

Review

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**Love, Loneliness and Protest**

Ahaa Re

***Ahaa Re (The Two Lovers, India, Bengali, Feature, 119 M, 2019) By Ranjan Ghosh.***

Upon the Rhine, in the night, the water bears a mouth....

All the rivers speak of what you hasten  
And the chained soul is shaken in your earth.  
-Pablo Neruda.

The flowing river water, symbolizing life and love is a generic way, is felt to be the teardrops of a golden harp that was going to be decayed. Water can build up, water can mash up, and water can even portray the fading away of a tiny unit of civilized delicacy of life. On that wide, motion canvas, two souls were going to be separated. Time and life - these are always the vital factors to enforce destiny, as characters are sometimes powerless to it. The visuals of the scene though, don't possess that

poignant, aesthetical and technical strength, yet the traction that was increasing among the two creates lots of inquisitiveness in respect of the growth of the story. Raja Chowdhury, a chef from Bangladesh, wants to stay at Dhaka while his fashion designer girl friend expresses her determination to go to Paris for a better career growth. The film starts with this anecdote of separation. Later, two more characters enter this story of love, lack of love, and loneliness, and both the characters are also kind of victims in the emotional fronts of their lives. Raja had lost his father in his teens; his Hindu mother had entered into wedlock with a Muslim person whom Raja does not accept as his foster-father. This unhappy, shattered, handsome and skilled youth leaves Dhaka and joins a restaurant as chef in Kolkata. Eventually he meets a beautiful girl, expert in

the art of cooking, develops his interest in her, becomes friends and while he expresses his love to this girl, she runs away leaving some unexplained questions to him. Time passes and after a few incidents and experiences, the boy conquers the heart of the girl.



Raituparna Sengupta and Ranjan Ghosh

Love, though is the heart of the film, is endorsed with the collated multi layering stratum of emotion, tussle, psychological conflict, ideological antonyms, existential crises of the characters and their struggle to live out of these. The commanding feature of the film is the aesthetic expression of the theme and quest for playing with a fresh narrative. The structure of the film reveals that the director is extra restrained in creation of a breeze-like refreshing narrative pattern with simple and uncluttered visuals loaded with the emotions of the characters in the frame or even behind the frame. Director Ranjan Ghosh's narration is like the process of the *night blooming cactus*, the way it unfolds its beauty slowly with the growth of each petal with a touch of surprise and aesthetic pleasure. He creates some situation-based questions and later provides the answers that unfold the layered

mysteries of relationship. The fluent narrative casts a spell on the audience with the basic essence of literary romanticism. This concept of Romanticism, though a Victorian one, and yet, the director had added this century old conception in a modern day context and he



Ranjan Ghosh

visualized it with profound expertise. Free and straight lip-lock scene or act of physical intimacy and dialogue to match with such actions are commonly included in most of the Indian films. Ranjan Ghosh had ample justified opportunities to add such scenes in his film, but he has held good to some social norms of the recent vintage. To display his female characters, the director has maintained every norm of societal dignity, including in the costumes. His directorial debut, *Hrid Majharey* too reflected that polished sophistication. He is very selective in the physical gestures of the actors to maintain the descent visual look and the mood of the film. But, most important thing is, though he seems to be conservative, he actually possesses a mind to protest, a mind to change some of the social norms. A true love story is a story of protest in essence and in this story also, it speaks that love should

go beyond all obstacles like age, religion and geographical boundaries and the director had systemically planted a senior citizen to support the pair and to lead this protest.



The thematic simplicity was maintained in the visual narrative with pithy camera movement and shot composition. But, to express the inner layers of the story, the director played with the camera, light and properties on a different level. To establish the loneliness of both the lead actors, the director placed the male actor in such a wide and almost empty apartment where the sky is visible, sometimes clear day sky and sometimes the night sky with out of focus lights glittering in the skyline to establish the inner perplexed mindset of the hero. In contrast to the hero, the lead female character's old house was cluttered with so many things that reflect her mind loaded with old memories. The bluish night sky with a few stars, seen from her place also carries the same feeling of loneliness in a different perspective (as the poet Jibananda Das wrote- *Neel nakshatryar ratri* - night of the blue star). Though the plot, the cinematic narration and overall appeal of the entire compilation looks simple and straightforward, the director had

inserted some ornaments in the narrative that reflect his deep understanding of literature and notion to do 'out of box' creations. One major character of the film, the father-in-law of the heroine - the retired old man, practices magic, but he fails to achieve the result. Towards the conclusion of the film, while the unsuccessful hero starts to return to his own place Dhaka, the situational emotion reaches a height that craves some miracle to happen which will unite the pair instantly. Expectation arises that the old father-in-law who supports the union, at least he should do something. But, instead, he sits with his pack of his cards and starts practicing a magic trick that was a failed attempt a few months back. And, suddenly the magic works, and all of them achieve their targets! In a realistic film, such unbelievable magic is a totally unrealistic inclusion, but it has automatically been transformed into magic-realism and pushes the film into a higher level of artistic work and also reveals the director's deep understanding of literary component. In this context, it may be added here itself that the compact, multi-layered and well-structured dialogue of the film is another surprise.



The artistic strength and vigour of *Ahaa Re* lies in the plot, the characterization, the minute

twists that change the pace and flow of the story, the interpretation of the human behaviour in various spectrums, and the courage to rewrite a love story in a wider perspective along with a note of huge protest in an almost silent voice. Most of our Hindu-Muslim love stories either start or end with some violence. But, this film says it in some other way echoing the Upanishada - *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Despite all the sincere and artistic efforts, two things remained irritating and mood-spoiler, one is the inclusion of a few Hindi film actors' names in dialogue which breaks the illusion of the realistic world which the director has created in his frames (the same comment is applicable in context of the included Rabindra Sangeet). And the other is the huge age difference of the father and his second son. The aerial shots of the accident in the sea were beautiful to look at, but some kind of scary feeling was required there in place of the beautiful frames.

Performance of the actors demands special mention for their involvement and attachment to the places they live, for the organic presentation of the dialogues and the restrained body language. Paran Bandopadhyay is on the top of the chart. His acting in this film will be regarded as a text-book of film acting.

The present scenario of filmmaking is drastically changing and this change has affected the content and making style. Content is turning to be more journalistic to grab instant attention and making is becoming more spectacular and colourful with technical gimmicks and overdone stuff. In this perspective Ranjan Ghosh has made this multi-layered story of love and protest in a cinematic language, with an inclination towards the classic omnipresence of meaningful literature. Beyond doubt, *Ahaa Re* is Ranjan's signature film.

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