



A Film Journey of Ritwik Ghatak

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Abstract

Ritwik Ghatak left a legacy of art that resonates well beyond his much-belabored but short-lived career after he died in 1976 C.E. at fifty. Although he made a mere eight feature films and was involved with unfinished projects throughout a career of over twenty-five years, his impact on Indian cinema is profound. Besides making films, he was a teacher, functioning as a film teacher and vice-principal at the Film Institute of Pune. His involvement with the Indian People's Theatre movement (IPTA) and his knowledge of various short stories and over fifty Bengali articles on cinema signify his vast contributions towards the establishment of an arts-based agenda. In his lifetime, the Bengali film industry largely ignored Ghatak, only 'Meghe Dhaka Tara (Cloud-capped Star)' getting much appreciation from the Bengali audience out of all his films. Works that went relatively unnoticed and were screened by smaller theatres couldn't obliterate that impact. Today, Ritwik Ghatak's films stand as cultural treasures. A cult favourite. A never-ending source of inspiration for filmmakers. His work is raw and uncompromising. It looks at aesthetics, cinematic storytelling, and the deep wounds of Partition. Ghatak didn't just tell stories he questioned history, and challenged society. His films are both structured and chaotic, measurable in technique yet impossible to pin down in meaning. They evoke something deeper, something unspoken, a mix of philosophy, politics, and raw human emotion. His work is flawed and messy, but it lingers, and that is what makes it timeless.

Keyword: Ritwik Ghatak, Partition Cinema, Melodramatic Cinematography, Women's Representation, Mythological Cinema,

Those were the golden years of Bengali cinema, bearing for us a tradition that sets for innumerable possibilities. Films by eternal directors like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Rituporno Ghosh, and Tapan Sinha have taken an indelible place in our culture's reverent ability to shed light on the typically darker nooks and corners of our souls. Born in Dhaka in 1925, Ritwik Ghatak was a child in a huge joint family. His father, a bureaucrat, led the family to numerous places in East Bengal. A plethora of images flooded into the inner eye of young little Ritwik, an eye that could soak in whatever it could see and hear- rivers, dialects, folktales, and the flavours of a landscape that would shape his imagination. The invasion of factors in East Pakistan, like those events from World War II through the Bengal famine of 1943 C.E.-1944 C.E. to the partition of 1947 C.E., pained Ghatak throughout the 1940 C.E. This made him and many refugees, along with his family, leave their native land and settle in Kolkata. The massive influx of refugees and the cultural disturbance of this period greatly affected his cinematic work. To describe Ghatak's creativity would be to catalogue unending achievements as a filmmaker, playwright, and

novelist. It was in his youth that he became very prolific, producing hundreds of short stories and twelve novels. The socio-political situations of Bengal in the 1940s C.E. and 50s heavily tormented Ghatak. The Hungry Bengal movement of the 60s, which wholly marked its destination in art and culture, exercised considerable influence on his creative work in literature and cinema. This movement made artists of the countenance of Zainul Abedin, Somnath Hore, and sculptor Ramkinkar Baij. A radical twist in Bengali literature was initiated in 1944 C.E. by Shri Bijon Bhattacharya's revolutionary work 'Nabanna', which shook and changed many societal outlooks. Influenced by this book, Ghatak became actively involved in the Indian People's Theatre Association and the Communist. Afterwards, he started writing, directing, and acting in plays for IPTA setup which was greatly committed to producing plays on topical social subjects in those days.

Viewing The Films by Ritwik Ghatak

Ritwik Ghatak's films don't just tell stories, they scream about loss, exile, and a world that failed its people. His cinema isn't just art—it's rage, love, and nostalgia wrapped in frames. Ritwik Ghatak's film has basic three ingredients. That formed his films and his style: Rabindranath Tagore, IPTA and Partition. That's what made Ghatak, Ghatak.

Ghatak grew up soaked in Rabindranath Tagore songs. The songs, the stories, the way Tagore saw the world—it all became part of him. In an interview, he said,

"I cannot speak without him. That man has culled all my feelings long before my birth. He has understood what I am and he has put in all the words. I read and I find that all has been said and I have nothing new to say. I think all artists, in Bengal at least, find themselves in the same difficulty. It just cannot be helped. You can be angry with him, you can criticize him, you may dislike him. But ultimately, in the final analysis, you will find that he has the last word" (Ghatak, Ritwik. 'Cinema and I' PP-79).

His films breathe Tagore's music. In 'Meghe Dhaka Tara' (1960 C.E.), the effect of a long sequence is designed to a song 'যে রাতে মোর দুয়ার গুলি ভাঙল ঝরে (The night my door was broken in the storm)', a deep internal feeling of a woman with self-assessment. In the 'Subarnarekha' (1965 C.E.) movie, 'আজ ধানের ক্ষেতে রৌদ্র ছায়ায় (Today in the paddy field in the shade of the sun)' plays like a whisper of hope, even at the edge of Disaster. In the 'Komal Gandhar' (1961 C.E.) movie 'আকাশ ভরা সূর্য তারা (The sky is full of sun and stars)', a song is used as an opening to the wild to the new journey, and in "Jukti Takko Aar Gappo" (1974 C.E.), 'কেন চেয়ে আছো গো মা (why are you looking mother)' just stares into the abyss and is used as a Chaos of a world where the mother wants hope to her freedom.

The theatre was in Ghatak's blood he was possessed by IPTA. Rather than cinematic style, the conceptual conventionality of the film can be traced. His first film, 'Nagarik' (1952 C.E.-1953 C.E.), isn't just cinema—it's theatre on screen. In the tight drama, the heavy silences, and the raw performances, we can find traces of IPTA. Later, he made 'Meghe Dhaka Tara', that's when people saw the real Ghatak and pure cinema. It wasn't just theatre anymore. Deep-focus shots, Tight close-ups, and the depth of field make it Ghatak style. He took theatre's soul and made it pure cinema. Kali Banerjee's father figure in 'Nagarik' Echoes through Bijan Bhattacharya's characters in Meghe Dhaka Tara and is repeated in 'Subarnarekha' as the leader serving as a father that is like the traces of the IPTA.

Partition haunted him. Ritwik Ghatak wants to tell how terrible the whole partition process was partitions wrecked Bengal in two. Ghatak was a Bengali, and he felt that the cultural tradition of his land had been destroyed. Ghatak's films had one obsession Partition. Like Godard couldn't stop talking about Vietnam, Ghatak couldn't stop talking about 1947 C.E. His Partition Trilogy—*Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar*, *Subarnarekha*—are different pieces of the same tragedy, each with its separate telling. Ritwik Ghatak's '*Meghe Dhaka Tara*' is created out of an instant glimpse moment—seeing an unmarried girl standing at a bus stop. She was like countless Bengali refugee women, struggling but determined.

Not destitute, not entirely hopeless. Just trying to hold a fractured family together. His heroine is that woman. A father, once a teacher, is now powerless, a mother who resents her daughter's sacrifices yet depends on them, a brother, a singer, but without a job, Another brother, indifferent, a younger sister—prettier, freer and a lover. He promises a future, but she knows better she cannot leave responsibilities chained to her. In the end, her sacrifices amount to nothing. Her lover marries her sister. Her body, worn thin, succumbs to tuberculosis, she dies. A story repeated endlessly across partition-torn Bengal families clinging together in quiet desperation. Survivors, but at what cost? Ghatak saw the partition not as an external tragedy but as an internal failure. The very people suffering were the ones who let it happen.

Ritwik Ghatak's '*Komal Gandhar*', the second of his trilogy, has a very unusual sense of hope. It deals with three interwoven themes—Anusua's dilemma, the divided leadership of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), and the indelible wounds of partition. A film about theatre, exile, and longing: at its core, it is two rival theatre groups, Anusua the lead, and dreams of unity. Nostalgia grips her—memories of her mother, of Bangladesh, her lost home. Bhrigu, the male lead, is a refugee, too. In one haunting scene, he points beyond the border

“ওটা আমার বাড়ী ছিল, এত কাছে, তবুও অগম্য। আমরা সব হারিয়েছি আমার বাবা ভিকারির মত মারা গেল, আমার মা না খেয়ে (That was my home. So close, yet unreachable. We lost everything. My father died like a beggar; my mother starved)”.

Ghatak's pain breathes through '*Komal Gandhar*'. Theatre is not just performance—it is resistance, expression, and survival. Bhrigu and Anusua, divided by ideology by tragedy, find their way back to each other Reconciliation, at least in part, is still possible.

'*Subarnarekha*', the final film in Ritwik Ghatak's Partition Trilogy, is bleak and unrelenting. Set in a refugee colony in post-partition Calcutta, it follows three lives—Ishwar, his younger sister Sita, and Aviram, a lower-caste boy, homeless Stateless Lost. “When will we reach our new home?” Sita asks Ishwar. But there is no home, only displacement. Ishwar rescues Aviram, hoping to rebuild a life. Years pass, and stability is an illusion. Love emerges between Sita and Aviram. Ishwar, fearing loss, resists. Aviram, an aspiring writer, finds his dying mother. Sita escapes, marries Aviram, and bears a child. Yet, poverty drags her back. Refugee life repeats, forced into prostitution, she meets her brother again—unknowingly, as a customer. A tragic cycle, a decayed morality.

Mythological Cinematic

If we look at Ritwik Ghatak's work, we can see partition as a mythic complex. Ritwik Ghatak's mythic expression is different from any other artist's. Laws of nature open out to the historical process. It is characterised by humans with mythological aspects.

In 'Meghe Dhaka Tara' (1960 C.E.), Neeta is Shakti. Neeta represents the female principle of Shakti as a fusion of Jagadhatari, the eternal giver, a nurturer, destruction and creation. Her mother, Pure *Kali*, is in her fiercest form. She plays the game, twists fate, and keeps Neeta bound. Fear drives her—fear of losing the one who holds everything together. Rain pours, and Neeta's face fills the frame. A storm within and without endings are beginnings always. In 'Subarnarekha' (1965 C.E.), the living Sita, whom Abhiram follows, becomes also the myth of the Hindu God Rama and his quest for the ideal feminine captured and locked by Ravana. It's about land, power, and caste. Sita isn't a princess here. She's a woman fighting for love against the chains of tradition, and Ishwar is Ravana in this modern Ramayana. He wants control over Sita over fate. Abhiram is banished, but love doesn't just fade. It fights, it runs, it loses, it dies and in the end a voice "ও রাম ও রাম (And Ram and Ram)" chorus. In that scene portrayal of the modern time women again take their lives and make the modern Ramayana. Modern times, the same old tragedies. In the movie 'Titash Ekti Nodir Naam' (1973 C.E.), Kishore, a fisherman, marries Rajar Jhi in a neighbouring village. Their wedding night passes, then disaster—she is abducted on the river. When found, she remembers little. Not Kishore's name, not his face, only his village met his lover, Basanti. This story echoes across the subcontinent's art and culture. Kishore, like Krishna, Rajar Jhi and Basanti, like Rukmini and Radha. A love, not just physical but spiritual and eternal. Krishna's devotion shaped generations. So does this tale. Ghatak's film weaves myth into reality. Three lives a love triangle, a tragic echo of an ancient, sacred bond.

Women In Ghatak's Films

The women in Ritwik Ghatak's cinema are not your typical heroines smashing the patriarchy. But they are familiar they are the women we see every day. The ones who fight, who endure, who struggle.

Ghatak's films 'Subarnarekha' (1965 C.E.), 'Meghe Dhaka Tara' (1960 C.E.), and 'Titas Ekti Nodir Naam' (1973 C.E.)—tear into society's hypocrisy. They show us a world where women seek freedom but find barriers at every turn. 'Subarnarekha' opens with images of displacement and violence. The partition's wounds are still fresh. Sita, a refugee, moves through life's shifting circumstances. She loves Abhiram, a lower-caste boy, and marries him against her brother Ishwar's wishes. Ishwar, who once protected Abhiram, now turns against him. The *bhadralok* society—educated, refined—holds on to caste and patriarchy even amidst crisis. Sita is never truly free. Not as a sister. Not as a wife. Not as a woman. She carves her path, but the world is unkind. Her marriage alienates her from her brother. Her husband, rather than supporting her, fuels her suffering. Her decision to employ her skills in music to earn money to independence. But violence follows. In the end, only death grants her release.



A scene in Subarnarekha movie 1965 C.E., Photo screenshot from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

In 'Meghe Dhaka Tara', movie a different woman is in a different prison. Nita, the eldest daughter in a displaced lower-middle-class family, carries them all on her back. She earns, she sacrifices. And they take and take. No gratitude, no escape. The capitalist, patriarchal world doesn't make space for women like her. The weight breaks her. The body gives in; tuberculosis takes hold. Finally, she understands. She has allowed this she has never questioned her place. That last cry —

“দাদা আমি বাঁচতে চাই (Brother I want to live)”
cuts through but it's too late.



A scene in Meghe Dhaka Tara movie 1960 C.E., Photo screenshot from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

'Titas Ekti Nodir Naam' shifts focus. The river Titas, flowing, full of life like Basanti, both are bound by fate. The film follows an ecofeminist critique of how women and nature, both nurturing forces, are dominated and controlled. Rajar Jhi, abandoned by the Malo community, mirrors the river's slow decay. But the women refuse. They come together and build their world. A world of care, not oppression. Ghatak's films aren't just stories. They are warning critiques of patriarchy and capitalism in a society that hasn't changed much since Partition. His women struggle, they suffer, but they fight. Even when the fight is silent, even when it is lost.



A scene in Titas Ekti Nodir Naam movie 1973 C.E., Photo screenshot from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

Analysis The Films of Ritwik Ghatak

As an approach to cinema, Ritwik Ghatak's vision was extremely philosophical. His films ask, 'What is cinema?' at their core. Making a film for him is an integration of various elements: camera, sound, and song. But perhaps the most ironic and, hence, vital instrument that he employed is cinematography; it governed the visual composition of all his narratives. In Ghatak's film, point of view is not just some mechanical options but also a way of directing visual perception. He understood how the eye of a viewer is instinctively drawn to central compositions. However, he also played around with inherent visual orientations-light and shadow. While light in a frame draws attention, movement is more authoritative. The moment anything stirs, even in the faintest corner of the screen, the eye follows. This is the great difference between still and moving images; this is Ghatak's pronouncement of a cinematic language.

An encounter brief yet brilliant is 'Ajantrik' (1958 C.E.), where Bimal, the hero, sees an abandoned girl by the lover when a train comes to the station. It is a close-up shot, and as the train arrives, when shadows go upon her flickering face, it looks weak and almost broken, then momentarily painted into her with light, but comes back under the shadow. This movement and light interplay create Ghatak-style filmmaking, where emotion is painted by the camera and not only through the actor's performance. Later, when Bimal races along mountain roads, the camera shifts from him to the surrounding landscape, mirroring his restless state of mind. Even Satyajit Ray, in *Mahanagar*, uses this technique effectively. Here, motion is not just physical but psychological. In another powerful moment from 'Ajantrik', Bimal is forced to sell his beloved car, Jaggadal, hitting hard poverty, then he finds Jaggadal sound, a child playing with Jaggadal's horn. Pain and joy merge in a single close-up of his eyes. Ghatak believed in leaving the audience with hope. In the final sequence, a folksong lifts the scene beyond despair.



A scene in Ajantrik movie 1958 C.E., Photo screenshot
from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

'Komal Gandhar' is filled with such moments. Bhriгу and Anasuya converse by the river Padma. Bhriгу reminisces about a time before the Partition when train tracks connected, rather than divided, lands. His words fracture the film's visual and auditory unity. The chant 'Dohai Ali' ((a traditional East Bengali boatmen's prayer to nature for safe passage) crescendos as the camera speeds down an abandoned rail track only to crash into a wooden barrier, the India-East Bengal border the film transforms into one of those "phantom rides". Ghatak's style is at its peak here, where history and personal loss collide. His use of close-ups, inspired by Botticelli's paintings, creates an expressive, almost mythological presence.



A scene in Komal Gandhar movie 1961 C.E., Photo screenshot from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

In 'Meghe Dhaka Tara', melodrama dominates the cinematography. When Nita, betrayed by her lover, sings "যে রাতে মোর দুয়ার গুলি ভাঙল ঝড়ে (The night my door was broken in the storm)" her chin is lifted, and the light behind her head forms a divine halo. She is both a suffering woman and a goddess. When she learns of her tuberculosis, she wraps herself in a bedsheet and runs, hiding her fate. The 'Agomoni' song swells in the background, blending sound, image, and tradition into one devastating moment. The camera lingers. Every frame speaks Ghatak's language of sorrow. The film's most haunting sequence comes when Nita, in the hospital, hears of her family's happiness without her she breaks down, crying, "দাদা আমি বাঁচতে চাই (Brother I want to live)" The camera stays close, making her pain inescapable. Ghatak often displaced characters within the frame, using long takes to create visual isolation.



A scene in Meghe Dhaka Tara movie 1960 C.E., Photo screenshot from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

A different form is used in 'Subarnarekha'. Nearly ninety per cent of the film remains in universal focus, capturing every detail from the horizon to an extreme close-up of Sita's face. One striking example is when Sita and Abhiram meet in the woods. She rubs her nose on her forearm. The camera holds still. Her tousled hair, the arranged trees, the endless field, the cloudy horizon—all visible, all part of the same moment. First, love is simple yet profound. Ghatak never moved his camera without reason. The motion followed emotion. When young Sita encounters a terrifying 'Bahurupi', the shift in focus is so sudden it startles both Sita and the audience. He believed the camera could manipulate subconscious attention, leading the eye beyond mere perspective. In 'Subarnarekha', when Ishwar tries to get rid of all the problems by ending his life, Ghatak makes a dramatic horror situation where Hariaprasad looks like a ghost peeping at the window and jiggle of both faces frame shot to make it devastated and the narratives changed. In Subarnarekha's climax, Ishwar arrives at Sita's house, only to realize the horror of her fate. A blurred close-up of her face. A sudden, sharp focus on one eye, ready to burst. Her suicide follows. The camera captures

the trembling of her body against the tempera's strings and then darkness. A fast crane-up shot as Ishwar collapses. The camera tilts down, landing on Binu, her son. The narrative shifts. Tragedy echoes through generations. Ghatak used low-angle shots to signal destruction.



scenes in Subarnarekha movie 1965 C.E., Photo
screenshot from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

In 'Bari Theke Paliye' movie, he played with motion and stillness, creating contradictory objects moving yet appearing static. Without technical manipulation, he forced the audience to feel time's weight.

In Titas Ekti Nodir Naam, Kishore finally recognizes Rajar Jhi. She, too, recalls her husband on Holi Yatra and faints. Ghatak crafts melodrama here. Kishore carries her, running through the river. A haunting image—like Shiva carrying Parvati after her death, dancing destruction. A still camera. A moving object. The contrast amplifies the moment's gravity. Ghatak's stillness arrests motion, much like Truffaut's 400 Blows or Ray's Charulata. He plays with wide and close angles, shifting between hope and despair. The film's final shot—Basanti walking through the dried Titas—mirrors a documentary. The camera walks. Hopeless. Relentless.



A scene in Titas Ekti Nodir Naam movie 1973 C.E., Photo
screenshot from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

'Jukti Takko Aar Gappo' opens with an old, sick man staring directly at the audience. Ten silent seconds, a question lingers on the politics of India, watching its suffering. Then, with a jarring shift, three figures dressed in black dancing in a white void, folk music rises. The

camera swings, unrelenting, chaotic, political, surreal, unsettling. Ghatak's style echoes across cinema. Like Hitchcock, he used surrealist imagery. Like Truffaut's *400 Blows*, he froze frames to arrest emotion. Like Ray and Sen, he played with narrative time. But his vision was singular every movement, every stillness, had meaning. Every cut, every lingering shot, acts as a turn for editing and other stock-related to motion.

"If the filmmaker is unable to conceptualize this essence, he will not be on firm ground. He will immerse himself into minute details corresponding to various constituent shots and the central theme will lose itself in the crowd and the entire take will falter" (Chalachitra, September - October issue, 1969, PP. 6-12).

It asked the same question: What is cinema?



Scenes in *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo* movie 1973 C.E., Photo
screenshot from the movie, viewed on March 4, 2025

'Jukti, Takko Aar Gappo' Is A Voyage

Ritwik Ghatak's *'Jukti, Takko Aar Gappo'* (1974 C.E.) remains to be amongst his least acknowledged masterpieces. A cinematic autobiography, this film is intensely political and deeply personal—halfway an exploration and halfway a conventional narrative. It is a disjointed journey through ideology, loss, and the traumatizing reality of post-independence India. It is a journey, says Ghatak, due to the duality of him being a director of the film as well as the protagonist. He is Nilkantha Bagchi, the failed intellectual, the drunkard, and the disillusioned man of his times. The movie is one of Nilkantha wandering all over Bengal and meeting voices across generations. A young revolutionary, a failed artist, a migrant woman. Talk flows, caustic and unflinching. He listens, quarrels, needles. Sometimes, he gives way to inebriated babbling, spells of cynicism with piercing honesty. He probes the very fundamentals of society. Why does revolution not work? Who writes history? What does freedom even exist? In these dialogues, Ghatak uncovers his wrath with the empty rhetoric of freedom. The setting is essential. The early 1970s C.E. was a claustrophobic time. The reverberations of the Naxalite rebellion sound louder, followed by brutal state repression. The Bangladesh Liberation War is at its climax. History is changing, but for whom? The underprivileged are left behind, bounced between ideologies that bring little genuine transformation. Ghatak does not offer solutions. Rather, he reveals contradictions, leaving us uneasy. There is one sequence that leaps out. Nilkantha argues with a young Naxalite, questioning his idealism,

“আপনারা আমাদের চেনা বাংলার ফ্রেমে তৈরি করেছেন, কিন্তু আপনারাও কখন কখন অজ্ঞ ও অন্ধ হয়ে যান (You have made us in the frame of Bengal we know, but you too are sometimes ignorant and blind)”.

Although Nilkantha interrogates him, it is not a rejection. He does not venerate any one ideology. He failed them all. In his dialectics, Ghatak criticizes the range of bourgeois domination during India's so-called liberation. To him, independence was a spectacle, an illusion of liberty hiding a greater level of suppression. This disillusionment is reflected in his very being, which has been in exile and deprivation. His marriage collapses, his relationships disintegrate, and his country betrays him. The movie ends in tragedy. Nilkantha is killed in the firefight between Naxalites and the police. A metaphor, maybe. An artist overwhelmed by the very disputes that he had attempted to solve. The opening and closing crowd shots bookend the film. A cycle. A quest for truth, one that is incomplete. Ghatak does not instruct us as to what to think. He merely compels us to see and to question.

Conclusion

The filmic representations of womanhood, melodrama, and partition by Ritwik Ghatak are inseparably intertwined with his setting, sound, camera work, and songs. Ritwik Ghatak was one of those directors who cemented his works with his own Bengali culture and tradition. He was never away from the theme of partition. He tried to depict the life of Bengal society after partition. Mixing and layering the traditions with his innovations- all rooted in social-historical observations and critiques. Ghatak is above and beyond the category of mere creator-film-maker. He is designed for a society devoid of absorption and exploitation. One without a political economy, communal violence and cultural deprivation. Hence, he was found working during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 C.E., providing transit work for the refugees in Calcutta. Ghatak was never one to keep his thoughts fancifully befogged. What he wanted to say was said clearly, unfiltered, and without fear of expulsion. In Ghatak's films, visions of the Bengal land he cherishes are constructed purposely in a politically and culturally generative role in a viewer's life. Melodrama weaves itself around people and myths that Ghatak speaks about. The great director of India departed in 1976 C.E. at the age of 50. For most of his life, professional success had eluded him. Alcoholism severely aggravated problems in his personal and economic life and was a major influence on his death.

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