

Tribute to Buddhadeb Dasgupta

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Journey Through the Memory Lane

Anwar is walking back to his memories... with the world extending to the horizon, wind gusts howling over uneven meadows, Anwar keeps walking with a dark blue huge sky above his head. He has left the city in order to seek his lost rural homeland, actually he has left it in search of his childhood roots, his adolescence relationships. Buddhadeb Dasgupta's film *Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa* (The Weird Tale of Anwar; official English title: Sniffer), released a few years back.

For a living Anwar was working in a detective agency in the city. It was his job to encroach on the personal life of other people. While doing so, in an unspecified moment, he encroaches on his own past life. He leaves the city and travels all the way to a remote village, his rural homeland.

He is walking, slowly, alone, accompanied only by his pet dog Lalu. Dasgupta's camera follows them in a hidden and distant mode. From behind a tree Anwar suddenly discovers his long dead parents: his dad is carrying his mom on a bicycle or the two of them are walking side by side with the

bicycle in between. In the same way he happens to come across his old friend Amal, even his love interest Ayesha, with whom he is engrossed all his life.

Buddhadeb Dasgupta used to create films on memories – or, to put it better, used to create memories through the frames of celluloid. The images in his films used to spring from his own collected memories. While making the film *Uttara* he went back to his house in the suburbs; the two big trees located there – a mango tree and a jackfruit tree – resurfaced in his mind; upon touching the two trees he felt that he was touching his childhood, he was returning to his old memories. When in the old house of theirs it was partly lit and partly dark, when he started playing with his siblings, a lot of things were visible, a lot of things were invisible too; the invisible ones took shape in Dasgupta's imagination. His memories were acquired thus, little by little.

In *Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa*, Anwar at last enters his old house; Dasgupta's camera guides him through the darkness of the horn of a gramophone

and makes him reach the light of his past memories... there his young aunt puts him to sleep by playing a record and performing excellent dance moves with the rhythm of the song, a song which speaks of getting carried away in a stream of laughter or getting the heart flooded.

It is memory that keeps us alive, we have a major dependence on memory for life itself, yet there is a constant attempt to separate us from our memories... those in 'power' always intend to blur the nuances and mysteriousness of memory, to push us towards a biased life which is cast in the mould of stereotypes, so that an individual cannot live with his or her originality. This originality is the principal component in the creation of memories; an individual laden with memories cannot be detected from outside; only if studied slowly, he or she can be revealed as an exceptionally mysterious individual, although very much ordinary in his or her appearance.

Dasgupta does not admit an existence disconnected from memories as a real existence at all. He says, "*We remain tremendously indebted to our memories. Although our memories are often taken for granted, the fact of having memories is not important in itself; rather, a return to the scenes emerging from our memories is what I call being with memories. For me, 'image' is essential. These scenes are never devoid of memories... I cannot conceptualize making my films without these scenes. Memory nurtures me; in other words, I love to live my life with these memories.*" (translated from Bengali).

The above is an excerpt from a long interview with Adrish Biswas, who, like Dasgupta himself, is no longer with us. However, Dasgupta

drew our attention to a crucial aspect of his approach to the making of his own films: "*There are two kinds of creators. In celluloid too, there are a number of powerful directors who can give utterance to reality with amazing expertise. There are some others who can transcend reality and move their as well as the audience's focus to a different world with a greater enigma. Andrei Tarkovsky and Luis Buñuel belong to the second category. In the first category we find Satyajit Ray.*" (Kabikatha, "Raktamangsa") (translated from Bengali).

An example of how memory empowers us within, builds a foundation of faith, teaches in times of impenetrable darkness to walk with gritted teeth is *Grihajuddha*, a film from Dasgupta's initial phase. The young woman never let goes of the memories of her old traumatic days, never makes a compromise with 'power', in the last scene of the film she is all by herself, bearing memories like deep wounds and crossing a busy road of Kolkata, packed with vehicles.

Dasgupta believes that artistic expression takes place through the artist's quest for memories. It often seems that the characters of his films are his alter ego while he is merely the narrator. His effort to incorporate memory into his art is in fact a challenge to those films which are unproblematic to the establishment or to the authority. That is why his films raise questions on the conventional values of the state rather than playing the role of a collaborator or making concessions in creative space, that is why they are constantly full of observation and appraisal.

[Translated from Bengali by: Sharanya Dutta]

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