

Article

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Power: Domination and Hegemonic Masculinity: Depiction of Working Man in Indian Parallel Cinema

“The term hegemonic masculinity is quite complicated; it has mentioned the behaviours, languages, practices, which are commonly associated with males, which reflects social and cultural expectations of males behaviours, rather than biology. If we have gone through the films like ‘Shimabaddha’ or ‘Nayak’, we can find a clear picture that Satyajit Babu had emphasised on how men’s sense of identity valid through the dominant discursive practices of self and how this identity work connects with gender power and resistance...It was quite impressive that in the context of the 1970s Ray depicted the deterministic understanding of the power relationships within social actions and identity process. In these two films, he depicted that in taking up these localised and culturally specific signifying practices, how males achieved an association with other males and also a differentiation from the other not only from women but also from marginalised men. While domination is not only based on the sex differences, it can include forms of embodiment and ethnicity, as well as cultural variations of masculine performance...” (Benegal: 2019)¹

The theoretical model of hegemony² underpinning the concept of hegemonic masculinity owes much too critical structuralism, in particular to Antonio Gramsci’s neo –Marxist analysis of class relations. Thus the concept assumes power as fundamentally, a contested entity between social groups, women, and men. The key structural entities such as the state, education, religion, media, political institutions, and business, being structurally and historically dominated by men, all serve the project of male dominance through their capacity

¹ Benegal’s interview was taken by author Dr. Debnai Halder, on 27.12.2019 in Mumbai.

² Hegemony, a pivotal concept in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks and his most significant contribution to Marxist thinking, is about the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that process. In this sense, it is importantly about the ways in which the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination. The ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality is an essential part of this process. Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear "natural" "ordinary," "normal." The state, through punishment for non-conformity, is crucially involved in this negotiation and enforcement

Connell R (1987), ‘ Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics’. , 107; published by: Allen and Unwin, Sydney p-95.

to promote and validate the ideologies underpinning hegemonic masculinity.³ Here in this article in the context of the two films¹) Ray's '*Sheemabaddha*' (1971) and '*Aghaat*' (1985) by Govind Nihalani, I would like to argue that since the power can be understood from the relational and positional point of view and most position of power in the public sphere is controlled by men, so how the Parallel Indian filmmakers they criticised the relational notions of male power in the public sphere especially in a business organisation or in an office? I will try to theorise my argument in the concept of 'Hegemonic Masculinity', which serves to sustain the inequalities not only between men and women, but also between men and marginalised men (See also Connell, 1987), while the concept of power determines the importance of discourse as a means by which power is exercised and resisted and through which male supremacy and power inequalities become legitimised.⁴ I have chosen these two films because the director duos tried to emphasise that, beyond individual abuses of power and to see power as something which circulates the social webs as both as a positive and negative force, that implicated in the process of producing privileged and subordinated discourses.

“ It seems the number of unemployed educated youth in West Bengal is over a million...I am not one of these unemployed...I have been working for almost 10 years. It is called Hindustan Peter's liability of members limited...I am the sales manager of Hindustan Peter's...my name is Shyamalendu. The secret of my success is my intelligence, luck and my hard work... initially; we are living in an apartment near to Bullygaung. The company has gifted us a residence after I became a sales manager. In-office after MD and Director, immediate bellow them in the hierarchy are two people. Those who are looking up with great hope. One of them is the lamp division sales manager, Ranu Sanyal. The other is the fan's division's sales manager, Shyamalendu Chatterjee. It's me...”

----- (*Sheemabaddha*: 1971)⁵

³ Whitehead Stephen M. (2002), 'Power and Resistance' in the book of Men and Masculinities, published by Oxford, UK, p-91

⁴ Drawing on post structuralists, such as Michael Foucault, third wave masculinity studies have tried to locate to understand the process by which definitions and discourses reinforce gender inequalities. For example by positioning men as strong, women as fragile, men as rational, women as emotional, men as disciplined, women as undisciplined, heterosexual male are normal, homosexual are sick, and so on.

Whitehead Stephen M, Men and Masculinities, published by Oxford, UK, p-70

Stephen and Frank J. Barret. (2001), 'The Sociology of Masculinity' the article published in the book 'the Masculinity Reader' edited by Whitehead Stephen and Frank J. Barret., published by Polity Press, UK, p-17

⁵ Ray Satyajit, (1971), '*Sheemabaddha*'.

The above dialogue is taken from the film *'Sheemabaddha'* (1971), where director Satyajit Ray specified in the beginning, that how Shyamalendu's masculine identities and assumptions were related to the workplace. In *Sheemabaddha* there hegemony depicted as a political technique of patriarchal social order. Ray depicted that the employment and man's role as breadwinner imposed the men's continued domination of power relations in the organisation. Here the director revealed that the importance of paid work considered as the source of Syamalendu's masculine identity, status and power⁶ for him. As an employee of a British company, here Shyamalendu's manhood was identified from the politics of colonial masculinity, which provided him with a means to pursue power and authority. Whether seeking the right to bear arms or expanding government employment, he pleased to define himself as more modern than the traditional aristocracy, which the colonial state designated as more manly.⁷ Ray depicted in the movie employment provides him the interrelated economic resources, symbolic benefits of wages and salaries, skills and experience, career progress, and position of power, authority and high direction, which depicted that Shyamalendu's gender identity typically constructed, compared and evaluated by self and others according to the whole variety of personal success in the workplace.

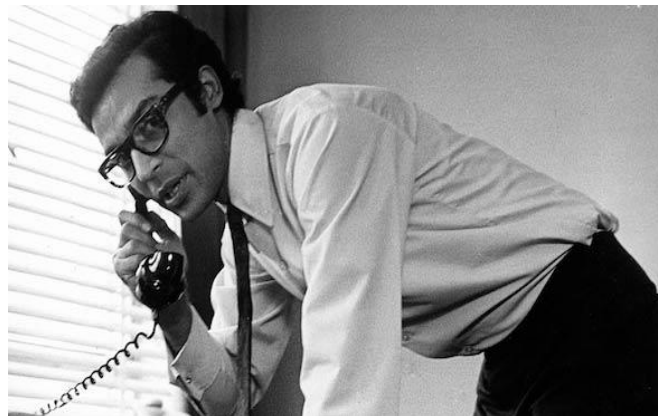


Figure:1, 'Sheemabaddha' (1971): While masculine values and assumptions related to the workplace

⁶ Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of chain. It is never localised here and there, never in anybody's hand, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads, they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising the power.

Foucault M (1980), *'Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings, 1972-77'*. Edited by C.Corden, Published by Pantheon Press, New York, p-104

⁷ In the book *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century*. (1995), author Mrinalini Sinha has depicted that this native elite also deployed the discourse of colonial masculinity strategically. By framing their subordination as symbolic of the contradictions of British rule, they linked the reclamation of Indian masculinity to their social and political advancement.

SINHA MRINALINI (1995) . *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century*. (Studies in Imperialism.), published by New York: Manchester University Press: distributed by St. Martin's, New York, p-xii

In both of film '*Sheemabaddha*' (1971) and '*Aghaat*' (1986) director, Satyajit Ray and Govind Nihalani criticized the interrelation between men-masculinity and management, while formal power exercised over workers and women. In '*Sheemabaddha*' (1971) Ray depicted that management was always set within the complex binaries between ownership and control, within the market and the institution, and beyond technological relations and social relations. Simultaneously he depicted the antagonistic relations among capital and labor and wages and profit too. Ray visualized in the film that in the ground of hierarchical spatial and functional differentiation, there were already contradictory elements that were excised within management. The confrontation between Shyamalendu and Ranu Sanyal for the director post integrated the concept that management was rather a set of hierarchical areas for diverse, which specified the power struggle for getting a promotion or up-gradation of career. In '*Aghat*' (1985) Nihalni also tried to criticize that, the competition and conflict between two idealist union leaders Madhav Varma and Rostam Patel for getting control of the labor process examined the fragmentation of power, status, and domination at the workplace. In the film '*Ághaat*', the director tried to criticize the state of constant tension and struggle with ideological and structural determinants, while the ideological forces at the disposal of and enlisted by the powerful groups. Particularly in the film, Nihalani depicted that power was more circulatory, rather than hierarchical, while hegemony was depicted as less domination and more about negotiation.



Figure:2, 'Aghaat' (1985): the constant tension and struggle with ideological and structural determinants,

Since the managerial masculinity might be understood as a form of hegemonic masculinity, so there was an equal contradiction existed between hegemonic managerial authority and diverse managerial masculinities. Here depicted how ambitious male managers were seeking to purchase their career progress at the cost of others. (Collinson David and Hearn Jeff: 1996: 69).⁸ In the film, '*Shemmabaddha*' (1971) director emphasised that there were always a contradictory relationship between management and labour.⁹ Here ambitious sales manager Shamalendu was seeking to purchase his career progress at the cost of the others, especially in the cost of production and labours.

"Shamalendu:- Tell me...

Talukdar:- It's fine, it's fine...since you are not habituated, you feel bad about this...all this is the part of the game.

Shamalendu: We don't have another way out?

Talukdar: What you're doing? Don't be emotional...your job is to simply keep going, not compromise...

The production does not go on... the company won't tolerate...production stop...then charge sheet...a couple of bomb...you want police action right? Lockout right?..."

----- (Sheemabaddha: 1971)¹⁰

Since here Shyamalendu's masculinity related to the elements of power, culture, and subjectivity in the organization's need so he overlooked the coordination between capital production and labour relation. Ray depicted that in the context of affluence and anxiety, Shyamalendu inclined to treat his life as an enterprise and he self-consciously 'constructed and

⁸ Collinson David and Hearn Jeff (1996), 'Men At Work': Multiple masculinities/ multiple workplaces', the article is published in the book 'Understanding masculinity' edited by Martin Mac and Ggail. Published by Open University Press, Philadelphia, p-69

⁹ As regards labor relations, men's position in patriarchal societies yields a series of material advantages, such as higher incomes or easier access to education, something that Connell calls "patriarchal dividend" dividend." Connell, "New Directions in Gender Theory," 162. The term "patriarchal dividend," however, is sometimes used to refer to the overall advantages (not simply to the material ones) that men gain in patriarchal societies. In such cases, Connell uses the term "material dividend" to refer to the more restricted meaning of "patriarchal dividend." See, for example, Connell, Masculinities, 82.

¹⁰ Ray Satyajit (1971) '*Sheemabaddha*'.

managed' relished his fame, emotion, power, from the hegemonic position. In his interview with Cristian Brand Thomsen, Ray articulated that, "it is certainly the system that makes Shyamalendu what he is. He is the part of a bureaucratic and commercial machine that has no place for one single man if you want to live in a society; you immediately become part of the pattern. And that drives you into something you may not have been. This man has two sides: he has his private feelings and his conscience, but the system forces him to disassemble them and think only of security and advancement."¹¹ Ray depicted that the connection between Shyamalendu's masculinity and professionalism practised as the form of ontological validation of subject, a way of being (a man), that strengthens man's ability to exercise power as a professional and as a man. Ray criticised in the film '*Sheemabaddha*' (1971) that how the discourse of professionalism was overlaid by the masculinity, and how the predominant conceptions of what counts as professional practice in given context reproduced and sustained a particularised mode of engaging with the organisational power structure.

¹¹ Dasgupta Chidananda (1981), 'Satyajit Ray: An Anthology of Statements on Ray and by Ray'. Published by Directorate of Film Festival Publications, New Delhi, p-93