of film which influences millions of people. Ghatak mentions that as cinema is about the giver and the taker, thus the film is also created through the audience, the film maker might initiate certain thoughts and ideas but the process gets fulfilled when the audience makes sense of it giving it a meaningful interpretation and understanding. The Bengali audience when it comes to cinema is mostly a middle class affair and the working class was hardly the target audience. The middle class has a fascination for bold words and really bold solution and thus the novels of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee where a strong female protagonist is seen to overcome all odds, but just this narration of stories in films might not bring any change as there hardly is any discomfort in the thoughts and thus for him film techniques needs to be experimented in order to bring out something new and different. He makes a strong statement saying that the adaptations of literary texts and novels into films actually did not led the Bengali imagination grow out of the box. However, when it comes to 'Pather Panchali' made by Satyajit Ray, though it is an adaption from the novel of Bhibhutibhusan, there was a change in the filmic expression and idiom which is something that came as a breath of fresh air. Good cinema cannot be divorced from life and the film maker like all forms of art should have a sense of meditation, deep penetration, humility and awareness of the magnitude of the task penetrating into the

aspirations and struggles of the masses to understand the reality which in return could be expressed through their cinematic imaginations.

Satyajit Ray on the other hand has a legacy in creative endeavors with Upendrakishore Roychowdhury and Sukumar Roy who were already a known family in the Bengali culture but however he tried breaking the barriers of making cinema with a new outlook. Ray's emergence as film maker is not only seen against an already established tradition of realism within the popular genre of social but also the intriguing engagement with the tradition of the Bengali novel and its reading public with an unparalleled representation of the Bengaliness and also as internationally acclaimed Bengali film maker of that time. He says that he learnt the ways of film making through making films and not through schools or books on them. He also believed that the use of the language of cinema with their insights unsettles the sensibilities in the same way as other forms of art. About the use of novels in making of Bengali cinema, even Ray points out that "since nine out of ten Bengali films are based on novels and since both films and novels use words and images, one would think that such novels would substantially help in the creation of a film language. But here a problem arises. I don't know if it is a reflection of the Bengali temperament, but many of our writers seem more inclined to use their minds, rather than their eyes and ears. In other words, there is a marked tendency to avoid concrete observation". (2005:22). However, when he says this, he actually focused on the intricacies of making a film. He often wondered why the film critics are more concerned about what a film has to say rather than focusing how it is saying it, like the structure, the language

In 1960 and 70s however Ray had the greatest of influence over his viewers with Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen paralleled by the Uttam-Suchitra, including other heroines like Supriya Devi, Sandhya Roy with the love stories and family drama. Ray also influenced his contemporaries like Tapan Sinha with his films *Kabuliawala* (1957) and *Jhinder Bandi* (1961), *Jatugriha* (1964) and also Tarun Majumder making *Balika Badhu* (1967) *Ganadevata* (1979) who were also great in their own rights. Sinha's films *Apanjan* was a landmark because his films started a generation who have by then started looking critically into the family values and the traditional systems. 'Songs' (*bhalo gaan*)

became an added attraction to the films. During this time in 1964, Raj Kapoor's , 'Sangam' released in colour and also with a foreign shooting location in Venice, Paris and Switzerland which swept the idea of Hindi Bollywood films and also started diverting the attention of the Bengali audience to a great extent. However the tradition of Bengali films then was seeing a trend which portrayed the tremendous anxiety of the time where the Bengali *Bhadralok* was in a threat as the long held ideals and pride was gradually degrading with the rising political activism where thousands of youths sitted unemployment even after good education . One of the films, *Teen Bhubaner Pare* (1969), directed by Ashutosh Bandopadhyay, which actually says a lot about the time where the protagonist played by Soumitra who was a face of both the mainstream and non so mainstream genre of films playing a frustrated youth facing all the relevant crisis of employment, food and generating of traditions beautifully woven with a love story as well, Satyajit Ray's *Pratidwandi*, (1970) *Jana Aranya* (1975) also signified this new order in the Bengali middle class scenario. The prototype of '*sikkhito bekar*' and '*bhadralok loafer*' with the middle class involving in prostitution started coming through many of these films which actually gave a thrust to the long hold traditions and values of the *bhadralok* culture.

iv) Bengali Cinema in the late 80s and after

No film industry survives on art or realist films inspite of their strong and enduring representational importance as the medium which was primarily designed to provide entertainment and escape from the everyday struggles and boredom with a sense of relief couldn't be achieved through art films. Thus, the death of Uttam Kumar, the hero in 1980 showed a crisis in the Bengali mainstream cinema, which aggravated by the coming of a director Anjan Chowdhury who with his first film *Satru* (1984), *Indrajit* (1992) actually tried to replicate the Bombay Cinema with the story of a police inspector transferred in a village of corruption and wrong doings and his fights to get justice and bring peace. His films were generally spiced with song and dance and some over spiced dialogues. However which is interesting here is that his films touched the subaltern class over turning the middle class orientation.

Ranjit Mallick became a common face in his films. Gradually action became a part of the Bengali films as a part of the entertainment with Chiranjeet and Prasenjit as the action heroes of the time. The films of this time majorly portrayed a rich girl/boy and a poor boy/girl love story. This was also the time of the opening of theatres in the smaller town which was so long concentrated in Calcutta. These films had market in the villages and among the so called subaltern groups in Calcutta rather than the middle class who were feeling the crisis of good Bengali films and started watching more of the Bollywood cinema of the time. In an interview in Anandalok, a Bengali magazine (11 February, 1995, pp 36), Anjan Chowdhury says that *“Today, the audience for Bengali films are those people who do not have TVs and VCRs in their houses. The people, who pull rickshaws, sell fish, are vegetable vendors, are the ones that now spend money to come and watch films in the theatres”*.

Interestingly, this was the time when the Left Government came in power after a prolonged period of agitation in 1977, the ‘barga’ system started being implemented with the land reforms and new rights to the farmers and share croppers, was a challenge for the landlords and also the urban working class felt empowered with the changing that seemed to be coming. This transformation of the Bengali text, 80s onwards did not attract much of the middle class but it did have its niche market which was also made relevant for the working class focusing on the lower-middle class milieu and the drama that was said to entertain trying to forget of the reality that they have to face in daily lives.

In this period the Bengal film industry could be said to have gone through a shift from its traditional turmoil with a shift from its traditional artistic and emotional inclinations towards an increasing interest for Hindi films alongside a decline in the audience and critical appreciation. The parallel cinema however continued its trend with the film makers who were the part of the new cinema movement of 70s and 80s trying to reach out to a greater space of audience. Aparna Sen’s *Parama* (1984) is worth mentioning which actually focused a Bengali house wife and her trajectory of relationships and her world coming up side down when a photo journalist shoots her within the premises of her ‘home’ through which she rediscovers herself and grows a intimacy with the photographer, much lesser to her age who later publishes some of her

photographs without her consent creating a havoc in the family. Parama was ostracized by her family and has to go through psychological therapy but ultimately chooses for a job rather than being sorry about the situation. The other films like *Atanka* (Tapan Sinha, 1986), *Swet Pathorer Thala* (Prabhat Roy, 1992) also was radical in its views to a great extent but portraying in a very subtle way. And then came the films of Rituparna Ghosh which actually brought a turn in the Bengali cinema that the Bengalis saw in 60s and 70s, and attracted the middle class Bengali audience creating a new 'Bengaliness' raising pertinent questions about gender, sexuality, marriage, motherhood which were well related with Bengali goodness, Bengali 'culture' and respectability and breaking of certain norms at the same time gave these films a new flavor. *Unishe April* (1994) became extremely successful as a film. Though the distinction between the mainstream and the parallel cinema are debatable because of its own nature but Ghosh could be said as someone who broke this diversification of this trend to a great extent though his audience majorly was the middle class, but it did attract audiences beyond the small market of parallel cinema, which were commercially successful and also critically acclaimed.

v) *Sexuality and Bengali Cinema*

Sexuality being one of the very important parts in individual's life also reflects a change in its representation with time. Just like the economic, social or political changes or transformation reflected through the content of the films, which primarily remains 'social', sexuality or the dynamics of the changes in gender relations does come out through the cinematic world as well. In spite of the 'silence' that is being maintained by our cultural practices when it comes about sexual affairs, films in general and also Bengali films in specific, have been quite explicit about the eroticism, desires or sexual feelings, at least in recent times. The 'intimate' scenes, which were consciously avoided in a film narrative, during early era of the cinematic history, now are shown with explicit visualizations. Though at times it falls in the criticism of sensualising the audience, objectifying the 'body' of women in order to make profit, but the fact that it is now 'shown' in the big screens does speak of a different language when it comes to sexuality in public domain.

History of cinema as a form of art or as a form of communication dates back in the era when ‘women’ who were deemed ‘respectable’ were not allowed coming in the ‘public’ spaces for performance. In 1913, when *Raja Harishchandra* was made by Dadasaheb Phalke, the role of Harishchandra’s wife was enacted by Anna Salunke, a male actor. Kanan Devi was one of the women who came in Bengali cinema in 1926 acting in a small role in the movie *Jaidev* under Madan Theatres. Acting as a child, in many silent films she actually became a well-known actress in the talkie world with the film, *Jorebarat* in 1931 directed by Jyotish Banerjee. In gradual years there were many actresses coming in the world of cinema like Suchitra Sen, Madhabi Mukhopadhyay, Sabitri Chattopadhyay and others breaking their caste boundaries to make a life of their own in the ‘public domain’.

Coming back to the discussion on gender and sexuality in Bengali cinema, though there has not been explicit quest on sexual identity or desires as such, but a gradual transformation could be seen. The character of ‘Arati’ played by Madhabi Mukhopadhyay in Satyajit Ray’s film *Mahanagar*¹²⁴, released in the year 1963 shows how a woman answers to the needs of her family in the growing crisis of modernity by stepping out and earning a livelihood being a saleswoman in Calcutta. It is not only a story of a woman enjoying an economic and psychological freedom, but also her own struggle in managing the ‘home’ and the outside world. ‘Neeta’ in Ritwik Ghatak’s *Meghe Dhala Tara*¹²⁵, released in the year 1960, played by Supriya Chowdhury was also a similar story of struggle thought of a different context. It was the narrative of a family, who has been a refugee from East Pakistan where Neeta, the daughter of the family becomes the sole bread earner. In order to fulfill her own responsibilities towards the members of the family, she loses her fiancé, gives up her wishes to be a singer and at the end is left alone being a victim of tuberculosis. Suchitra Sen played *Indrani*¹²⁶ (in the year, 1958, directed by Niren Lahiri) which was again a story of a woman who comes to Calcutta from her village in order to complete her education and falls in love with Sudarshan (Uttam Kumar). She defies the selected groom by her father and married her

¹²⁴ Satyajit Ray.1963. *Mahanagar*.India.131mins

¹²⁵ Ritwik Ghatak.1960. *Meghe Dhaka Tara*. India. 134 mins

¹²⁶ Niren Lahiri.1958.*Indrani*.India.114mins

love. The narrative evolves around how Indrani worked as a school teacher while Sudarshan is unemployed and one day he leaves with the frustration of being dependent and the story proceeds. These are only very few examples of some women characters being portrayed, but the idea here is to understand that how during the late 50s and early 60s, women were actually coming out from the space of 'private' to 'public' which changed not only the dynamics of the household and relationships between home and outside, but also the agency that as women they started experiencing and enjoying. Mrinal Sen's *Ekdin Protidin*¹²⁷ (1979), the character of Chinmayi, (played by Mamata Shankar) was the narrative of a woman, the sole bread winner of the family who couldn't return home from work for one day and how her family faces the anxiety with various speculations and assumptions. The film however goes on deeper levels of understanding as it leaves the audience without any answer to where was she was that night. The control of the Brahmanical patriarchal system of the middle class values were seen to be losing with the various crisis of employment and living that the so called modernization in India carried with itself in the post colonial times. It now became a necessity and also a responsibility for women to educate and make a living for themselves and family which also gave them an agency in the domain of both the private and the public.

The actress turned film director Aparna Sen's *Paroma*¹²⁸ enacted by Rakhi Gulzar, made in the year 1984 was a very strong film about a woman whose identity is specially tied with the various relationships of a mother, a wife, a daughter in law etc of her joint family. Her identity is somewhere submerged in all the 'others' in the family being an ideal home maker. It is only after she falls in love with 'Rahul', the (Mukul Sen Sharma) the photographer, much younger than her age, who visits her family and shows interest in caging her life as the ideal housewife through his photos. It is the journey with him that made her realize her own identity or wishes and desires that she secretly kept apart playing the 'expected' norms of the society. The films shows explicit visuals of their intimacy where the urge of desires burst within Paroma is seen to overflow. The narrative however ends with Paroma, being out of the familial boundaries when her husband and others get to know about the affair and she refuses to get back to her

¹²⁷ Mrinal Sen.1979.*Ekdin Protidin*.India.95mins

¹²⁸ Aparna Sen.1984.*Paroma*.India.139mins

‘normal’ self within the home choosing a life for her own. It is not a story where she gets back to her lover, or maybe it is left to the imagination of the audience. But what lies extremely relevant is that ‘choice’ of going beyond the ‘husband’ who is shown to be extremely workaholic and not much careful about the needs of her wife when it comes to fulfilling her wishes or desires. In this context, Satyajit Ray’s *Charulata*¹²⁹ (1964) played by Madhabi Mukhopadhyay is also a life story of a lonely woman who could be compared to the character of Paroma to some extent and it is in that respect that it could be understood that how sexuality actually changed its way with time. In Ray’s film, *Charulata* which actually sets back to the pre independence Calcutta where she remains within the space of her home in a affluent educated family being a wife of a highly educated husband. It is only with her brother in law, Amal (Soumitra Chattopadhyay) that she finds the sense of freedom where she lives her moments in life sharing her wishes, views and thoughts with him. The film however ends in that sense of a fresh air through ‘another man’, who happens to be her husband’s cousin, and however does not go any beyond even if, their feelings went beyond their formal relationship. The agency that Paroma at the end is seen to have, not only by defying norms but also by abandoning the roles that she perfectly played since then and identified, she ultimately chose to be free for herself, obviously shows that how women also was gradually gaining the space for their own expression, not only in the sphere of economy or social but also when it came to the sexual choices and desires.

The 1992 Prabhat Roy’s film *Swet Pathorer Thala*¹³⁰ starring Aparna Sen as Bandana was yet another story of a woman who got widowed within some years of her marriage having a son for herself within the traditional Brahmin household. Her son got deeply affected by the appearance of her mother as a widow in plain white saris which forced her to change her ways of dressing almost like a married woman which called for a struggle being tagged as a ‘deviant’ not conforming and defying the control of traditional values of an upper caste Bengali woman. However, the story travels with her own struggles to educate her son Abhirup, leaving the family and staying with one of her uncle Pareshbabu. She then falls in love with her son’s art teacher Sudipto but could

¹²⁹ Satyajit Ray.1964.*Charulata*.India.117mins

¹³⁰ Prabhat Roy.1992.*Swet Pathorer Thala*.India.157mins

never end up marrying him because of her own dilemmas and also that her son never approved of her relationship with the man. Ultimately she chooses to stay among the orphans, while her son gets married and settled. It is a narrative which actually spoke of many voices of the young widows of Bengal, however unlike Bandana; they cannot always come out of their controlling family and society and thus keeping their desires secret in their own hearts. Though widow remarriage as an idea was not alien to the Bengali community, yet the internal dilemmas, struggles or stigmatization that they continuously face is also another side of the same reality till date.

Aparna Sen as director always gave a feminist perspective of looking into familial relationships, the struggles, contradictions, self realization of women in a Bengali society being trapped in the system of patriarchy, yet flowering a sense of freedom and assertion of one's own identity and desires have been extremely relevant in the way she approached the issues of her narratives. In *Paromitar Ekdin*¹³¹, made in the year 2000, featuring Aparna Sen herself as the mother in a law, Sanaka of Paromita, played by Rituparna Sengupta as the daughter in law. It gave a story which in commonsensically prejudiced as a relationship of struggle, power within the space of domestic, over the son or the husband, but here the narrative gave another perspective of the relationship that women shares, in respect of their dilemmas, struggle for identity, finding their own wishes over others that are imposed on them and many more. Here Sanaka and Paromita both share the unhappiness that they face within their married lives and the struggles as mothers having a schizophrenic and a spastic child. Paromita ultimately goes out of her marriage and marries again in support of Sanaka, who could never have the space of going out of marriage, more because Monimoy, played by Soumitra Chattopadhyay could never express his love towards her, yet keeps coming to her family and meeting Sanaka within the boundaries of the home/ the private. It is a story of intimacy that women shares within domestic spaces where they both are somehow in situations of oppressions and suppressions of various kinds that they share together which bonds them with a relationship of friendship and companionship. It is a story of multiple subjectivities, through the voices of both Sanaka and Paromita that arises out of an

¹³¹ Aparna Sen.2000.*Paromitar Ekdin*. India.130mins

objective system of domination, patriarchy and middle class values in this specific case. The film actually goes in a flashback on a day when Sanaka dies and Paromita comes in her last rituals to the family she was once married to and starts remembering her life in the house, justifying the name of the movie.

*Shunyo E Buke*¹³² is a 2005 Kaushik Ganguly film speaks about yet another issue of sexuality among women and its reaction from the minds of patriarchal hegemony. It is a story of Saumitra, a character played by Kaushik Sen, and Teesta, played by Churni Ganguly who meets in Khajuraho and falls in love and gets married in spite of some disparities within their ways of life. But the crisis starts on the day they first involve in a sexual affair after marriage when Saumitra realizes that she is flat-chested, which makes him angry and cheated. Teesta's body was not as expected by her husband, and thus she feels dejected and insulted as well. However her husband also goes to the extent of sharing this with his friends making a mocking of the woman in public because of her small breasts. However she gives a divorce to her husband and marries again. It is only when her husband again comes across Teesta and her husband; with her daughter that he realizes his mistake with a sense of guilt. The film questions '*bhora buk naa buk bhora bhalobasha*', which means is it the full breasts or the heart full of love. This film does hold a very bold aspect of patriarchy in idealizing femininity and female bodies in particular. Though it does see women in the lens of men, but yet it gives a new arena on thinking the absurdity of sexualizing body and appropriating them in reality. Saumitra being an artist and the film referring to Khajuraho gives another dimension to how women bodies were actually imagined by male minds even in various architectures and paintings, whereas in reality women bodies are beyond the male gaze and imagination.

Most of the films by Rituparno Ghosh also gave an alternative view of women and their experiences with their own sexual desires, their own self and the contradictions and conciliations of different relationships they share with daughter (as in *Unishe April*, 1994), father (in *Asukh*, 1999), with lover (in *Raincoat*, 2004, though made in Hindi), within various relationship in family (as in *Utsob*, 2000), with husband (in *Dosar*, 2006) and many more. In the recent times, sexuality has been represented in various ways in

¹³² Kaushik Ganguly.2005.*Shunyo E Buke*. India.120mins

almost all Bengali movies with the overwhelming space of liberty and freedom of the female characters that are being crafted which actually could be seen like a journey of stepping out to public from private domains, reclaiming spaces and identity within various spheres of lives, realizing their own sense of self and desires and living up to their own wishes in fulfilling them and ultimately a free voice to be heard when it comes to their choices and fulfillment of wishes even when it's about the much silent affair of sexual urge. The films by Q, (Qaushiq Mukherjee) are so much overloaded with sexual meanings and sexual identity of the characters he narrates the stories about. He believes that sexual experiences and feelings are always an integral part in his ways of expression and representation.

IV. Rituparno Ghosh: A phenomenon in Bengali Cinema

Rituparno Ghosh (1963-2013) with his films has been able to create a space for himself both for Indian audience and beyond. However, due to his extreme love and comfort for the language and culture, most of his films are in Bangla and thus his primary audience is the Bengali urban middle class who could also easily relate with the narratives in their everyday life. Ghosh was seen to have extended the legacy of Satyajit Ray with his stories and film making. He wished to make cinema for the sake of making cinema. It is actually interesting to see that he got immensely influenced by Ray's films when he decided to be in the profession of film making, other than the interest that grew with his father who was also a documentary film maker and mother being an artist. . While writing an autobiographical account which was published in 2014 he confesses that while accompanying his father for the making of a documentary film on "Ganga", he decided not to be a documentary film maker for the simple fact that it did not give one the right or scope to create something rather captures a reality.

Looking through the cinema that he made since *Hirer Angti* in 1992, which was a Children Film, a story based on Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's writing, he continued his journey till 2013 with *Satyanweshi* the detective collection on Bomkesh by Sharadindu Bandopadhyay which was yet to release by then. In midst of these films were a series of films that he made or were a major part of that actually got very close to the hearts of the Bengali audience, talking about the different dimensions of relationships and the

intricacies of their existence which were mostly not talked about or so to say remained behind the doors. He was a man who chose his own name from Souroneel to Rituparno being deeply moved by a story in Mahabharata which at the onset gives us an immense sense of agency that he chose to choose his name which generally is not decided by us but by our parents or family, the society so to say. Most of his films as well highlighted this issue on agency that operated at every levels of every existing relationship and one's own will to chose or not chose to be out of this maintained hierarchy, be it between mother and daughter, husband and wife, a gay or a bisexual lover and so on and so forth. His stories to a great extend transgressed from the social norms questioning the subversive ideas of the Bengali middle class values and traditions focusing on marital rape, issues on freedom and agency, mostly of women and also the operating dynamics of power even between what is called 'love' or 'marriage' and 'family'. It's also true that even in this portrayal of deep protests and denial there always remained a sense of 'hope' in his films which sometimes are also criticized as his approach to be 'functional'. While talking to his classmate and his sister in law, Dipanwita Ghosh Mukherjee, she says that *"he was very well aware of the fact that an individual doesnot and cannot exist in vacuum, the struggle and the negotiation that goes on is the way one exists in family and the society. Thus the changes could be expected to evolve with time and consciousness and so, one has to be in the society to defy or accept it as it is."* Ghosh was extremely close to his mother, which is reflected again in his films where the character of a mother remains quite soothing and comfortable in the middle of the chaos that remains and happens with the protagonist. He wished to act in films which were possible when Kaushik Ganguly approached him with the character Abhiroop Sen, a gay film maker and also to enact Chapal Bhaduri. Then happened *Memories in March*, director by Sanjoy Nag but the screenplay was by Ghosh himself and ultimately *Chitrangada*, which was by his own direction when Nag was his assistant-director.

Unishe April (1992) was the first film which made Ghosh extremely popular. It was a story of a mother daughter relationship where the daughter Aditi (Deboshree Roy) lacks the motherly attention from Sarojini (Aparna Sen) who carries on her career as a dancer against all odds creating a huge gap between these two individuals, even more after the death of the father. The film revolves around a prestigious award that Sarojini

got and its excitement and celebration by her colleagues, friends, and students on the one hand and the seclusion of Aditi from the whole affair that is taking place in the same space of 'home'. It is after eighteen years that she comes back from hostel being a doctor and seems to be alienated from her mother even more, till the night, the death anniversary of her father and the night when she attempts for suicide being rejected by her boyfriend, that opened all the knots of misunderstandings and grudge that Aditi has with her mother. The film happens so realistically in a slow pace with meaningful gestures and dialogues that gradually the audience as well could well associate and connect with the minute narrative details. For this film Ghosh bagged two national awards in 1995, one for the Best Feature Film which started his journey of popularity. *Dahan* (1994) was a again a story of a newlywed couple, where the wife (Romita, played by Rituparna Sengupta) gets molested and consequently the reactions she receives from her in-laws and husband. It was also an excellent piece of details that Ghosh had crafted to show the agony, the disrespect, the crisis one goes through as the victim of the patriarchal hegemonic abuse which is actually continued also in the so called safe sphere of 'home', the domestic space that are often more abusive than that of the outside where the outside world, Jhinuk (Indrani Halder) is restricted to protest for but the abuse remains and continues. This film also awarded the director with the National Film Award for the Best Screenplay. Ghosh continued his journey with *Bariwali* (1999) featuring Kiron Kher as the protagonist, *Asukh* (1999), *Utsab* (2000), *Titli* (2002), *Subho Mohorot* (2002), *Chokher Bali* (2003), *Raincoat* (2003), *Abohoman* (2008) and many others.

What remains interesting is to note that most of Ghosh's earlier films carries subtle markers of 'queerness' into it which remains important in the retrospection of his film making imagination which could well be connected with the present queer politics. *Asukh*, is a story again about a relationship between a daughter, Rohini (Deboshree Roy) and her father Sudhamoy (Soumitra Chotopadhyay) who are forced to interact in the absence of the mother who is ill and hospitalized. In this film, Rohini's room could be seen as a 'closet' which is dimly lit and silent, and in the process at the end, there is a ray of light that enters which justifies that idea of a closed self. Through his films which becomes clear is that he was very sensitive about the issues that existed within the 'private' sphere of home, as premarital sex, adultery, divorce etc and dealt with the issues

mostly from the eye of women. *Antarmahal* (2005) which was adapted from Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's short story 'Pratima' was a crude representation of how the act of 'sexual intercourse' is so not associated with 'love' as it is generally thought of. It's the story about the zamindar, Bhubaneshwar Chowdhury who desires for a male successor but was unable even after being married twice for the same. It shows the violence in the very private space of the bed where the zamindar carries out the process with 'notun bou' to have a male child while Brahmins chant hymns. However the film ends with Yoshomati, 'notun bou's act of suicide on bearing a child by her husband and also her so called 'illegitimate' affair that grows with the low caste potter Brij Bhushan. Though the story shows a feudal economy, but it does tell us a great deal about many of the realities even in the present scenario. The sound of the bed shown in the film did give a shock to the audience and well deconstructed the notions of marriage and sex which is often thought to be romantic and wishful.



Rituparno Ghosh on the sets of Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish

His deep admiration of Tagore and his texts are again well reflected in his films. What seem to have attracted him the most was Tagore's sense of ambiguity and androgyny about the love for nature and humanity. *Choker Bali* (2003), *Noukadubi* (2010), *Chitrangada* (2012) was the Tagore trilogy that Rituparno created, *Choker Bali* being widely watched and greatly praised. Ghosh was always conscious about the market needs, thus most of his films has popular actor/actresses in his main roles. The character of Binodini in *Choker Bali* and Neerja in *Raincoat* was played by Aishwarya Rai, which cannot be ignored because there was a typical idea of casting 'serious intellectual faces' in the so called 'art films' so far. But Rituparno presented the audience with a new

package of a good story which the viewers can easily associate with and as well attracted through the faces of the so called established Bengali/Hindi popular cinema.

He was an extremely well read man and focused immensely on detailing of the day to day relationships, anger, love, angst, hatred, emotions etc. His props and costumes was collected from various places, sometimes even beyond India. He worked as a copy writer in an ad-agency before he started making films after doing his Economics from Jadavpur University. He was the editor of a popular Bengali film magazine '*Anandolok*', and also for '*Robbar*', a cultural supplement for the Bengali daily '*Pratidin*'. He hosted many shows as '*Ebong Rituparno*' and '*Ghosh & Company*', which kept in the constant attention of the public. His films created a new cultural hegemony with the rich cultural aesthetics and forms that he introduced. Through the journey of his films there is a silent story of protests and a sense of empowerment among the women which not said loudly rather very subtly through dialogues, symbols, representations and conversations between the characters. His constant engagement with the novels also started creating a new Bengali 'cultured' middle class through his representations. His continuous involvement with the audience through his talk show '*Ebong Rituparno*' and '*Ghosh & Company*' made him even more popular in the homes of Bengal.



Images of Rituparno Ghosh to understand how he changed his choice of dressing with time Source: Internet

Interestingly in one of the episodes with Mir Afsar Ali, popularly known as Mir in *Ghosh & Company*, he openly discussed about his own sexuality and expressed his discomfort about the act of mimicking an effeminate man on different stages as a form of humour.¹³³ Not only through his films but also his constant engagement in different forms with the Bengalis through writings, conversations, interviews hardly left any space for him

¹³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BLsJFE9Qvo&spfreload=10>

to be avoided and thus he became a 'popular' 'queer' face in almost all Bengali household which obviously has a huge role to play in all these three films I will be discussing in this paper. However, before proceeding in reading these films I will try to briefly discuss about reading of film-visuals in sociological studies.

CHAPTER THREE

“QUEER” TRILOGY

Before we start an elaborate discussion on the three chosen “queer” films, it would probably be relevant in understanding the idea of “queer” not only in the theoretical sense of the term, but also through the lens of different people in the social space. Though its direct translation in Bengali has been done as *‘bichitro-kami’*, yet the term ‘queer’ in itself is just not about the meaning signifying something different from the regular, but it holds an immense political significance within it and also a potential to encompass a variety of gender notions and experiences within the binary of just the homosexuals or the heterosexuals. With the following discussion we shall go deeper into the meanings and representations of the films in specific where, not only the researcher becomes the sole interpreter of the text but also the perspective of the ‘audience’ who sometimes identify themselves with the crisis or the situations that they come across in the narratives and in the contrary would also view it in a quite different perspective. It thus becomes a journey of ‘text and talk’.

I.Theorization of “queer”

The term ‘queer’ has changed its meaning with time and now stands for a sexual identification of culturally marginal sexual groups. The interesting connotation of ‘queer’ is its elasticity and indeterminacy of its definition. “Queer” thus remains a space of possibilities rather than a domesticated and definite school of thought. A journal named *Gay Left* started during 1975 with a socialist idea, where gay men edited the published issue. Jeffrey Weeks was one of the members of the left collective which started in London and later came as a book named *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, in the year 1980. The two concerns that brought this issue was a need for dialogue about Socialism with the gay movement and the much needed confrontation between gay liberation on the one hand and socialist and labour movements on the other.

Though the use of the “queer” started in a strange way where Teresa de Lauretis titled a conference that she held in February 1990 at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she was serving as a Professor of The History of Consciousness. She had

heard the word “queer” being used in a gay-affirmative sense by the activist, street-kids and members of the art world in late 1980s. It is with her courage and conviction that she linked this word “queer” with the academic holy word ‘theory’. Though her usage was scandalously offensive, but it gave newer dimensions of thoughts. (Halperin, 2003:339-40) ‘Queer theory’ disrupts lesbian and gay studies, as well as women studies as it binary constructions of male and female, feminine and masculine, homosexual and heterosexual and so on. It to some extent hints on going beyond tagging oneself or any particular categories.

Marinucci.M (2010) considers the casual use of ‘gay’ with “queer” creates a theoretical problem. There is richness in queer whereas the limitations of the words like ‘gay’ seem like an oversimplification. However in understanding queer theory, the initial studies on gay and lesbian studies no way could be overlooked. Terminologies develop with time and the space of “queer” and its definition will be ever-changing and continuous. The nature of fluidity and deconstruction of categories link this theory much with post-modernism, fluidity, subversion.

The gay and lesbian studies in itself is a recent phenomenon in academics since the 1990s and in lieu of that queer studies could be said as a more recent transformation of similar thoughts. Specialized journals as North American *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* first published in 1993. In 1995, the Australian *Critical Inquiries* had its first issue. Other journals and periodicals as *Sociological Theory* (summer, 1994), *Socialist Review* (vol 22 no 1, 1992), *Social Text* (vol 9, no 4, 1991) started coming up. *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* came up with two queer issues in 1991 and 1994. (Jagose: 1996) In India, R.Raj Rao’s novel *The Boyfriend* in 2003 was one of the first of its kind in Indian context, though Ishmat Chughtai’s *Lihaaf, Tehri Lakeer* in 1944 and 1945, Rajendra Yadav’s *Prateeksha* in 1962 did also depicted homosexual relationships and same sex attraction. In 1970, the journal *Gay Scene* was published in Calcutta, though a few publications. In 1978, Shakuntala Devi published her interviews and interactions with homosexuals in the *World of Homosexuals*. In 1990, the *Bombay Dost* was published as the first gay magazine and *Pravartak* in 1991 in Calcutta. In 1993, books as *Lotus of Another Colour* written by Rakesh Ratti, *Out of Main Street*

by Shani Mootoo, *Queer Looks* edited by Pratibha Parmar and others were published and this legacy continued with several books and films like *Fire* and several plays and writings, though in the hard core field of academics and disciplines of study it took a little more time to enter fullfledgedly. Rao, the writer and activist and presently a professor in Pune University would say that 'queer studies' in India has not acquired the potentiality as Dalit Studies or Women Studies in India, and even in 2016 there has been a handful of universities that offer the course on queer studies which are mostly optional that also reflects a homophobic attitude thinking that the courses of these kind will make one speak about their own identity and he would say that it is preposterous to think that India will mainstream queer politics as women and Dalit politics did in the country.

Which makes queer a complex field of work are its indeterminacy and the approach beyond definitional limits, questioning the stability in relationships between sex, gender and sexual desire and focusing more on the mismatches between the same categories. Though queer studies started with gay and lesbian but it gradually incorporated cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender corrective surgery, gender ambiguity and so on. So what queer does is to question the so called 'natural' sexuality and also intervene into the distinctions of 'man' and 'woman'. This however thus seem to have a similarity with the legacy of post structural and post modern ideas suggesting 'identity' as multiple which is as well unstable in its existence. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, which was first published in 1985 and reprinted in 1992 quotes that "a growing gay and lesbian studies movement already existed in American academia at the time [1985]," between then and 1992 there emerged a 'highly productive queer community whose explicit basis is the criss-crossing of the lines of identification and desire among genders, races and sexual definitions.'"(Sedgwick, 1992: x).

In 1869, Swiss doctor Karoly Maria Benkert coined the term 'homosexuality' but it did come into wide use till 1890s when Havelock Ellis, the sexologist adopted the term. However, homosexuality remained to be a term signifying the medical perspective which often has seen it through a pathologising discourse and thus there was a needed attempt to

think beyond these lines.¹³⁴ In 1960s, the word ‘gay’ started being used by the liberationist as a political counterpart to the standard binary gender categories and compulsive heterosexuality. When John Boswell’s book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Fourteenth Century* was published from the University of Chicago Press, Keith Thomas (1980) pointed out why is it wrong to use ‘gay’ and he writes

“The first objection is political. A minority is doubtless entitled to rebaptise itself with a term carrying more favourable connotations so as to validate its own behavior and free itself from scandal. But it is scarcely entitled to expect those who do not belong to that minority to observe this new usage, particularly when the chosen label seems bizarrely inappropriate and appears to involve an implicit slur upon everyone else...the second objection to ‘gay’ is linguistic. For centuries the word has meant (approximately) ‘blithe’, ‘light-hearted’, or ‘exuberantly cheerful’. To endow it with a wholly different meaning is to deprive ourselves of a hitherto indispensable piece of vocabulary and incidentally to make nonsense of much inherited literature.” (1980:26)

However, ‘gay’ stood as a term which was not clinical and an unbiased term which pathologised homosexuality. Interestingly there has been a fact stated by Chauncey (1994:101) that queer was also a term used in the pre World War phase, when men who experienced themselves different from other men rather than their woman like gender status actually called themselves as ‘queer’, whereas ‘gay’ came to be used during the war. Thus ‘queer’ can be seen as a term not very recent in its evolution of the expressions of identity rather could be said as an appropriation in the construction which mainly problematises the universalization of terms and categories. James Davidson (1994:12) pointed why is it apt to use the term queer in this present world we are living in. He says

“Queer is in fact the most common solution to this modern crisis of utterance, a word so well-travelled it is equally at home in 19th-century drawing rooms, accommodating itself to whispered insinuation, and on the

¹³⁴ Jagose.A.1996. *Queer Theory*.New York University Press

streets of the Nineties, where it raises its profile to that of an empowering slogan”.

Queer thus directs to a changing reality and as Weeks (1977:3) says that it is not only the terms used in hostile realities rather also a way in which the ‘stigmatized’ view themselves. Thus in process it stood as a term which is more empowering than that of stigmatization and pathologization. Susan Hayes comments that

“First there was Sappho¹³⁵ (the good old days). Then there was the acceptable homoeroticism of classical Greece, the excesses of Rome. Then, casually to skip two millennia, there was Oscar Wilde, sodomy, blackmail and imprisonment, Forster, Sackville-West, Radclyffe Hall, inversion, censorship; then pansies, butch and femme, poofs, queens, fag hags, more censorship and blackmail, and Orton. Then there was Stonewall (1969)¹³⁶ and we all became gay. There was feminism, too, and some of us became lesbian feminists and even lesbian separatists. There was drag and clones and dykes and politics and Gay Sweatshop. Then there was Aids, which through the intense discussion of sexual practices (as opposed to sexual identities), spawned the Queer movement in America. Then that supreme manifestation of Thatcherite paranoia, Clause 28, which provoked the shotgun marriage of lesbian and gay politics in the UK. The child is Queer, and a problem child it surely is.” (1994:14)

The fluidity that “queer” offers in signifying ones identity is obviously also an effect of the post modern and post structuralist ideas that has been also in rise since the 1990s. It not only focuses the differences with each individual but also sees the differences within the individuals. In that respect giving an ear to the individual’s sense of self and their own understanding and interpretation gives a broader outlook in understanding what “queer” means in a society like ours.

¹³⁵ Sappho was a Greek poet around 5th Century BC from the island of ‘Lesbos’ from where the word ‘lesbian’ has been derived. Through her poetry it was believed that she was a homosexual lover.

¹³⁶ On June 28th, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in New York (Greenwich Village) a group of ‘gay’ men and women were harassed by the Police and some were arrested on the grounds of ‘indecent’ for kissing, dancing and cross-dressing. Leading to that issue, there started an intense protest against this harassment and became an important step towards the civil rights. On its first anniversary, the first Gay Pride Walk was celebrated.

Fuss (1991) interestingly mentions that homosexuality could only be understood in relation to heterosexuality as they are mutually dependent, and yet antagonistic. Queer theories try to understand and explore the various sexual identities, and the politics that negotiate those identity formations. However he feels that queer theory understands the impossibility to move entirely out of the sexuality discourse that is present in the society and thus it neither fit itself within the dominant heterosexuality discourse nor establishes itself outside the hegemonic ideology completely. The alternative ‘terms’ and its meanings only make sense in relation to the ‘other’. This view cannot be totally dismissed as the term “queer” itself and the identity attached to it is indeed a counter gesture of protest against the normative hegemonic system that are imposed on individuals.

II. Understanding “queer”: Different ‘voices’

The term “queer” by nature suggests a ‘fluidity; in gender discourse. In a society where heterosexuality triumphs with its system of marriage and family, queer gives a deviation of this system of ‘morality’ with its multiplicity of desires and identity that questions the rightness, inevitability and naturalness of heterosexuality.

“[O]nce we give up on the idea that only heterosexuality is normal and that all human bodies are clearly either male or female, more and more kinds of bodies and desires will come into view. Perhaps also, one body may, in one lifetime, move through many identities and desires. The use of ‘queer’ then, is a deliberate political move, which underscores the fluidity (potential and actual) of sexual identity and sexual desire. The term suggests that all kinds of sexual desire and identifications are possible, and all these have socio-cultural and historical co-ordinates.” (Menon: 2012)

“Queer”, thus speaks about non-normative experiences of gender identities, sexual practices, erotic behaviors which contest the embedded structure of heterosexism in various ways. There are different categorizations as *Hijras*, *Kothis*, *Lesbian*, *Gay*, *Transgender* and multiple ‘others’ who finds a collective expression through the term “queer”. *Queer* also gives space to them who would not like to club them in a definite

category and would like to move between ‘performances’ of gender or rather not comfortable clubbing themselves in a definite category.

However, when I talked and interacted with some of the “queer” people in the urban spaces of Kolkata, what is observed is that the individuals are sometimes more comfortable with a definite and fixed category to talk about their sexual identity and choices.

Sombit, (name changed) one of the respondents, aged around 30, teaching in a college would say that he has a political problem against valorizing fluidity too much because as constructed as identities may be, they are experienced as slightly inflexible. The politically “queer” celebrates a certain kind of fluidity which may be accessible under certain conditions and these conditions are the conditions of privilege. So what the term “queer” does is that it definitely creates a marginalization of its own. Moreover, this term is found to be associated and used more organizationally and academically than to really represent one’s own sexual identity because it is abstract to some extent and hard to associate with. The marginalization is formed in the respect of ‘who’ then is the real “queer”, because “queer” exist in certain language which is only available to certain class and caste in the Indian context. Everybody doesnot hold the power of being the “queer”, rather them who are educated in a certain way have the resources to call themselves as so. And also, the term in some levels gets inflated with certain kinds of gay and transgender identity and thus somehow gets excluded. The people using the vernacular language hardly have any access to these terms and it is mostly the academicians, theoreticians and activists who hold this term as a sign of movement which essentially may not necessarily stand relevant among the people from different levels of our society. However, it gave a space to talk about desire, confessions, celebrations, empathetic dialogues and obviously some

sort of collective resistance which till now were not widely discussed or talked about.

Queer thus very interestingly is not only a term of identity rather a position with regard to sexuality. “Queer” recognizes that gay men and lesbian women might not have much in common of their experiences and thus may disrupt the political solidarity of the movement against the larger heterosexual ideologies and thus an inclusion remains quite relevant to bring the variations of feelings, expressions, experiences bringing the “subaltern” in its centrality to have a positionality in the ongoing struggle of rights and recognition.

Some of the activists in Kolkata who works with the lesbians, bisexuals and transman would particularly point out that the categories they work with seems missing in any of Rituparno’s films which (gay, bisexual, cross-dresser, transgender) was my entry point and thus the primary concern they projected was whether a conversation with them would really make sense in studying these films. This reflection was very significant for me as a researcher because I was more of an idea that when marginalization and stigmatization happens in sexual identification, though there might be many categories but the experiences of struggle would be similar to some extent. Ideally, no one experience is identical with another, but the struggle to live one’s life with dignity inspite of a different social expectation was thought to be similar. They feel that for women it still remains more difficult to speak about their sexualities, more in case of a lesbian or a bisexual and thus the experiences are not really the same.

The theorization of “queer” becomes more relevant with the greater consciousness of globalization where one become more and more conscious about the receding geographical boundaries and the fluidity of the global change. Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) describes *Empire* as the “decentered and deterritorializing

apparatus of rule that.....manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command” in contrast to imperialism. Globalization itself becomes queer in this regard where a distinct nation state becomes irrelevant and borders become blur. However, it produces more of one’s sense of identity and difference. On the contrary it’s also interesting to note that these post modernist discourses mostly resonates with the elite population that enjoys certain rights, certain level of position and wealth in the global hierarchy. Thus it remains a common idea that even the “queer” movement is an elitist one.

A college student in this regard makes an interesting observation saying that most of the reflection of the “queer” movement he understands is through the media. “I find the entire movement around sexuality, the visible part of it, and my access to the movement is mediated majorly by the media. That shared space gives an impression of an empowerment, that they are empowered where I personally don’t find rural voices or suburban voices, but I also know my vision is limited. I see an urban makeover to the movement around sexuality. It is dominated by the language of the privileged which means that if you have not mastered the language, you are already out of the movement.”

On the contrary an activist (female)aged around 26years says that the idea of elitism in the movement came with the idea of the ‘west’ which remains close with the idea of “queer” and the associated movement in India. But she thinks that class and gender are interrelated when it comes to ones experience and gives a narrative of a girl in rural West Bengal where the girl was a lesbian and was forced to take her life as she did not have the power of money to live her own way and also was not ready for the marriage planned by her family leading to the way to death. She says that there are many instances of these kinds that they find while working in rural India. She explains that if the girl belonged from a definite class she might

not be compelled to die and again if she was “normal” in respect to the societal heteronormative ideas she might have a usual life like other girls of her age but her position the “lower” class made her doubly discriminated and thus made her situation even more complex.

A transgender aged 35years, says that s/he feels, the so called ‘upper’ class and ‘lower’ class has a greater autonomy in exercising their will to live their desired sexuality. He personally thinks that being in the “middle” class he was forced to study commerce in St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata where he actually wanted to study literature. Then he was compelled to become a CA, Chartered Accountant, and pursue his career as an accountant. It is only much later after he had access to money for his own he left the job and started associating himself with the organization working with the minority sexualities. He denies marrying and somehow declares his wishes to his family but says that much of his youth was a compulsion to live according to the expected norms and thus he missed happiness for a greater phase of his life. He says that he has a friend, who happens to be a lesbian and is a shopkeeper in Jogubabur Bazar in Bhawanipore is someone he saw had a greater access to live her own way as the family did not much bother about her education and career and was much more keen on the earnings she provided to the family and thus to him she was much liberated and empowered than what he was in her age.

‘Now days I see many people wearing different clothes, men wearing sari, putting lipstick and earrings. I feel strange at times, but I don’t know much about ‘queer’ sexuality. People are exercising their freedom in different forms, which at times look awkward’, says a sixty year old man.

To look at the category of “queer” it however is designated as “subaltern” from the perspective of the ruling class or the hegemonic ideology which persisted or persists but regardless of that they have a sense of their own ‘community’ cultures which comes with the sense of solidarity among themselves and which always reflect in their own conversations and language. A transgender while sharing her experience says that *“we always have a practice of referring to ‘our community’ and whoever outside is referred as ‘outside community’, the same way as we for them as “outside” their existing community.”* It reminded me of Foucault that how not only the structures have the power upon the individuals but also the individuals themselves internalize the structure and create a complex mechanism of the power play in their everyday life. Though it’s true that ‘homosexuality’ is now a known idea, but however it doesnot mean that the associated ‘taboos’ and ‘marginalization’ has gone away and it has been totally domesticated. There has been a sense of ‘new liberalization’ which might have accepted or may have tolerated the sexual variations, talking freely about these issues much more than earlier times. There also has been a definite change of language and expression in the surface level where queer people themselves choose to be a part of the new language, but when it comes to personal experience, there still remains a sense of rejection and disapproval or a forced sense of acceptance. However, we can continue to discuss about the emerging discourse on queer experiences and the ongoing movement in details after reading the three chosen films in Bengali cinema which were the first of its kind to talk about the alternative sexuality having Rituparno Ghosh, as the overwhelming figure in all these films.

“Films are interesting, specially Rituparno’s film which the middle class watch together in their bourgeoisie safe space, there is a possibility that this whole ‘queerness’ can be passed on as bourgeoisie event but there is also a ‘real’ problem, a ‘real’ struggle which brings the issue closer to the people who are not affected otherwise by it”, says Saptadipta, a 20 year old college student.

“Films are case specific but they do talk about the stories of life as well. In all these films there is a sense of hope when it comes to

'family support' which is generally not the case in reality because most of the researches show that family is the prime source of violence. Family support is a very rare situation in the real life of the LGBT community. Violence, where its parents, husbands, wife, inlaws cracks in the family not always in form of external violence but much more in the form of internal violence. These films, doesnot necessarily have to talk about 'all', as he chose to make films in these themes and he made it. But films have tremendous importance because it is through this medium that many thing transcends which is impossible otherwise in written forms other than theatres and performances which also attract the attention of the common mass to a great deal. Films are an indispensable tool for mass awareness on sexuality where these films also did made an impact, I believe", says a South Kolkata based activist who works for the lesbian rights.

Janaki Nair and Mary John (2000) in their book, *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, would direct the readers to see sexuality as “.....a way of addressing sexual relations, their spheres of legitimacy and illegitimacy, through the institutions and practices, as well as the discourses and forms of representations that have long been producing, framing, distributing and controlling the subject of ‘sex’.” Our intention should not be just to understand sexuality per se but to see the politics of desire and violence. The concept of homosexuality and heterosexuality generally grew up in the discussions on botany or zoology in 19th Century while analyzing the peculiarities of the intercourse of people and interestingly heterosexuality we seen as an inclination for both the sexes and ‘other sex’ attraction outside of procreation. Freud would also see humans as “polymorphously perverse” until they were ‘constructed’ according to the dominant idea of heteronormative compulsory sexuality. However when we discuss sexuality, the most obvious way to start is by taking the reference of the West, and sometimes thus it also has to carry the idea of ‘elitism’ with it, yet we cannot but draw upon the West. But it also remains true that the sexuality discourses in India has its own local socio-political and cultural underpinnings which is actually not necessary the language of the West and

also not how we conceptualize and understand ‘desires’. In 1988, when two policewomen in Madhya Pradesh decided to marry each other, the news was picked up by the press and created havoc. In reference to this we remember Serena Nanda (1990) saying that Hinduism has always been able to accommodate gender variations, ambiguities and contradictions much more than the West, where hijras have a recognized place in India as the third gender. However it’s also strange to see that a country which still holds the colonial Penal Code in their Constitution and in almost all spheres of life be it economy, cultural, political aspires the West, then ‘why’ when it comes to sexuality is it tagged as a transport from the West which is about the innate desires and one’s own identity.

III. Reading of the chosen “queer” films: ‘Text’ and ‘Talk’

“Bonomali tumi porojonome hoyo radha”

Kaushik Ganguly, the director of *Arekti Premer Golpo*, makes a very interesting comment saying that *‘the audience very well accepts ‘homosexuality’ in the cinema halls just as ‘extramarital affairs’, which they might not be very comfortable with in their personal spaces.’*¹³⁷ However Ghosh, feels that though none of the work of art alone can change the society but there remains a hope of a little change in the mind of the audience where homosexuality will not just be another name of homoeroticism, rather they will also understand that just like any heterosexual relationships there also remains varied dimensions and complications, with the emotional journey of love, hatred, jealousy, arrogance etc. It’s just not about the sexual relationship which remains as the major thought of the homosexuals. He adds that ‘divorce’ was not something very easily acceptable even before few years, whereas now it’s a common affair. Widow-remarriage was an absurd phenomenon in some period of history. But now the scenario has changed to a great extent. So what these films might do is to give a little impetus in the process of change, which ultimately will come someday with the change of ideas and collective effort. However before going into more of these discussions, we will try to give a closer view on the three chosen films.

¹³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGquafmgNyE&spfreload=10>

i) *Arekti Premer Golpo*, February 2010

“Protishtito ke sokolei sombhrom kore/kintu jar protishtha nei, shee gunnannito holeo manush take obohela kore/eei holo jogot songsarer niyom”.

(The established is always respected but who doesnot have the recognition, is not acknowledged by the society even if it is worthy. This is the law of the lifeworld.) [A dialogue through Chapal Bhaduri enacting the role of Maa Shitala, the Goddess of Vile Pox, introducing the narrative of the movie]

This film by Kaushik Ganguly was a modification or a revised elaborate conception of a telefilm that he made in 2003 named *Ushno Tar Jonnyo* casting Churni Ganguly and Rupa Ganguly as lesbian lovers. He admits to be deeply influenced by the life of Chapal Bhaduri, the veteran jatra actor who performed women roles in the times when women were not allowed to enact publicly on stage. He wished to bring the life of Bhaduri who in his late 70s is now forgotten diva, living a lonely life in the bylanes of his north Kolkata house. He consciously chose Rituparno Ghosh for the leading role, who already was a known face in the Bengali household with his national award winning films and has by then started coming out of his closeted self. He feels that through this film as well Ghosh did his activism and ultimately spoke about his self as neither a man nor a woman, calling himself belonging to the ‘third’ gender. Though Ghosh has not directed this film but the presence of such a well known director as an actor did influence the film to a great extent. The name Rituparno itself has its own aura apart from the role of the creative director that he played in the film. Ghosh, who played the character of Abhiroop Sen, a documentary film maker, making a film on the life of Chapal Bhaduri said in an interview that, people saw this film to get a sneak-peak on the life of Rituparno Ghosh’s life to a great extent. However, the strong presence of Ghosh can no way be sidelined in all these three films as he himself became a phenomenon and the sole object of attention in all these three movies that he acted for.



This is the poster of the film which went across the city

Arekti Premer Golpo is an intersection of different forms of narrative representation through the cinematic portrayal. In the ancient tradition, narratives were seen as only the stories ‘told’, but in the present times, narratives did become a transmedium phenomenon, where a story is not only told but also enacted and seen through dance, visuals and different other performances. Different media activate different kinds of storytelling. Narratives as a self-conscious body of inquiry came about in the 20th Century. The phenomenon of storytelling with the available myths, folktales, and sacred scriptures in a society remained since human started making sense of its surroundings. Narrative exists throughout human culture and cuts across distinctions of art, science, literature, fiction and nonfiction. It exploits predispositions, habits and skills that we take for granted and through sharpening and twisting, subject them to confirmation or questioning. One thing that we expect of stories is what Aristotle called as ‘*peripeteia*’ that is the change of fortune from bad to good to good to bad.

The three dimensions of film narrative as summed up by David Bordwell (2007) is the story-world, the plot structure and the narrative. The story world includes the surroundings, the circumstances and the agents in the film. The plot structure arranges the narratives in a meaningful coherent whole and ultimately the narratives which include the moment by moment flow of information. In the story world, there remains a protagonist around whom the narration evolves. It is the protagonist about whom the story is being told. However, some films might as well have more than one protagonist. Artworks

constantly cross the borders of logic. More than treating a narrative to be decoded, it could be seen as an inferential elaboration. While talking about the audience, it is hard to avoid the sense of convergence, no matter how culturally localized a film is. There might as well be disagreements among spectators about grasping the characters and understanding the narratives. The movements of the camera and the cuts carry us into the scene with the sound-tracks; music which sets the mood and dialogue which rises to the audibility and gradually every little detail carry us in the story of the narrative. The play with the order of events, shifts in point of view, voice over commentary, everything falls in the space of the narration, which ultimately unfolds a story with the gradual moments which is experienced with time.

The film starts with the prologue by Basudev (kumar) Roy, setting the context of the film. The narratives continuously travel through different spaces of time. It says, *‘the year is 1959. Satyajit Ray is in an award winning spree at International film festivals. Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen rule the Bengali Silver screen. And in the villages of Bengal, a young actor in his twenties, Chapal Bhaduri, most famously known as Chapal Rani, Queen of open air theatre, continues to captivate a million hearts.’* 50 years later, Chapal Rani is now 71, stays in his secluded house in North Kolkata has been an interest to many known and unknown documentary film maker for his ‘unusual’ life story. *“In September 2009, A Director friend and I (Basudev Roy) from New Delhi started planning a film on this forgotten diva”.* (02:01) On the one hand, it’s the voice of Basudev, the cinematographer of the documentary starts telling ‘us’ the story and the other is the one in the film about whom the documentary is made of, that is Chapal Bhaduri. There happens a simultaneous progress of events both in the making of the documentary and also in the real life of the director (Abhiroop Sen) who could personify himself with Chapal Rani, and these two narratives/ life story coincides with the progress of occurrence.



This scene is in the beginning of the film where Chapal Bhaduri is shown enacting the 'jatra' on Maa Shitala, demanding recognition from the King. She says, 'I know in the field of Celestial Medicine, men rule here. The Ashwinikumars and Dhanwantary are the established ones and no body dares to question their judgement. But have they any cure of the vile pox?' This also talks about the alternative medicinal practices that remain significantly important in Bengal, especially when it comes to the cure of vile pox. (01:27)

This story itself speaks of a change. It's "just another love story". The character of Chapal Bhaduri is obviously different from that of Aviroop Sen (played by Rituparno Ghosh) in various ways, as no individual experiences are same, but there also remains a host of likeness between both of them, more so when their life stories seems to get merged.



This scene (3:31) shows that the director Aviroop talks with Chapal Bhaduri about some issues in making of the documentary, and what is shown explicitly is the applying of kajal and lipstick which becomes particularly important when Chapal Bhaduri inspite of his 'wish' to do the same is unable due to his social position.

The 'wish' of applying kajal and lipstick remains in both of them, where Sen, seems to be 'liberated' and is able to fulfil his will in his everyday life, whereas Bhaduri seem to have remained in the 'closet' suppressing his wish to dress up as the way he

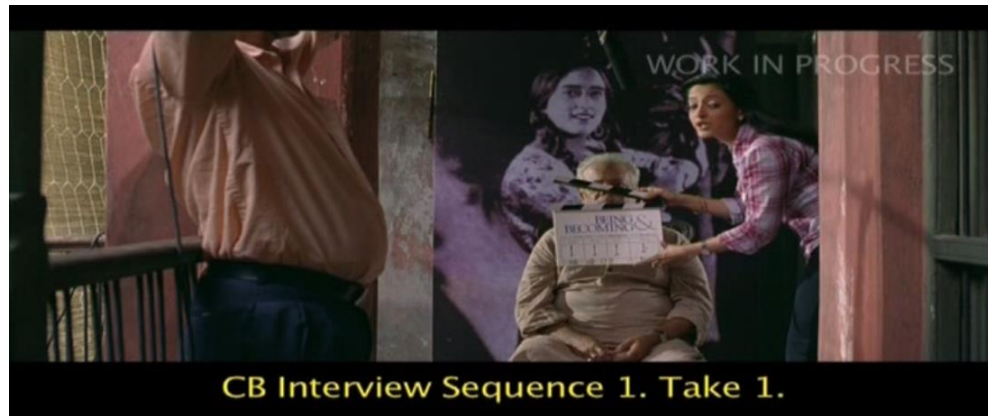
likes. There is a very important dialogue by Aviroop Sen, which says “...*what is more important? ...the way we actually live our lives or the way we want to?*” (09:46)



This has been in constant discussion in sociological studies. The structure-agency power dynamics seems to remain very evidently at play when one is split up between their body and soul. Judith Butler (1993) would say that gender performativity could only make sense in relation to the forcible and reiterative practices of the regulatory sexual regimes, where the agency is being strongly conditioned by the discourse and power which cannot be broken with individual voluntarism. The regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe the ‘materiality’ of sex which is formed and sustained through regulatory norms that are obviously a part of heterosexual hegemony. Thus it also remains interesting to think about the bodies which doesnot ‘construct’ in the social terms and thus tagged as someone “outside” and thereby starts the struggle of identity.

Chapal Bhaduri while narrating his life-story mentions that it was 1953, after his mother’s death in 1952 when he was fourteen or fifteen, he dresses up for the first time like a women in the character of “Marjina” in Alibaba and later laments saying that sometimes I think that God has not made me with care, He gave me everything but the ‘body’. (“*Majhe Majhe bhabi, thakur amake ekdom mon diye banaini. Uni sob dile, sorir tai dite parle naa?*”) In the process of making the movie, Sen also starts visualizing himself in the place of Bhaduri, and he starts relating with the characters of his life with

his own. The dramatization of Bhaduri's life in the film was enacted by Ghosh which does lead the audience to think so.



This is the start of the series of interviews that follow in the film with visual scenes where (Rituparno plays the role of Bhaduri, as well as the documentary film maker) with the parallel narrative of Aviroop Sen, the film progresses. The documentary is named as 'Being and Becoming'.(11:10)



The scene (21:28) depicting Ghosh as Chapal Bhaduri and Indraneil Sengupta as his lover. This is seen as the backstage of the jatra performance, when Bhaduri played women roles.

'The film that we are making is on Chapal Kumar Bhaduri who is just not an actor but the first self-evident, self-confessed gay actor of the Bengali stage' says Sen to Uday Narayan Chowdhury (played by Jisshu Sengupta) who agrees to let his ancestral place in Hetampur, Bhirbhum for the shooting of the film where Bhaduri gives *'candid, brutal interviews'*. The location was shifted from Bhaduri's North Kolkata house after the

chaotic situation created by the news “*Gay bonding gets festive*” where the documentary were seen as *vilification of an honorable actor*. The neighbours were shown to shout objecting the intervention in the actor’s private life and saying to deal with homosexuality, sexual rights, and free sex life in Delhi or foreign countries and not in the localities of Kolkata. “*Eei duto sex shamlate amader shomaj himsim khacche, apnader kindly aar third sex shekhate hobe naa*”. (Our society is already trying hard to tackle the two genders, so kindly don’t try to teach us the ‘third’ gender)



(30:07)

This scene, (30:07) where the neighbours protest against the open interviews of Bhaduri is indeed important to understand that till one talks explicitly about their love for same sex, their experiences, the society doesnot seem to bother. But once one asserts their identity, it becomes a trouble for the so called ‘normatives’. Thus, its not always when one ‘do’ certain acts, for instance sexual acts which are personal it becomes ‘deviant’, but rather when they talk about it, the ‘labeling’ starts to happen. The news of Abhiroop Sen making a film on Chapal Bhaduri comes in television, newspapers which shows how media as well spread certain news as ‘sensational’ and in consequence, complicate situations even more. Most of the people come to know about ‘homosexuality’, ‘gay’ or ‘queer’ through media, but it is often than not that media present an unbiased view, and thus common men perceive much of these sexualities and the movements relates as media projects or describes them to be.

However, androgyny or gender ambiguity was never new in India or even specially speaking about Bengal. While choosing the site of the shoot, Abhiroop finds a Gouranga temple and think it to be a ‘nice symbol’.



The first picture is where Aviroop is choosing a shooting site after the chaos in Kolkata with Uday Narayan, (played by Jishu Sengupta) who offers his country place for the shooting. The below is the picture of Chaitanya with his followers. (34:52)

Chaitanya is an epitome of cultural androgyny of this country. Radha and Krishna are almost symbiotic in him. *“He is the first person to stand against all forms of discrimination...he is creating bands and brought about the concept of liberation through music. Five hundred years ago and it happened so organically”*, (34:52) he feels. The theme song of the film was, *“bonomali tumi, porojonome hoyo radha’* which integrates with the story to make a meaningful expression. ‘Jatra’ which is the form of musical theatre believed to have started since the time of Chaitanya’s Bhakti movement. He himself played the role of Rukmini, the wife of Krishna, in the performance ‘Rukmini Haran’ from the life of Krishna in around 1507. This has been mentioned in Chaitanya Bhagavat. (Varadpande:1987)

The time when Chapal Bhaduri was impersonating women roles in ‘jatra’, not much women were allowed to enact in ‘public’ travelling places, as it were. However both his father Tara Kumar Bhaduri and mother Prava Devi worked in jatra. Starting with the character of Marjina in 1953, he continued his career playing Razia Sultana, Chand

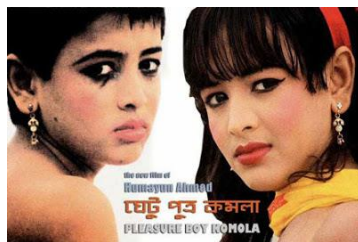
Bibi, Devi Kaikeyi and the Goddess Shitala. He also played the character of Mahinder Kaur in the play on the massacre of Jalianwallah Bagh and Janhabi Devi, the heart broken mother of Micheal Madhusudan Dutta. In 1960s he was the highest paid 'actress' of the jatra being paid almost seven to eight thousand rupees per month. He became one of the great attractions of the stage. He also got a great deal of attention from the other male actors and use to enjoy it. But gradually women started coming to these performances which did affect actors like Bhaduri, and also his revelation as gay did influence his career as the fact could not be accepted as a "normal" phenomena and thus was thrown out by the manager of the troop (Vinodbabu, in the film) which ultimately lead him in a poor condition. However, Bhaduri was not the only one who uses to impersonate female roles, as we have heard about the well known Bal Gandharva, (Narayan Shripad Rajhans) in Maharastra who as well were very famous for his roles as females during the early 1930s. But however his (Bal Gandharva) 'cross-dressing' remained just as his part of work 'on the stage' and never become a part of his life off stage. Thus, the thought that dressing and performing like a female from a very tender age might have been the main reason of Bhaduri's will within to become a woman, might not be true. On the other hand again, it might not be the case always where one might perform the characters just externally to himself as a part of his job. Bhaduri, somewhere within had a strong wish to become a woman which might have got its expression through these performances but again were forced to 'dress' as a man just after the performances got over.

".....painting his face, his eyes....but ever did you think of shooting the opposite? When he takes off the paints, strips off his satin sari/dress, goes off to his home in his shirt and pant?" says Chapal Bhaduri in reference to the performance that Abhiroop Sen plans to shoot where the old man dresses up for the play for the the character of Shitala.



The following pictures of Bhaduri tries to capture the different ‘selves’ that he enacted in his process of living, where the first picture is of getting painted for the role of Shitala, the second is how he looked in the role of Shitala and the third is his ‘social’ self, dressed according to his gender male.

The film *Ghetuputra Komola* in 2012, written and directed by Humayun Ahmed actually depicts the stories of the colonial era when the troop of *Ghetugaan* use to travel places performing their songs and drama. Small boys use to dress up like women and dance in those performances, called ‘ghetu’(s) were also forced for sexual relationship with the landlords. This practice of impersonating women roles by male actors were thus a practice that happened in the world of theatre in different forms throughout India which also carried with it the stories of sexual violence that they had to face, even while performing the roles of women. Even dressing or feeling like a women called for a host of violence alongside which also shows how patriarchy works in our society.



Poster of *Khetuputra Komola*, a boy dressed up as a girl

The story of Chapal Bhaduri at the onset was said (in the continuation of the prologue) to have attracted attention of the known and unknown documentary film makers because of his “unusual” life story. Naveen Kishore of Seagull Arts Foundation, made a documentary on him *Performing the Goddess: Chapal Bhaduri’s story* in 1999 which also influenced Kaushik Ganguly to make *Ushno tar Jonnyo* in 2003 and with a much larger vigour in *Arekti Premer Golpo*, 2010, the time very significantly important for the gay movements in India. However, what made the life of Bhaduri interesting is

that he embraced the psychic entity of the stage into his ‘real’ life as well. Even at puberty his voice refused to break and his visits to doctors did not help. He thus simply did not impersonate female roles, dressed like females while his performances rather as well associated them in the process of his life creating a huge gap between his wishes and experiences. He remembers how he was forced to shave his head after the death of his mother while his elder sister was not said so. He laments saying, “*amake byatachhele banabei banabe*”. (14:06)

With the progress of the film we even see that Abhiroop shaves his head when Udays comments to him about his hair that with his hairstyle he is trying to prove a point. Hair is also seen as a symbol where power executes, as Bhaduri was forced to shed all his hair to perform rituals and he laments about it, on the other hand Abhiroop does the same act on his wish and celebrates the androgyny that he found through the act. In one of his interviews Rituparno Ghosh says that the scene where the character Abhiroop is shown without hair, it came as a powerful statement. It showed liberation from many ideas that prevail over ‘hair’ when it comes to our social way of looking at it. Thus it remains extremely meaningful.



This is a picturization showing how Bhaduri laments over his hair when he was forced to shave his head because of his mother’s demise. Hair again remained a powerful symbol. (13:53)

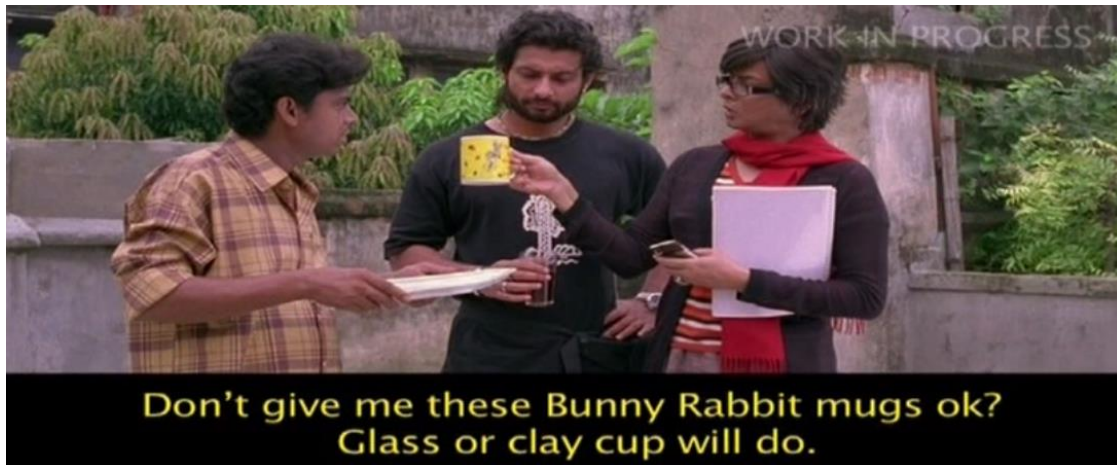


Abhiroop after having a new haircut in the film (1:00:32)

Even at the end of the movie he says to Abhiroop, “*byatachheleder kaaj byatachhelera koruk*” (let males do their job), (1:53:00) Abhiroop asks back, do you really think yourself as a women, Chapalda? And he replies, if I thought I was a man, there would have been no problem at all. Here, despite of almost a similar stream of events these two characters are shown to see themselves in two different ways. Abhiroop says “*men are different, women are different, and we are different*”. Going back to the instances where Prasanta, a crew member calls Abhiroop as ‘*madam*’, he says that if he continues calling him ‘*madam*’, he would sent him to a shop inside the village to get a packet of sanitary napkin for him. It shows that Abhiroop never wished to be treated as a ‘*woman*’; he wanted to be what he is. There was even a scene where Abhiroop was given a ‘*bunny mug*’ full of tea, by one of his co workers, Khoka and he refuses to take it and demanded a simple mug rather than anything which is tagged as ‘*girlish*’ or ‘*boyish*’.



The scene where Prasanta, a crew member calls Abhiroop as ‘*madam*’ and he protests.(42:44)



The scene where Khoka gives a cup of tea to Abhiroop in a yellow Bunny Mug and he refuses to take it.(13:18)

Bhaduri however, remains in the constant flux of becoming, as his on stage/off stage roles seems to differ and thus on stage he perform like a woman putting up the makeup, jewellery, sari/attires and again after the show, coming back to the role he plays in front of the ‘society’ in his home, wearing male clothes and putting off the markers of female roles. There lies a constant shift of performances and also at different levels. Thus on stage he performs hyper-femininity, and off stage, his effeminacy in the male role, his relationship with a man who happens to be married later deserting him for another woman brings the inevitable comparison of a “real” and a ‘not real’ woman.

“Bhaduri or Ghosh is more insecured than another women, who is biologically and psychologically a female” says Guddu, (name changed) who would call himself a kothi (in a relationship with a married man) and a make-up artist by profession.

Though some of my informants would say that there has been a continuous focus on the queer characters having the accepted ‘female’ attributes of home making, care, sensitive or the self sacrificing love that is shown in the film, but some would even disagree saying that this is case specific. It could rather be said that the situation shown in the film, the progress of events are such that their characters had to be self sacrificing and selflessly loving, which

might not be true in general. Chapal Bhaduri is shown through out the film being exploited of his nature of kindness by the lover who had a family with kids.

Dodo, (name changed) a transgender female says that 'If Chapal Bhaduri is saying his own narrative, it must be true. The continuous exploitation that he faced is tremendous and heart wrenching. If I would be in his place, I could never think of doing so much disrespecting my own self. Society doesnot accept us, it creates different kinds of violence not only on us but also to our families. But when the lover becomes the form of violence, it's pathetic. We look for good times with our lovers and not that they treat us like rubbish because they hold the power of being 'bi-sexual' and thus marrying conveniently.' Raja joins, for us 'bi-sexuals are characterless. They don't have any sense of commitment. They are the ones who uses people like 'us' and leaves us as and when they wish'.

Rather than reading the cinema shot by shot, what I am trying to do is to contextually talk about the issues that seem relevant in this discussion on culture and sexuality. One of the very strong sequence when Sandy or Sandipan, the media journalist came to interview Abhiroop Sen, about the film that he is shooting in Bhaduri's home and end up having a heated conversation.

Sandy asks *"is your film focusing on his career or sexuality?"*

Sen replies, *"I am not making a film on Viagra"*.

"I mean, sexual preference". Sandy fumbles.

Sen comments *"Suppose I am making a documentary on the Amitabh Bacchan, would the sexual preference still be relevant?"*

"Obviously not! Because its normal!" He replies.

Sen with his anger asks, “*And what makes you such an authority on whats normal and whats not?*”

The conversation ends when Sandy too being irritated calls Sen, “*Faggot*”, which Sen replies saying “*Welcome*”! (17:04)

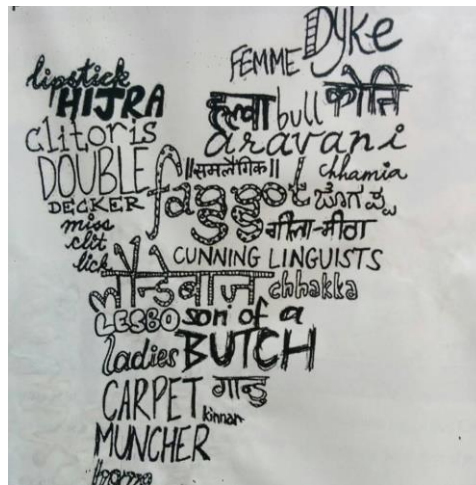


This is a picture where Abhiroop gets angry with the questions he is asked by the Sandipan, a TV journalist who comes to cover the making of his documentary. (17:04)

To start with the discussion, the slang “faggot” that the conversation ends with has a discourse of analysis in itself which C.J.Pascoe (2005) talks about in his article ‘*Dude, You’re a Fag*’: *Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse* , especially in the context of North America. It means loser, which came to have been associated with old females and homosexuals. Becoming fag is to have failed in the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess and strength and revealing weakness or femininity, as it does with sexual identity. Many words like this come to be associated with homosexuals in a demeaning way which is often used as jokes or laughter by many, especially youths. In Indian context, the common slangs used are ‘*chakka*’, ‘*homo*’, ‘*ladies*’, ‘*boudi*’, ‘*double decker*’ etc.

With this discussion which I find important to mention is the way ‘slangs’ are used by the ‘queer’ among themselves. When I use to spend time with them, the use of different colloquial slangs was part of their speaking habits which initially created a little discomfort for me as a researcher. But gradually, their lingo became familiar where the use of slangs is not taken as any insult to each other, rather was a part of the conversation. This remind me how ‘cultural norms’ teach us about the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ or even for that matter what is refined and what’s not. But the easy use of slangs among themselves

seemed that they even challenged the system of this Bengali cultural hegemony in a very humble way. Probably it could be said as the power of the ‘margins’. This tradition of protest could also be noticed through the different writings of Nabarun Bhattacharya¹³⁸, mostly in ‘Kangal Malsat’,¹³⁹ novel which was made into a movie in 2013 with the same name by Suman Mukhopadhyaya. Though it is a dark satire on the state powers and the power of the ‘others’, but it does pose a question on the cultural aspects of the Bengali ‘bhadrolok’ through its uses of language which questions the refinement of Bengali language. Here comes the politics of language, where elites establishes a definite form of language as ‘civilised’ and thereby many of the so called colloquial way of speaking or writing gets marginalized in a process. However, though I am relating to Bhattacharya’s novel as an example of the voices of the marginalized, in his interview¹⁴⁰ he once said that to him queer doesnot make much sense. It is an elitist affair. It is the basic existence of humans which matters the most. Sexual marginalization is not something which he really focused on, but his writings question the structure of the society and the state through his imagination of characters and stories.



This is a poster found in JNU, New Delhi (2015) which tries to capture different ‘terms’ that are used for the homosexuals.

It has always been a pertinent question by the intellectuals, activists, empathizers who fight against the draconian law of the state to have criminalized homosexuality asks

¹³⁸ Nabarun Bhattacharya was a write of radical aesthetics. He was the son of Bijon Bhattacharya and Mahasweta Devi.

¹³⁹ Suman Mukhopadhyay.2013.Kangal Malsat.India.113mins

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIUC9Gv-R2o&spfreload=10>

that who decides becoming an authority of what's 'normal' and what's not. 'Abnormality' generally is thought about something which deviates from the 'taken for granted' parameters of the society. On the other hand, society itself is changing and is fluid in nature and thus the expected norms change with time and space. Durkheim in *The Rules of Sociological Method* would say that there are certain ways of thinking, acting and feeling which is external to individuals and are invested with a coercive power by which they tend to control and exercise its power over the individuals. It is when an individual tend to go against it, they feel the pressure of it and the power it exerts.

Howard Becker (1963) would say that deviance is a relative term where the 'act' of deviance is not the only thing which comes in focus but also the 'stigma' that the society connotes and which affects the individual to conceptualize their own identity in turn.

Foucault also talks about this 'internalization' of the norms which creates a pressure on the individuals other than the mechanism of the state and the society. Through the reference of a panoptican model of a prison, he tries to see how even in a society the individuals are increasingly caught up in the system of power of the state mechanism, laws that continuously in the process of surveillance through camera, media, and other technological apparatus tries to exercise 'power' on the conduct of the individuals. It only becomes a successful phenomenon through the 'internalization' of the social norms and expectation through a top down process which in turn 'normalizes' the phenomenon and makes it a strong mechanism of power.

Ronit,(name changed) who calls himself 'gay' but also is confused about his sexual identity says that "I would prefer not to become very evident about my identity in public, rather I would like to portray as anyone else. Infact I say my friends that when you are with me, you should behave 'normal'." This conversation with a 19-20 year boy made me rethink on this terms of what's 'normal' and is it that everyone in the society sees 'normal as normal' ? He would say that "I don't like when people around me make fun of 'us', and thus I would prefer my friends to dress and behave as others. In film festival

though, we get a space to dress up as we like, otherwise I would not like to become evident about my sexuality in public and be a part of the attention.” He does a private job to earn his livelihood but waiting for better opportunities to be able to come out to his family to live in his own terms.

Associating with Chapal Bhaduri, Guddu says that “I generally don’t dress ‘differently’ in my house or even when I come for work. Thus nobody understands my gender difference. But when there is any social gathering of the ‘community’ (queer), I wear sari, put kajol, and wear bangles. I really look good when I dress up like a girl.”

On the one hand, Chapal Bhaduri in his house is seen wearing a lungi and kurta, like any other old man in Bengal, inspite of his feelings of a woman deep inside, whereas Abhiroop dresses as he wants. Though at times he is also called as ‘madam’ to which he protests, but he accepts it with grace as well trying to change it in his own way. There arouse a question by a 55 year women “then what is the need of one dressing in a way that they get attention?” Another woman joined saying “they are very loud. Their body language and way of speaking are funny and strange”.

To these questions, what I am reminded of is Bourdieue’s ‘habitus’, the agency that actually differs from one another and thus the way of presenting oneself changes. This ‘habitus’ however is not constant and it keeps changing adding or subtracting ones agency in performances. That Abhiroop Sen in the film could dress as he wished, is because of his power he enjoyed being in Delhi and as a film maker, whereas Chapal Bhaduri, remained in his North Kolkata home without much power and wish to change his 75 year long life. He deep inside believes himself to be a woman, but he never again challenges his way of life by doing anything other than what he is expected to. He ‘comes out’ to one extent and yet remains ‘closeted’. Society accepts them who remain

closeted inspite of their differences that lie within themselves. Thus challenging the social norms remains important with ones ‘performances’ of the gender that they wished to become.

In a conversation with Momo (the character played by Raima Sen) who was the Kolkata coordinator and researcher, when Basudev asks her about the experience of making this documentary, she says that *“putting on kajal is not all about liberation.....Abhida is as closeted as Chapalda deep inside and I think he is using this old man’s life very conveniently...as a peg to hang his own story on”*. (1:30:03) This might or might not be true for Abhiroop Sen, because he was seen as a confident and established film maker carrying his androgynous dresses with flamboyance, not feeling ashamed of the way he talks or expresses but there remains a crisis even in him.



Rani, (Churni Ganguly) Basudev’s wife looking at a close picture of Abhiroop and Basudev with a sense of shock, however the movie doesnot potray it as melodramatic (1:35:07)

At the time when Rani, Basu’s wife (Churni Ganguly) comes to meet him to say that her husband is not among those who can balance acts and thus they need to separate, he asks *“...If I were a woman, would you react the same way?”*.(02:02:25) This dilemma might have existed in Abhiroop’s mind even when he says that they are neither women nor man, rather different and the third gender. Or when Basu recites the poem he wrote for his pregnant wife as a gift for the news of the expected, he says that *‘babies, diapers, nappies.....these are not my ball game all together’*. In a society where gay relationships

are still not a norm, the 'bisexual' individuals tend to choose a family life rather than choosing the alternative.



The moment of departure of Basudev (from Abhiroop) with wife Rani and a deep scene sadness (02:13:23)

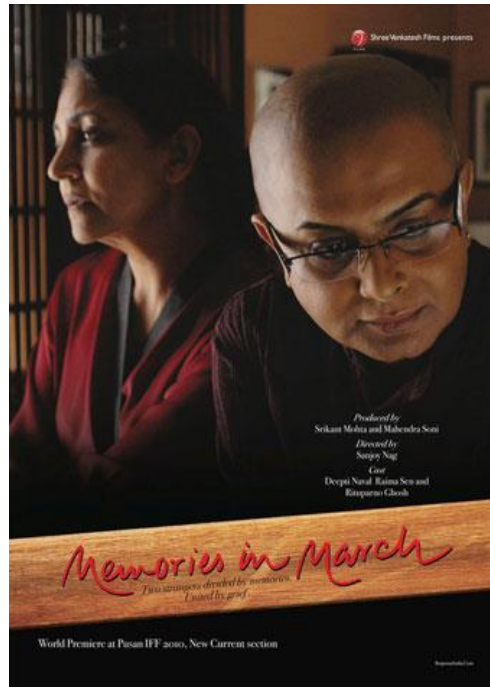
The movie also ends in a functional way where Basu is seen preparing to start a new journey with his wife. Rituparno in the *'Times of India, Mumbai Mirror, October 2nd, 2009'* interview says that *'Abhiroop is neither a man nor a woman; he belongs to the third sex. As of Chapal Bhaduri, he always felt that he was a woman trapped in a man's body. These two different concepts of androgyny and sexual identity had to be brought out. There's no external factor of femininity in Chapalda. Only when he speaks do we hear a women's voice....the two roles challenge the stereotypical image of a gay man....he feels that there is a sense of loneliness in both the characters of Chapal Bhaduri and Abhiroop Sen, but the difference is that Sen feels a sense of triumph in that space whereas Bhaduri goes to seclusion'*.

ii) *Memories in March, April 2010*

"What is more unacceptable to you? The act of seduction or the relationship per se?"

"What is more acceptable to you? That fact that Sid is no more? Or the fact that he is gay?"

[Arnob (Sid's lover) to Sid's mother] (53:42)



Poster of the film 'Memories in March'

This film in comparison with the two other films deals with the issue of alternative sexuality in a more subtle, composed and a matured way. It is not only about the love and relationship between two gay 'lovers' but also a 'mother' coming in terms with the sexual orientation of her bereaved son Siddharth/Sid, lovingly called as 'babu'. The beauty of this movie is that it has three main characters, the mother, Aarti Mishra (played by Deepti Naval), Ornob (played by Rituparno Ghosh) the lover and the creative director of the ad agency Sid worked for and Sahana Chowdhury (Raima Sen) the colleague of the character around whom the story evolves and progresses but we, as audience could only hear the voice.

Sanjay Nag, the director would give the major credit to Rituparno Ghosh for this script and music/lyrics. He says that initially though they thought of making this film in Bangla, but two days before shoot they realized that the major character of the mother played by Deepti is not that comfortable with the language and its then when the film was made in Hindi, Bengali and English. Talking about the story Nag mentions that there are two journeys that happen in the film which was partly a true story with some fictional characters in an expansion of four days. The film opens with the mother rushing from

Delhi to Kolkata, hearing about his son's death to perform the last rites and also to collect his belongings. So, at one level there is this journey that happens whereas on the other level the journey that the mother takes is in discovering her own son, which happens through Sahana and Ornob. There were initial resistance and conflicts of the mother which gradually turns into bonds after a point of time.

The film actually speaks of a host of emotions. The beauty of the script lies in the entire line between the insider and the outsider which gets blurred with time and merges into a new relationship. Initially the mother thinks that she knows everything about her son and the others are outsiders or strangers. As the film progresses, the mother realizes that the 'others' knew much more about her son than she ever thought. This transition remains very interesting for the director other than the character that borns through grief.

This story unfolds in such a way that till the half way of the one hour, thirty-eight minutes film, the audience doesnot really understand that this story talks about alternative gender, other than *Arekti Premer Golpo* which starts with the prologue by Basudev Roy and Chitragada, where as well the story is set by a small introduction of the Tagore's dance drama. Both the other film however orients the audience in a specific direction and makes them guess about the film whereas *Memories in March* unfolds it with time as it was unfolded to Sid's mother.

The mother stays in her son's apartment alone where she keeps remembering the mails and messages sent to her by Sid explaining the details of the flat and that's how the 'voice' becomes the medium of connect for all these strangers who just met after his fatal accident and also the audience. It is when the mother asks for all the belongings of Sid, especially those struck on his soft board in the office cubicle, Ornob asks for some more time to decide on that which however angered Aarti and she says to Sahana that "*the stuff belongs to someone closest to me, and nobody else has the right to stop me from taking it. Its my basic right.*" That's when Sahana replies, "*maybe that's exactly what he (Ornob) is thinking right now!*"(40:49) Gradually this conversation just before the 'pause' opens up the 'secret' about the very special relationship that Ornob and Sid shared as lovers. The second half of the film then sees the mother trying to come in terms with the reality

through conversations with both Sahana and Ornob and trying to find Sid more closely through his colleagues, home, the paintings.



The soft board of Sid in his office (35:55)



The following are the two pictures from the movie where Sid's mother interacts with Ornob and Sahana in the dining table, getting to know her son more closely.

At the onset, as most of the mothers, she was also in complete denial of the fact that her son is a 'gay'. She says to Sahana, "*You know, how many girls use to drool over him when he was in Delhi?*" And Sahana replies, "*Yes, but did he drool back?*" (43:52) I personally felt that the character of Sahana as a attractive, good looking, smart colleague, who were also in love with Sid were intentionally kept in the film in the contrary of Ornob to say that it is one's own choice and preference than the common perception of 'lack' of choice, as his mother also feels that till now no girl were up to the mark for his son and that's the reason he did not show interest in them.

The late night call to Sahana by Aarti finding a packet of condoms also showed her terrible anxiety and his constant try to proof his son not “guilty” of what he is blamed for (*tumlog jhooth muth aspe ilzam laga rahe the*). (49:50) It is a strange situation as the mother now just has the collage of memories of his son and at that juncture of life she is confronted with another truth which is indeed a great revelation for his son in front of her but again she knows that she at that point can’t do anything about it but to accept.



A poster Aarti looks closely while brushing her teeth in the bathroom (47:08)

Yet she blamed Ornob for seducing his son and was confronted by the question in return, “*what is more unacceptable to you? The act of seduction or the relationship per say?*” Finding the draft saved in Sid’s mobile to be sent to her someday actually made her confront the reality in the voice of Sid saying, “*hey mom, there’s something I have been wanting to share with you for a long time. I have been drafting and redrafting on my phone but never end up sending it. Probably because I know it might upset you. I don’t know how you are gonna take this but I have found someone special, very special. Not as special as you mom, but almost and just like you, loving, sensitive, caring, a fine sense of aesthetics, well-read and has an impeccable taste for saris. Also just like you, nagging, jittery, impatient, can’t live without air conditioning, no nonsense sort, always keeps me under a tight lease, a total drama-queen. Samajh rahi ho naa maa, bilkul aap ki photocopy.....and hopefully a year from now, we will be a big happy family, you, me and Ornob. Yaa, it’s a He*”. (59:43)

However she blames herself for this saying that after her divorce in November, 2001, his dad went to US and she immersed herself into work and couldn’t give so much time and attention to her son which might have lead to this ‘*abnormality*’. There were a constant play of emotions within her where her saddened eyes were seen to be grappling

with both the realities, yet were falling short at times thinking it would have been able to be cured by *psychiatrist or counselor*. She herself admits to Ornob that *'if you appreciate handloom saris and jewellery, then you also have to accept the other part of me also. All this is not a style statement. I am a very conservative woman'*. (1:11:08) This has been mostly the case in urban areas too.

"When my mother understood that I love to dress differently, she couldnot take it very normally. Other family members were continuously teasing me for my 'strangeness'. One day I even try to hang myself up in the fan, I was so depressed. I found none in the family. Gradually, my mother is accepting me with much difficulty but she has accepted that I am different", says a 24 year transgender in Kolkata who after college is now working with an NGO.

Most of the aged persons I talked to still feels it's as an "abnormality" which happens due to intense influence of media and cultural changes. Some even refer to religious texts justifying their point. Though most of them are aware of the alternative gender discussions happening around them, they also feels that previous days were the better time when these complications did not seem to exists. Many of them even felt that 'gay' men are impotent unable to reproduce, born with some physical abnormalities.

Ronit says that "I know my mother is not going to take my sexual orientation with ease thus I avoid discussing about it with her. She sometimes is told by other people about me and my different sexuality and many a times give me examples of gay relationships that he has heard to see my reaction. But I don't react. I am waiting to be establish myself in my own way that one day actually I can go up to her with the reality when I get someone I can really depend and stay with as my boyfriend."

“It is a social trauma to face your own children as gay or homosexual. It is not easy to face the society. Society to call you by names, will laugh at you, which is not easy to tackle. I really don’t know how I would react if my children were gay. Even if we chose to accept, the society will not, and we have to live in a society, a community. We are still not in that stage where these issues are easy and no body talks about it differently”, says a 58 year old man.

Kaushtab, college student comments that “my mother liked these films, but she is still not ready to accept it whole heartedly. There remains a sense of sympathy and not empathy in understanding and seeing these films. Though some parents are heard to accept their son or daughters as ‘queer’ that we come to know in newspapers or television, but in reality when we look around in our locality or relatives, the instances seem to be totally missing. It becomes hard to believe that parents really could accept their children as they are.”

Saptadipa, studying in a college joins that “even with the simple practice of marriage, our parents, specially mothers get so worried and hyper. Even now when the age of marriage is no more fixed to 20s, then also after certain age parents start forcing their kids to marry and get settled, as if marriage is the only way to settlement. Things apparently seem to have changed, but the actuality is no so much different from earlier times. The only changes I feel is that they want us to get educated and get a job, but about marriage, they still expect a man for a woman and a woman for a man.”

When the family gets to know about their children’s choice of sexual life which happens to be different than that of the hegemonic idea, they try in various ways to change it or prove it as wrong. The usual nature is trying to get them married or to take them to psychiatrists. There are many informants who were taken to doctors and were given medicines that affected them otherwise or tried to give insensible comments to hurt

their ego in order to change them. It's also very sad in reality when we get to know that the route to rescue is actually a way of severe trauma and pain. The doctors are yet to be sensitized in order to tackle cases like this. They hold an immense power as individuals to make the families understand that there is nothing 'abnormal' about the wish to same sex, but in most cases, the reality remains otherwise.

It's very interesting to see how the Western medicine actually created homosexuality as an 'abnormality' in the contrary to the only form of normality as heterosexual. In the contrary in India, homosexuality was never a medical category with the diverse and complex systems of medicines being ayurveda, unani, homeopathy as the traditional systems of medicines against the allopathic practice. The other ways were also through religious gurus, faith healers and others which were mostly used as a form of 'cure' for homosexuality even today. But in the West, as Weeks (1981:71) says, "the negative side of this classificatory enthusiasm was a sharp reinforcement of the normal....the debates over the causes of the perversions and the eager descriptions of even the most outrageous examples inevitably worked to emphasize their pathology, their relationship to degeneracy, madness and sickness and helped to reinforce the normality of heterosexual relationships".

It was Richard Krafft-Ebbing, the Viennese psychiatrist, who saw the 'deviations' as perversions including sadism, masochism, necrophilia, fetishism, homosexuality and exhibitionism. (Brecher:1976) A study done by Beiber, among hundred homosexual and hundred heterosexual individuals concluded that homosexual orientation was a result of a pathological family with a domineering mother and a detached or an absent father. He notes that "because of its pathological status, the possibility of establishing a stable and intimate homosexual relationship is precluded....hence there is a ceaseless, compulsive, anonymous cruising". (Bayer 1981:46) All these uncritical defenders of a category however produced a scenario that homosexuality is a disease which has to be cured and thus complicates the situations even more.

While Siddharth's flat was being wrapped up by her mother to be taken back to Delhi, the fish-tank remains and she suggests Ornob to take it. Initially he disagrees

saying *“I hate life being caged. Caging everyone, putting them into boxes.....why do you have to box everybody? Set them free. Let them be what they are.”* This actually speaks a lot about the queer people who continuously are being tried to bring in the terms with the societal norms and when it still deviates there starts violence from different spheres of life. There have been many lesbians who were forced and raped by their own family members as brothers or uncles to make them realize the ‘natural’ process of the peno-vaginal sex. These incidents still continue to happen in many parts of the country, found in newspapers.



The flat where Sid stayed was packed to be sent to Delhi where Aarti lived and the fish tank waiting to be taken by Ornob.(1:34:30)

It is probably human nature to categorize and club things to make sense of their surroundings, but each individual is different, each one has their own interests, own wish of living their lives which is not acknowledged. Be it in education, behavioural conduct or living life, there has been a trend to homogenize, creating a hierarchy, of the “acceptable’ and “non acceptable”. This ‘binary’ division thus becomes very problematic in grasping the diversification and fluidity in an individual, more so when it’s about sexuality where it also gets to be tagged as “perversion”. However, Ornob lastly agrees to take the aquarium thinking, *“Who am I to decide whether they should stay in a box or set free. May be they have accepted their little boxes as their worlds. Once out they would not survive”*. Though the emergence of a strong identity and consequently the ‘communities’ that grow with the collective effort indeed show a way towards the light, but there lies an inevitable question as to whether these often exclusionary boxes actually takes every individual into account? What happens to them who would not be comfortable to be tagged in any specific box? Why is it that we try to name and codify

desires also into a specific model? Akshay Khanna, (2007) a social anthropologist, a lawyer and an activist would challenge the proliferation of identities in the queer spaces. He asks a critical question as how the way we name ourselves actually impacts the way in which we participate in the political processes. Thus, on the one hand, it remains true that boxes restrict, boxes give an identity justifying the characteristics but there again remains the fear of a growing expectations and consequently the fear of being “tagged”, but on the contrary, these little boxes and identities again let one fight for their own rights when it comes to law or talking about human rights. One finds solace in the association of the created collective identity that talks about their feeling, experiences and desires in the contrary to the hegemonic ideals. Thus this tug war will remain as many more unresolved crisis of humanity.

However, the movie ends with the mother realizing that she came here to collect her son's belongings but what she found was something much larger and realized that her son has left so much of himself with his colleagues whom consequently she also became close with through sharing dinner, grief, silences and some intense conversations through which she discovered her son in a new way almost. Ornob asks Aarti, *“What is more unacceptable to you? The fact that he is no more ? or the fact that he was gay?”* The reply was almost a honest confession which says that *the fact that he is no more, I can never ever, ever comes in terms with. But the fact that he is gay is, I think, no matter how much I try and pretend that I understand or I actually truly try and understand, but still deep inside me, honestly speaking as a mother, I don't think I will be able to accept the fact that my son, my son is gay”*



A picture of a gay pride walk where a mother is seen with the placard

Most of the parents' initially couldn't accept their daughter or son as 'homosexual', but gradually in the fear of losing them they sometimes were forced to accept. But never are these 'coming in terms' very smooth rather does proceed with a series of processes intended to cure them and are taken as a shock. It is associated with the fear to be laughed at by the society and other family members. Still it's only a handful of these parents who are gradually trying to change their views through readings or watching films or talking to people about the issue whereas a lot more would outrightly reject it as pathological and would remain creating pressure to 'normalise' their son/daughter and would take it as "shame".

iii) *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*, May 2012



This is how the story starts. Rudra, the protagonist is in hospital visualizes his choreographed Tagore's play 'Chitrangada'. This picture depicts a play within the play (04:32)

"It had to be an heir.

That was all the father knew. To carry on the name and family pride.

And so the training begun.

But the child to be a girl or boy ?

Did anyone ask or even want to know?

Children have dreams beyond their parent's expectations and they wish on stars and fallen eyelashes.

Sometimes wishes come true. And expected to crown alive and turn the everyday inside out". (Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish, 03:05)

".....Amader bongshe probhonjon naam e ek raja chilen. Tini putrer jonnyo toposshya korle mohadeb take bor dilen, tomar bongshe proti purusher ektimatro shontan hobe, amar purbo-purushder putro-e hoyechilo, kintu amar konya hoyeche, takei aami putro gonyo kori. Tar gorbhojato putro amar bongshodhor hobe...." (Chitrangada's father Chitrabahon to Arjun in Mahabharat: Rajshekhar Basu aka Paroshuram)

[...the king named Probhonjon in our family pleased Lord Shiva to be blessed with son and was told that they will always have a son as an heir. In spite of that I had a daughter but I treat her like a son. Her son will be the successor of Manipur.]

"....nari hoye emone purushpran mor. Nahi jani kemone elem ghore phire duhswopnobiubwolsomo.....grihe giye bhangiya phelinu dhonushswor jaha kichu chilo; kinankito e kothin bahu- chilo jaa gorber dhon eto kal mor- lanchona korinu tare nisfol akroshbhore. Etodin pore bujhilam, nari hoye purusher mon naa jodi chinite pari britha bidya joto...." (Chitrangada to Modon in "Chitrangada" by Rabindranath Tagore, 1892)

[...even after being a woman, I have such a male-heart. Don't know how heartbroken I came back home. I broke all the armours that I had and which made me proud. After so long I understood if I am unable to read a man's heart being a woman, my birth is of no value.]

"Dosh toh amadero chilo. Sarajibon jene eshechi, mante chaini. Amader jed chhele chheler motoi hobe.....Jar jeta swobhab setai toh swabhabik naa ! Swobhabero toh ekta icche ache. Oor jeta swabhabik setai jodi amra mene nitam, tahole oor eei nijer sorrier opor kantachera kore benche thaka...seta korte hoto naa!" (Conversation of Rudra's, the protagonist's mother with his father in

'Chitrangada: The Crowing Wish' - the movie by Rituparno Ghosh, 2012) (1:19:22)

[...even we are to be blamed. We always knew but denied to accept. We were adamant that a man will behave like a man. But what comes normally is normal, isn't it? There is also a normality of one's own self and that normality has a wish of its own. If we would accept him as he is, he wouldn't have been forced to do the operation.]

"...ekdom choto boyoshta ketechilo aami chhele naa meye, chhele naa meye, chhele naa meye...aami toh meye, aami toh meye eei kore. Tarpor bojhanoyeche naa tumi chhele kintu tumi meyer moto bhan korcho, keno hocche, keno hocche, keno hocche! Tarpor holo maar maar kaat kaat dhor dhor dhor, tarpor treatment treatment..... 2011 ei Sananda' te ekta article beriyechilo 'rupantor', seta dekhe amar mone hoyechilo, aami toh change hote pari, aami thik hote pari, amar chances ache !"(Personal conversation with a Male to Female transsexual).

[...my childhood went with the constant questioning of whether I am a boy or a girl, boy or a girl, I am a girl, I am a girl. Then I was made to believe that I am a boy, but I act like a girl. But why is it happening so? ..Then the phase of physical torture following the treatment. In 2011, I saw an article on "sex-change" in Sananda, a monthly magazine which made me decide that even I can be alright, even I have chances.]

Though it is still a concern whether mythological stories and characters could be treated as 'history' but yet it gives us a variety of information and probable relationships that could have imagined to have existed in a certain society or culture. Tagore would say that Mahabharat in the context of India was not a story written by a certain individual rather it is the collective history of a clan. (*"Eha kono byektibisheshar itihash nohe, eha ekti jatir sworochito swabhabik itihash"*. Tagore: *Bharotborhse itihasher dhara*) (Basu: 1954) The folklores, the beliefs, the imaginations of the Aryans gave rise to this as a text. However, once these orally passed stories and ideas are written down in the form of words and structures, it gives more accessibility of re-reading them as text in different

time and space. There lies an immense possibility thus to make sense of the 'social' through the mythological. Sociology in its present context has actually spread out its arena of study expanding its gaze from the search for meanings in the text towards the sociological play between images and between different cultural forms and institutions. The cultural sites are very much a space of our own manipulations and constructions and thus in no way predetermined and 'given', rather, a space of contestations and negotiations of specific interventions, inputs and collaboration.

The basic premise of this discussion is deconstructing a text, breaking it and reconstructing it in new forms. It is however directing to a multiplicity of meanings that are being constructed as no text is universal or stable in its nature. Derrida (1991) would say "deconstruction does not consist in a set of theorems, axioms, tools, rules, techniques, methods...there is no deconstruction. Deconstruction has no specific object". The process of deconstruction comes from its text and signifies the constraints that remain in analyzing it. "There is no method to deconstruction because texts literally deconstruct themselves in their impossible attempt to employ language as a 'transcendental signifier'" (Usher & Edwards: 1994) In the process of deconstruction there cannot be one 'authentic' explanation of reading or analyzing a particular text. While a text is being deconstructed through its writing, by its end becomes a self deconstructing product by itself.

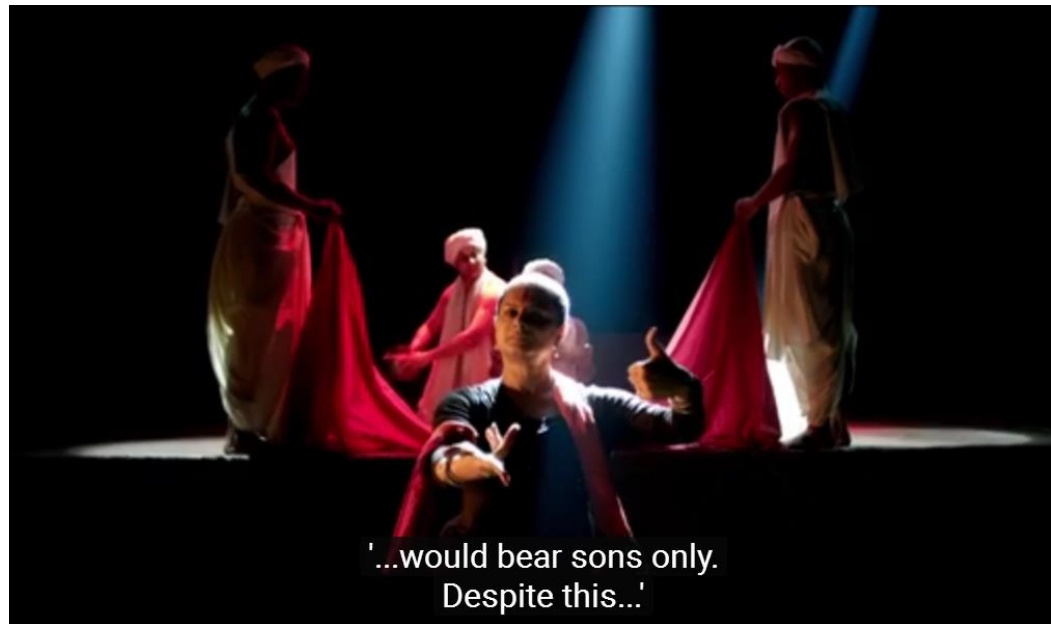
Spivak (1976) points that "all texts...are rehearsing their grammatological structure, self deconstructing as they constitute themselves". It thus becomes an infinite circle of deconstruction where the 'ultimate' never comes. It is not particularly a method, but might be taken as a rule of reading and interpreting texts. It looks also into the ideological underpinnings that operate within and try to analyze and look for that which might not have been emphasized or being overlooked or suppressed in certain ways. Deconstruction tries to find out the not so expected relationships present and the loose threads which might not be very evidently visible. It is an attempt to consider the various multiplicities of meanings of the interwoven words and tries to see how a text looks like when speak through different voices. The concepts are tried to be conceptualized from different frameworks, re conceptualized to find something new out of it in some sense.

Chitrangada-the dance drama written by Tagore in 1892, takes us to a different world from the perspective of Chitrangada who was the princess of Manipur and was conditioned to be a man because their family was blessed by Lord Shiva to always have a son as the heir in spite of which Chitrangada was born a girl. Meeting Arjun made her realize that she wants to become a woman. Thus started her journey from *ku-rupa* to *su-rupa* and her wish to be transformed to become feminine, which in contrary to the actual text of Mahabharata was very different where Chitrangada was just a small phase in Arjun's life while his exile for twelve years. However, when Arjun wished to marry her, he was given the condition that their son will be the successor of Manipur and later Babruvahana became the king of Manipur. It basically shows a matrilineal lineage which remains quite relevant in the progress of events in Mahabharata. What Tagore does is to look at Chitrangada in the mirror view where she has a self realization of her femininity her journey to achieve her wish. Rituparno relooked Tagore's text and redefines it in his own terms and imaginations. It shows simultaneously the life of Rudro, the protagonist played by Ghosh himself with the parallel performance of Chitrangada, on stage which ends with the idea that no transition is ever complete and rather an ongoing process.

"It raises the question whether the choice of an identity by the child is self-willed or imposed by society: It had to be an heir, that's all the father knew, to carry on the name and the family pride. And so, the training began. But the child, to be a girl or a boy, did anyone ask or even want to know? Children have dreams beyond their parents' expectations and they wish on stars and fallen eyelashes. Sometimes wishes come true unexpectedly to crown our life and turn the everyday, inside out." (03:14)

It is a story of wish, her father's wishes versus her own. It is the story of being what he wanted to be. Chitrangada is a story of desire, that you can choose your gender. Rudro chooses to be a dancer even after being forced to study engineering by his father. In a conversation with Partho, his partner in love, Rudro says that *"I don't dance with my body Partho. It comes from within. Fortunately, my art form is not gender bound. My dance is not limited to my gender Partho. And neither is my identity."* (01:07:18). Dance

form is a challenge to the patriarchy and are examples of androgyny with no regard for the conventions of partnering or sexually determined dynamic modulations, the absence of a single sexual logic or essence that would neatly divide the sexes or bifurcate the behaviors of dance or appearances says Hanna (1988) in *'Dance, Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance and Desire'*. Gender being the already scripted roles of sex, dance conveys gender through a process of modeling.



Rudra as a choreographer and director in the play 'Chitrangada' which is performed onstage in screen (4:48)

A cultural analysis reveals the way a dominant ideology is structured into the text and into the reading subject and those textual features that enable negotiation, resistance and oppositional reading of the same. It becomes interesting when the ethnographic study of the historically and socially located meaning that are made are related to the study of the predominant system of culture in the present context. Texts are produced within a political economy and thus the constructions of representations and the discursively constructed textual social world however require an engagement with the social structuring of practices in order to get a broader perspective of structured social differentiation and their historical transformations in respect to class, status, gender, nationality, ethnicity etc.

The character of Chitrangada as well is seen to have evolved in these different texts in time and space and also a construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of a character in these three different art-forms in the lines of sexuality. The mysterious and mystical ambiguity of androgyny in Tagore's text has always been a treasure in the Bengali literature and this has been a constant source of inspiration to Rituparno which got reflected in his own imagination and ways of expression in his art forms. It is in a way autobiographical where his wishes to become a woman are portrayed with the parallel representation of Chitrangada being transformed. Ghosh was very aware of this sense of autobiography that would reflect through this film and thus he posed the question at the onset through the councillor (played by Anjan Dutta) Subho, asks him about the performance of the play Chitrangada on stage, and comments that it might look autobiographical, or is it that he wanted and Rudro (played by Rituparno Ghosh) replies that, it might seem so because he knows Rudra personally.

Raju (name changed) a transgender informant of mine thinks that it is just the story of Rituparno Ghosh through out. He wanted to say something to the audience and he did that. "I really don't think he had any empathetic concerns for any of us". It is a film by Rituparno, of Rituparno and for Rituparno. This is a view that is shared by any of the informants while the discussion where they felt Rituparno Ghosh himself wished to be in the limelight where he is, and he had less concerns about the issues of 'others' who were like him.

A student thinks that Ghosh wanted to express his pain through these films. The ostracization and trouble that he faced, he just wanted to communicate them to the audience. His eyes are full of pain. If acting is concerned, he is not a great actor, he has only a definite way of talking and behaving which hardly changes, but in these three films which are common is his pain which comes out through these narratives.

“Rituparno could take someone else for acting being such a brilliant director. But somewhere I feel he remains self obsessed. As if the ‘queer’ character could just be played by a ‘queer’ like him. He doesnot represent us. He is in some different class and inspite of his agency, he never communicated with people like us, even when we needed him by our side”, says a kothi.

An around 60 year old man comments that Rituparno is a very good film maker. “His films like Dahan, Unishe April, Asukh are some of my favorites, where he tries to say something very lightly, very nicely with some meaningful conversations and acting. But I felt ‘Chitrangada’ (the film) was through out trying to prove some point, something which is not natural. I felt the general subtlety that Ghosh generally use in his films seems missing in this one. About sex change, I have nothing to say. It must be very painful. But I really don’t understand the meaning of gender reassignment surgery, its meanings and need”.

When an individual decides to have a sex reassignment surgery, the questions which remains to bother is whether one could really change their sense of ‘self’ through the series of operation and is able to live with the new identity forgetting all the socializations and ways of life of the previous. It’s a struggle in itself other than the stigmatization and marginalization caused. The first struggle that one faces is to communicate this wish of changing ones own self. In this film, this is shown very maturedly when Rudra decides to change his sex to ‘technically’ become a woman to be able to adopt a child with Partho, his partner after becoming just like any other man-woman couple. Though Partho tried to make him understand about the side-effects and that his body would get hampered in this surgery which is the main instrument of Rudra’s work life, he also being a dancer. Partho even poses a question to him

*Partho: then admit it that you are not happy with your natural self.
You just want to become a woman. By force.*

Rudra: Most of us are not happy with what we naturally are. Then boys wouldnot go to gym to become a man developing six packs and woman wouldnot thread and wax to become a woman (01:08:00)

This is a pertinent question that Partho poses to Rudra because changing the sex which Rudra calls as just a ‘technical’ change to his body as he had no intention of wearing salwars or saris and be what he is, then what make the affair of ‘changing’ the sex so important. In reply even Rudro’s perspective actually forces us to see that how we are trained to see some attributes of both ‘ideal’ male and female as ‘attractive’. Much of this in recent times is also the creation of the media. The advertisements of fair and lovely for example shows how important it is for a woman to change her complexion in order to be confident and successful. Similarly, the men are shown in typical terms of power and position. These markers of market create a sense of identity seem to influence the masses hugely and thus we as individuals keep looking for happiness in terms of the created needs and created sense of self which ultimately remains unattainable. However the thread of hegemonic idea runs through these portrayal and projection which again can no way to ignored. Even men faces this whole pressure of ‘being a man’, just as woman does.

Coming back to the discussion, when Rudra clearly states his wish to become a woman, which he supposed would create problem, he wanted to leave his home and be with Partho. In the dining table discussion, (much like Sid’s mother in the film *Memories in March* that we discussed earlier) his father thought Rudro, his son to come back to a ‘normal’ life through proper medication and counselling, but with the decision of his son’s sex change operation he was shown to be extremely shocked. His mother were shown to be skeptical about Partho being the partner as she believed that he would leave him with time and there Rudro again comes with a strong dialogue, ‘*what is permanent, maa?*’, to which his mother had nothing to say. However, this film showed that his father was the one who inspite of his skepticism was with his son during surgery, and probably this is the power of cinema to hold a sense of hope. In actuality, it is still a question as to how many parents would ultimately accept their son as they are, or their son in becoming a woman for that matter. The most number of violences are heard to be coming within the

families. The society remains unprepared to accept the change in identity of an individual as well.



This is the scene (1:15:25) when Rudra informs his parents about the change he is hoping for, that he will go for a surgery which will change him as a woman in six months and his parents are shown to be extremely hurt

The other significant question comes through the scene where the nurse in the hospital calls 'Rudra' as 'Sir' and when he says that he is going through a series of operation to become a woman, which needs a lot of preparation, *'if you keep calling me Sir, it would be more and more difficult for me to prepare myself'*. (9:36) The reaction of the nurse is shown as very real. She then again calls him 'Sir' and corrects it as 'Ma'am', when he says her to call him Rudra. The nurse represents a part of the society and the individuals who choose to go through gender reassignment surgery needs to negotiate with this 'society' at every now and then. It is not that the nurse (in this case), had any intention of hurting or judging Rudra. It is the social norm that teaches one certain etiquette, with certain vocabulary and meanings and thus the process of physical change becomes even more complex. Change thus needs to come at various levels rather than just an individual's own transformation with their own body or 'self'.



A Scene of the significant conversation between the nurse and Rudra (09:21)

Our body is expected to behave in terms of the 'sex' that we belong to, but the major disconnect creates a conflict in the realms of desires and wishes for a person who cannot associate between the body and the soul and thus keeps struggling for the fulfillment of their penetrated desires inspite of the constant resistance and ostracization. In a conversation with Subho, Rudro in the hospital says that Partho, inspite of being a drug addict was chosen as the percussionist in their dance drama team. As a reason to this Rudro says that he himself has gone through this struggle of discrimination for being effeminate, so he thought if he could help Partho overcome the social 'stigma' he was carrying due to his addictive nature.

Niloja (name changed) is now working in an NGO in Kolkata who would say that "...my childhood was never smooth, though my early childhood was spent like other children but, since five years of my age I started thinking myself as a girl, I don't know why, but I remember. I went to Julian Day- a co-ed school, was in Red house but I never liked boys games. Was never interested in Football or Cricket, rather I was friends with girls. During the tiffin period, I use to sit with Sharmistha, Tanushree and others, chat and shared my tiffin with them. I was mostly by myself, sometimes walked alone around the garden. I use to play "ranna-bati" (kitchen games) after coming back home. I was the brother of two of my elder sisters but I could never think myself as so. Chotdi gave me bangles to wear, applied kajal. I use to play a mother with the doll on my lap."

She says, "...when I grew a little older, I told my chotdi. During 13-14 years of my age, there started a lot of problems and I was taken to the doctor. The treatment started. The counselor gave me medicines but I use to throw them. I was even slapped by my counselor in SSKM, though now I hear that counselors are not suppose to slap, but when my counselors tried to make me understand that I am a boy but I refuse to understand, he told me to draw myself and I drew myself as a girl with the bindi when he slapped me and recommended for ECT,

electric shock therapy. There were three sessions that happened and I lost all my strength.”



This scene (1:16:39) represents the enactment of the on stage transformation that Chitrangada had gone through after meeting Arjun. This also is shown as the change in Rudra’s life with his breast implantment surgery that he was going through.

Arvind Narrain would say that when a heterosexual doctor treats a homosexual patient there remains a huge gap which sometimes becomes quiet crucial as their discourses are also developed through law and religion and obviously the social norms that most of them think as “normal”. He cites some of the conversations he had with doctors in Bangalore, where the psychiatrist says that *“homosexual people, because of the social pressure, donot have relationships which last long. They have issues of how to deal with pain of break up etc...there are those who go to seek sexual satisfaction by paying others for sex.”*(2006:59) Another councillor says, *“in today’s world, young people have to fight both against peer pressure and the media, both of which are very strong. I believe that people should be free, but not free to commit suicide or to commit homosexuality. When we talk about freedom, we should ask the question, if God would want you to do that particular act”.* (2006:59) These ideas of a doctor remains even more pressurizing when the family takes the individuals to the doctor to treat where they go through another form of violence of the medicine. When heterosexuality is believed so rigorously, even a small question against it provokes resistance which is ultimately thrust upon on its patients which doubles the trouble than the hope to reduce the pain.

As one grows up from a child to an adult, they try and concretize their wishes that have crowned their lives since forever with their available sources and power at that point of life.

Niloja decided to go for the sex change operation when she was around 25 years old and her family was not with her. She also adds that since childhood she always wore different kinds of clothes as in not the usual shirt and pants for boys. “Chheler jama juto konodin e bhalo lagto naa”, she mentions. When her father took her to the tailor she use to give different designs to make and one day she remembers, “dorji najehaal hoye giye baba ke bole apnar chheleta naa ektu onnyo dhoroner, o je sob nokshaola jamakapod pore, shee sob aami banate parbo naa. Baba bolechilo tor jonnyo maan ijot sob chhole gelo.” She says that her fight was fought alone where her family was never with her, though she mentions some names of her friends whom she wishes to thank to support her to become what she is today.



The picture of Niloja after having a successful sex change operation (used with her permission)

“I have managed the money bit by bit all by myself. I worked in Sathi, Manosh Bangla, infact worked since long to get the money for the sex change operation. I always use to get pocket money from my baba, rupees 20-30 each day, I even saved that money. When I grew up, I pierced my ear and nose, stopped cutting my hair. At that time there were no pictures of mine in my home. I decided then that I will be what I wish to be, whatever happens. The trouble in my home went on for 8-10 years, but I was adamant that if I am alive I will get the

operation done. In 2012, I did the breast augmentation. I took the money, admitted myself, stayed in the operation theatre for three days, then a friend released me. My female self came into being. 2013th February 23rd, finally I did the genital reassignment surgery. It was a very painful process.” Niloja remembered.

Rituparno had a deep bond with his mother in real life which got reflected in this film as well. Though Rudro’s father continuously tried to resist against his behavior, the mother however negotiated between both of them. Rudro’s father never liked his son to have danced. But when Rudra actually visits the hospital to become a woman, his parents were seen to realize their mistake of not accepting him as he is. His mother says, ‘*amader jedd, chhele chheler moto hobe*’. Father replies, ‘*chhele chheler moto hobe, etai toh swabhabik*’, and his mother replies, ‘*jeta jaar swobhab setai toh swabhabik*’. Here comes the question of nature and nurture. What is natural? And who decides it to be natural? Is it the culture which projects something as ‘normal’ and the sets the markers of normality? Or is it the individual who in actual live their lives decides whats normal for them. The ‘normal’ might not be the normal for all.



The following picture is a scene (20:27) when Rudra is informing and inviting his parents about the final show of ‘Chitrangada’ in Birla Sabhagar. This is the moment when Rudro says that he is playing the role of ‘Modon’, the cupid of love in the dance drama.

The picture clearly shows the astonishment and anger in the face of the father in knowing his son performing the role of Modon. Modon is the one who transformed Chitrangada from ‘a man’ to a ‘woman’. Ghosh deconstructed the character of Modon as a ‘plastic surgeon’, who operates one in changing their physical appearance. Modon in

literature means the god of love who through his clever ways is believed to be responsible for falling in love and then gradually changing in the act of love.



Rudra, dressing himself for the role of Modon, having a conversation with Partho(32:22)

The name of the protagonist seems to be well thought out. One of the names Arjun was called was Partho and Rudro signifies destruction, power and is also the name of Lord Shiva. It was Arjun, whom Chitrangada fell in love with and then wished to be transformed in order to be able to convince Arjun for marriage. Likewise, here Rudra, in her wish to stay with Partho and having a family with him, adopting a child after being ‘cerfied’ as a woman wished to go through the process of transformation.

However, the film closes with the positive note of the parents accepting Rudro with his changed identity, where the father asks, *“amra lawyer er sathe kotha bollam, tomake ekta affidavit korate hobe, tumi ki tomar naam change korte chao.....tumi jeta korecho, seta is a change in entity, seta legally register naa korale, aamake will-twil kicchu change korte debe naa.....sekhane my only son and heir lekha ache ! Seta modify naa korle tumi mushkil e porte”*.(1:47:41) To this, Rudra again questions, *‘which ‘me’ are you talking about baba? The son you made your will for, I am not that!’* One’s association with name and identity is a pertinent aspect of one’s life. We are all known by our names which gives us the first impression of whether we are a boy or a girl. Thus it’s actually a dilemma where one faces when their sex is changed. Niloja says that *‘I changed my name, yet there are people who would call me with my previous name inspite of my protests sometimes to humiliate me and this happens even in my community where one does this intentionally just to tease me’*. Thus this process of change and adapting the new identity continuously is in progress where though they hold a certificate to be a woman, there is always a constant comparison between the “real” woman who could bear

children and be a mother. And thus their continual urge of settling down in a marriage which though again is a conformation to the normative institutionalization, they are unable to fulfill their wish. Thus the perennial conflict remains. In one of the dialogues Partho says to Rudra that *“the man I loved was not this...not this half thing. If I have to have a woman, I would rather have a real woman. Not this synthetic one.”*



This scene (1:25:47) is when Rudro had his breast implants done and he shows the change in his body to Partho, and Partho says to cover himself up showing no interest in him.

The question of ‘identity’ keeps coming through different conversations and dialogue in the film to make the audience aware of the pain and confusion, one goes through even when they wish to change their sex with their own wish. As individuals they themselves are a ‘social’ being. They themselves have certain presuppositions, learnings and socialization which unable one to go beyond certain point of performing oneself in the ‘social’ stage. In the last scene, the councillor says Rudra that he has to die. He can’t continue with two lives at a time. To change, he has to let one of the self go to be able to live the changed life. This is actually a strong statement. Changing of physical entity doesn’t guarantee the change in the sense of identity for any individual, though ‘body’ is closely associated with ‘self’. The foremost struggle is with the own self that one needs to go through and thus in this medical process counselling is a must. The counselling process tries and reassures that one is strong enough to face the change themselves before they face anyone else in the society. The end of the film tells the audience that Rudra never had a councillor because he did not want it. Subho, the councillor was a part of his hallucination that one goes through in times of deep stress.

Niloja would say that it is almost impossible for one to go through this operation without a rigorous counselling. At the end, Rudro calls off the operation, even after having the breast implants, requesting Dr. Shome to take off the implants, to go back to the self he was before.

Culture is to be understood in relation to the existing ideology to which laws remains an important construct to be looked at. Though laws at large gives a space of empowerment for them whom the mainstream looks at as marginalized but laws always doesnot work the same way in the individual level as the ideas and perception of people doesnot seem to change very easily and needs a lot of time to gradually think otherwise than their taken for granted book of knowledge. Rudra decided to ultimately go for a sex reassignment surgery because he wanted to have a child with Partho and the Indian law doesnot allow two males to adopt. Rudra says to the doctor that *“to me, it’s a technical necessity. All I need from you is a certificate that I’m a woman. No other changes. I am not going wear a sari. So to me, it’s more of a cosmetic surgery.”* (01:10:03) However, Rudro’s change couldnot be graciously taken by Partho and they part their ways, when again Rudro realizes his urge to be what he was rather than welcoming his wish to become a woman in certificate.



This scene (1:31:41) is where Partho and Kasturi comes to meet Rudro in the hospital. This moment is when Kasturi (played by Raima Sen) and Rudro were seen together with Partho. Partho later admits that the Rudro he loved was not this, rather a vivacious, energetic, eccentric and creative dancer. If he has to have a woman, then he would rather chose a real woman who could give him his own babies and own blood.

In the contrary, Niloja would say that “the gender reassignment surgery is a complex decision and thus there are phases of counseling

that one's goes through before confirming the decision to change the sex because coming back is not something very easy as shown in the film. One cannot go for the operation before they are absolutely sure themselves in going through the process. They are shown the videos of the operations before they are executed to them and are asked if they are ready for such a painful process. And most importantly, one cannot avoid a counselor's grant of permission before the process of change begins and decide to change their sex just to adopt a child. One is only taken to the operation theatre when he/she is absolutely firm in their wish to change their sex through operative terms and not in a state of constant dilemma as a new struggle of accepting the 'new-identity' awaits outside the operation theatre both from the world within and outside."

However, there might be a wish to be back to the earlier 'body' as Rana (name changed) would say who changed from a female to male and is not in a good health presently. He spends a lot on medicines and would say that the struggle for a female to male is even harder as he remains incapable of any sexual activities and thus stays all alone in a flat in New Alipore. She was born as a female, but could never behave like one. But inspite of his inconveniences to fit in, he never thought to change his sex, though he dressed mostly like a man. Till the time his mother was alive, he could not think of sex change operation, but after she died, he decided to get rid of her breasts and went for a changing process through medicines and operations. At the age of 45, he feels that he shouldn't have experimented with his body. There are times when he suddenly urinate on his bed and feels really sad about his health issues. Spending so much of money seems to be a burden to him now. He wishes to come back to his 'god given self' and would continuously regret his decision.

The body is said to be the primal identity of a human. For people like Rudra, Niloja or Rana, it is this body that has become a battleground. Niloja inspite of being happy with her ownself now, being a woman, is still struggling to prove herself as a 'woman' in various phases of her life. For her it is the struggle with the society, whereas Rana or Rudro struggles with ownself along with societal expectations. Rudro while talking to her mother after her breast reassignment surgery would say, "*our own body that we take so much as permanent is not even so*" and thus the whole notion of permanence remains in question and their lies the fluidity of one's sexual expression and their wish of 'doing' and 'undoing' gender. Chitrangada is thus not only the story of one's wish versus their parents wish; rather it's also a journey of one's wish versus the change of that wish in their own evolving time and space. It's a struggle within and without. It is the journey and the search of identity which never stops rather is a lifelong partner in existence.

IV.Songs in the films

The music or the songs in the films does hold an important part in the portrayal of the narratives. It becomes particularly significant when it is seen as a phenomenon to narrate a particular instance, as a romantic engagement or any emotional expression or the evolvment of the story or to emphasize a particular moment in the film. It at times also meaningfully takes the story forward. Thus to emphasize on the placement of the songs and the meanings it projects seems relevant in the discussion of film discourse. Kironmoy Raha (1991) mentions that Bengali cinema relied less on songs to draw its audience when compared with other language films. Initially songs and music were seen as supporting aids and not as one among the components of a complex art form in its totality. He thinks the reason to be the rich literary tradition that Bengalee as a community had and always attracted the masses in the form of cinema.

Satyajit Ray while talking about music in his book *Our Films, Their Films*, mentions that the presence of songs in Indian cinema could be for one reason that the Indians are quite fond of music, but then again he questions that whether Indians are so fond of music that their films cannot sell without songs in it. He then mentions that "the vast conglomerate mass that makes up the Indian public, the cinema is the only form of

available inexpensive entertainment. They have not the choice that the western public has of music halls, revues, concerts, and even, sometimes of a permanent circus. Yet the craving for spectacle, for romance, for a funny turn or two, for singing and dancing remains and has somehow to be met. If the film does not meet it, nothing else will” (1976:72-73). However this is also true that Ray has viewed the audience “in terms of tired untutored minds with undeveloped tastes” who needs a “well mixed pot pourri of popular entertainment”. He mentions that sometimes the excessive songs are intentionally placed with the purpose of the audience to be aware of the artificiality of the whole thing. This view did not stop Ray to use songs in his own creative endeavor with much care.

Ghatak on the other hand says that the musical tradition especially in the Hindi film industry is a monstrous tradition, which is also quite uncinematic. These are the traditions which “stems from the corrupt, inartistic and vulgar art forms of jattras, nautankis, opera plays and other hybrid stage productions” which were most in practice just before the talkies came into the scene. (1987:41) Thus when the Bengali educated bourgeoisie has the power of film making, they chose to differ from this tradition in serious film making. Talking in reference to the Bengali audience, Ghatak says that “ours is a naturally melody loving people” having a epic attitude which is still a living tradition in our country, especially in the rural spaces and according to him, the largest of the cinema audience resides in those spaces. Whatever may be the view about the presence of songs in movies, it does hold a very important place in the narrative, be it for mere entertainment or meaningfully to express emotions or carry forward the story.

In the above mentioned films there are some very important songs which grasp the tone of the cinema through a collective cultural imagination. In *Memories in March*, the song ‘*Baho manorathe*’ was written by Ghosh himself and was sung by Subhamita Banerjee, Debojyoti Mishra being the music director and music composer. This song is heard when the camera shows the site of the accident where Sid is being taken to the hospital in the ambulance and Arnob in a state of shock and pain accompanies him till the hospital and then ultimately had to let him go. The song depicts the picture that how Radha with the hope of meeting Krishna, prepares herself- *kaajra nayane saagaje bayane/kusume sajanu kesh*, looks for him in *jamuna pare gahana andhare/ghanar*

pavan majhe but unable to find him feels, *sakhi chir abhagini hum/baithe ekakini pohano rajani/tobo nailo shyaam*. The love between Krishna and Radha was never accepted by the social norms, but was unconditional. The song *kahan sang khelu holi aaj brajapur/keu gela chore hume mohana nithur/birasa brindavan nirasa upavana/ jaate ko brajero bala bedana nidhur* also expresses the pain of Radha and Brijbasi when Shyam had gone away which is associated with the pain of Arnob and his mother and colleague in his sudden death. The story of Radha and Krishna through the background score actually becomes significantly relevant while understanding the narrative meaningfully through the mythological underpinnings. The other song *kaisi ajeeb daawat hai yea/main bin bulayi mehmaan/gharwala kahaan laapata/sab chhod ke sunsaan* is the song which speaks about the emotions of the mother, the thoughts and feeling that she is having while staying and discovering the spaces in the flat of her son who is no more. She feels like a sudden guest where the host seems missing and everything around feels so empty. Much of the thoughts and feeling of this movie comes through the song which happens as a background score, rather than sung by anyone in particular on screen. The association of the mythological stories¹⁴¹ gets well established through the lyrics of the songs become meaningful expressions of the emotions and thus the music and lyrics become all in one with the on screen visualization giving it a new dimension and a different perspective that is not overtly talked about in the film per se. *Arekti Premer Golpo*, the second film in the trilogy also sets the tone with the song *bonomali tumi, porojonome hoyo radha/kandiyo kandiyo, amaro moto kore kandiyo/krishno krishno naam bodone bohiyo..* which keeps coming in different contexts of the film. Krishna, however becomes a character of significant importance because of its fluidity that it portrays throughout the Indian mythological stories and also the love of Radha and Krishna, which is so deep, yet unfulfilled. It was said that their marriage was performed in a gandharva style where the nature was in witness but was secret to everyone else in the society. In *Arekti Premer Golpo*, Abhiroop Sen (Rituparno Ghosh) was in love with Basudev Kumar Roy

¹⁴¹Ravi Vasudevan while talking about the “Bombay Social Film”, takes the example of the movie ‘Devdas’ by Bimal Roy and mentions that when Devdas leaves Parvati, Parvati is seen to be listening to Baul songs that actually is very specific to the cultural context it is based signifying a similar plot when Krishna is seen to be leaving and Radha is in sorrow. The characters are both within and without and the audience associate with both at the same time being familiar with the stories and narrative of both in the film and outside.

(Indraneil Sengupta) who was already married, (same was the case for Chapal Bhaduri during his time), which however made the relationship even more complex as in the society, marriage hold the recognition and thus the 'power' to negate a relationship which is not even recognized by the society. This song '*poro jonome hoyo radha*' depicts the pain of Radha when Krishna goes away and she wishes Krishna to be Radha in the next birth just to realize how much she is in pain with the continuous thoughts of her lover, just as Abhiroop feels it when Basu even after being in love with him ultimately had to leave with his pregnant wife at the end of the story and was in a dilemma throughout the journey of their relationship. The relevance of the song is in drawing a parallel picture of the narrative through a mythological discourse sung in a *baul* tone, again a discourse which defy the social norms and speaks of humanity and crossing boundaries. *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*, is a text deconstructed from the dance drama of Tagore's in the same name, and thus throughout the narrative we find Tagore's song which is again very well placed in accordance to the mood of the story. Songs, individually as a form of art has its own importance, but when it is tied with the narratives, it not only expresses the plot more meaningfully but also gives a new meaning to the story which the director wishes to express but not in the actual visualization but through a imagined shared book of knowledge expanding the span of imagination and understanding of the visuals. It gives a narrational story which is external to the story telling in the film; rather it merges at some time with the shared emotions and associations s society experiences. Thus the specific characters expand its space into the wider mythic symbolism and significance of specific events or actions.

V.Epilogue

Muraleedharan. T (2006) while discussing on *Crisis of Desire: A Queer Reading of Cinema and Desire in Kerala* says that a queer reading is not one that attempts to look at things from a 'different' angle, but one that seeks to demolish those very angles that perpetuate hetero-patriarchal visions. I however would not totally agree with this way of reading films as I think demolishing the angles which might perpetuate patriarchal visions remains quiet difficult while reading films as the characters that we deal with are seem to be trapped in the societal norm and structure that they either want to go out or

remain in, but the values have been so innate that the dialogues or the perceptions that the films deal with has a “shared knowledge” of the patriarchal space that it is based on. The reading rather would become more meaningful if we try to read them critically. The mainstream cinema mostly lack the sensibility where queer themes if at all dealt are mostly dealt with shock or laughter whereas these films somehow tries to say a different story of the struggles and pain which seems like an insider’s eye through the portrayal. Cinema now has become one of the most relevant medium to study sexuality or identities because of its ubiquitous presence as the popular medium negotiating with the powerful ideological apparatus through subjectivities and narratives. Though it is not really ‘real’ but it does create an imagery of imaginations that help us to visualize the real constructing ourselves into the ‘real’. These stories remoulds subjectivities, desires and pleasures creating a new culture and circulating it, it to some extent gives a hope for the better world someday when the stigmatization will diminish and where individuals will have the freedom to talk about themselves just as they wish.

Other than *Memories in March*, the other two films had a reference point to begin with, one being about a well known jatra artist and other the mythological character of Chitrangada. These references however impact more on the audience as they try and relate with them from their earlier disposition of knowledge which somehow gets a new exposure. *Arekti Premer Golpo*, has Chapal Bhaduri as a male impersonating female roles and also associating with the role that he plays on stage, but he has no strength to portray himself as he wished once he was in his “off stage” life, whereas the character of Abhiroop being a director who lives in Delhi, has a better space to be as he wished and thus dressed according to his wish though he faced ridicule various times. He was shown to be more confident to deal with his sexual orientation being in the class and position he is in contrary to Bhaduri who stays in a North Kolkata locality which is a much conservative space than that of Delhi. Basudev is the character which shared bisexual traits and tried maintaining both his marriage and his relationship with the man, which ultimately seemed impossible and thus the easy way was to choose the family rather than the struggling life to live otherwise in our society. *Memories in March* is a much simple love story between two gay lovers but the crisis was seen from the point of view of the mother who gets to know about her son’s orientation when he is no more. It is a beautiful

script which captures the mind of the audience with its appropriate songs, dialogues and much needed silences. It reflects a sense of maturity among the characters, none of whom are shown to be “crying” loud after the ‘death’ rather the portrayal was brilliant through the eyes, the expressions; the sudden remembrance and the control of sudden tears are brilliantly dealt with. The film does not have Sid in person but at the end of the cinema, the audience also discovers him through his mother and friends. *Chitrangada*, seems a more complex film dealing with a performance onscreen which talks about a character who was brought up or socialized to be a man who till met Arjun and felt love behaved like a man. It is after her feeling of love that she wishes to transform as a woman. It is also the story of the choreographer Rudra who on the one hand is preparing his artists for the play of *Chitrangada* and also associating himself in different ways with the character wishing to fulfill his desire to become a woman after falling in love with Partho, the percussionist. Through the character of the counselor Subho, the imaginary world of Rudra comes into scene which is actually his inner voice which ultimately made him realize that we all are in the process of making and ultimately executes his wish by calling off the sex change operation that he was going through with so much pain and struggle. Through these portrayals, different dimensions of a complications and crisis of a ‘queer’ individual come into picture. The ‘dining’ table in all the films attracts the attention which remains the space of conversations, revelations and understanding which to some extent also happened in the case of the audience who started discussing on the issue of alternative genders in their private spaces, the dining room where the urban middle class is seen to sit together for food and conversations. The mother of the protagonist, other than in *Chitrangada* seems to be absent physically but her presence remains as a soothing corner in the fight of the character interestingly. It somehow also speaks about Ghosh in real life that was very close to his mother and shared a space of comfort, the feeling to home through his ‘maa’.

In the process of reading these films and also in conversations with the ‘queer’ informants, it came out clearly that there were to some extent a feeling of resentment in the representation of these films. Ghosh as the protagonist in the films could not be differentiated than that of Ghosh, a film maker in Kolkata and his personal choices of living his own gender. Ghosh was well aware of the fact that he would be seen through a

personal lens and not as the part of the narrative in the films. *‘The subject matter on sexual orientation is far more important than the strange connections that are being made between the film (in reference to Arekti Premer Golpo) and my life...I like the process of acting but I have the fear of being typecast in homosexual characters. One reason why I did this role is because I knew any other actor would make a spoof of it. You can’t play gay if you have no empathy for homosexuality....i think actors who refuse homosexual roles are homophobic and probably latent homosexual. They aren’t afraid to play rapist, but they are scared of playing gays. When I offered Aftab Shivdesani and Kunal Kapoor a gay role, they freaked out’*.¹⁴² It seems that the characters that he played, and mostly the professions that the character played merged with the broader imagination of Rituparno Ghosh and thus the audience feels it’s the tale about himself rather than an issue. This contrary view of Ghosh himself and the audience would again raise this question as to what if for example Shakukh Khan or Salman Khan, the hero of Bollywood Cinema played these characters, would the questions still persist. However, interestingly in *Arekti Premer Golpo* and also *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*, these dilemmas did come onscreen. The association of Ghosh, as a gay director and Ghosh, the protagonist merge also because there is a preconception of him in the minds of the people and there was a continuous search of his life through the portrayal of the cinematic visuals which to some extent lacked the intensity or importance of the issues the films tried to say.

The reading of these films also raises certain inevitable queries and reflection on love and marriage, the issue of law and the democratic space that the Indian Constitution stand for and also the role of the family that needs detailed intervention not only through this films but also through the eyes of its audience and thus in the following chapter I wish to look at these issues closely with the experiences and conversations that I had during my fieldwork regarding talking about these films where these issues remained unavoidable.

¹⁴² The Times of India, Mumbai Mirror, October 2009

CHAPTER FOUR

REFLECTIONS

“To consider homosexuality as an ‘alternative’ lifestyle is to leave unquestioned heterosexuality as a norm”. (Nivedita Menon: 2012)

While the narratives of the films and the audiences probe us to question various aspects of normality-abnormality, expected-unexpected, choice-coerce, some of the concerns which rise as primarily significant in understanding these concepts are the issue of identity in a so called ‘democratic space’. Democracy of a civil state guarantees a sense of space, freedom and agency, but does it actually allow these aspects in the actual living of a good life for all its citizen or it fails in its execution where the so called ‘majority’ dominates the ‘minority’. Being in the margins, does the voices of the ‘minority’ actually matters when it comes to the execution of its laws? In a society, where heterosexual marriage or love relationship is a norm, it remains a struggle for the various alternative genders to actually find a ‘free’ space to express their feelings being tagged as a ‘deviant’. In a contested space of this kind, it is a humble attempt to understand some of the questions that arise which needs to be discussed much more than could be done in the following chapter as it ultimately is about an individual’s life of dignity and respect.

I. Understanding the social dynamics through these films: Perspectives from the ‘field’

The discussions on these three films not only gives us the narratives of dilemma, crisis, and the struggle of so called “queer” individuals, but also takes us through a journey where one tend to reflect on certain questions on existence. The prominent issue being of ‘identity’ and how we are all somehow expected to identity ourselves with the existing categories or classifications available in the societal level, different other related concerns also arise as to where and how then we experience the so called democratic space which the Indian state seem to guarantee through the Constitution. In a country like India where the majority of the population is in the utter need of a square meal per day, how then these issues of ‘sexuality’ and expression of self identity actually is perceived. In a state where still ‘honour killings’ are practiced, marriages are arranged through

parents with prior attention through caste, where love marriages are still not common in all parts of the country, there its evident that a homosexual partnership will be one of the forbidden ideas as well. The struggle of the queer activists remains a challenging act in changing the laws of the State that is as old as the Colonial rule. The verdict of the Delhi Court in decriminalizing same sex affair between consenting adults in 2nd July, 2009 and again overturning the judgment by Supreme Court in 11th December 2013 upholding the value of homosexuality as unnatural, but recently on 2nd of February 2016, the Supreme Court declares that it will re-consider and re-think on its judgment regarding the IPC 377. It's actually interesting to see that in a space of turmoil where the state itself is in a state of flux considering and reconsidering on the issue of homosexuality there are 2.5 million gay who actually spoke about their identity coming out of the closet reporting to the Ministry of Health. There must be so many more who are not even conscious or can't afford to think about themselves in the struggle of livelihood. All these films were based on a context where the persons who spoke about their sexual preference with confidence actually are well established and belong from a particular class that gets reflected through their way of living. Ornob, who is visible on screen in *Memories in March* and his partner Siddharth, whom the audience knows by the voice, earns quite well in the ad agency that they work in. Abhiroop Sen, is a welknown film maker from Delhi in *Arekti Premer Golpo* and it also hinges on the fact that Chapal Bhaduri might be a known face now as many known and unknown film makers and journalists write about this 'forgotten diva' of the Bengali stage in *Jatra* but however he is still closeted physically and mentally who stays aloof in his North Kolkata house. Again in *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*, Rudra is a choreographer who stages his performances quite often is a respected person in his troop. Thus all these stories are obviously a story of struggle but it's also true that it talks about a definite upper middle class where the family is seen to be more or less supportive. Kaushik Ganguly, in one of his interviews says that *this film (Arekti Premer Golpo) will not be released in rural Bengal and he extends saying that the people in the village are left to know many more things and have to deal with troubles of electricity, education, and thus they might not be confused with homosexuality now. This film will be released in the Kolkata.....and if it influences even five people, it will worth it.* The issue

of identity is never a simple understanding rather it's complex and complicated and more so with the time that we are living in.

A. The issue of 'identity'

The growing diversity in the sphere of post-modern market and the rise of different social movements made the issue of 'difference' and 'identity' a relevant one to be looked deeper into. The dimensions of politics has expanded its nature which is not only bound to the affairs of the state and the election processes rather has become a part of various personal and private affairs making the statement "personal is political" true in every sense of the term. The 'society' that we live in have various life-worlds and micro-groups and is better perceived as postmodern collage of micro-cultures. Thus the experience of the "self" grows in relation to this position, interaction with other actors and through the subjectivity of one's experiences. It is thus a struggle of identity and coherence against the fragmentation of the 'self'. The constant engagement and negotiation with the identity given and the experience within itself conflictualize experience and are critical to reconstructing our capacity to make sense of a social world undergoing profound transformation. The changing economy actually facilitated the women in the labour force which gave the sense of independence. Gradually, increased the rates of divorce, single headed families and people living alone and the technological developments in new reproductive technologies and abortions procedures also gave a sense of liberation in the field of sexuality. It is in the end of the 19th Century that the gay and lesbian movement asserted the rights of the individuals questioning and challenging the conventional binary categories of male and female and spoke about a identity different to those. Jean Francois Lyotard (1984) while talking about *The Postmodern Condition* points that the metanarratives of Marxism, liberalism, radical feminism were critically looked at by the post modernist views and the sense of 'subjectivity' that arises out of the present cultural system is not 'unified' rather a 'fragmented' and 'multiple' identity.

As soon as a child is born, the nurse/doctor says 'it's a boy/girl', starting our journey of 'labeling' and identifying in certain boxes. Later gradually, with ones power, position, interests, they choose to highlight one category over the other. 'Identity' is also

constructed with the reflexivity of the self where one label themselves in relation to the various 'social' classifications and categories which happens through 'self-categorization' in relation to 'others'. In this process, an individual associates with a social group of people where the sense of 'in-group' (and consequently the sense of 'community') and 'out group' develops. One identifies themselves in reference to the similarities and dissimilarities of different 'givenness' of attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, behavior, style of speech etc that these groups associates with. Hogg and Abrams(1988) points that social categories in which individuals place themselves are parts of a structured society which exist in relation to contrasting categories. There remains an issue of 'power' that governs through these labeling of self in its context of time and space, which also evokes meanings in form of expectations with regard to others. The sense of recognition develops with the way one 'acts' in the social structure performing its roles and counter roles. Role identity focuses on the match between the individuals meaning of occupying a particular role and the behaviors that they perform enacting those roles. By taking these 'roles' one negotiates with the meanings and situations and the identifications in its situated context of interaction. On the contrary, the deviance arises when one refuses or feels unable to perform that 'given' and 'expected' role where they are placed in.

In *Memories in March*, the mother Aarti comes to know about a new side of his son, the sexual preference which discloses a new 'identity' to the character-- as 'gay', that stood contrary to the expectation of his mother who well accepted the fact of 'girls drooling over him' and blames Ornob to have 'seduced' his son. The presence of the 'other' thus remains the most important aspect of the 'self'. The process of identifying self is not an easy and straight way; rather it happens through many trajectories and twists and turns in a person's life. Sociologically, this issue of 'self' and 'society' has been looked time and again by many in different perspectives. Herbert Mead, Blumer would emphasise on language, symbols and communication in the growth of 'self', whereas Goffman focuses on the 'presentation of the self' and Giddens look at it in reference to global institutional process.

To understand how an individual develops their own sense of self which reflects in formation of identity, which might be in itself a personal and private affair but it never happens in isolation rather is a intersection of the society and social world that one lives in. Mead in *Mind, Self and Society*, (1934) looks the process of self formation only in presence and interaction with the 'other'. Language and symbols being the most important ways of communication one expresses meaningfully and also in turn makes sense of the social life. Thus the formation of the self is a social product which develops since the childhood phase and Mead emphasized on the 'play' of infants which are both rebellious and structured in a way. With the negotiation of the world around and 'the conversation of gestures', the individual self achieves its meaning with adjustments and transformation in order to meet the expectation of the generalized others. One learns the values and morals of the culture imitating and following their parents as a child and gradually with many more associations 'taking the role' of the other. However, he also distinguishes between 'I' and 'Me', 'I' being the un-socialized self with personal desires, needs and dispositions and the 'me' being the socialized self internalizing the attitudes and expectations, and self awareness comes with this realization of the differences.

The self for Freud however is structured by the unconscious which prompts desires, wishes, and fantasies but also with a sense of control and cultural control on the other hand which actually presents us a psychoanalytic way of identification. He talks about the three phases of self within all of us as 'Id' which is the most spontaneous self emphasizing on instant gratification of needs and urges without much thought of reasoning. Whereas with maturity comes the sense of 'ego' and 'superego'. Ego controls and checks on the urges of the 'id', that which are to be expressed and which rationally tackled. Super ego however adds the sense of morality and values into ones thinking in the context one is born and brought up in, that is the norms and the sense of justification. These three phases intersect with each other and thereby happens a 'presentation of self'.

Goffman (1959) however looks at it very differently where he sees the world as a stage and the individuals as actors or performers who present themselves 'on-stage' and 'offstage'. Identity to him is like a dramatic effect which happens through interaction and

ones conscious decision of representation, that how one might like to behave and present in 'public' and 'private' domain of life.

Giddens (1991) would relate self identity with the discussions on modernity where he says that through 'reflexivity' the social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of the available information about those practices which consequently also transforms and alters ones character. This however seems very true in case of a 'queer' identity formation where an individual might not be aware of certain ideas as a child but might learn as they start knowing the world around. The relationship of the self and society are highly fluid which in constant negotiation changes and develops with the continuous overturning of the traditional ways of knowing and doing things. This idea however has a sense of sovereign self and a liberal individualism that only makes sense with the process of reflexivity and the interplay of the personal life and global influences. The concept of androgyny was never something very new in Indian thought and culture, yet the terms and categories however travelled through West which now has been very smoothly ingrained in Indian way of expression as well, atleast to some who understands this language. This couldnot have happened if one was not aware of the surroundings and the global movement or consciousness. This again has only been possible because of the media where the disposition of knowledge, true or presented is no more concentrated rather travels throughout the globe. To understand about the society it is unable to avoid the individual and thus the discussion on self and society remains predominantly important in identifying the 'self' and understanding where they stand and how they stand in relation to that of others.

Lacan(1949) also talks about two levels of self, one which is 'out there' which copes, negotiates and interacts with the world outside, that probably 'others' can see and communicate to, the other is 'in here' where the intimate self works mostly in the sphere of 'within'. It is through this negotiation that one gains the power of existence. The inner self is always in a state of flux and equilibrium which actually works with a fine line of coherence in order to keep one going. It is quite difficult thus to understand the 'pure' form of self or self formation as the mirror view of self also gives a reflection rather than the actual image, thus self could be said as an image of 'others'. It starts with the mother

who remains closest to the child and thus becomes the 'intimate other' from whom one learns the microcosm of culture and the first experiences of thinking and living. When a child passes through their early phases of growing up, they are not able to differentiate between themselves and their mother who takes the sole responsibility of feeding and providing the needed protection for them. The identity they experience is one with the mother. Gradually when they grow up, they start realizing that there remains a world outside as well, and that's when the 'self' starts developing with a sense of independence. Lacan would say that 'desire' is something which only emerges in relation to others, it is always 'out there' which becomes desirable. This discourse of the 'other' progresses through the system of speech and language, which itself is outside an individual's existence and thus the part of the 'other' but remains the base for expression and communication in the society.

Theorization opens up different dimensions of thought and provokes one to debunk on those notions. An individual is always splitted up into different selves and role playing. The basic identity that grows is with the gender one is assigned to by the society and also the name one is called in, signifying and reinforcing the sense of gendered self. However, Butler unsettles the gender assignment by the society or culture rather focuses on the performativity of roles by the individuals, most importantly which is not fixed. She focuses on the power of the agency in forming their own gender emphasizing on the wishes, emotions, feelings, representing oneself in a particular manner to the society. It thus becomes a fluid process which is based on language and discourse. She questions the formation of subjectivity and identity through which we become subjects assuming the various narrow identification of 'race', 'gender', 'sexuality', 'class' etc within the hierarchical power structure of the society. Difference in sexual orientation is now an active a politicized aspect of identity.

While a group discussion about the 'films and lives' in Santoshpur, Kolkata, Biswajeet Mukherjee introduces saying "Nijeke amar meye bhabte bhalo laage". (I like to think myself as a girl) Dodo follows saying "Aami maa er pyet theke konya sontan" (I am a girl since I was in my mother's womb) Most of the others introduced them as

transgenders, lesbian or gay. What I found most interesting while talking to the 'queer' informants is that they talked and expressed their sexual orientation linking their identity, mostly because that is the space they are fighting for 'out there' and 'in here' in Lacanian terms for their existence. They hardly believed to be out of the hegemonic system and would say that they want to be incorporated in the mainstream culture rather than being stigmatized as the 'other'. They strived in their own ways to live their lives in their own terms, even while some of them still remained 'closeted' in their familial life.

Dodo continues, "when I was a child as in in my primary school days I couldnot really understand what 'I' was actually. Gradually I realized amar moddhye meyeligoto dikta beshi kintu aami purush, aami chheleder proti ekta taan-ekta akrorshon upobhog kori, tader sathe ektu golpo korar icche jege othe amar moddhye. Rastay ghaate tokhon thekei shunte paai 'eei ladies'..." (I have many girlish traits being a man, I feel attracted towards boys and becomes excited to talk to them, and since then I could hear 'eei ladies')

Samir, (name changed) would join saying that the "first realization one has is that they are different, without understanding what exactly-aami ektu onnyoder theke alada, ektu hatke, I only became conscious when my desires went towards a boy and not a girl. When I started masturbating during adolescence, I felt much comfortable thinking about a boy than a girl and the stigmatization which followed in school was 'testube baby', 'half ladies', 'boudi'. That's the time I felt really cornered and questioned myself, 'keno aami meye meye holam'" (Why did I become so girlish?) My masis (mother's sisters) use to say, "tui emon meye meye hoye jacchis keno, ektu chhele chhele hote parish naa?" (Why are you becoming so girlish, cant you behave like a boy?) But now I don't feel that anymore that this stage of my life, says the 40 years male to female transgender. He even said

that he thought at some point of time that there must be some remedy to this disease, may be it gets cured with ones growth, may be it's just a passing phase which will change "and I will start liking girls. May be it will happen automatically, that's what I felt when I saw my friends staring at girls, having affair with them. However I remember that my stigmatization decreased with my high school and college days and in office, though it's also true that I never dressed up in 'sari-churi'. Gradually I also got to know about the 'cruising-spots' of the homosexuals in Kolkata where people went for friendship, to find partner or just for 'adda'. Since then I started knowing about the different terminologies which till then I clubbed as 'homosexuals' and learnt that transgender is a gender orientation, MSM is a behavior and etc etc."

Pakhi (name changed) speaks that how she uses to dress up like her mom during his childhood wearing sankha and sari. "I use to play bou-bor with Gopalda who stayed just beside our house and later I experienced love for the first time with him, nothing much just hugging each other. My school friends use to call me 'sokhi'. My mama (mother's brother) use to tease me and tell my mother to throw me out of the house. I loved to dance, but they did not even encourage me. At some point I even tried for suicide but couldnot succeed but that's when my mother accepted me inspite of all other criticisms. I never liked to cut my hair, chul kat-te gele amar kosto hoto khub."

Guddu says that his family would never accept him as he is, that's why he prefers not doing something which would offend them. "Ekdom chotobelai, kokhono maa-er sari pora, lipstick lagano, tokhon oneke bhabto boro hole thik hoye jabo. (During childhood I enjoyed wearing maa's sari and applying lipstick, and then everyone thought I would be alright when I grow up.) My cousin brother would say why I don't go out and play cricket or football with other boys".

Dodo suddenly intervenes and says, “I don’t understand that if during our childhood maa applied kajal and that was ok, then why not when we are grown up? Maa-Baba der sathe samanyo jhogra holei, dhoro boleche joler balti tule niye jaa (carry the bucket of water) and I said no, she would say, tui toh ladies, tui keno parbi ? Tor pete baccha! Comments of these sorts are really very hurting.”

Prema, (name changed) who has given this name to herself, says that once “I went to the market with my father and met one of his friends there. He suddenly asks him that ‘...tor chheleta erokom hijre hoye jacche keno?’ Baba should have protested against this but he did not”.

Ronit said in his interview that “one of my friends when told his parents about being “gay”, they couldnot understand him at all and clubbed him as a “hijra’, they couldnot even understand that being gay was something totally different from being gay!”

Anindya clears that “no one is born a hijra but becomes one. It is a profession that choose to do, they do badhai (blessing new borns or in marriage ceremonies) challa (who chooses to beg money whom we find in traffic signals) or khajra (sex work). Hijra is a parampara. If u want to go to that profession you have to leave your biological parents and accept your ‘gurus’ as your parents and live in a ‘daryar’. There are seven paramparas of hijras who have their own rules and regulation of doing their work.”

On the contrary when I engaged in a discussion with the group of college students, they felt that studying sexuality in isolation is never possible and thus inter-sectionality should always be a part of it where religion, caste, class everything should be studied in a totality to understand the situation. “Rituparno Ghosh’s films has a particular

class appeal, it's not for the masses. It talks about a particular class who seems to have every resource at their disposal and the only thing that becomes important to them is the acceptance of their identity in the society. They did not seem to struggle in the first place for understanding their own sexual identity which might not be the cases for most where people are not even conscious about their own self", says Saptadipa, a third year Honours student.

Arko, another student studying Political Science Honours says that "sexuality is not something which is restricted to any particular social category. If someone feels that he/she is a male or a female within, seeing 'sex-change' as a remedy doesn't really seem practical to most of the people and most importantly, it's also like settling in to the system itself, reaffirming the whole heteronormative structure in the society".

Sreyoshi, however feels that "there is a (aha-re factor) sympathetic attitude that works towards these 'other' sexualities. She feels that there is a thin line between recognition and acceptance, recognition with the equal rights and dignity is something very different but just acceptance means nothing. Ghosh's films are more like whether people are accepting us or not accepting us. It's very less about the struggle that one goes through in finding one's own identity".

Chitra, would add that "I have some friends who would say that they are 'bi', which I think comes up as a trend, a 'yo' factor in the urban scenario".

Priyanka, an activist who works for the rights of lesbians and bisexuals in an NGO mentions that "when we talk about identity it stands very tricky as it depends on the individual as to what he or she chooses to identify with. Someone might feel the urge to come out of

the closet and talk about their sexuality in terms of their identity, but there are instances where the individuals themselves put immense pressure on them to be inside the boxes and inspite of their different choices they sometimes chose to be with the opposite genders and also go for marriage even when they are not satisfied and happy in their life. They put pressures on themselves and in a way the violence is perpetuated by their own way of living in their own lives.”

Arun, from his experiences of working with different gender groups feels that “it is not at all easy to identify oneself as someone who is different from the societal gender norms. There are threats that come from various sources, be it neighbourhood, family, friends, public humiliation, violence in their own relationships, even in intimate ones that always direct in ‘teaching a lesson’, ‘rectifying the abnormal’ that makes the situation more complex to understand how one actually then comes up while expressing their own urges, feelings and experiences.”

Through these conversations what came out was that an individual is born in midst of a collective of humans who has a set of beliefs, a way of thinking and living in the society. It becomes significantly important to locate the person who talks about identity for themselves or when it comes to address about someone else. The individuals who experiences the so called ‘otherness’ in their behavior continuously tries to relate and negotiate with the social norms that they are a part of, as they are not out of the society and thus the way of growing with an identity prescribed by the society stays alongside the way they would like to define or express themselves. There remains a continuous tension that they grow up with, which is not only the acknowledgement or the recognition that they call from the family and society but also understanding and recognizing their own likes and dislikes and then ‘coming out’ as an individual who would in a way question the whole system.

As Durkheim would rightly say that till the time when one behaves according to the expectations of the society and fulfils it through their behavior, it does not create any resistance. But as soon as one does differently, the collective starts their process of bringing them to the track of expected ideologies. As a child when a male child seem to enjoy the plays of ‘*rannabati*’ or ‘*putulkhela*’(playing with dolls) they might be told in various way to do otherwise and play with boys or with cars etc, but the enforcement doesnot start with a vigor because it still doesnot effect the societal norms too much. It is when the person is growing up and gradually starts expressing his likings or desires towards a boy instead of a girl, starts behaving in a girlish way (*komor benkiye hanta, chul boro boro kora, nokh bora kore nailpolish lagano, kajal pora, meyeder moto kore kotha bola*), that is when the individual starts ‘expressing’ himself/herself, the trouble begins. It is when there is a clash between the ‘I’ and ‘Me’ that Mead points in his discussion of self; there is a rupture in the ‘mirror view’ of one’s self, as Lacan mentions. There remains a constant conflict between how one likes to ‘present’ oneself and performs the roles and the way they are forced to or are stigmatized with various words/ slangs that are used with specific meanings. One of the informants say that “that I am telling you now that the situation has been better in the gradual days when I grew up, (*hoito ekta sikrite peyechi, loke hoito mene niche, kintu amake dekhe mene newatar moddhye jei chhokher ‘bhashata’, jei ‘chayunita’ ache, sheei bhasata kintu amra porte pari, sheei bhasatar moddhye ekta chinish e fute other, tumi toh ‘chokkha*) may be there has been a change, but when someone stares at me and accepts me, there is a language in those eyes which we could read and that says, you are a ‘*chokka*’.” The stigmatization doesn’t only happen through language, but also with certain gestures that the others understand, communications does happen with symbols which at times make much sense than that of words.

Then how do we say what is acceptance? How do we distinguish between someone who throws slangs and someone who keeps a slight distance understanding their gender with the silence? The society is indeed a complicated place of affairs and the individuals living in it makes it even more complex with the various meanings, gestures, language and so many other things. However at this juncture the question that arises again and again is whether then this is something innate, or it’s just like an individual

choosing to live their lives in a particular way than that of what he/she is expected of? Butler would say that gender could be changed like changing dresses, one chose to wear a gender, perform and might feel like doing something else later, its fluid, it cannot be boxed, cannot be bottled down. Probably, the ones who links gender to their identity, doesnot wishes to change their gender very often because they try and find a space through that identity that they would like to be in.

In *Arekti Premer Golpo*, when Chapal Bhaduri says that it would have been much easier for him if he did not think like a woman within, but Ghosh through his character Abhiroop replies, I think men are different, women are different and we are different. He would call himself as the third gender in many of his interviews as well. Rudro, the protagonist in *Chitrangada* wished and thus chooses to be a woman and thus also goes through the complicated process of surgeries, but ultimately realizes that, '*no transition is ever complete. It's an ongoing process*'. Gender is not a binary division of homosexuality and heterosexuality rather is a spectrum which has many more variations and differential expressions within, and it also seems true that "queer" might be an expression which gives space to all who would not like to fix their sexual orientations in a specific boundary and that speaks of a different language than that of the hegemonic heterosexuality, but in reality what seemed true was that individuals who tries to find a sense of expression and finds it through a specific language or 'term' available in their surrounding, they try to gather than and express in terms of them. They would rather call them in specific 'kothi', 'gay', 'transgender', 'hijra', rather than the fluidity. Someone who seems to be in a clash and struggle all through their lives finding 'what am I', and tries to find a sense of identity through their gender, they would rather fix an identity that they feel suitable and they find deep association with. The sense of information remains very important at this juncture. Given the society where we are born and grown up gives us a limited set of information and knowledge, it is only when we comes in terms with different media, books, people across spaces that we gather information with which the outlook changes, with which there happens certain clarity of information which might not have been the case otherwise.

Most of my respondents would say that as a child they always wondered what's wrong, why are they behaving as they are as everyone around are teasing them; they are embarrassed in various ways. It is only when one is growing up, getting to know the world that they start feeling it to be 'normal', to be something that they alone are not a part of, not a disease to be cured rather becomes confident of the self in association with the other, forming a sense of community, finding friends who they think would understand their feelings and not make fun of them or tease them for what they are.

Kaushik Ganguly in one of his interviews expresses that while making the film '*Arekti Premer Golpo*', there were initial clash of thoughts between him and Ghosh. "*I did not want to see the third gender as Rituda wanted and therefore there always remained a conflict....i don't think that one person whose sexual preference is for same sex, they will be different from any other people around. (Ritudar ekta chilo ooi chhobite kromosho Rituparno'r dike tene niye asha ooi chhoritrotake. Aar aami chaichilam bar bar, sadharon manusher moto ghure berak.) Rituda always seemed to bring the character towards Rituparno Ghosh, whereas I wished it to be like any other human being..... What I was afraid of is that, a person who calls himself third gender, would not do, or dress up or tell something which would increase the chances of homophobia.*"¹⁴³

Ronit who now calls himself a 'gay' would say that initially he also made fun of Rituparno Ghosh's effeminacy. Gradually he understood that he also felt differently and got attracted toward boys much more than that of girls and that is when he realized it to be nothing different. Thus, it is also through realizations, experiential knowledge or the resources from the outside world that one starts thinking about oneself and the 'other'. One who remains in the closet even after realizing their love or interests which expresses about their sexual orientation would have a sense of self with is within and intimate, but not a self that is recognized or accepted. It is only when one speaks out, communicate with others, the sense of social self becomes strong, which is probably the self that

¹⁴³ <https://www.voot.com/shows/shonge-srijit/1/368527/kaushik-ganguly-and-anjan-dutta/360839>

protests against the law of the state that criminalizes the same sex law of IPC 377 that tries to acquire the right to live life with dignity and a demand to express their wishes, wishing a better world without stigmatization and marginalization of different sorts.

B.The issue of ‘democracy’ and ‘law’

India as the largest democracy is believed to reassure the universal core values and principles of the United Nations by respecting human rights and fundamental freedom of its citizens. But in the present scenario ‘democracy’ has just turned itself into an electoral phenomenon where the principles of ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘freedom’ seems be at stake. Indian Constitution has the underlying principle as ‘inclusiveness’, and the Article 14 and 15 clearly declares equality before law or equal protection of laws within the territory of India, and also declares that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth, but it automatically contradicts with the Section 377 when it prohibits private consensual sex of the same sex adults. Prosecution of the consensual sex however thus makes the state powers accessible in the bedrooms and private space of these individuals, and thus creates apprehensions of arrest and assault among the gay, bisexuals and transgender people. This in consequence harm the individuals with the prosecution of the law by the police and court than to be protected by the state in order to live a life of dignity respecting the rule of privacy and choice.

i)On Sexualities

Laws, in the Indian Constitution, are the expression of the ideas of secularism, federalism, minority rights or judiciary system which is filled with the essence of democracy in abundance. But in the post Foucauldian world, the dream of ‘democracy’ seems to be at stake where its nature of universality is being questioned to be made possible by the exclusion of the most for the few. With reference to this, Shefali Jha¹⁴⁴ rightly questions whether democracy in the present scenario is *‘merely a legitimating*

¹⁴⁴ Jha.S. Democracy in India: The State Institutional Domain. Paper prepared for the project on ‘*State of Democracy in South Asia*’. CSDS. New Delhi

device to keep the subjects quiet by giving them the illusion of participating in their own governance? Or, can we still design institutions to successfully exemplify the democratic ideal of one person, one value. How does the institutional design that was put in place in India half a century ago measure up to its own democratic principle of one person, one value?’ As law stands closely linked with justice and social change the practice of discrimination reflects an undemocratic and secretive nature in the legal processes.

With the emergence of queer consciousness in the Indian context, the focus was mostly on Section 377, as the locus of oppression of the sexual minorities. This law which was drafted in 1860 by Lord Macaulay as the part of the colonial project to control and regulate the Indian subjects mentions “*whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment.....which may extent to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.*” The explanation says that penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section. This law as reported by the Peoples’ Union for Civil Liberties and the Report on Human Rights Violations Against Sexuality Minorities seems to be enforced by the police through illegal detention, sexual abuse and harassment, extortion and outing of queer people to their families which in turn creates a violence against the sexual minorities. In this context the questions which comes up is whether these laws forms a particular form of social reality which legitimizes the violence caused against the sexual minorities or does it reflect dominant ideology of the common man imagination? The implication of this rule permeates in different social settings from medical establishments, media family, schools, colleges, work places and obviously the state. As Foucault states that laws are not only external but also internalized as the way we behave is normalized in certain pattern through the process of socialization and thus whoever seems to deviate these hegemonic laws are not only seen as “deviants” by the society but also by their own selves and thus it becomes more difficult for them to speak out their minds and assert their choices. Moreover the people who come out of their closet to speak their choices are seen as abnormal and are forced in many ways to be in track with the law with the aim of converting them to heterosexual majority.

With the debates on the Constitution, constantly in the background of this argument about a majority and several minorities, it was quite clear that democracy did not merely mean the government of the majority, rather a responsible and accountable governance. When it's about the individual's voting rights, it also becomes an issue of safeguarding individuals concern for that matter.

Democratic citizenship is supposed to be about mutual co-existence, where the citizens share a bond between each other. But it remains a question as to whether the government with its various policies succeeds in fostering this sense of 'allegiance' to each other, in spite of certain diverse sociological criteria like class, caste and religious affiliations. With these severe inequalities between one another how then is the government planning to foster the sense of democratic citizenship remains quite intriguing. Democratic citizenship is based on the idea of equal citizenship, on equality in terms of rights unlike the system of monarchy where the monarch enjoys the ultimate power and thus the rule of law operates according to his whims and fancies, on his/her subjects.

The modern state operates with an idea of citizenship which focuses on democratic equality. There were many discussions and debates in the Constituent Assembly of India about the specific rights that Indian citizens were entitled to. Jha rightly poses some questions as did the conception of equal rights require that the list of fundamental rights include not only civil and political rights but also economic and welfare rights? Did it require that not only individuals are considered as the bearers of rights, but that group rights be also made a part of the fundamental rights? If cultural rights given to minority groups were somewhat a novelty in the Constitution, the Indian Constitution also contains a listing of the standard rights to freedom. Article 19, clause 1, sub-clauses a), b), and c) grants all Indian citizens the rights to freedom of speech and expression, to assemble peaceably and without arms, and to form associations and unions. But clause 2) of the same article also lays down that nothing in sub-clause a) of clause 1) shall prevent the state from imposing, by law, reasonable restrictions on the right to freedom of speech and expression in a number of circumstances, including in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality. Similarly, clause 3)

allows reasonable restrictions on the right to assembly in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India or public order. Finally, clause 4) allows reasonable restrictions on the freedom of association for the sake of the sovereignty and integrity of India, public order or morality. Of course, the Supreme Court has contested the reasonableness of the restrictions on these rights that have often been imposed by the government, but, nevertheless to allow for these restrictions in the Constitution itself places these rights under threat.

Foucault (1984) would say the “in nineteenth century texts there is a stereotypical portrait of the homosexual or invert: not only his mannerisms, his bearings, the way he gets dolled up, his coquetry, but also his facial expressions, his anatomy, the feminine morphology of his body, are regularly included in this disparaging description. The image eludes both to the theme of role reversal and to the principle of a natural stigma attached to this offense against nature.” The society measures an individual as an “ethical” subject with the reference in relation to its moral conduct and his/her mastery of own desires. One however tries and follows the tradition as they intrinsically imbibe the responsibility to carry forward the spiritual tradition one is subject to. Foucault would also clearly state that he is not supposing these codes as unimportant but when it creates subjugation there might be a sense of trouble. The whole question of Foucaultian ‘biopolitics’ becomes immensely relevant in this context to understand ones social and political power over one’s own self and ‘body’. Agamben however extends this discussion and identifies the state of exception with the power of decision over life. “The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.”¹⁴⁵ The series of questions posed by Foucault still stands significantly relevant to reflect on, in reference to the exercise of the power, the mechanisms which operate as repression in many instances.

In India, though transcendence of sexuality has always existed in its culture, mythology and also practice to a great extent, but yet in the present scenario what is seen is the intervention of the powerful ‘state’ and society in lives of the individuals to regulate and instruct their ways of living even when it (sexuality) is a matter of personal

¹⁴⁵ Douglas.M. 1966 . *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984, p. 116

'choice' and decision. The issue and the fight for the same sex relationships achieved a step forward after eight years of advocacy campaign in India with the 2nd July 2009 Delhi High Court judgment which decriminalized homosexual relationships providing legality for consensual sex among adults including gay sex. Naz Foundation India Trust¹⁴⁶ with the collective voices of people against this law challenged the existing Penal Code 377. On 11th December 2013, the Supreme Court of India dragged back the step forward by striking down the decriminalization of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code after four years of the Delhi High Court Judgment with a huge upsurge of protests from students and queer activist. Since last few decades in different democracies of the world, these archaic colonial laws were fought to be removed in realization of the fact that these laws are hindrance to the full development and ability of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. A ray of hope is now been seen after the reconsideration of this archaic law which not only stand against homosexuals but also heterosexuals. The 2nd February 2016 event where the Supreme Court handovers the rethinking of this law to the Five Judge Constitution bench for a possible in-depth hearing has however encouraged parents, civil society, LGBTIQ groups and many other people around the country. The judges, one of whom is Kapil Sibal, a lawyer and a politician says defending the change, that *any provision that penalizes an adult person's expression of consensual sexuality in private is significantly unconstitutional*. In the present times when individualism and democratic rights are the main concerns of the human existence, criminalizing the behavior of a group of people for no justifiable reasons other than their unpopularity violates the principle of largest democracy of India. These laws penetrate and curtail the ability of the LGBT people to function autonomously and freely undermining the ability to express their own gender identities and sexual desires. The decision of the Indian Supreme Court has driven millions of the LGBT Indians towards injustice and pushed them into a dark life of indignity and falsehood.

A student Kaushtab, aged 21, from Presidency College, Kolkata would say that "all the structures of our society doesnot progress in

¹⁴⁶ The Naz PIL against Section 377 was filed in the Delhi high Court on December,6, 2001 with Shaleen Rakesh representing the organization and the lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit, under the guidance of Anand Grover providing with legal representation. This was a formal challenge against the Section 377 which curved the rights of ones personal choice and living criminalizing sexual acts.

the same way. They progress differently, though I have a problem with the term 'progress'...I am a very cynical person. Change in the law is important as all the structures are important in the socialization. The only socialization is not the family rather we are socialized by a set of structures. We may be coming from very conservative families but we are in social media, we come to institutions which are much freer. We learn to negotiate those spaces. India is a country where you have spaces which are both radical and conservative, though the move is towards more and more conservatism. When the family is against me, the law is against me. The institutions are against me, and then it becomes a major problem.”

Saptadipa says that she has a major ideological problem with laws through which sexuality is being defined and talked about. “You are imposing a law in order to correct it, in order to put it within the mainstream fold. There is a continuous attempt to sanction and to legitimize. If you really believe that this is a part of the mainstream society, then why do you need a law to sanction or legitimize your existence? I think these laws actually create a more gap between what we call the different genders. First, you recognize them as the ‘other’ and then you protect them with laws, which for me is very problematic. But again, when we come to the practical scenario, the struggle that a queer person goes through could only be recognized through the laws, so may be in that respect its also important, but I have a ideological problem with it.”

Pritha mentions that when we talk about laws, they are modifying or remodifying themselves but in no time that are actually talking about the alternation of laws, which remains a trouble. “Now there is another category of ‘others’ with the ‘sex’, male or female when it comes to filling forms. But why can’t we actually go beyond this

mentioning of sex in definite applications and official forms? Its like either you have a binary or you have a four fold or five fold gender box, which ultimately is falling in the same trap of gender in definite boxes.”

Soma, a second year graduate students however contradicts this view saying that “not fitting into any box is fine, but then when it comes to legality, it does becomes important. May be categorization will lead to exploitation, but someone who belongs to any ‘alternative’ gender or sexuality which is not recognized by the society, the accumulated anger, anguish, hatred, frustration, exploitation, be it familial or personal which I am not facing could only come out through the proper channelization of laws. Legitimization thus is needed though it might not really bring any change in the mindset of the people, but they who suffer needs some legality. Something like prostitution might have some drawbacks in itself, but legalization again is very much a necessity for them who is in the syetem.”

Mou (name changed) who would call herself a lesbian, says that “laws are very important in securing ones identity. Identity will evolve with the sanctions of the society. But now, in the present situation, laws doesnt make much sense as (Jader jebhabe jibon japon korar tara shee bhabei jibon japon korche) people lead their lives in their ways.” She adds that “there is no point focusing on laws because there will be a change in laws, that’s definite; it has no other way but to change.”

Dodo, says that “Let me talk about Trans life, when a transgender becomes a Bidhan Sabha member, then there is a sense of power that (shee jodi hote pare tahole nischoi West Bengal eo hobe konodin) if a transgender can become a Bidhan Sabha member, then someday it might also happen in West Bengal. We might not make people or

family understand about laws much by speaking but setting real life examples actually help a lot. (Tobe amader nijeder lorai nijeder korte hobe) We have to fight our own struggles and India is lagging behind in case of transgenders.”

Pakhi, (name changed) a kothi adds “now female can report ‘rape’ to the police stations, but if someone does the same with us, we will not be able to do anything”.

Sumit (name changed), a male to female transgender would rather say that “laws hardly make any difference in our daily lives. I live with the society not outside. If today I dress in sari-churi from my home I would have been made fun of. (Amake law onujayi keo judge korbe naa) I will not be judged in terms of laws. I generally board ladies compartment because I don’t feel comfortable in gents’ compartments and till now our government has not come up with a different compartment for transgender. One day I was very tired and exhausted and was travelling in a local train, a police came and asked me, ‘Why are you here?’ I had to clap my hand (like a hijra) and prove what I am. I am not a Hijra, but I learnt to clap to traumatize people that they can’t torture against us. People generally don’t say anything to Hijras. However in any revolutionary verdict, the legal acceptance has come much before the social acceptance. There are still problems in individual level and the most important thing is that (eei boro boro buli metro city gulite boshe boshe onek kopchano chai, gramer lokera esob janeno naa, eto verdict er golpo tara shonenoni) it’s easier to give lectures sitting in a metro city whereas the rural spaces don’t have any idea about these laws and verdicts where much of the people are not even given the space to realize their identities.”

Rana, (name changed) a female to male transgender would say that “laws have to be implemented by us and the police, but it’s very poorly administered. We are very often abused by the police mainly.”

Ruksha, (name changed) calling herself a queer and also an activist, who is still trying to find herself out says that “laws or legality are extremely important, but there are not many people who can access that. I don’t personally feel that laws have affected my life very much actually. Yes, I guess I am a criminal now after the Supreme Court verdict, but it has not changed my life. But ideally, it matters. I personally don’t believe in same sex marriage, because I don’t believe in marriage, not because of the same sex part, so I don’t need legality. But there are lots of people who want to have extremely that in Bengali we say ‘songsar kora’, so I think for them it is absolutely important in terms of civil union or rights, property rights. Laws are symbolic to the country as in how the country is thinking at this point of time. I am deeply terrified and hurt about the verdicts and the blooming saffronization making our lives more complicated. On a deeper intellectual level it does, but practically no it doesnot. For movements, it matters a lot, for apparent security, but when it comes to the day to day living, it’s difficult to think that laws can make any sense.”

Section 377 impacts deep into the mindset of its people pointing homosexuals as perverted, animal like behavior and thus it functions as the condemnation of Indian sexual minorities be it gays, lesbians, kothis or hijras. Thus this law is just not a simple law but an encroachment in individual’s private choices and the wider mindset of the people. The Supreme Court however, in the National Legal Services Authority VS Union of India & others (Writ Petition, Civil, No. 400) of 2012 passed the judgment that those who identify themselves as transgender, third gender in a gender opposite to their biological sex should be granted equal protection and inclusion as the third category in election card, passport, driving license, ration card, or admissions in schools, colleges and

other educational institutions hospitals etc. The court even clarified that “any instance for SRS for declaring ones gender is immoral and illegal”. This has been a great leap ahead in the context of gender discrimination and marginalization. But what remains interesting is that when the court on the one hand accepts the existence of the different genders going beyond the binary category of ‘male’ and ‘female’ proving an equal opportunity and space in all the public sphere of work and livelihood, it also constricts one with the presence of the IPC 377 which stands contrary to this judgment. Criminalizing the same sex, sexual relationships it is constricting the personal space and desires of the other genders which go against the logic of peno-vaginal sexual behavior. Laws, being one of the state apparatus of work remain the main source of attack by the activists, intellectuals or sympathizers and empathizers, but what needs to be also changed is the mindset of the people as that is where the execution remains possible. Most of the stigmatization happens in the local spaces which are still to be sensitized which is hoped to be changing with the change of the law and through dialogues and interactions with common masses and political leaders who are councilors or run in the level of smaller units. Prohibitions, censorship, denial are the forms in which these powers operate and was there really a rupture between the age of repression and the critical analysis of repression? Thus in the present scenario we can only think of a petition and a silent movement against this arbitrary law but what needs to be changed is the mentality and imagination of the people which might bring about the real change in this respect.

During my field, the experience that I have with two policemen in Kolkata was indeed horrifying. It was when I was interviewing a kothi inside a park in a locality I never could imagine that the space was prohibited for girls after 6pm in the evening. They questioned me and as well as my informant about what exactly we are doing in the park. I think it is also to be mentioned that we were sitting in two different benches (L position) just near the adjacent road. The Police informed me that women were not allowed inside since it's not a safe place. I asked if that's a law, and he mentioned 'yes', though he couldnot show me a copy of it. However what is important is that, why is that place unsafe for girls, which is almost in the heart of a residential

locality? The answer that I got was, it is the space where gay men mingle in the evening.

Instances like this actually prove that regulation happens in different levels in the life of the 'queer'. My interactions with older people, when some of them even said that it is not really any body's concern when two men or women share sexual moments with each other inside the closed door, but when they come out so openly and sometimes explicitly, its not a soothing site. It no more is acceptable. What is 'acceptable' and what not is actually determined by the way we grow up. It is not only the family, but the friends, professors, acquaintances, and definitely the books we read expands out vision and perspective which does affect in changing views or rather going a little beyond the small space of whats wrong and whats right. It is not only the individuals, but also our government, the ruling party to be specific who with their set of ideology and beliefs determine this sense of 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong', 'justified' and 'unjustified'. Mostly these are seen as cultural and ethical issues which need to be addressed strongly. Anything going against the prescription of the state becomes 'sedition', a conspiracy.

ii)On films

Since 1913, with the first full length feature film, the extraordinary rapid expansion of this media could be felt. "The early fascination with the cinema, its remarkable hold on audiences and its unrivalled potential for informing, influencing and shaping public opinion has engaged the careful attention of successive governments from colonial time onwards." (Vasudev.A:1978) Thus the rise and control over the Indian cinema could be understood through the motivations of the powers imposed and the political, economic and socio-cultural climate in which policies were formed and executed. The period of Emergency from June 1975 to March 1977 was a phase of rupture in the otherwise continuous pursuit of democratic freedom since Independence.

The rapid changing structures of society itself and the constant increasing power of the media however makes the process of supervision important in maintaining a balance between the liberty and license, freedom and responsibility. When these decisions are taken in terms of individualistic and narrow political considerations, it

becomes a serious issue with infringement to the right of expression. *Arekti Premer Golpo* was restricted to be screened in Nandan, which is the government sponsored film and cultural centre in Kolkata, when it was the Communist party rule. A governing body that is believed to believe on human rights, especially of them whole voices are not heard in the politics of class struggle is seen to be hesitant about the rights of the “queer”. Thus it remains a constant question to be as to what extent do we think change to happen? On what terms? Is it only the chosen field that I support for or ideologically is inclined to that constrains my looking towards what I think change would occur? Or it is a larger question of human rights, of my own choices, and similarly the choices of others. Isn't it about the equal sharing of space that we as humans are striving for? The fight for one group of ‘minority’ cannot be an opposition to another, with the simple idea that both encourage voices from below, from the margins, but in reality our social existence is much in contradiction to what we could even imagine. Politics, to be literal the game of power has entered our lives in such ways that even we are forced to envy, to compete, to succeed. In case someone chose not to believe in the competition of power, he/she is left out as ‘alternatives’. It surely concerns me beyond just the question of ‘queer’ identity or equality.



The news of ‘Arekti Premer Golpo’ in Anandabazar Patrika, 2010.

However coming back to the discussion on films and its censorship, Indian film industry with the Bollywood in its core has many other important regional film making units which end up producing more than thousand films each year which are again

screened in more than thirteen thousand cinema halls or theatres across the country. Since 1896, when the first film was shown in India, the popularity of this medium started increasing day by day. In 1913, after the first feature length film *Raja Harishchandra* was made, its rapid expansion calling for an extraordinary huge audience with the potential of informing, influencing and also shaping opinions of the public actually called for the attention of the successive governments to restrict its content and communication. The political policies and ideologies of the government play a significant part in understanding the motivations of restricting a particular film at a particular point in time. the period of emergency from June 1975 till 1977 did see a rigorous suppression over media with all other social agencies which did question the 'democratic' ways of expression to a great extent.

The issue of censorship is both relevant and interesting in this discussion because on one hand, films come under Art 19 (1) of the Constitution which says that all persons have 'freedom of speech and expression' which automatically includes not only speech of an individual but also through writing, printing, pictures that includes cinema as well. Again on the other, this right is restricted with 'reasonable' clauses of Art 19 (2) that says that it has to be restricted in its presentation to uphold the interests of the sovereignty and the integrity of the Indian state. Film certification thus became a norm as films than any other form of the media is treated as the most vibrant and widespread media influencing a lot of people. Specially, the moving images with sound and light in the dark hall make an intense effect on the minds of the people. Thus the state holds the 'power' to delete and modify certain sections of the films with its discretion. By the Cinematograph Act, 1952 (Act 37 of 1952) through the Central Board of Film Censors created two categories as 'U' which signifies 'unrestricted public exhibition' and 'A' which remains 'restricted to adult' viewing. These two categories were again extended to 'UA' in June, 1983 which says 'unrestricted public exhibition subject to parental guidance for children below the age of twelve and the other category is 'S' that remains restricted for the specialized audiences as doctors, scientists etc. 5B of the above mentioned Act clarifies that 'a film shall not be certified for public exhibition, if in the opinion of the authority competent to grant the certificate, the film or any part of it is against the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the states, friendly relations with foreign state,

public order, decency or morality or involves defamation or contempt of court or is likely to incite the commission of any offence'. The terms, 'decency' and morality' being deeply subjective holds the power to subjugate the thoughts that go against the state or the then government. The CBFC (1983) was set primarily in Mumbai with regional hubs in Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta which now has expanded its hands in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Trivandrum, Delhi, Cuttack and Guwahati.

Cinema remains a strong agency of communication and expression, but yet its vulnerability is only understood when it is also manipulated and subjected by the distortions that happen based on narrow political considerations or individual interests with powerful interventions. However as the media is thought to remain quite responsible for the public accountability and understanding, the central government thinks censorship as a means to regulate the freedom, responsibility and liberty of the same, which might not always be justified and rational when we look from the perspective of free expression and communication. But with the constant increase of the powerful media, a balance is expected in its work between liberty and license and freedom and responsibility.

Raka, a young student I engaged with thinks that censorship is the biggest hypocrisy of the government. "It shows that mentality of the government that you are not free. You don't have a censorship for 'Sheila ki Jawani', or 'Munni Badnam Hui', and thus you have the idea as to what to think and what not to think, what is appropriate and what not is appropriate. Audiences are not passive, they have a lot to say about the movies they watch and also to reflect on them, which makes censorship extremely problematic. There are specific issues that calls for censorship, again our state forces determine that for this you need censorship and for that you don't need censorship. Who determines thus remains very important. During BJP regime, the film Parzania was banned because it directly attacked the Godhra riot, the fascist regime which was implemented back then. So you see all this is so inter-related with your economic forces, your social forces."

Kaushtab however doesnot think that censorship creates much of a ruckus. “Whoever wishes to see the films will see the films and this controversy rather would call for more attention from the audience, thus at the end of the day, it doesnot really matter.”

Sreyoshi would say that “for any form of art I don’t think censorship should prevail. It is a way of expression and why some authority will have the power to ‘correct’ it or regulate it if they think it’s not right. They might not necessarily think as the way the creator is thinking while working, right?”

In the present context its quiet fascinating to observe that the songs and dances, loaded with sexual underpinnings to a great extent defaming women and portraying as mere objects of consumption hardly have any problem in passing the censor board unless loaded with extreme portrayal of sexual acts, violence and obscenity but otherwise films which talks the truths about the social reality and the state are seen to be against the law of censor board. It is again contradictory to the ‘freedom’ of speech and expression. It is at times restricted or banned in name of maintaining beliefs, sentiments and traditions which might be a daily practice in people’s life but not something which is critically looked at. There however is an astonishing lack of protest by film makers themselves against this whole debate on censorship issues, which might be a cause of the diversity that India as a country experiences from religion to caste to language and various other cultures. *Gandu* (2010) directed by Quashik Mukherjee and *Chatrak* (2011) directed by a Srilankan, Vimukthi Jayasundara was banned because of the sexual contents. In 1996, *Fire* was banned for depiction of lesbian relationship after being attacked by the Hindu Fundamentalists. The role of ‘You Tube’ has now become an easier and accessible free space for both film makers and viewers. Many films are just released through this social media and reach out to a vast audience mainly those which are censored and can’t reach out to theatres. The circulation becomes more with different social networking sites of Facebook, Twitter and other social network sites. The documentary *India’s daughter* about the 2012 Delhi gang rape was an example of how this documentary after being banned because of its raw interviews of the rapists which does affect the sentiments of

mind was throughout Facebook sharing the video and the You Tube links. Thus, it might be true that the State has its laws and try to constrict the free space of expression, but also the emerging forms of media has made it easier for individuals to reach out to its audiences through alternative ways other than the theaters. The film, *Arekti Premer Golpo* was not screened in Nandan for its bold representation whereas it actually tried to depict a small story about the struggle of the people who doesnot like to be fitted in the binary boxes of 'male' and 'female'. It is actually, just another love story as its name signifies, yet there were no release in CDs of the film till date, even after the end of the film being 'functional' where Abhiroop remains alone, all by himself whereas Basu goes back to become a good husband and a good father.

C.The issue of 'love', 'marriage' and society

Marriage is thought to be an immemorial institution which is closely associated with the functioning of the social structure. Thus, love and marriage are commonly thought in terms of heterosexual couples where there is always a hope of reproduction. In primitive societies there have been stories of mutual love, of elopement and a daring capture of a girl, but when it comes to 'marriages' it is seen as the conscious decision of staying together following the established norms of the family and society. Thus it is not only an institution which is supposed to stabilize the society and seen as the sole source of reproduction but also to further family's economic and social position. It is seen as the basic unit of the social life which might extend to many other growing and existing relationships. It thus falls into the obvious trap of men being the providers and protectors whereas women as the devoted house keepers and caring mothers. An individual who remains single and never marries feel out of place, socially and culturally. Traditionally single persons were supposed to be the responsibility of the extended family, and the tradition still continues. Remaining single is more acceptable for men than it is for women. As De Beauvoir mentions, men provide the norm, the normal, the absolute; they are "true" autonomous individuals. Women are, in framework, "the other". However because of the dominance of marriage, permanently single people, whether male or female have been seen between two extremes that is of 'invisible non-entity' or 'stigmatized outsider'.

As portrayed in Indian films, love affairs in this country is always not so flowery, rather the issue of permissiveness, intimacy, proximity and freedom are always in question, more so when the 'love' seems to be against the laws of the society and the mindset of the people. The 'gandharva' marriage as one of the seven forms of marriages mentioned in Hindu scriptures written during 200 BC to 900 AD seems to be close to the marriages by 'mutual choice', that might also be seen as the romantic or the marriage by choice. Hindu scriptures also mentions the phase of 'grahstashrama' among the four stages of life talks about the life of the householder including procreation of children. Marriage is thus seen as an ideal, a duty and a social responsibility. Still now the expectations with marriage has not changed much and with this practice as natural and inevitable in ones life also reinforces the idea of heterosexual conjugality, where the woman or the wife remains responsible for the various acts of the household and children. Though, now the scene has changed where the agency of the woman has also expanded in the public sphere.

Though till date arranged marriages happen within caste, religion and according to other social categories yet the increase in self choosing of spouse is also not a rare event. Pre marital sex is also not unknown though the 'stigma' seems to be attached to them who become mothers out of marriage, however the Supreme Court recently legalizes that a single unwed mother can be the sole responsible parent of a child. Sexuality thus is a cultural construction but with change of time not only the cultural practices and beliefs changes but also the notions attached with sexuality seems to be reexamined and understood in a new perspective. The history of sexuality as also a history of a category of thought as Foucault would mention has a delimited history, and a history of changing erotic practices, subjective meanings, social definitions and patterns of regulation whose only unity lies in their common descriptor.¹⁴⁷ The distinctions like "hetero" and "homo" in the study of sexuality is told to be modern, Western and a product of bourgeoisie culture because sexuality as an identity is a version of self-narration which also requires the existence of a very strong notion of "self".¹⁴⁸ 'Sexuality takes the role of the privileged illuminating component of the sovereign self- one of the

¹⁴⁷ Weeks, J. 2000. *Making Sexual History*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp 130

¹⁴⁸ Halperin, D.M. 1990. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, New York: Routledge, pp 26

essential secrets that can unlock the meaning of interior life and public display.”¹⁴⁹ The ‘self is a product of the continuous interplay from the economic activity to the spatial relations to domesticity.

Nivedita Menon in her book *Seeing like a Feminist* tries to narrate how our society is intolerant about the diversities that it possesses. “There is zero tolerance for those who breach the carefully produced ‘natural’ order of society by refusing to conform to norms of looks and behavior.”(Menon: 2012:3) The family remains hugely responsible for making sure about how one is brought up in appropriate terms and in case the institution fails, medical and psychiatric helps are expected to bring those individuals in the directed “path” of the society. “Non-heterosexual desires threaten the continuation of these identities since it is not biologically directly procreative; and if no-heterosexual people have children by other means, such as technological interventions or adoption, then the purity of these identities is under threat.” (Menon: 2012:4) She also quite rightly questions the existence of a ‘family’ and what is it that makes a family. Is it always a father-mother-children who defines a ‘family’ or there are possibilities of calling a group of friends, unmarried mothers, women living with their siblings, or a homosexual couples staying together could also be granted the status of a ‘family’. However thus, the whole notion of ‘love’, ‘marriage’ and ‘family’ are dominantly heterosexual and accepted as the ‘normal’ norm, making any deviation to it as ‘abnormal’, ‘deviant’, unethical and unacceptable. Section 377 criminalizes any sexual behavior which is ‘against the order of nature’. “The assumption is that ‘normal’ sexual behavior springs from nature, and that it has nothing to do with culture or history or human choices”.(Menon :2012:93) Individuals who chose to be ‘gay’/‘homosexual’ are tried to be normalized with ‘violence’, either by physical or mental, in most case forcing them to a “marriage”. The disciplining act of society operates at all level clearly stating the desire for the same gender/sex love as unnatural and immoral which needs to be normalized at any cost. Thus there are many instances where the gay/lesbian individuals were forced to marry out of their choice to someone of the different sex as per the societal norms and ended up in a

¹⁴⁹ Steedman.C. 1995. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority*, 1780-1930, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

suicide or a bad marriage. Marriage is seen as a way to cure the 'abnormality' of the same sex desires. It is an incident reported by one of the NGOs I got in touch with but it is just one among many of the same kind.

It was about a young girl who lost her parents in the age of 3 and was staying with her uncle's along with her own elder brother. In the age of 17, she fell in love with another girl who caught the notice of her brothers (her own brother and the cousin). They both decided to teach her a lesson and thus repeatedly raped her to purify her soul and bring her back in the normal path of heterosexuality. Being an orphan, dependent on her uncle, yet to finish her studies she went into deep depression. She then decides to marry thinking that would cure her complications and she could be back to a normal life. She died after four months of marriage, hanging herself at the age of 23.

Another incident was with a bright student of engineering who probably did everything according to the wish of her parents to keep them happy. The problem occurred when she fell in love with a girl and her parents got to know about the love affair. She was taken to a psychiatrist; her relatives gave her lectures on how what she was doing is against the law of nature and absurd. She eventually was forced to marriage as she was afraid to go against her family wishes and did not want to be an outcast, though she continued having an affair with the girl she was in love with. She is not trapped in these whole societal expectations of having a family with kids and inspite of being unhappy, she continues her struggle everyday to continue her relationship with her husband being a 'good' wife.

Marrying forcefully always does not happen with an external violence rather sometimes the internalization of certain societal expectations forces us to do things that is not of our choice, the pain eventually are inflicted by our own selves. It happened with a girl who being the

eldest among her siblings did full all her responsibilities in the familial grounds. When her younger sister's marriage was fixed, there came an immense pressure on her to marry a man which she was not willing to as she got attracted to woman and had a love relationship with a girl in her college. Being afraid of the consequences her family and sister would face if they come to know about her homosexual behavior she decided to marry a man who eventually was abusive and also impotent. She was tagged as a "barren woman" and was beaten by her husband often. It is then when she decided to come out of the bad marriage and not only that as she also decided to come out of her 'closet' where she kept herself for a long time thinking the wellbeing of her family. Now she stays with a same sex partner of her choice in a small apartment that they managed to get in the fringe of the city with their own earnings.

In the film *Memories in March*, when Sid's mother came to know about the sexual preferences about his son from Sahana, the beautiful colleague of his who was also interested in him but never got reciprocated, she as a mother told Sahana that she should have waited instead of leaving hope. It is an expected hope of parents that homosexuality is not something which can be a 'choice' of their children, it might be a passing affair where one is drawn towards something which to them is 'abnormal' but can be brought to the 'normal' track with a relationship with the other genders, the taste of sexual relation with the 'other' gender might alter their feelings, and thus there has been several attempts to rape and forced marriages when we listen to the narratives of them who are the so called 'alternatives' when it comes to the expected sexual preferences.

In *Chitrangada*, Rudra decides to change his sex noticing Partho's deep love for children and it could have only been possible to adopt when the couple is either heterosexual or have a mother or a woman to look after the children according to the norms in the Indian society. In the process when Rudra actually was going through the process of change in his body to become a woman, Partho lost his interest towards him

and started a new relationship with Kasturi, a woman in the dance group. Partho, in a conversation with Rudra says that he loved him as he was, but now that he wants to be a woman, he would rather prefer a 'real' woman. This context remains extremely relevant when it comes to love and marriage because it again reaffirms the whole ideology of heteronormativity of marriage when a man has to become a woman to be with the man of his choice, which ultimately is a man-woman relationship. However it is always not the fight with the society or the wish or choice to perform 'differently', rather to live life on their own terms that becomes primordial.

Raka, a student says that "marriage inherently is very heterosexual. Queer rights might include marriage or maybe there is an inherent desire to get married, but however they are not being able to get out of this trap of marriage".

Kaushtab adds saying that "there is a common understanding that marriage is the only legal recognition that might bring 'them' out of the shadows of discrimination or the struggle. They have been suffering for all these years because of their sexual choices, thus marriage and legality I think is very much interlinked to be understood when it comes to queer sexuality".

Rima, a second year student studying Sociology comments that "marriage is about legitimacy, but then there lies this inherent question as in who gives you the legitimacy, it's after all the state, the society that you are seeking your legitimacy from. Laws reflect how the state is thinking, and through marriage you want that recognition from the state. So ultimately there is no space of 'differences', because you are entering in this whole politics of recognition which depends on the state, though its important, but I personally feel it's like a circle again from which we are not coming our rather systematically putting ourselves as per the norms and expectations of the state."

In recent times there also have been some instances of gay or lesbian marriages happening across the country who plans to settle in US where it is legalized. However a question which arises is whether marriage still remains the ultimate satisfaction for all couples as the very existence of marriage is patriarchal and extremely heteronormative. This is a picture of a lesbian Bengali couple who gets married after six years of relationship with the idea of settling in US.



Picture Source: Facebook, 2014

Though there have been some stray incidents about marriages of the same sex across India, yet Prema, a transgender says that “by marriage, what do we understand? It is not only a relationship between two individuals but between two families. If there is no connection between the families, then there is nothing to think about. There can be no marriages in our community.” There has been an interesting conversation between Prema and Pakhi, both of them who call themselves Trans.

Pakhi: Amar biye hoyeche, aami shosur barite thaki. (I am married, I stay with my in-laws)

Prema: Kintu tor sasuri bolte parbe, eta amar bouma? (But will your mother-in-law be able to say that you are their daughter-in-law)?

Pakhi: Haan, amar jonnyo jhogra kore. (Yes, she fights for me)

Prema: Ko jon jane, toder biye hoyeche ? Court e giye registry hoyeche? Seta ki hoyeche? Shee rokom sikriti ki pawa jacche? Pawa

jacche naa. Tahole je jinisher kono ostisto nei tahole sheei jinish niye bhabna chinta keno korbo? (How many people know about your marriage? Did you have registered your marriage in court? Did it happen? Did you get that kind of recognition? Then there is no point in marriage which doesnot have the social recognition.

This conversation itself raises some of the pertinent issues about marriage among them who defy the rules of the heterosexual marriage. If marriage is treated as a bond between two individuals recognized by the society and the state through rituals and legal procedures then is it at all possible to have marriages without that social recognition or legal sanction. But then the question that arises is whether marriage at all remains necessary in a love relationship. Most of the kothis, transgenders and gay would say that love for them is momentary and not something permanent as the partner might leave to other girls/boys as per their comfort and settle for a life which is easy and acceptable. Guddu, a gay and a kothi says that “*amaderke sobai use kore, khele. Ami amar bondhuder kauke khushi dekhte parini. Sobaike chokher jol felte dekhechi*”. In an interview with Dipanwita Ghosh Mukherjee, sister-in-law of Rituparno Ghosh says that “*Chitrangada is not really a bio-pic but we could relate and understand the characters with the real life and associate whom he must have been talking about. There have been many who has been with him for some time for the fruits of work but did not stay for long.*” Anindya would say that ‘*amader moddhye onek bhalobasha jome thake, amra bhalobashar asol lok painaa*’. (We have so much of love to offer but don’t get the real ones to love) In most of the individuals there has been an intense feeling of loss and emotional crisis as they constantly seek of permanency in life and relationship which don’t happen because of the various circumstances of the state and society.

Guddu, who specifically mentions himself as a ‘korikone’ kothi who dresses up in shirt and pant, like any other boy (the other being bhelikone/santrakone who are cross-dressers) describes that “in an occasion when he was wearing a sari and a wig, that he had bought during the Durga Puja, his boyfriend Arup came when his friends brought ‘sindoor’ and told them to get married. Arup applied sindoor

in front of all of them and Guddu did not rub it for three says as the norm of the Bengali society”, he said. He became serious about the marriage and started feeling like a ‘wife’ but gradually he understood that Arup was very casual about the act and mentioned it just as an act of fun, and he was planning for a marriage with a girl. But Guddu still calls himself married.

Dodo, a female in male’s body says that “I have been in a relationship for six years with a man, then one day he comes up says me that he is having a relationship with a girl, but as he found time for me every Tuesday, and met me, I continued the relationship thinking that he loves me. He even introduced me with the girl and we became friends, till one day when Subhankar, my boyfriend came and told me that he is marrying her. They now have a son. Love was always about breakups for me.”

Gopal,(name changed) an old man who has almost spend his life all alone suddenly intervenes and says that “in our life we have to fight a lot. We have many relationships, but when it comes to ‘marriage’, it never works for us. When we get love, we get totally drawn away by that (bhalobasha pele amra ekebare gole jai, aar eto bhalobashi je dhorabandhar baire) and start loving them beyond anythingelse, but these relationships are all very short lived, and hardly anyone thinks of staying back, we are all left alone eventually”. “(Amader jibone prem onek ashe, kintu sex koratai toh aar prem noi, eksathe thaka, bissas kora, bondhutto sob tai taar part, jeta shesh mesh amader bhagye jote naa), in our lives there are many relationships of love that happens, but sex is not only the criteria, rather the friendship, the trust is also an integral part, which doesnot happen in our destiny.”

“There are some friends of mine who stays with their partners, but with the continuous fear that they might leave them any day. I cant

call these a relationship of love, where 'bhoi' or 'fear' is the constant companion", laments Biswajit,(name changed) a transgender.

Ronit, a gay man says that "I had several relationships and also had sex with some, but now I am happy with my present boyfriend with whom I would like to settle down once I start earning a good amount of money and don't have to care about my family for any kind of support, though I am hoping they would accept our being together. I am waiting for that day when I will be strong economically as that is what it matters the most for us."

Bhaskar, (name changed) a transsexual male laments that '(trans ra toh naa ghar ka/ naa ghat ka) trans neither belong here not there. Hijras atleast have a system of parampara where they go and start belonging with their gurus, but trans individuals stay with their family but they don't belong there, which makes their struggle more pathetic, (amra protiniyoto juddho korchi), we are fighting continuously. If someone goes through the process of breast augmentation and vaginoplast, the doctor gives them the certificate of a woman, but then again is she becoming a woman? She doesnot have a uterus and will always be unable to have children of their own, but ideally she is a woman and can be married to a man, but in India, even that is very difficult as ultimately no one accepts you as a woman and you are always reminded that you have changed your sex and were not born so. Men comes and go, relationships does not sustain for long because, if you are homosexual, you love the man or woman who is same as your gender, but if you are going for other gender in any case, then will you chose someone who has gone a surgery to be what she is or someone who is naturally so ? I think its complicated to understand the psychology of love."

A middle-aged woman of around 52 years of age would say that “same sex love can still be possible but marriages can never happen because they will never be able to reproduce. She says that god has created us in such a way that naturally we can give birth to the next generation and its absurd when two individuals of the same sex think of marriage.”

A fifty-six year old man Alok rejects the whole idea of same sex relationships. He says that “these are some of the upcoming problems of the age we are living into. These issues were not there when they were young. There have been effeminate males all through the time, but the whole idea of same sex love affairs is new in our society.”

A 64 year old woman was surprised in the issue I am working with and remained bewildered if this is something that can actually happen. It is also interesting to note that some of the aged people who said that yes, we are hearing about the same sex individuals through media and movies but when asked whether they will be able to take it normally be it with their own son or daughter, they were not sure.

Ratna, a woman in early fifties says that “none of our religion approves same sex relationship. Now a days in paper we do see and read about these relationships, but I don’t know if it’s with gods wish. How is it even possible that a man loves another man? I don’t know if that can actually happen. Love can happen between two friends but something like between a man and a woman, I don’t think it is even possible.”

Mitali, who has a daughter studying in college feels sad for the situation homosexuals needs to face, she feels very sympathetic about their situation and struggle as she saw in Ghosh’s films as well which she liked a lot, but she cannot think same sex relationship or

marriages to be a solution of the problem. She does not think that as a disease or a problem, but she also cannot think about a legal sanction of homosexuals. She laments “aami janinaa ki kora uchit, baa ki hole bhalo hoi”, I don’t know what needs to be done or what could be a way out to this situation.

Ruth Vanita (2005) in her writing on *Same Sex Weddings, Hindi Traditions and Modern India* mentions that though apparently the phenomenon of same sex marriages might seem to be an idea brought from the West, but interestingly, most of these couples who are surprisingly from rural places are even unknown about the terms like ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’. Their understanding seem to be framed with the ideas of something that they grew up, the heterosexual, the traditional love and marriages where they have the idea that they can’t live without each other and will live together and die together. India started culminating a hatred and violence against the homosexuals with the anti-sodomy law introduced by the Britishers in 1860, since when the system of family, education, and the modern system of police and administration have been trying to uphold this system with horror and violence. However Indian families are still skeptical about love marriages of different kinds where the same sex love has been added as one in the list.

The intervention of the Hindu Right Wing remains mentionable be it the protests on Valentine’s Day where they forcibly marry young heterosexual couples treating it as a practice transported from west through globalization and neo imperial market forces which ultimately commercializes sex according to them, they also agitate after the screening of the film “Fire” in Delhi and thus their protests against homosexual affairs cannot be expected any less. In January 2006, when Seeta, a nineteen year old girl attempted suicide in Meerut while her bride was locked up in her home after being married in a Shiva temple, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Shiv Sena together shouted slogans in front of the magistrate’s office and also the hospital Seeta was admitted saying ‘*stop perverse marriages, stop anti social impulses*’. There have been various instances of female couple marriages after the first reported case of Leela Namdeo and Urmila Srivastava, two police women of Bhopal in the year 1987.

Same sex marriages take the relationship of 'love' to another level which like any other heterosexual hegemonic marital relationship has a 'bride' and a 'groom' and thus a question that remains is that whether we as individuals cannot actually go beyond the notions of the sacred bondage and probably think of a friendship like Krishna and Arjun, of Mahabharata. Or marriage to some extent actually works as a sense of stability which lacks in many of the homosexual affairs causing a sense of insecurity among the 'queer'. Or as Ruth Vanita points that we are socialized in such a tradition and society where we tend to think and relate to love and marriage as seen around us and thus the same sex love affairs are nothing outside the traditional frame of mind. Vermillion (sindoor) which is one of the markers of getting married among the Hindus does remain so even in homosexual marriages. However the debate continues as to what extent are these marriages 'social' when the majority of our society and family, and the state stands against with the IPC 377, criminalizing the sexual expressions of the 'queer'. Though it's also true that its also a judgement against the heterosexuals as it stands against any sort of sexual behavior and practice except the peno-vaginal sexual intercourse.

Thus it's true that none of the social affairs can be understood in a straight line rather can only make sense with the complications and complexities of human behavior and understanding. Vanita also points out same sex liaison that existed in premodern times in India where poet Maulvi Mukarram's companion Mukarram inherited his property and Mukarram also mourned as a widow and observed 'iddat' in Maulvi's death. In a 14th Century devotional text in Sanskrit and Bengali, the birth of Bhagiratha from two women was also a fascinating example where the two women who were co-widows, and after the death of the kind, the husband of both, they made love with divine blessings and one of them became pregnant. There is two versions of the story, one in which it states that the new born was born boneless and later cured by sage, but the other states that the new born was born healthy with the blessings of the God of Love, Kama and the God of Creation Brahma. However this story directs to a dimension in '*Sushruta Samhita*' (1st Century BC to 1st Century AD) stating the if a child was born out of two women the child will be 'boneless'. Though the mention of the story thousands of years ago lead us to think that the fuss that are being created in India in present times regarding same sex relationships being a result of modernization and westernization doesn't stand

true in any respect. Homophobia has been a product of modern nationalism and the try to maintain a uniformity of sexual cultures in all parts of the world.

However among the eunuchs there have been various rituals of marriages linked up with mythological stories and folklores around the country. Kuttantavar Festival in South India remains one of the significant ritualistic celebration where eunuchs who are also called 'aravanis', gets married for a day following the story of Aravan or Kuttantavar from *Mahabharat*. The story goes like this that Arjuna, the third Pandava had a son Aravan with his wedlock with Ulupi, a widowed 'naga-kanya', during his period of exile. Later Aravan sacrificed himself to Goddess Kali ensuring the victory of Pandavas in Kurukshetra. Before Aravan sacrificed himself he wished to get married and thus Lord Krishna took the female form of Mohini and married him as no other girl was found to marry for a day. The next day of marriage Aravan offered his head to the Goddess and Mohini mourned as a widow. The festival which happens during April/May, 'Chittirai' month every year in the main temple of Koovagam in Tamil Nadu and other small villages in Devanampattinam, Tiruvelkalam, Adivarahanattam, Puducherry etc. After the dance with the flower crown of Aravan, priests marry the eunuchs and some of the men who vowed to marry Aravan after some ailment of disease, with the thali tying ceremony as the 'thali' is seen as the symbol of married women. The next day of the marriage follows the act of mourning by breaking bangles, beating breasts and opening their worn jewellery. They cut their thalis and wear white clothes after taking bath symbolizing the life of a widow and they continue doing this for a month after which they come to their daily life of color clothes and bangles. A symbolic cooked 'blood rice' is distributed which is believed to make woman conceive. And thus with the hope of conceiving in the next birth, having a clear feminine gender, eunuchs take the 'rice' with utmost belief.

Yellamma Devi in Belgaum district, Shimoga district and Bellary district in Karnataka also have a festival on the full moon day of "Margshirsha" (November-December) when Yellamma Devi is taken out and hundreds of eunuchs with vermilion on their forehead and wearing ornaments seek blessings from the Goddess. The story is that Yellamma or Renuka was a very beautiful Brahmin lady who got married to an extremely short tempered sage Jamdagni. One day Renuka went to fetch water and got so

engrossed watching boys playing water sports that she forgot coming back home which led her husband to question her chastity and being angry he ordered his five sons to behead their mother. The four sons made some reasons and did not carry out the order and angry Jamdagni cursed them to be eunuchs and as soon as the fifth son, the famous Parashurama behead his mother, to their surprise her head multiplied its numbers and moved to different directions. The four sons and others since then are believed to be her followers.

Bahuchara Mata is also another diety of the eunuchs who is most famous in Bechraji town in Gujrat. The followers believe her as the incarnation of Goddess Durga and the patroness of eunuchs. There have been two stories associated with the Goddess. One is that she was married to a man who went to the woods and enacted like a woman rather than making love to her every night. Angry Bahuchara Mata cursed him and castrated him to become a eunuch. The other story is that once Mata was wandering in the woods and a man tried to rape her when she got angry and cursed him of impotency. The man then begged to her to forgive him from the curse and she agreed on the terms that he can only come out of the curse if he went to the woods and enacted like a woman, only then can he be pardoned. Eunuchs believe that they have been cursed with the non-functional gender due to their sins and Mata will forgive them and in the next life they will also be born a clear gender of a man or a female. However all these goddess are seen as the goddess of fertility.

Shakuntala Devi (1977) in her book *The World of Homosexuals* interviewed a well-known Sanskrit scholar and a Vaishnava priest in the temple of Srirangam in South India said that same sex lovers must have been cross sex lovers in former life. The soul remains the same and the power of love seeks one another. Ruth Vanita interviewed a Shaiva priest in 2002 who conducted weddings of two Brahmin woman said that marriages are between two spirits and no spirits are either male or female. Thus it can be understood that the/ issue of love and marriage among the homosexuals has been an issue of discussion for quite a long time now. And it can no way be said as a culture of the West, as there has been stories of mythology which were far before these systems of modernization and globalization processes and moreover these marriages are seen and

performed in lines of traditional beliefs of marriage more than the legal procedures where it still awaits for its rights to be granted. However the question of its recognition and acceptance by the society and state still remains a question.

CONCLUSION

The rich historical narratives and lores show the open-ness of a complex variety of sexualities that Indian culture had presented us with. The formal academic discourses on different sexualities might have come in the late 20th Century, but the diverse mythical, religious and architectural representations make one to reflect on its presence since time immemorial. In this context, a relevant question which arises is the importance of ‘categorizations’ or ‘definitions’ in understanding our social selves and social reality. The absence of definite classifications like ‘queer’, ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ for example in any given cultural setting doesnot necessarily mean the people who experience homosexual desires doesnot exist. In the 21st Century when we are on our way of deconstructing the definite identities and going beyond towards a path of ‘fluidity’, it definitely makes one wonder of its existential complications.

Individuals tend to understand themselves through the available categories and structural definitions which are at their disposal. It is language which plays a powerful role in constructing the social reality through its forms of communication. In this specific study what could be understood is the role of classifications which remains extremely important for the ‘queer’ to understand themselves. On the one hand where queer theory aims at going beyond binaries, not only of gender ‘male’ or ‘female’, but also of ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’, the individuals experiencing various sexualities, try and find a definite identification for themselves to adhere with. It helps them in living their lives and calling themselves in specific terms that they could relate to. A ‘man’ who feels like a ‘woman’, inspite of understanding his/her ‘curious’ behaviours remain unable to identify themselves till they find a definite cultural category of expression in the holistic social structure. In this context, queer sexuality discourses at times get tagged as ‘elitist’ as there remains a power of knowledge in the expression of these various different gender identities. In India, where the majority of the masses struggle to earn their livelihood, the concern of sexuality at times, is seen as an indulgence, which probably is not true. It remains an integral part of human existence. The ancient architectural creativity in the walls of the religious places, ‘*mandir*’ so to say, depicts so much of sexual images that it

perplexes us even in the present era where we follow a ‘decorum’ in discussing issues regarding sexual acts, romantic affairs etc. It shows us that sexual acts were nothing to be treated as a sin, rather was just an important part of life with everything else in the path of living.

As culture is everywhere in our existence, in our doing, thinking and expressing, its overwhelming influence over sexual choices makes ‘heterosexuality’ a norm. This norm is established within the system of marriage and reproduction making it an institution in itself. It is when this ‘norm’ is in question, it starts exerting its power to silence the voice of the ‘other’. This could be contextualized with Durkheim’s social facts, which says that till one chooses to remain in any system without any sense of protests, it functions as a peaceful system and it is only when the acts of ‘deviance’ arise, the system/structure through the state and society tries to show its ‘power’. There is a structured ‘violence’ through the legitimacy of the state and society and on the contrary there is a ‘counter-violence’ of individuals or group against that structure of order. It is through this negotiation of structure and individual, society works with changes, rectification and adaptation.

With diverse multi-cultural and multi-lingual heritage, India also holds a possibility of ‘ethnocentrism’¹⁵⁰ and thus it operates through strange ways of ‘unity’ through its diversity. Interestingly, though Hinduism as a religious belief is supposed to be the ‘faith’ of the majority, but it initially existed as a way of life and the formation of specific ‘faith and belief’ system in lines of religion started with other religions coming into play, specifically the colonial rulers who in understanding India and its people had to categorize its masses on certain terms. The colonial legacy and their Victorian morality¹⁵¹ were so strong that Indian culture is still living to those age old norms. Indian Penal Code Section 377 still holds a law criminalizing homosexuality which dates back to 1860. Even after independence and the process of globalization, liberalization the colonial mindset seems to have prevailed in this country to a large extent.

¹⁵⁰ Understanding ‘other’ cultures in reference to one’s own.

¹⁵¹ In the times of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) in the 19th Century Britain, certain moral codes like sexual repression, low tolerance in criminal activities and strong ethical values were maintained and most importantly were imposed on Indian system of social life.

In spite of a hush-up silence that is being maintained in our society when it comes to sexuality or eroticism, there is an array of cultural means through which it also comes up into serious discussions, one of which are 'films'. Films always depicted the 'social' and initially Indian films depicted social and political life of the 'nation' more than that of individualistic representations. Heterosexuality, as the supposed norm was reinforced. It is only when individuals became a concern and their choices and issues started coming up, with a strong sense of 'self', the binary notion of gender was questioned with a multiplicity of sexual choices that remained within the spectrum of the male-female category. However, there is still a moral inertia and cowardice that exists in the name of retaining 'chastity and respectability' of culture when it comes to sexuality beyond the hegemonic heteronormativity. India still continues to remain a country with different layers of cultures ranging from primitive to modern reflecting the Hindu mind from the aboriginals to the Orient and the Occident.

Interestingly films remain dominantly important in understanding the shift of cultural trends and understanding the reality that it is afterall based on. The influence of film as Nehru would say is greater than the influence of newspaper and book combined. Popular cinema in India has always acted like a metaphor for understanding the society being complimentary to each other. Though there has been always a debate between 'commercial' and 'art' cinema in reference to its relevance and authenticity, but even popular cinema could be read in terms of, how people perceive themselves, their values and behavior and the complex understanding and most importantly why 'these' films attract more of its audience than the art house films. The process of cinema enables us to examine the transformation of a society with its internal complexities and external policies becoming a significant category of cultural politics. We have seen how the change in the socio political field actually influenced the film makers, sometimes they being directly a part of the movement that was going on in the specific time and sometimes their realization to the issues happening around them has actually affected a great deal in the stories that came up as tales in the movies. Thus in understanding culture, and its discussion on sexualities, films can no longer be ignored to be discussed as just a means of entertainment.

Movies in a theatre has its own sense of awe where in the dark room we see the characters in the large screen with the narratives going on and suddenly we feel associated with their lives and the complications that goes on till the end. This is the reason we keep talking about the films even much after we finish watching them as if the stories were just of a friend or a person we know. This makes films a very relevant issue in our private spaces of home, in the 'dining table discussions' specially which remains as the space for everyone in the 'modern' family to meet for food even after living in a world of much alienation and work.

The immense technological growth had on the one hand brought the world much closer in respect to communication but on the other created a life of much 'distance' when it came to inter-personal relationships between individuals. Interestingly, the three films that we discussed in details also hold this 'dining table discussions' with much importance. In *Memories in March* we see that Sahana and Sid's mother through food actually talks a lot about Sid and the mother comes to know her son much closely through the conversations. Infact, Aarti and Arnob bond with each other through the sequence of having dinner in the dining table. In *Arekti Premer Golpo* as well we see that Gopa comes up with the revelation to her husband, Basu (Dev Kumar Roy) about her pregnancy in presence of Abhiroop while having food, not though in a proper dining table scene but much around 'food'. In *Chitrangada*, the interaction between Rudra, and his parents happen specifically again in a dining table sequence where the conversations between his father remains extremely intriguing, through which we as audience get to know the trouble that both the son and the father shares with each other centering on their expectation towards his child and the child's own wish and expectation from themselves to live a life of his own choice.

In this respect I am also reminded of Gibran's poem *On Children* which starts saying "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you yet they belong not to you..." In the film, (*Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*) Rudra's mother at one point claims that when he was born, a baby, she is the one who nurtured him and thus there is some claim that she also has in his 'body', which is something that

we as a part of the society cannot ignore. Probably this is a clash that remains between parents and their children, especially when the wishes of each other clashes or deviate. Here what comes as the most important point is the intervention of the state in this phenomenon of one's 'wishes' to live ones live and also in the space of one's physical existence which is obviously manifested through the 'body'.

'Body' of individual's as we see is never a simple affair of living life rather its connotations are much larger and complex. The movement that Gandhi fought all his life was through his own body and it has high political significance. I am not going into the debate whether it is just or unjust, but the practice of '*brahmacharya*' and '*satyagraha*' which includes non-cooperation and fasting is all about one's own existential protest. In the present context when in protest of the rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama in July, 2004 at Manipur by Assam Rifles, there were around thirty middle aged women who walked through Imphal to the head quarters of Assam Rifles shouting slogans as *Indian Army rape us too...we are all Manorama's mothers*. This has an immense powerful statement as the women's body is generally supposed to be the space of her dignity and respect where rape becomes a means to malign the dignity of the women and she is victimized on the lines of 'purity and pollution', whereas her psychological trauma enhances with the questions and mistrust the society puts forward her. In that context when middle aged women can actually by their choice be 'naked' and protest, it proves that one's body which can be on one hand be regulated by the state and its powers, also hold immense power to protest. I am discussing about this here because I feel that 'body' also remains the most important space for a 'queer' to express, to live and to execute their own freedom and wishes, which when clashes with the notions of the society and the state, there happens ostracisation and marginalization and something which is the most 'personal' to ones existence actually becomes a 'burden' or 'pain' to carry in accordance to the law of the state. One's own act of 'suicide' that is, killing of oneself becomes a criminal offence whereas the state seems to hold the power to kill or to regulate as per the wishes of the machinery. Though the Constitution of India does provide us with laws about our freedom to live and express but however it becomes meaningless at times when on similar grounds it questions the right to live a life of own choice, the right to express an alternative thought, 'discriminating' on various grounds. When the society questions

on 'queer' dressing habits and the exaggeration of their behaviors (as many of my heterosexual respondents said), it cannot be just understood in terms of one's choice to do so, but also very importantly their conscious way of protesting against the 'norm'. It does question the authority of the normative to be 'normal'. There is a 'counter violence' that exists, in response to the violence of the state and the society where 'body' becomes the means of expressions and revolt.

In this reference of expression and revolt, an experience of my 'field' could be shared to understand the politics of body and behavior more closely. It was a day when I was walking with a transgender respondent-friend along the Rabindra Sarabor railway station that a woman suddenly shouted on me for stamping on her feet. I was about to say a 'sorry' when suddenly my companion clapped his hand like a 'hijra' and the woman got scared and told me a 'sorry' instead. This was a seemingly funny incident that we both laughed at after the woman was gone, but what Raja mentioned was important. He said that it is this clapping of hands in this way that a hijra is recognized. *'I am not a hijra, still I clapped such that people understand that I am a transgender because I don't wear sari and bangles'*. These remains very symbolic because this sound of the 'clap' distinguishes hijras which help them to unite even among the masses and people are afraid of hijras (of their so called 'vulgar' gestures which doesnot go in terms with the established norm of social behavior and ethos of the 'culture' of the Bengalis) or are somewhat uncomfortable and thus sometimes 'acts like these' helps. This remains as an act of self protection. When 'laws' and 'society' stands against, there were personal ways of noegotating with the violence they continuously faced.

Anindya, one of my informants would say that *'laws are important in some level but when we are actually travelling around, whenever we are dressed 'differently' there is a 'gaze' that follows us which sometimes are not through words but we can read their eyes.'* On the contrary, while walking with a Pakhi in the streets of Kolkata, I witnessed an experience of some school boys (who were passing by in a public vehicle) throwing derogatory comments at her randomly. This to me was a very significant point to be noted as in how we actually read violence and marginaliation. Is it always physical, verbal or sometimes very well psychological and symbolic? The laughter or the mockery

many of the mainstream films for example portrays are very well a reason for the so called 'queer' to feel insecure justifying the laughter it intentionally creates through its representation and projection in which somewhere the real trouble and complications seem to get undermined. However, in a positive note again, what could be seen is the acknowledgement of the 'queer' identity, though not always in a sensible way but something which can no longer be avoided or can kept missing. It also gives us a picture of the society that we stay in. It is not only the director or the script writer who gives life to a sequence rather also the reading of the audience that makes it a meaningful text. The humour that is being created or the homophobic attitudes which is being seen is also not something which is out of the world, rather is very much a part of the socio cultural system we stay in. Gopal, in this respect comments that *'we don't want to be 'different'; we just want to be incorporated in the mainstream system. I don't want to be seen as someone 'alternative', someone strange, rather a part of the larger society'*. However in this process of mainstreaming with social and legal recognition, at times the coerce power of heterosexuality perpetrates even in homosexual relationships through marriage or role-playing which again falls in the vicious circle of perpetrating patriarchal and heteronormative norms though through an 'alternative' manifestation.

While walking with the "queer" informants in local trains, public buses and streets of Kolkata, I as a researcher, witnessed many incidents which tend to harass 'them' who dressed and talked 'differently. In the park of Kakurgachi, that is a 'cruising point' for 'queer' people, when I as a woman was not allowed to sit there after 6 in the evening, actually came as a shock, because on the one hand it seemed that the meeting points of the "queer" is seen as a space of 'threat' (for girls) and on the other the presence of the policemen and the 'surveillance' in the place talks a lot about how state intervenes in various spaces of our lives to control and rectify us. It seems that even spaces are 'marked' with special system of 'surveillance'. The policemen actually blamed Guddu, the informant I was conversing with to not have informed me about this unsaid rule that prevails in that place which also proves that many like Guddu remains the easy victim for oppressive state acts.

In reference to this discussion of maintaining particular ‘space’, recently I heard a speech of Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh saying ‘*homosexuality as a threat to Indian culture and if it is legalized then there will be no much difference between humans and animals.*’ He also condemns the act of linking homosexual acts with religious scriptures, which is hugely immoral. ‘*What is unnatural is unnatural. What one is doing in their home is not our concern but when they are fighting for it in public, there should not be any constitutional support for it.*’ He supports the Supreme Court Judgement of criminalizing homosexuality.¹⁵² In this comment, the space of ‘home’ as ‘private’ and ‘public’ comes in juxtaposition to each other. It seems that they are definite and bounded spaces of existence, which probably needs more questioning. Prof Siras of Aligarh University was suspended in 2010 even when he was in this space called ‘private’, but with the 2009, Delhi High Court Verdict he however won the case, ultimately giving his life. In the year 2017, we seriously need to reflect on these notions of bounded territory or a specific space in order to live a life of our own choice.

The act which common-sensically is known to be ‘vulgar’ is also used as a form of protest and protection of these ‘minority’ groups against the conservative traditional ethos of the society. Though most of the aged people would see it as something which disturbs them (*dristi-kotu*) but it as well can’t be ignored that this ‘disturbance’ is a result of the deviance in the behavior that they showcase in order to question the expected norms of the society in spite of fact that this becomes an attention to the public ‘gaze’ and comments. It is also among many of the youth that ‘*Rituparno*’, the name itself becomes the part of the ‘slang’ among themselves to mock the males who behave in a so called girlish way. ‘*Nyaka*’ which is a term used for females become an abusive word for males.

In an interview¹⁵³ film-maker Kaushik Ganguly said that the exaggeration in showcasing one’s own sexuality through dresses and behavior also calls for ‘homophobia’, which he feels would have been much lesser if ‘they’ were portrayed just like ‘others’ in reference to representation in films. However on the contrary, it could very well be seen as a conscious act of ‘deviance’ to the ideas of decency and

¹⁵² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=be4sn-QTKf0&spfreload=10>

¹⁵³ A talk show named ‘*Songe Srijit*’, 11th December 2015. The Interview could be viewed in <https://www.voot.com/shows/shonge-srijit/1/368527/kaushik-ganguly-and-anjan-dutta/360839>

sophistication be it with the language they use or the exaggeration in the ways they dress themselves at times, that the society holds and was also an influence of the colonial Victorian morality that upholds itself through its various manifestations in laws and the societal practices. It's also true that the language we use also depends on the space we are in, be it in office, family, among friends etc, it is also something that is learnt through the process of our socialization and which most importantly is different in different spaces. Thus there cannot be anything as 'the decent' form of expression, as it differs. Thus the so called 'vulgar' language can also be seen as a means to safeguard themselves from the continuous domination from the public spaces and obviously as a conscious way of 'deviance' in order to protest and question the established cultural order and the system of language.

Sexual differences are one among the many identities that constitute the spectators. It is sometimes through association or by rejection that the readers see the text of the film. Dodo mentioned the film *Shabnam Mousi* and said that *'we are not hijras but there is a sense of empowerment which happens within when we see that even a hijra can be a strong contestant in the politics'*. He continues that *'we only get attention while the election process happens; otherwise no one bothers about our existence and the continuous stigmatization that we go through'*.

In their journey of continuous stigmatization and minotization, there were many questions that came my way. Initially 'I' as a researcher, was no less an object of observation for my informants and my life and objective of work also attracted them whom I was interacting with. Many questions came by as whether I with my supervisor will try and manipulate their interviews, whether they will be misinterpreted, as they believe they had been in many cases when they were interviewed by many NGOs who worked with 'queers'. It took a lot of time to gain their trust and be friends with them. There were various reactions from the different groups that I interacted with. The college students were curious about my research and its findings and my experiences with my 'queer' respondents. The older generation was mostly in question with my research and its objectives and they were very unsure as to why it becomes even a subject of academic research. The experiences were diverse and thus interesting. The question that came from

one of my “queer” informants that whether I had a boyfriend and in replying a ‘no’, the comment that ‘*aami tomar boyfriend ke kheyee nebo naa*’, (I won’t eat your boyfriend) at one hand made me quite uncomfortable as to how to react to such a comment, but on the other hand probe me to think that how ‘women’ who are usually viewed as sexual object remain desirable, but for somebody whom the mainstream would call as ‘queer’ might as well desire a ‘man’ and thus man just like woman may also be a ‘sexual object’ in the similar logic.

The issue of ‘power’ and ‘position’ not only of the director becomes relevant in the field but also of the researcher and the researched who inter-mingles to make it a meaningful journey called the ‘field’. The continuous question as to how the research will help them, “how am I going to ‘write’ about their shared experiences”, ‘will I actually come back to them after my work if done’ are some queries which brought some of my inner questions on surface. Many of the informants would say that they felt comfortable talking to me because I am a ‘girl’ even if I may not be “queer” and from their ‘community’. There were repeated questions about my sexuality and about my personal life which very well proves that no more is it true that the researcher solely is the one to ‘observe’ rather is continuously ‘observed’ and questioned. There were instances when some informants would get very impersonal sharing their life and go to the extent of asking me about their decisions in reference to their lives. The whole debate on maintaining ‘impersonal’ space between the researcher and the researched sometimes got blurred; however I tried my best to support them and make them realize that I may not have all the answers of the dilemmas but can only be a silent ear. While studying a section of society who is supposedly marginalised vis-a-vis the mainstream society, there is always a curiosity if the study is of any help to them. If at all this study will bring any difference in their lives? To this question I could only say that just a study of a paper can obviously not call for change in the minds of people in the society but definitely there is an attempt to bring in consciousness and sensitivity about the multiple sexual experiences through this research.

The continual process of differencing leads to a sense of ‘community’ and ‘non community’ among the ‘queer’. The spaces of family and society where they were born

and socialized primarily was their 'community' but gradually with their realization of own self and the information and knowledge about multiple sexualities, the space of identification changes where their sexual experiences brought them together due to the marginalization that they continuously encountered. They socialised in either 'cruising points' or 'gay chat rooms' and in some so called liberal spaces through film festivals, gay prides, literary meet etc. Through the associations, the strong sense of community arises, where the so called heterosexual becomes 'outsiders'. However this space of community and non community also in relation to self and others are shifting and contested. The very existence of an insider and outsider is today a questionable factor as the internal diversifications merges with external issues. There are instances where the respondents shared their experiences as to how even within the space of their 'community', they at times felt insecure and harassed. Niloja, changed her name after the sex reassignment surgery, but it is within the community that people repeatedly called her with the previous name in 'public' to insult her. She was continuously joked with her inability to be a mother inspite of being a woman. She was also denied entry as a female-employee in a NGO working with lesbian and bisexual issues because she was not born a 'female'. There remained margins within the margins, that is, discriminations within the discriminated, where 'power' never ceases to manifest itself in some form or the other.

Coming back to films and their sexual representations what remains the most noticeable fact is the constant search of one's 'identification' with the characters played in the film and in relation to that their own experiences and association, with the disagreements in relation to their personal lives. There has been a discontent from my 'queer' informants and college students specially about the functional way of approaching the narratives in the films where the protagonist who happens to be 'queer' is ultimately left alone, whereas the bi-sexual lovers are seen to find their love or go in the system of marriage as per the expectations of the society. Though it's a reality in most the cases, as most of the transgenders and kothi feels, yet the search for a revolt or a deviation in the norms of the films was the point of association for most of the 'queer'.

The figure of the 'mother' in all the films, though in *Memories in March* (other than Sid's mother Aarti) and *Arekti Premer Golpo*, her presence is only felt through the

dialogues of the protagonist who is seen to be in conversation with her over phone has a major attention even being absent onscreen. Most of the individuals who associated with the character in some way felt that it's mostly not the case, where they believed that the space called 'home' remains a major source of violence where parents can never accept the fact with so much grace and support. To them it is very much a personal experience of Rituparno Ghosh, as himself and the class he belonged from.

The absence of any 'lesbian' reference in any of the films are again seen with discontent by some of the informants who would say that it's obviously a step forward to have these films talking about the so called 'alternative' genders with such sensibility but yet there is a large part of the 'queer' community which remains missing from these representations. A film is obviously a director's creation where his/her own looking at things would come into play is the most obvious phenomena to happen but when the association of Rituparno Ghosh, who willingly or unwillingly became a known face in the space of 'queer' politics in Kolkata, the expectations comes with much valour.

Many of my respondents actually felt that these movies were of Rituparno Ghosh and by Rituparno Ghosh where he himself has been the major character in all these films and his awe could not be avoided in anyway. They even go to the extent of saying that these films has nothing to do with the queer community at large as he being the most known face in the 'queer' imagination in Bengal, specifically Kolkata, never actually got associated with the movement that was happening. They would even question that 'why Rituparno?' and no one else in the place of the characters played? This however was also a concern of Ghosh, where he in reference to *Arekti Premer Golpo* comments that his presence actually turned the major attention of the audiences. Most of the people were actually looking for the life of the person Rituparno Ghosh in the life of the documentary film maker Abhiroop Sen, and again while *Chitrangada*, people were more concerned about the film maker Rituparno Ghosh and his dilemmas in his wish to change his sex rather than the character of Rudra, the choreographer. The presence of Rituparno had so much more overwhelming influence over the characters that the on screen characters to some extent gets lost in identification and goes much deeper in understanding how Ghosh as a person experiences and narrates his own story. *Chitrangada* was told to be

semi- biographical but even while playing the role of Chapal Bhaduri in *Arekti Premer Golpo*, the major attention happens to be on him rather than the character he was playing for. Rituparno Ghosh as a film maker took a conscious decision in coming out of his closet. He established himself as a wellknown director, writer and became a favourite name in Bengali middle class household. Though most of his films had strong women protagonists and he was extremely critical and sensitive about the issue of sexuality, he only came out of his closet in later phase of his life which talks a lot about the individual's position and power of expressing oneself as he/she wishes.

With reference to the voices of the 'marginalized', attention could be drawn towards the subaltern studies which gradually changed its nature from looking at just the 'voices from below' towards a critical and cultural theory with the representation of subaltern subjectivity thinking in lines with Foucault or Derrida who questions and deconstructs the meanings, positions and structures in search of new meanings and reality. It is through subaltern studies that subversive cultural politics started being seen from a different light which critically discussed the forms of power and knowledge that oppress the so called 'subaltern' people providing with a space for alternatives and recognition of the difference creating a new cultural history. It emphasized on the search of the hidden pasts which would restore the integrity with the indigenous histories that is generally found in non-linear, oral, symbolic or dramatic forms. In a way this study also evokes some of the similar concerns as how culture and politics through the colonial discourse have created a hegemonic idea of sexual behavioral practices and it is also a humble attempt to engage through films, mythological stories, narratives and conversations in understanding 'voices' that are forcibly 'silenced'.

However, this study for me as a researcher has enriched me with experiences of the field which otherwise could never be learnt from the text books. The constant dilemma while addressing and writing about the narratives dealing with the ambiguity of one's own body and expression, that is the 'gender' also is something which I continuously experienced while writing. Bengali being the dominant language of my 'doing research' I did not face much problem talking with them as it does not have different gender terms for 'he' or 'she' but when I am writing in English, it does becomes

a problem to look at. There remains a constant question as to in which gender terms I am supposed to write in order to express those emotions they felt. Is it the biological self that I should refer or the innate experiences or wishes that they encounter? The hegemonic gendered society which has constructed itself with the 'language' of expression hardly has any space for the other genders, left aside fluidity. Bengali as a language as well lack terms of identification where '*somokami*' (homosexuality) remains the predominant term homogenizing all the various identity that we can find in the vocabulary of English. Thus I feel that domination of the heterosexual patriarchal values is not only in terms of bipolar gender binary but also present in the set of 'language' that remains the major way of communication. The established system of language needs to be deconstructed with the newer vocabularies and linguistics creating more equal spaces for all. The politics of language thus remains central to the discussion of culture and gender which associate 'terms' for different gender differently implying meanings attached to them.

To conclude, these films atleast open up discussions which are critical to rigidity of values and practices and create a ground of thinking and reflection. It becomes an entry point of discussion. Like or dislike, there are atleast a scope of opening that room for understanding, conversations and debate which makes the 'queer' genders visible and bring them in the public knowledge. Though films are also seen as an instrument of the bourgeoisie to express and represent as such which would attract audience with a sense of ease rather than disturbing. The position and the power of the story teller can also no way be avoided but it is also true that if the narratives are not something very 'obvious' in the minds of the majority of the people it does become an important tool of change as well. In that space this medium could also be seen as a tool of cultural movement holding the immense power to directly influence its audience without 'preaching'. It opens up spaces of discussions and debate and most importantly disturbs the taken for granted book of knowledge of most of its viewers. However in global media, it's also quite difficult to distinguish 'politicized aesthetics' and 'aestheticized politics' where both politics and aesthetics become integrated with each other in creation of any art form. Cinema has now become a part of our everyday life being interconnected with art, culture and politics, also holding the multifaceted forms of experiences with itself.

Films of these kinds which at least try to communicate the diverse gender notions with an intension to break some of the established ideas of the same, if not ahead of times, could at least be said as a powerful way of deconstructing hegemonic thinking and practices. In the urban spaces of Kolkata, the youth to some extent seems to be altering their views with their association with different people, friends, movies and spaces, whereas the older generations are yet quite reluctant to change. They at times, inspite of their good knowledge about communism and people's rights justify their views of not linking Rituparno and his movies due to his explicit expressions of sexuality which they cannot accept to a great extent. When asked to validate their not liking him, they however fall short of words to express. At times as a listener, I felt that may be logically they also are quite aware of their illogical support of gender practices, but changing their age old notions seems a little difficult to happen in reality.

Films thus cannot be seen as just a replica of the social but very much the agency of communication of the social in various levels. In the present society, films which talks of changes, initiating critical thoughts and breaking notions might not be accepted whole heartedly, but interestingly are also not rejected outrightly. It remains in 'between'. It initates newer enagements, attracts criticism, opens up debates and thus proves its existence. The films of Ritwik Ghatak could not make good business in his times and he did struggle a lot to make his living, but now those same films become a part of both academic and social discussions. He becomes significantly important as a film maker. Rituparno's films did make a good business, more because Ghosh himself as a protagonist appeared on screen and it was more to take a sneak peek to his own life that many people felt an urge to watch these films. There was a continuous association of him as a 'queer' film maker, with the characters he played on screen. This might be a short coming in these three films as these films could not establish the narratives independently, rather was read to a great extent with the reference to Rituparno Ghosh, a well known film maker, who is a queer himself. Inspite of the alternative views of gender notions, the 'functional' way of ending the films cannot be ignored. The 'queer' protagonist is seen to be left alone in all the three movies. The reason of such a representation might be because it hints on the society who forces the homosexuals to live their lives in seclusion or may be the limitation of cinema as an art form. It is an art

but the business factor which is associated with it can also not be ignored. It after all wants to make profit and thus limits itself by the needs and aspirations of its audience that it caters for. These films thus become both dialogical and dialectical in its nature. It does initiate a discussion among friends, families and neighbors but at some point limits itself within certain social norms.

A study of this kind could be expanded with special reference to caste, class and religion within the 'queer', the voices of the 'rural' which could not be addressed in this specific study. A further research can bring out newer dimensions of reading of the same texts and the varieties of experiences and ideas which vary with time and space. Language being such an important part of films and social life, a sociological study with reference to the linguistic approach could also lead to further studies in understanding how language constructs itself in social terms and its constraints and limitations in a study of this kind. A research work is a continual process, rather than a destination reached and thus this work could be seen as the first step of attempting to study a social reality with a sociological criticality and imagination.

Filmography

Arekti Premer Golpo.2010.

Writer & Director:Kaushik Ganguly.

Production Designer & Creative Director: Rituparno Ghosh

Production: Cinemawala.

Music Director: Debojyoti Mishra

Actors: Rituparno Ghosh, Indraneil Sengupta, Chapal Bhaduri, Raima Sen and others

Time: 128 mins

Memories in March.2010

Director: Sanjay Nag.

Production: Shree Venkatesh Films & Rituparno Ghosh

Writer: Rituparno Ghosh

Music Director: Debojyoti Mishra

Actors: Rituparno Ghosh, Deepti Naval, Raima Sen and others

Time: 104 mins

Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish.2012

Writer & Director: Rituparno Ghosh.

Production: Shree Venkatesh Films. 135 mins

Music Director: Debojyoti Mishra

Actors: Rituparno Ghosh, Jishu Sengupta, Anjan Dutta, Raima Sen & others

Time: 135 mins

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Appendix:

A brief set of questions to initiate the discussion among the respondents:

Discussions about the movie with the college students:

- How do you like the movie?
- What difference do you find between the movies of earlier times and the present set of movies that you watch?
- Which are the movies that you can remember of that represented gender in a different light other than the stereo-typical roles?
- Do you think the issue of sexuality should be openly discussed in public? Why?
- What do you find interesting to talk about in this particular cinema?
- Do you watch these movies with your elders?
- Do you think that films at all represent society or just a piece of entertainment?
- Will you discuss these films with your parents or peer groups?
- Do you think that cinema of these kinds which are not representing the so called 'expected' and 'normal' holds a special importance when its represented through a 'popular culture' of this sort?
- While you discuss these issues in home, what sort of reactions do you get from them?
- If supposedly you were in the place of the protagonist would you have reacted?
- How did you get to know about the notions of gender, sexuality or homosexuality/heterosexuality?
- Whats your take on censorship of movies?
- Do you think the censorship laws are biased towards sexual representation in homosexual romanticism and heterosexual love scenes?
- "Arekti Premer Golpo" was a movie which was not screened in 'Nandan', how do you justify the act?
- Do you think movies also have an important role to play in the construction and appropriation of gender?
- What's your take when people relate sexual assertion with modernity?

To the directors/story writers:

- What actually made you interested about making this film? Any inspiration or incident?
- Which target group do you make these films for?
- What kind of reactions did you get after making this film?

- Do you think ‘Rituparno Ghosh’ being the common actor for all this films holds a special importance in the Bengali urban imagination?
- Do you think the films could be a weapon of change in a way?
- Do you think censorship laws are important in cinematic representation?
- What sorts of reactions did you receive while passing your film in reference to censorship laws?
- What basic difference as makers of cinema do you notice in the films of present times and the films of the earlier era?
- Do you think that there remains a huge gap in these sorts of representation in the mainstream cinema?

Questions to the queer activists:

- Since when are you involved in activism?
- What made you a part of this movement?
- What do you think about the term “queer”?
- Do you think the use of the term ‘queer’ represents all who are the so called “others” in the strict binary notions of gender?
- What according to you is the factor(s) which makes one bold enough to come out of the closet and speak freely about their sexual choices?
- As an activist how is that you feel the society is expected to change from its expected norms?
- Do what extent you think ‘laws’ are important in assertion of ones identity?
- Is there any difference that you could feel around you in the space of your activism that has happened after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2009 and the High Court Judgement in 2013?
- What importance do you think the queer film festivals have in the space of activism?
- Do you think films have an important role to play as an agent of change?
- To what extent has the Bengali queer films has made a difference according to you in the imagination of people, including the queer themselves?
- Do you think the language that we talk and write itself is very gendered?
- To what extent do you think those films has represented the reality?
- Are the so called ‘queer’ people well represented in those films? Does it encourage them to talk about their sexualities openly while the discussions of the films?

- Is there a difference that you can observe between the rural and the urban class in their expression of sexuality?
- When people call the 'queer movement' as an elitist one, what do you have to say about that?
- Do you observe any changes in mentality of people from the time you started your journey and now (2014)?
- What do you have to comment on the sex education classes in schools?
- Do you think 'Rituparno Ghosh' was one of the important icons in the queer movement atleast in the cultural arena of the Bengali imagination?

'Queer' narratives and questions:

- Are you comfortable with the term 'queer'?
- When did you become conscious about your identity or your choice of calling yourself as queer?
- Why do you think the term has so much of importance inspite of its negative connotation of something strange and not normal?
- What among these do you think holds a major importance- gay prides, queer film festival, conferences/talks?
- Do you at all feel that films could play a role in changing the mentality of the people?
- What do you have to say about the representation of gender in mainstream movies?
- How correctly do you think these 'queer movies' has represented the queer experiences?
- Do you think these movies are an integral part of the resistance against the state and society? Why do you think so?
- What are your experiences regarding the insensitivity of gender notions at the societal level?
- What difference does the law of 2009 and 2013 have on you personally?
- Do you at all think that laws could actually regulate our behaviors in this respect?

Elderly persons:

- Do you watch Bengali movies?
- Who is your favorite director and your favorite movies?
- Why do you like those movies for?
- What are the recent films that your have watched?

- Did you watch any of these films (or the particular film screened) earlier?
- How do you like the movie?
- What in the movie do you like and not like about?
- What is your idea about the theme of homosexuality (love relationship between two same gendered person)?
- How would you have reacted being in the role of parents in this particular film?
- According to you, where do you think the consciousness of our sexuality comes from?
- Are you comfortable with the notion of homosexuality?
- In your times, do you remember talking about sexuality with your elders and others?
- Do you think homosexuality existed since time immemorial in our society or did it appear later? When do you remember to first have come across this term?
- Do you think homosexuality has something to do with our religion and mythological stories? (Ardhwanariswar/Shikhandi/Mohini/Ayappa)
- How do you see gods wearing jewellery?
- Will you watch these movies with your children or grand children?