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## Postcolonial Resistance of India's Cultural Nationalism in Select Films of Rituparno Ghosh

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### **Abstract**

The paper would focus on the cultural nationalism that the Indians gave birth to in response to the British colonialism and Ghosh's critique of such a parochial nationalism. The paper seeks to expose the irony of India's cultural nationalism which is based on the phallogocentric principle informed by the Western Enlightenment logic. It will be shown how the idea of a modern India was in fact guided by the heteronormative logic of the British masters. India's postcolonial politics was necessarily patriarchal and hence its nationalist agenda was deeply gendered. Exposing the marginalised status of the gendered and sexual subalterns in India's grand narrative of nationalism, Ghosh questions the compatible comradeship of the "imagined communities".

### **Keywords**

Hinduism, postcolonial, nationalism, hypermasculinity, heteronormative

India's cultural nationalism was a response to British colonialism. The celebration of masculine virility in India's cultural nationalism roots back to the colonial encounter. The colonisers portrayed Indian men as effete, sexually impotent, infantile and feminine and hence unable to rule themselves. Ashish Nandy in his seminal book *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (2009) observes, Indian nationalist leaders were so much affected by this colonial construction of emasculation that "they did resurrect the ideology of the martial races latent in the traditional Indian concept of statecraft and gave the idea a new centrality" (7). They felt the anxiety to express their martial spirit which they thought lied in the traditional Kshatriya values of Hinduism. They "tried to make Ksatriyahood the 'true' interface between the rulers and ruled as a new, exclusive indicator of authentic Indianness" (Nandy 7). On the other hand, being critiqued by the Christian missionaries for the abject status of Indian women, the nationalists felt the need to reform Hinduism. However, while the Indian reformers with the help of the colonial administrators banned the practice of *sati*, child marriage and implemented widow-remarriage, they emphasised on Indian women's prime duty in the home and family. Associating femininity with spirituality, the nationalist leaders restricted women within the private sphere of home under the watchful gaze of the male members of the family. Even some nationalist leaders like Gandhi who sought active participation from women in the struggle for independence, always focused on home as the principal site of their activity. Thus associating masculinity with the martial tradition of Hinduism and femininity with the domestic world of spirituality, the Indian nationalist leaders emphasised on a reinvigorated Hindu nation. According to Peter van der Veer, "In this way nationalism embraces religion as the defining characteristic of the nation" (132).

Women were thought to be the cultural emblems of a Hindu nation. They continue to engage in the biological as well as the cultural reproduction of the Hindu nation and it is on them that the dignity of a nation depends. The simile of the nation as mother called for the duty of the nation's sons to protect the mother from the rapacious foreigners. The martial spirit of masculinity was warranted and control of women justified on the ground of protecting the nation. While restricting the women within the home was a self-proclaimed duty of the masculine nationalist leaders to protect the sanctity of the nation, it also imparted the male members with a certain kind of power which they were denied outside by the colonisers. They felt a kind of power and satisfaction controlling women within the home and the family. Historians like Tanika Sarkar explain the relation between production of domestic femininity with the anxiety of an emasculated masculinity constructed by the colonial masters. The domestic sphere substituted the world outside, as the man "became within the home what he can never aspire to be outside it – a ruler and administrator, a legislator or a chief justice, a general marshalling his troops" (qtd. in Oza 119). Thus dominance over women and controlling their sexuality became fundamental to India's cultural nationalism. Peter van der Veer argues, "nationalist discourse connects the control over the female body with the honor of the nation" (113).

India's anti-colonial struggle as well as nationalist agenda was in fact a reproduction of colonial ideologies. Being interpellated by the discourse of colonialism, the Indian nationalist leaders while on the one hand associated masculinity with

nationalist vigour and femininity with passivity, on the other, they equated heterosexuality with normality, suppressing any other kind of sexuality as abnormal and punishable. The colonisers scoffed India as a sexually promiscuous nation and its men and women were perverted sensualists. To defend themselves against such accusation, the nationalist leaders tried to suppress their ambivalent sexual identity and indigenous philosophy of androgyny or psychological bisexuality prevalent in Hindu sacred texts and culture in celebration of heteronormative masculinity. Forgetting India's liberal past, the Hindu nationalist leaders embraced the colonial ideology of "compulsory heterosexuality" to create the modern nation. The culturally amnesic nationalist leaders tried to establish India as a traditionally heteronormative place without any queer history. Tradition became in fact a construct of modernity in the hands of the modern Hindu nationalist leaders. The language of nationalism was used to justify masculine prowess and heteronormativity often suppressing the voice of the gendered and the sexual subalterns. Thus the definition of nation as an "imagined community" by Benedict Anderson doesn't take a firm stand as the internal hierarchies cut short the ideology of inclusive comradeship.

As nationalism was closely associated with the progress enunciated by Western modernity, the nationalist leaders suffered from a paradox. While India's cultural nationalism demanded a close adherence to its tradition, it also felt the necessity to imitate the West, especially in the field of material progress. As Partha Chatterjee, in *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993), argues this kind of dichotomy was resolved by the nationalist leaders by making a distinction between the private and the public sphere. While the private sphere was considered to be the realm of spirituality, the public sphere was the place of material progress. The Indian nationalist leaders acknowledged their subordinate status to the West in the public sphere, and it was thought to be the responsibility of the men to follow in the scientific and technological progress of the West. On the other hand, India's autonomy and superiority were located in the private sphere of spirituality and it was the duty of the women to maintain the sanctified authentic realm of the nation. This perennial anxiety of being modern yet traditional has propelled the Hindu nationalist leaders to restrict the movement of women within the *ghar* or private domain, since they are supposed to exhibit the essentialised Indianness.

Tamar Mayer observes, "In addition to biological reproduction, the nation is reproduced culturally, socially and symbolically through the performativity of its members. This is also the way that norms of gender and sexuality are reproduced when they intersect with nation" (8). To maintain the autonomy and uniqueness of India, the nationalist leaders have constructed the norms and proper behaviour for the members of the nation. While the women are dictated to follow the tradition and remain modest to the indigenous codes of conduct even while being modern, the male members are inspired to celebrate their masculine prowess through body-building, celibacy and controlling women. Rupal Oza in her book *The Making of Neoliberal India: Nationalism, Gender, and the Paradoxes of Globalization* (2006) observes, "The construction of the militant Hindu identity in the public sphere has its concomitant part in the expression of heteronormative masculinity" (118). Heterosexuality is celebrated in all sphere of life

relegating any other kind of sexuality as inauthentic and anti-national. As the masculine members of the society construct the proper behaviour for Others, in effect, they actually control the body and the sexuality of the Others, such as women and the homosexuals. They are threatened at the wayward sexuality of the women and feel emasculated at the non-normative performance of the male body. As nation, gender and sexuality become intertwined with each other, any deviation from the prescribed norms of heteronormative masculinity come to be regarded as anti-national. “Locked within a heteronormative paradigm, women bear the nation’s children while men’s virility is weighed by their ability to protect territory and women against invasion” (Oza 7).

While the celebration of masculinity and indigenous cultural purity have been emphasised in India’s cultural nationalism to differentiate itself from the West and to protect itself from the insecurities endangered by globalisation, Rituparno Ghosh, the renowned filmmaker from Bengal, completely does away with this parochial Hindutva nationalism. Ghosh who started making films in the decade of India’s economic liberalisation, exploits the global flow of capital and culture to help the gendered and sexual subalterns come out of the closet. Strongly criticising the colonial ideologies regarding gender and sexuality on which India’s cultural nationalism is built, his films expose how the ideology of nationalism which was once invoked to grow a sense of collective togetherness, ends up being a grand narrative of Western modernity promoting the values of certain categories of people at the expense of the Others.

In India’s cultural nationalism, the nation is thought to be a Hindu deity to whom her children must express their bhakti (devotion) through the performativity of the ideologies constructed by the heteronormative patriarchy in the name of tradition. Individual wish is sacrificed for the larger cause of the nation and any deviation from the Hindutva ideology by an individual is considered to be anti-national. Ghosh expresses his unease at this hegemonic aspect of nationalism which robs an individual of any liberty and compels him/her to perform the nationalist ideology. With the celebration of individual wishes, Ghosh’s films resist the ideologies of the heteronormative masculinity on which a Hindu nation is built. In *Chokher Bali (The Passion Play, 2003)*, a film based on Tagore’s novel of the same name, he questions the gendered nationalism which posits the nation on the primary site of a woman’s body and forces her to uphold the tradition by maintaining the purity of her body, sacrificing her individual wishes and desire at the altar of the nation. Ghosh presents Binodini with subversive agency, someone who refuses to conform to the tradition and the codified moral laws set down for a widow to follow. Acerbically challenging the ideologies of patriarchal nationalism of colonial modernity that attempts to curb the vital sexuality of the women, Binodini uses her widowhood to satisfy her individual passion. While her friend Ashalata tries to fulfil the ideals of a Hindu wife, or rather attempts to perform the nation within the home, Binodini challenges the dead traditions that straightjacket the women. In spite of her close adherence to tradition, Asha fails to protect her home. While on the other hand Binodini succeeds to move beyond the confines of home in search of her own *desh*. Binodini’s vision of *desh* or country is different from India’s cultural nationalism based on the ideologies of colonial modernity. While the nationalist leaders like Bihari remain indifferent to the sufferings of individual women within the country in his grand mission for the country’s

independence, Binodini's dream of an independent country which respects individual wish, is a more inclusive and liberal space for the marginalised section of people like her. Conflating the divisive strategies of British colonialism along with the patriarchal ideologies of the gendered nationalism, Binodini calls for a resistance of the hegemonic ideologies of the colonial modernity. Referring to Lord Curzon's politics of territorialism, in her letter to Asha Binodini calls for a gendered solidarity to make impotent any such divisive politics. She tells her friend that the real country exists within the mind and if they remain true to each other, no division can set them apart. She also pleads her not to keep her would-be-child, whether boy or girl, restricted within a narrow space of continuous surveillance, but to allow him/her to move beyond the carceral space for a broader universe and one day the child would show her what the real country is. Srimati Mukherjee observes,

However, at the end of her letter to Ashalata, she focuses on Bengali women's freedom from confining domestic spaces and the concept of a nation/*desh* that is both an independent India and a more liberating terrain for women. (N.pag)

Debunking the grand narrative of the gendered nationalism, Binodini destabilizes the spiritual/material or private/public dichotomy of the nationalist ideology which robs the women of any freedom and inspires her friend and others to do so. Pathik Roy in his article "From Rabindranath Tagore to Rituparno Ghosh: Domestic Space, Gender and the Nation in *Chokher Bali*" argues ". . . Ghosh allows Binodini the agency to breach the spatial and ideological hegemony that scripts the lives of women circumscribed by the discourses of patriarchal nationalism of colonial modernity" (322).

Ghosh's postcolonial politics also reappropriates India's cultural nationalism, which being moulded by the colonial discourses of modernity, is deeply gendered. As is already mentioned above, the Indian nationalist leaders, after acknowledging the colonial ideology which associated masculinity with the male body and femininity with the biological female, created the binary sphere of *ghar* and *bahir* and restricted women within the private sphere of domesticity while men were allowed to actively participate in the material world of public sphere. Women were supposed to possess inherent femininity and hence unable to successfully execute the activities of public sphere which necessitates valour, violence and rationality. But in contrast to this general assumption, in Ghosh's films we often come across male characters who behave in a feminine way as well as women characters who are more masculine than their male counterparts. In *Subho Muharat (The First Shoot, 2003)*, a detective film based on Agatha Christie's novel *Mirror Cracked from Side to Side*, Padmini, in spite of being a woman, unhesitatingly kills her suspects one after another in a cool and calculative brain. She writes her own story as well as the fate of others. She hoodwinks the flag-bearers of masculinity, whether her husband or the police department. While the masculine police force even fails to identify the criminal, it is Ranga Pisi, another independent woman, who resolves the mystery. Restricting herself within the home, she crosses the metaphorical boundary of private and public sphere. Ranga Pisi exemplifies the potentialities of women who can successfully take entry into the intellectual and rational world of masculinity. Ranga Pisi's success and Padmini's authoritative dominance of the public sphere throw a challenge to this precarious distinction between the private and public sphere. In another

film *Dosar* (*Companion*, 2006), Kaveri the wife is portrayed with a masculine aura in contrast to her husband Kaushik who is literally and symbolically put to a bed almost from the very beginning of the film. His movements are restricted while his wife successfully manages the private as well as the public sphere after Kaushik's accident on the way of returning from a rendezvous with his office colleague Mita. She deals with the double shock of her husband's betrayal as well as his accident quite practically in contrary to the expectations of the male members of the society. The police inspector seeks for a male member in the family to impart the news of the accident assuming that a woman is unable to bear the shock and handle the situation practically. Kaushik's office boss Mr Sanyal is amazed at Kaveri's efficiency and mentioning it to his wife he praises Kaveri for her "unnatural" bravery. But the moment she actually shows her guts to chastise her husband before others with the rude revelation of Mita's death they cannot accept her any more. Kaushik's masculinity is put to crisis as his physical and mental well-being completely depends at the grace of his wife Kaveri. Shaking off his masculine ego, Kaushik has to go through the catharsis of his guilty-stricken heart to rejuvenate their companionship beyond any gender hierarchy. Thus, these films, though do not fight for women's entry into the public sphere like a feminist text would do, but of course offer a renegotiation of the patriarchal division of private and public sphere.

In the discourses of Hindu nationalism, as is already noted, the woman's body becomes the primary site where the nation is performed. The chief importance of a woman's body lies in its ability to give birth to the future children of the nation. Women become the biological as well as the cultural reproducer of a nation. "Only pure and modest women can re-produce the pure nation; without purity in biological reproduction the nation clearly cannot survive" (Mayer 7). Hence any woman failing to perform this role is perpetrated and relegated to the position of a non-human entity. In *Antarmahal* (*Views of an Inner Chamber*, 2005) Ghosh exposes the cruelty perpetrated on female body for failing to give birth to a male heir in a zamindar family. The landlord Bhubaneswar marries twice as his first marriage with Mahamaya has failed to give birth to any child. Even when after much attempt Bhubaneswar fails for the second time, the patriarchal priests come to his help. Both the women are compelled to suffer the crudity of sex as their bodies become the object of desire for others. The women are treated either as child-producing machines or sex-objects. While on the one hand mother goddess is worshipped in the household of Bhubaneswar, on the other, his own wives are perpetrated and humiliated. The irony reaches its height when the priests who codify moral prudence for women to maintain the purity of their body to build a pure nation, manipulate the religion themselves to satisfy their own physical hunger. They do not hesitate to prey on the woman's body which is symbolically the body of the nation. The film equates the patriarchal members of the colonised state with the colonisers, since the subjugation of women is presented at the backdrop of India's subjection to the British. Ghosh does not hesitate to present the crudity of sex on the screen to break the moral complacency of his bourgeoisie middle-class audience.

The trope of mythological motherhood was constructed to reinforce the idea of authentic Indianness. For women, child rearing in the domestic sphere becomes a vital task for regenerating a Hindu nation. Social historians like Dipesh Chakrabarty explicates

how the trope of the *bhadramahila* (the gentlewoman) who is pure, modest, self-sacrificing Hindu woman, an all-giving mother was constructed and used by the Bengali gentlemen to create an indigenous image which was different from the colonisers, the Eurocentric model of individualism. This image of women not only restricted them within the private sphere of home, but also curbed any other potential inherent in them. Ghosh questions this homogenising approach of forming an essentially Indian femininity which suppresses all other facades of individual identity. In films like *Antarmahal*, *Unishe April* (19th April, 1994), he demythologises the concept of mythological motherhood. Sarojini, the mother of Aditi, in *Unishe April* shakes off the ideological burden thrust upon the women to pursue her own dream and desire of being a successful dancer. Goddess Durga becomes an important motif in films like *Antarmahal* and *Utsab* (Festival, 2000), especially carrying India's gendered nationalistic overtones. The image of goddess Durga as a loving mother and at the same time a violent power destroying the evil becomes emblematic of Indian femininity or "Mother India," the *Bharat Mata* at large. Reinscribing these spiritual qualities on women by mythologising women's power, the nationalists wanted to epitomise a Hindu nation. But in reality this divine image of women curtailed the possibility to use her potential in the material and political sphere. The nationalist consciousness compelled them to keep away from the public sphere of contaminating cultural influences of Europe. Surprisingly enough, while the divinity controlled femininity and defined the indigenous identity in India, the colonial male elites did not hesitate to profane the divine to enjoy pleasure and power. In *Antarmahal* though Bhubaneswar makes it certain that the movement of women are strictly constrained within the private sphere away from the desiring gaze of the British narrator, the landlord disregardingly ignores the nationalist anxiety of contaminating European influences while he orders to create the image of goddess Durga in replica of Queen Victoria to please the British. Goddess Durga was worshipped in colonial Bengal to exhibit their power and opulence to gain favour from the British. In *Utsab* Joy informs us about the past glory with which Durga puja was celebrated in the huge mansion. The jewellerys of the goddess were brought from the European countries. But at the same time, the goddess was vested with nationalistic fervour. Joy's great grandfather once created the goddess in the image of Bharat Mata for which the British had taken away his title "Roy Bahadur." The patriotic sentiment of equating the mother goddess with the nation is however summarily dismissed by Arun, the youngest son-in-law of Bhagabati. Ramita Ray argues, "Arun's sarcasm targets the very idea of lineage and its tightly woven hierarchies of class and privilege that both the pratima and the palace represent, and the continuum of colonial heritage to which they belong" (346).

However, the grand narrative of nationalism becomes detrimental for common humanity, irrespective of men or women. As Mayer explains, "In the intersection of nation, gender and sexuality the nation is constructed to respect a "moral code" which is often based on masculinity and heterosexuality" (Mayer 12). As has already been noted, India's cultural nationalism was motivated by India's response to the colonial construction of its men as feminine and infantile. Indian nationalist leaders celebrated masculinity as a strategy to oppose the orientalist emasculation. Hence the strict gender roles which associate masculinity with men and femininity with women were professed

for its members to follow. Since the identity of a nation depends upon the performativity of its members, the nationalist ideology while directing the women to maintain moral purity, also compelled the male members of the society to fulfil the impossible ideals of masculinity. The myth of “proper behaviour,” constructed to reinstate the uniqueness of India, demands its male members to act heroic to compliment women’s feminine modesty. The nationalist ideology while thrusts an ideological burden upon the women, also creates a huge pressure upon the male members to fulfil the impossible ideals of hypermasculinity. If any man fails to fulfil the ideal form of masculinity, he is considered impotent and hence un-Indian.

While India’s cultural nationalism mediated by colonial modernity puts forth adult rationality or hypermasculinity as the normative condition of humanity, Ghosh emphasises the radical heterogeneity and indeterminacy of human nature. He shows what misfortune this might cause if men always try to conform to this ideal. Indraneel in *Sob Charitro Kalponik (Afterword/All Characters Are Imaginary, 2009)*, Manoj in *Raincoat (2004)*, and Ramesh in *Noukadubi/Kashmkash (Boat Wreck, 2012)* suffer as they fail to fulfil this impossible ideal. In *Sob Charitro Kalponik* Indraneel dies of heart failure because of the immense pressure and pain he had to undergo for not being able to play the role of a sensible, rational, strong individual, something a nation demands its men to be. Manoj and Neeru in *Raincoat* suffer because the man cannot act heroic. Like a masculine hero he cannot win his love away from the social obstacles. Even when the opportunity arrives, it is his socially tutored masculine ego and Neeru’s feminine social self that reinforce their closeted existence. Ramesh in *Noukadubi*, and Arun in *Utsab* also suffer as they fall short in the socially defined category of masculinity.

While most Indian men like Bhubaneswar in *Antarmahal*, Mahendra in *Chokher Bali* and Kaushik in *Dosar* emphasise their masculinity through polygamy or polyamory, celibacy is also practised by some as the ideal form of masculinity. Steve Derné observes, “. . . despite their differences, a politics of celibacy and a politics of sexual potency have both provided nationalist Indian men with a feeling of power by emphasizing sexual control of Indian women” (237). In *Chokher Bali* Bihari, who is an ardent follower of the Swadeshi movement, practises celibacy, moved by the ideals of Swami Vivekananda who represents ideal form of masculinity to him. Bihari’s vow of celibacy is closely connected with his belief in Hindu nationalism. As Derné further states, “Asserting control over one’s own body as a way of rejecting the alien forces of colonialism, secularism and modernity has been an important component of men’s nationalism in India” (237). Bihari can be judged to belong to this category. In the film, a symbolic fall of this grand ideology is expressed through the news of the immature demise of Swami Vivekananda who remains an absent presence in the film. Bihari’s closest friend Mahendra, taunts at him and significantly asks whether the death of Vivekananda is going to bring about the end of celibacy practised by Bihari. Binodini also chastises his phony idealism. While Binodini comes to Bihari at night with the proposal of marriage and repeatedly urges him to marry her, the latter remains firm in his ideal. Frustrated Binodini mocks at his celibacy and questions his masculinity, saying that his refusal doesn’t establish him as an ideal figure but rather an emasculated individual. This very accusation of emasculation by the colonisers which once propelled Indian nationalist leaders to assert their masculinity

in different ways works again as Bihari relents to talk about Binodini's proposal in the morning. As it will be later shown in the film, Bihari ultimately expresses his keen desire to marry Binodini, but that is ironically frustrated by Binodini herself. Binodini who has matured a lot and realises marriage to be a patriarchal attempt to keep women within the constraints of home, leaves for a larger universe, refusing to marry. One may also find the germs of homoeroticism in the relationship between the two friends Mahendra and Bihari and this also could be one of the many reasons for Bihari refusing a heterosexual marriage and practising celibacy. However, as a nationalist figure he could not but had to suppress, even if he had any such feeling, since India's cultural nationalism is based on the grand narrative of heteronormativity. While showing the ideology of hypermasculinity as an impossible ideal which may even lead an individual to death, Ghosh also exposes how homophobia and xenophobia became the guiding principles of Indian nationalism.

Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai in their edited volume *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History* (2008), contend that "Indian society too entered a transitional phase as older indigenous discourses of same-sex love and romantic friendship came into dialogue with the new Western legal and medical discourses on homosexuality as an abnormality or an illness" (222). With a desire to impose British Victorian culture, the colonisers propagated homosexuality as an oriental vice. Internalising the homophobia, Indian nationalist leaders propagated that homosexuality was a colonial import and India was a heteronormative country with no queer history. Rohit K. Dasgupta observes:

Finally, sexuality in India is significant because it offers an expression of nationalist anxieties, and it is also a marker of modernity through which subjectivities are formed in middle class India. It would be worthwhile to note that queer people are excluded from the grand narrative of nationalism and national identities that constructs queerness as anti-national. . . . (3)

According to Dasgupta, the homophobic and xenophobic Indians attempted to suppress the dissident voice of the non-normative people in order to create a modern nation.

Even at the time of economic liberalisation in India while the free market and liberal ideologies inspired the visibility of the queer presence in the public sphere, it was not without the resistance from the Right-wing nationalist leaders. Referring to P. K. Vijayan, Rupal Oza comments, "In contemporary India, the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s through the 1990s has coincided with displays of aggressive masculinity demonstrated through a display of heteronormative sexual virility" (9). But resisting the hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity constructed by the nation-state, Ghosh utilised the opportunities provided by the free market to put forth the idea of queer philosophy which moves beyond the binary construction of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Finding androgyny rooted to the tradition of India,

he [Rituparno Ghosh] accused colonial interference for alienating the Indian psyche from its cultural inclusivity about sexuality and different orientations. Such views persist as cultural amnesia. Hence, the acceptance of the concept and the practice of androgyny constitute an immensely significant 'nativist' cultural recovery. (Pramanick 236)

Resisting the grand narrative of cultural nationalism which was based on the Enlightenment logic of Western modernity, Ghosh attempted to celebrate the indigenous tradition of “cultural inclusivity about sexuality” through films as well as his entire life praxis.

While in the decade of economic liberalisation, the political fundamentalists struggled to protect the purity of Indian nation from the contaminating neo-liberal discourses of globalisation, Ghosh utilised that very opportunity provided by the open market to help flow the transcultural energy of queer aesthetics. Focusing on the performative nature of gender and sexuality and critiquing the regimes of heteronormativity altogether Ghosh’s queer-trilogy *Arekti Premer Golpo* (*Just Another Love Story*, 2010), *Memories in March* and *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012)<sup>1</sup> discards the nationalist claim of a heteronormative country. These films delve deep into India’s cultural past to assert the queer presence in India’s multicultural milieu. While in *Arekti Premer Golpo* and in *Memories in March* Ghosh uses the subtext of Gaudiya Vashnavism, in *Chitrangada*, he critically revisits the famous Indian epic Mahabharata and Tagore’s dance drama *Chitrangada* to contemporise the queer self of mythical Chitrangada.

These queer narratives demand for one’s right in a country to live one’s gender and choose sexual preference. Ghosh severely chastises the regime of heteronormativity which jeopardise the lives of the non-normative people in the name of the nation. All these queer narratives expose a struggle between a heteronormative family and the queer child. This symbolically represents the struggle between the heteronormative nation and its queer children who are suffering from an identity crisis and struggling for a space in the national imaginary. Koushik Mondal argues:

In his queer trilogy *Arekti Premer Golpo*, *Memories in March* and *Chitrangada* as well as in many other supposedly non-queer films, Ghosh either strongly criticises the heteronormative family values which jeopardise the lives of the gendered and sexual subalterns or rejects social institutions of marriage and family altogether for their normative mandates. (253)

Ghosh speaks for liberating the individuals from conforming to the nationalist ideologies suppressing their individual wishes and desire. He severely critiques the law of the country which does not allow two male friends like Rudra and Partho in *Chitrangada* to adopt a child. Basudev in *Arekti Premer Golpo* can’t continue to have a relation with Abhiroop for he is married to Rani. He has to maintain the heterosexual machismo in spite of his wish otherwise. The queer trilogy attempts to resist the hegemony of heteronormative family-space in search for alternative spaces of belonging.

The success of Ghosh’s queer trilogy lies in the change of the national perspective, that he managed to bring about the sexually marginalised. Ghosh says,

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<sup>1</sup>Among this queer trilogy, only *Chitrangada* is directed by Rituparno Ghosh himself, while *Arekti Premer Golpo* was directed by Kaushik Ganguly and *Memories in March* by Sanjay Nag. However, Ghosh acted in all these films and was the associate director of *Arekti Premer Golpo* and penned the story and rhyme of *Memories in March*. Due to his strong presence in these films which are not even directed by himself, all these films have become Rituparno-films.

“*Chitrangada* is the articulation of the marginalised people like us. Hence, winning the national award for this film brings hope for me and the people like me” (Ghosh 403). It would not be an overstatement to claim that the films like Ghosh’s queer trilogy propelled the Supreme Court’s decision to decriminalise homosexuality through the correction of the colonial law of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in 2018. The apex court also amended Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code to decriminalise adultery like extra-marital affairs on September 27, 2018.

The ideology of Indian nationalism which was once invoked to grow a sense of collective togetherness irrespective of caste and creed, region and religion, gender or sex in their anti-colonial struggle ends up being a grand narrative of Western modernity. Ghosh’s oeuvre demands for a reclamation of India’s postcolonial politics and exposes a postcolonial resistance of India’s cultural nationalism. Instead of celebrating the homogenising and exclusionary discourses of nationalism constructed by Western modernity, Ghosh creates an alternative discourse of postcolonial nationalism from the perspective of gendered and sexual subalterns. Based on the principle of humanity, Ghosh’s nationalist philosophy turns to be more a comity than a polity.

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