

Guest Column/ Film Review

Kankabati Banerjee

Tracing the Bylanes of ‘Manohar & I’



The tiff between imagination and reality goes on in our minds throughout our lives. But in the end reality triumphs over imagination – reality hits us hard. Shot in iPhone, the film ‘Manohar & I’ by Amitabha Chatterjee deals with this constant struggle of three characters, who try to find solace in the harsh reality by searching for peace that has long been lost in their childhood days.

The film traces the conversations between the woman (Monalisa Chatterjee), her elder sister (Senjuti Roy Mukherji) and Manohar (Shyamal Chakraborty). The peace of the three people lies in their childhood, which is now nowhere to be found. A father tells his daughter about a star of loneliness belonging to each one of us. It is the opening scene of the movie that gives us a pretext to the character played by Senjuti Roy Mukherji. After the demise of her father, she fails to come out of her cocoon of depression and stays confined within the four

dampened walls. What she watches all day long are shows on astronomy, still searching for her star, her peace. Her younger sister had become the breadwinner of the family at quite a tender age. Dealing with monetary and emotional upheavals, she gets involved in the daily bustle of her mundane existence. Having gone through so much, life doesn't give her a chance to be compassionate towards her elder sister.



Manohar and the woman cross each other's path every evening after work and delve into their imagined worlds. The two lonely souls, traversing the lanes of the indifferent city, could have spoken about their struggles and insecurities. But instead, they unravel the carefully knit imagination in front of each other. They hide their insecurities under the carpet of their imagination and make a space where they become relevant beings to each other on earth. Manohar identifies as a married man in search of his childhood home in Giridih. The woman is a silent listener of his thoughts and pretends to have a fiancé, also named Manohar. Both of them are in search of a home where they can never return to.

As the story unfolds, we come closer to the reality of the woman. She has no fiancé named Manohar. Rather, only a parasitic existence of her elder sister waits back at home. The image of the house echoes of a crumbled life that pairs up with the emotional distress of the elder sister. The younger sibling holds her

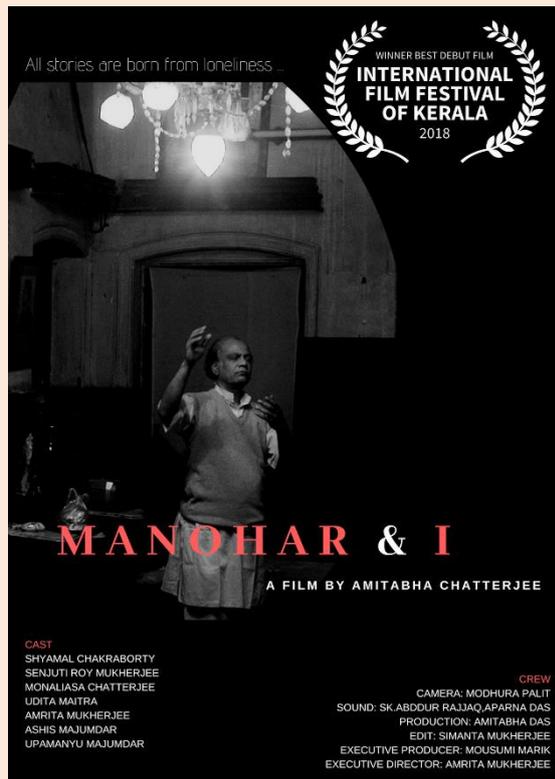
elder sister solely responsible for their father's death and is contemptuous of her existence. The burden that has been imposed on her finds its ways to be vented out upon her sister. But at the same time, she cares for her and works to support the both of them.

What we are still unaware of is Manohar's reality. The reality of life constantly follows the woman but she lives partly in denial when she steps out of the house and into the indifferent city – the city that is ignorant of the narratives of its builders. Her imagined world keeps her sane in the bustle of the city. But the film brings forward a harsh reality to her in the form of death – the death of Manohar, her closest companion. It is through his death that his reality comes into view. She gets to know that he isn't married to anyone nor does he have any childhood home in Giridih. The carefully knit illusory world breaks down in front of her and is in shambles. The screen captures the gloom of loneliness yet again as the woman closes the door of her house, and simultaneously, that of her mind. Probably, it is symbolic of the woman turning into her elder sister, as she had become, when their father had died. The untold love story between the woman and Manohar stops abruptly in the midst of blooming.

Shyamal Chakraborty portrays the character of Manohar with conviction. Successfully, he conveys the sensation of being alone and lonely with credibility. Monalisa Chatterjee renders the character of the woman seamlessly to depict her sluggish and monotonous life. Though she does not have many dialogues in the movie, her character is well established by cinematic narrative created by the director. Senjuti Roy Mukherji executes the character of the elder sister with precision. She holds up the parasitic existence of the character through her fine facial expressions and body language. Her apt performance takes the audience into her decaying world of the past.

The cinematographer Modhura Palit uses the camera as a moving entity when Manohar and the woman walk through the streets of the busy city. As she reaches her house, the camera becomes stagnant and time stands still inside it. With the help of the director, she uses bright light and colour in the scenes where the woman traces the streets of the city. But as soon as the woman enters her house, the colour changes to black and white in high contrast. Her

cinematography uses long shots leading to an intricate detailing of the narrative being exchanged between Manohar and the woman.



The use of sound is very particular to its surroundings. Where the streets of the city are full of cacophony, the house of the woman in the outskirts of the city is filled with and engulfed by a tremendously deafening silence. These two worlds are in high contrast in terms of their ambience, the use of light and the use of sound.

Lastly, the director Amitabha Chatterjee expresses the monotonous and ppaceless lives of the characters through the long tram scene where the narratives of their imagined worlds reveal themselves. This scene goes on for quite some time where the roaring city leaves no effects on their psyche. They remain unaffected by the commotion – be it a procession or the like. As soon as the camera peeks into the worn out house of the woman, the use of dim lights creates a claustrophobic atmosphere that chokes the lives of the sisters each and every day. Through the use of different lights and contrasting dialogues, the director makes the character of the woman go through various shades in the narrative. The characters constricted in their lonely worlds find rays of hope by breaking out of their solitary selves and creating a make-believe world.

In conclusion, it could be said that as a newcomer Amitabha Chatterjee has effectively provided the audience with a heart-touching story of loneliness. His award winning film, ‘Manohar & I’, has made its mark in Indian cinema.

Kankabati Banerjee is a thespian based in Kolkata.