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Through a Sand-Filled Lens: A Literary and Cinematic Exploration of *Chokher Bali*.

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Abstract: The present research paper intends to investigate the correlation between literature and cinema by comparing Rabindranath Tagore's text *Chokher Bali* (1903) and its cinematic adaptation *Chokher Bali: A Passion Play* (2003) directed by Rituparno Ghosh. The paper discusses how Ghosh reinterprets Tagore's text but succeeds in preserving the intrinsic themes of love, passion, widowhood, patriarchy and limitations imposed upon the women in colonial Bengal. A qualitative approach is followed in this research paper. This paper discusses the portrayal of the key characters particularly Binodini and how through cinematic features, visual symbols, costume, music and photography, Ghosh achieves the adaptation. In this paper, the comparisons between the novel and the film are explored while also observing the deviations that Ghosh has made in creating an interpretation of the text in a modern context that highlights the representation of gender and female agency and individual and social identities. The research paper analyzes adaptation in general and Ghosh's creative work in the context of the contributions of Indian filmmakers like Satyajit Ray. It is evident from the analysis that while Ghosh's adaptation remains loyal to the spirit of the novel, the film also carved out its own identity. *Chokher Bali* stands as a notable achievement in the field of literary adaptation; it is a blend of the textual and visual forms of narrative and serves as a stimulus for new considerations of female issues, culture and change.

Keywords - Rabindranath Tagore, *Chokher Bali*, Rituparno Ghosh, Film Adaptation, Bengali Literature, Cinema Studies, Binodini, Widowhood, Gender Representation, Patriarchy, Colonial Bengal, Adaptation Theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore (7th May, 1861-7th August, 1941), the Bard of Bengal, had an extensive impact on Rituparno Ghosh, who is one of the substantial filmmakers of Indian cinema, both at the regional as well as the national level. Most of his films are cultivated by the source content of Tagore; more specifically, most of his works are based on Tagore's novels or works. Cinema is by far always regarded as a profound medium for art in documenting human life, emotions, ups and downs, human psychology etc. Despite some differences, literature and cinema are internally connected to each other and, both aims to demonstrate the tangible truth of life and develop the plot by using a social ladder. Rituparno Ghosh's movie *Chokher Bali*, or *A Passion Play* (2003), is based on Tagore's retro-Victorian work of colonial chronicles of social dilemmas, *Chokher Bali* (1903). Simultaneously, Ghosh's cinematic work provides vivid eyesight of both the outer colonial world, when British governors were to rule over India, and the inner domestic environment of an Indian Zamindar household. The tradition of adaptations can be traced to the beginning of the 19th century. Directors often adapt their source content from a novel or a story, and then they make their own abridged version of that content while applying creative liberty, and thus it is called adaptation. This proposed paper explores the re-imagination of Ghosh's *Passion play* using his creative liberty in contrast to Tagore's *Chokher Bali*.

Fictional adaptation provides a set of circumstances where motives can be seen in action and interaction, allowing one to say many things that are not possible in a monologue or a statement of philosophical doctrine. We gain a perspective on the truth by observing instances in which it has been misconstrued and the process by which it was constructed. In this setting, we can see the social and psychological factors that contribute to the disparity in status between men and women being thoroughly examined. But it contended that, as opposed to its tremendous potential and openness, worries about orientation relations have not been integral to the book. It has been left generally to the more contemporary writers to bind a serious inspection of the manners that characterize the situation of women on a material set that builds social existence.

In the developmental course of writing, narrating accepted a few aspects and shaped the reason for worries about life and reality. The novel, like other forms of narrative, has been influential as an indicator of contemporary society. It frequently reveals the sinister and unpleasant to provide a truer understanding of the real world. One of the significant issues the structure has drawn into is its anxiety with orientation relations. This is presumably the after-effect of how the situation of women has been seen and assessed in various social orders, under shifting social experiences.

II. *CHOKHER BALI*, THE EPITOME OF AUTHENTICITY, A TAKE ON FILM ADAPTATION

“Adaptation” primarily started as a scientific term during the early nineteenth century, specifically, from 1860 onwards. It is associated with the changed version of a text, film, or other scholarly work. Adaptation studies concentrate on the transformation ‘Novels into films’, ‘texts into cinema’, or ‘literature on screen.’

A film adaptation is a process through which a literary work is transformed into a feature film. Though commonly considered to be a sort of auxiliary work, film adaptation has been envisaged as of late by scholarly researchers, such as Robert Stam, as a dialogic interaction. While the most widely recognized type of film variant is the utilization of a novel as the premise, other works adjusted into films incorporate verifiable (counting news coverage), self-portraying works, plays, scriptures, comic books, historical documents, and even other films. Variation from such various assets has been an omnipresent act of filmmaking since the earliest long periods of film in nineteenth-century Europe. Filmmakers, in contrast to those working on remakes, normally take more artistic freedom while making a film transformation.

The few purposes behind the film transformations can be traced to the director's interest in that story, and his conviction that the previous happenings can be flawlessly reproduced through visual scenes. Though, the views of the director and the writer are very similar, and the former wishes to reach out to a massive audience. To some point, this interest portrays a conflict between the various media (literature and film). Intentionally or not, variation is frequently a paragon conflict.

Thomas Leitch reformulated this conflict in the following way: “Because “literature,” unlike “cinema,” is already an honorific, however, any discussion of literature on screen, as opposed to journalism or comic books or video games on screen, will begin willy-nilly with a bias in favor of literature as both a privileged field (literary texts are what movies normally adapt) and an aesthetically sanctified field (literary texts have already been approved by a jury whose verdict on their film adaptations is still out).” (Bruhn, et al., “Adaptation”.6)

The changing relationship between novel and film is another discernible trend in adaptation studies. Overall, adaptation is seen within a more thorough comprehension of the social and text-based works. “The mysterious alchemy which transforms works of fiction into cinematic form is still being widely practiced without, perhaps, being sufficiently understood.” -George Bluestone (Bruhn, et al., “Adaptation”.21)

By focusing on these, we move through a basic “great” or “terrible” judgement of an adaptation and begin to see the implicit value in deciphering stories across mediums. Film adaptations present reimagining, faithfulness, or something in between. Film transformation permits us to see the inherent value behind these stories and their exceptional artistic works.

III. THE LITERARY YET CINEMATIC SPECTACLE

Rabindranath Tagore is one the most eminent poet, philosopher, and iconoclast in the annals of Bengali literature. Beginning with *Manasi*, his first original poem of consequence, published in 1890, he wrote several masterpieces, both in verse and in prose. Indeed, he was trying to work toward unison in constructive terms of painting, music, scriptwriting, novellas or short stories, and essays, both literary and informative. In his more important poetry, namely, the poems of *Gitanjali* and some others, his passion for humanist thinking as envisaged by the *Upanishads* is reflected forcibly. The philosopher-poet was also the first Indian to be awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913 for his creative genius. The pull and power of his efficiency were so great

that the world traveler Tagore soon became the icon of a poet of universal vision, a prophet of transnational sophistication.

The literary rendezvous of Rabindranath Tagore and *Chokher Bali* is an essential yet exceptional part of revolutionizing modern and post-modern Bengali literature. The nuances of the remarkable peripheral diversity of the female characters, which undoubtedly are not based on imitation of western women's literature, reveal Tagore's subtle creations of female characters with unique abstracts, which till date remain the frontier of human evolution.

The earliest novel of his, *Chokher Bali*, previously named *Binodini*, was published in 1903. Tagore's satisfactory choice of the title, *Chokher Bali*, has pursued its passage to fame and eminence in both the material and ideological fields. The matter of the originally was this:

Tagore, in 1903, tries to expand the story of "four young people trapped in a tangle of sensuality." (Fainaru) The novel depicts the lives of the Bengali upper class in the late nineteenth century, in the twilight of the British colonial period in India. The major characters in the story are the young widow Binodini, who finds herself tangled in unsatisfactory lives, confined in the zenanas of Calcutta, and Mahendra, who succumbs to the charms of the beautiful Binodini but cannot marry her because of his wife, Ashalata. Thus, the story of *Chokher Bali* is essentially one of relationships, shared values presumably carry out of tradition and culture, and consequent despair instigated by misunderstandings, the rigidity of social customs, and societal expectations placed upon individuals.

Rituparno Ghosh's *Chokher Bali*, or *A Passion Play*, is a prominent variant of Rabindranath Tagore's remarkable Bengali novel of a similar name. Deciphered as *A Passion Play*, the title hints at the film's investigation of cultural limitations, implicit longings, and the Subtlety of adoration. Set against the background of a politically charged Bengal in the mid-twentieth century, the story unfolds the limits of a rich, refined family. The story revolves around two women, Binodini (Aishwarya Rai) and Ashalata (Raima Sen). After her husband's death, Binodini, a young widow who is full of life and longs for connection, returns to her Pishima's house. There, she forms a guiltless friendship with Ashalata. Mahendra (Prosenjit Chatterjee), maintains distance from Ashalata, leaving an emptiness that Binodini, with her magnificent soul, accidentally starts to fill. An unpretentious closeness is created among Binodini and Mahendra, obscuring the lines of fellowship that rise above cultural standards. In stark contrast to Ashalata's loveless marriage, their love finds solace in emotional connection and intellectual stimulation. The emotional tapestry thickens as Mahendra's childhood friend Bihari (Tota Roy Chowdhury) enters the scene. Bihari, with his lighthearted appeal and friendly accessibility, turns Ashalata's unhappy marriage into relief. The movie portrays the idea of love triangulation, where love and desire drift in surprising directions. Binodini is attracted to Bihari's charm. Ghosh's genius is evident in how he depicts the characters' internal struggles. Binodini longs for adoration and an existence free from past cultural limitations in a world that anticipates that she should stay as a submissive widow. Ashalata is trapped in an unhappy marriage. Even Mahendra, at first portrayed as a medicine man, uncovers a secret weakness that causes him significant damage. Binodini's arousing qualities and her insubordination of cultural assumptions challenge the conventional depiction of Bengali womanhood. *Chokher Bali* is not simply a heartfelt story; it is a publication covering typical acts of the time. The foundation of the Bengal Segment development is inconspicuously woven into the film, featuring social inconsistency, and bringing up issues. The characters' inner turmoil is an impression of the bigger political issues, proposing an individual and cultural longing for freedom. The film captures the essence of Bengal through extravagant scenes, interiors, and attire. The story's emotional depth is further amplified by the melancholy soundtrack. Aishwarya Rai conveys a strong depiction of Binodini, catching both her erotic nature and her weakness. Raima Sen wonderfully depicts Ashalata's blamelessness and her continuous arousal. The film *Chokher Bali* welcomes different viewings, each with noteworthy new layers of social discourse. Through its strong narrating and marvelous filmmaking, *Chokher Bali* rises above to offer an immortal investigation of the human heart.

IV. THE ART OF MASTERY

Chokher Bali, directed by Rituparno Ghosh, is one of those films that provides excellent visualization of the story and the emotions of characters with the help of various motions and shots. This is particularly evident in scenes between Binodini and Ashalata, as it allows the group to see the unpretentious nuances of their correspondences.

In fact, the earlier *Bhanusingher Padabali* songs of Tagore were highly influenced by *Vaishnav Padabali*. Radha's voice was subjective. Similarly, at the age of sixteen, Tagore was also expressing another side of the life. Interpreting Tagore, we see that he continued to weave the theme of the female self or male/female

voice in his songs, of which many addressed the axiom of the Radha figure going in search of her beloved. Ghosh expects from the *abhisarika* persona to be vociferating longing, and the Tagore tune *Gahana kusuma kunja majhey* (*In the dense, flowering bower, a soft, sweet flute plays/Forget fear and shame, come friend and step out in the woods*) becomes one of the recurrent motifs of his movies *Abohoman* and *Jeeban Smriti*. Vaishnav verses of Tagore and diverse melodies evokes desire and energy in *Chokher Bali*. The conceptualization of Rabindra sangeet for forming rebellious relationships for the first time in *Utsab* and *Dosar* gave a new social setting to the Tagore songs that have been a middle-class commercial and domestic cultural state for a very long time. There are plenty of songs in the film *Chokher Bali*, and most of them are by Rabindranath Tagore and other folk melodies. But one song that helps the core narrative of the film is *Khachar bhiton ochin pakhi kemne ashe jai* (*How the unknown bird comes and passes through the bars*). Ghosh uses this song twice in his film to add a narrative of the captivity of the characters. Firstly, when he uses it for the first time, it certainly talks about the captivity of Binodini as a widow, and secondly, when he uses this as a tool to narrate the captivity of Mahendra as a helpless and oath-driven man. Another tune of a Rabindra sangeet that was used earlier in Ray's film, *Baksa Bodol* (1970), *Mora jole sthole koto choley* has also been used here as a background score. The use of Foley in his movies is also one of the exceptional qualities of Ghosh in creating an essence of originality.

Ghosh also manages perfectly the costume design of the characters. When Binodini is first introduced, she is dressed in a white cotton saree with no ornaments except a black string around her neck. She is a widow, and her attire reflects her status. It is also interesting to compare her dressing with Ashalata's, as she wears a beautiful silk sari that is vibrant in colour. Her hair is well braided, she wears a heavy necklace, bangles on her wrists, and she uses loud makeup. Binodini violates these codes, yet, in a realm of female propriety, Binodini, covering her head with the help of the sari and twirling her body away from the male, turns her back towards them. Binodini is more likely to play the role of a fallen woman—social regulatory norms are not being performed. As the movie unfolds, however, the portrayal of Binodini shifts to another representation of women. Women get ornaments on the marriage ceremony, from either the bride's side or the groom's side, but as a widow, she remains eternally a mourner for her husband, and, therefore, it is 'improper' for such a woman to 'dress up' in such a manner. Still, Binodini does not follow it, as she has vanity for her body and its dressing. Ashalata decides to call Mahendra and Bihari into the room, unaware of Binodini's state when they enter to find her dressed in jewels. Mahendra and Bihari find the situation uncomfortable, but Bihari is not afraid to let Binodini know he thinks she looks beautiful. It is evident that they are embarrassed by the forbidden image of widowed Binodini in Ashalata's marriage jewellery. Notably, this act creates a premise for Ghosh to emerge as an extraordinary figure who transgresses rules set in society.

V. CINEMATOGRAPHY

The cinematography of the film was under the supervision of Avik Mukhopadhyay, and he skillfully crafted that too with his creativity and passion for it. Earlier, he worked with Mrinal Sen, and he knew what Rituparno Ghosh wanted to do in his film. The setting of the film is set during 1902–05, when the partition of Bengal was at its peak and the locals were opposing it by showing protest and urging the people to believe and get full swaraj, or independence. To present the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Bengal on screen, the team worked brilliantly with its art and costume design departments, including the use of a horse-driven cart, a villa based on gothic architecture, the use of vintage attire, and accessories such as the box within which the betel leaves were used to be kept, the use of utensils made from white brass, and so on. These things have a subtle effect on presenting the era that once existed in Bengal. One more aspect of the cinematography of the film that needs to be addressed is that the use of warm colours in every shot indicates passion, the third stage of love, which also indicates the film's English subtitle, *A Passion Play*.

Ghosh takes advantage of static shots, handheld shots, and slow motion much of the time, outlining the characters in a manner that underscores their feelings. For instance, when Binodini is reminiscing about her past, she is depicted in a focused close-up with shadows, suggesting that she is going through a lot of internal turmoil. This gives off a sense of profundity and authenticity, and it can also be used to make one notice particular details on the edge. For example, in a scene where Binodini is walking around the picnic orchard with Bihari, the camera focuses on her as she walks, yet it also keeps the distinctive greenery of the picnic orchard in the middle, which gives a sensation of her being encompassed normally. The film has a more creative side because Ghosh skillfully utilizes handheld camera work. This is particularly reasonable in scenes that are planned to be tense or exciting, as it creates a sense of thrill among the viewers. Moreover, Ghosh also utilizes slow movement. For instance, the camera slows down Binodini's movements when she is walking while giving the impression that she is graceful.

The use of light in Rituparno Ghosh's *Chokher Bali* can be pointed to as a meaningful, thought-provoking factor that helps understand the film in terms of mood, the atmosphere, and a thematic field. Ghosh has used light cleverly and purposefully, coming up with visual symbolism and representation, which work so well to give more substance to the story as well as the characters. Day and night, the dual forms of lightness and darkness, are used to juxtapose states in *Chokher Bali*, which are physical as well as psychological. For instance, natural light indicates such things as joy, hope, and liberty, while darkness signifies sorrow, frustration, and confinement. This play between light and shadow can be seen explicitly in the introduction of Binodini, who enters Mahendra's house while the scene is shot drenched with the warm rays of the sunset. While this imagery can be read as denoting some lightness and freedom in Binodini's position of placement in the well-furnished Zamindar house, the darkness that soon envelops the house signifies a strange darkness overshadowing the bright light. Ashalata, who is an enduring character in the film, is, too, shown in less subtle conditions. However, the use of lights is an attempt to think through the topic of femininity and restrictions in the film. Binodini's desire for liberation portrayed through scenes where she tries to embrace the light of the outdoors in Mahendra's home. The gloomy interiors symbolize the constrictions put on women in the movie and the opportunities they have for self-realization. The movie became an art of storytelling since the use of light enhanced the film and made it pass through more analysis concerning its themes of the human experience within the confines of emotion and desire.

VI. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE FILM AND THE NOVEL

At some point, when a filmmaker recreates a popular literary work, they ought to consider both the reader's mindset and the audiences too. They need to sketch out whether the utilization of artistic liberty is appropriate or not. If we take an example from the novel *Chokher Bali* and the film *Chokher Bali*, several distinctions are visible.

However, there are contrasts in both the novel and film in terms of the story, the depiction of the characters, and the central part of the plot. That's one significant observable distinction: in the novel, all the characters are given equivalent significance, while the film focuses more on Binodini, because of the projecting of much-celebrated actress Aishwarya Rai. The social state of twentieth-century India makes Ashalata an embodiment of simplicity, while Binodini showcases a stark contrast to Ashalata. In the film, Binodini is depicted as a shrewd widow, though in the novel, she is searching for affection and care. "Binodini is a remarkable creation: passionate, indignant, intelligent, her ideals always at war with an insistence that she should have rights too." (Roy) The efficiency of dealing Rajalakshmi is evident in Binodini's character. Running against the norm, the film shows Binodini offering Rajalakshmi a denied delicacy like tea that stands out enough to be noticed.

Additionally, Ghosh skillfully uses his creative liberty to use all the hidden conceptions in the novel. Tagore was heavily influenced by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Bishabrikhsa* (*The Poison Tree*), a predecessor to *Chokher Bali* and published serially in *Bangadarshan*. Chattopadhyay makes it amply clear that novelty and change are the key factors behind matters of the heart, as Tagore does later in *Gharey Bairey*. As in Tagore's novel, we can see that Binodini was reading *Bishabrikhsa* by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. In the film, the *Bishabrikhsa* reference is left unattended. "Ghosh ends up structuring the complexities in the relationships through a different mode. Binodini orders a tree cut to allow air and light into Mahendra and Ashalata's richly furnished but dark and stuffy bedroom. The interplay of light and shade and the streak of the golden sunset glow that lights up Binodini and Ashalata are beautiful and, at the same time, a clever projection of the various hues and shades of the relationships." (Mitra)

Toward the start of the novel, there was no mention of Binodini's parish companion, who gave her chocolate. Yet, in the movie, there was a companion, logically a strict, unfamiliar lady, who visited Binodini's place to witness Binodini's hopeless condition in the wake of being a widow. While giving her a chocolate, the woman referenced, "Don't worry, my dear, there is no animal fat." (*Passion Play* 0:04:31) In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women who became widows were not permitted to consume any sort of animal protein. In the above assertion or dialogue, Ghosh depicts the unfortunate state of widow in nineteenth-century Bengal.

"While the male characters in *Chokher Bali* pursue a professional degree, the education of women remains unfilled. Binodini's father consults a 'mem' or white woman to educate his daughter. The subjects taught would normally include some works of literature, mathematics, and the history of Bengal. Along with needlework, a basic knowledge of English was also considered desirable." (Chakravathy, Introduction). Interestingly, Ashalata was uneducated. In the film, after realizing that Binodini is taught and some way or another figures out how to write in English, Ashalata faults Binodini's education for her widowhood. Yet, in

the novel, we can see that Mahendra was attempting to teach Asha, "Look, I have bought her a slate, notebooks and textbooks. Even if people malign me, even if it offends all of you, I am going to educate my wife" (Mahendra to her aunt Annapurna) (Chakravarthi 27). Asha was perusing *Charupath*, and later, when his better half was drawn to Binodini, Asha faulted her lack of education for her adversity. Therefore, she attempted to understand books. This is a vital scene that was avoided in the film.

In the novel, Rajalakshmi went to her parental house in Barasat. Bihari came to her place, and he had known Binodini since that time. Binodini organized a few things for Bihari "Every time Bihari returned from his wanderings in the neighborhood, he would find that someone had cleaned and tidied his room, arranged a bunch of flowers in a brass tumbler, and placed volumes of Bankim and Dinabandhu beside his mattress. In the flyleaf of each book, inscribed in a firm yet feminine hand, was Binodini's name." (Chakravarthi 40) Later, she came to Mahendra's home alongside Bihari and Mahendra's mother, Rajalakshmi. However, in the film, Binodini accompanied Rajalakshmi, and there, in the wake of seeing Bihari, she felt that was Mahendra, and Ashalata cleared up her doubts with respect to this. However, in the novel, it never happens.

Though in the novel, Binodini was not keen on meeting Mahendra. Asha completed a few tricks to meet them up. In the film, there were no entanglements between them. In a specific picnic scene in the film, Bihari approaches Binodini to go out on a picnic with them. On the other hand, initially in the novel, there was a conflict among Binodini and Bihari, and to figure out these things, Binodini moved toward Bihari to go on a picnic, "Why don't you come with us, Bihari babu? If you come along, I am willing to join the party too." (Binodini to Bihari) (Chakravarthi 90)

However, Bihari was initially intended to wed Asha; Mahendra really does so. This episode had an unmistakable effect on the psyche of Mahendra, as he later blames Asha and Bihari for having sentiments toward one another. The original presents the connection between Bihari and Asha as an ungainly one, while in the film Asha, what is more, Bihari and Asha share an exceptionally typical relationship. In the novel, Mahendra calls Asha by the name of 'Chuni'. However, in the film, there is no mention of Asha's moniker given by Mahendra.

In chapter 14 of the novel, there was a certain part where Mahendra was taking photos of Binodini she was sleeping. "Wearing a red shawl over her shoulder, she slept in such a beautiful posture when -facing the window with her head resting on her hand." (Chakravarthi 75) However, there is no mention of the above part in the film, yet Rituparno Ghosh adapted this scene effectively. In a specific scene in the film, Binodini stunned Ashalata by wearing her red blouse, which was gifted by her spouse, Mahendra. Asha was moved by her magnificence. Furthermore, toward the end of the film, Binodini requested a red shawl from Mahendra in Kashi, which likewise envisions the relinquishment wish of wearing the red of a widow. "The rebellion she puts up is symbolized by the repetitive use of the color "red." "Red" is not just the color of passion; it is also the color of revolt in *Chokher Bali*." – Rituparno Ghosh (Trivedi)

In the novel, Mahendra's aunt Annapurna assumed a remarkable part, yet in the film, her presence is very little recognizable. Annapurna carries Ashalata's marriage proposal to Bihari first; however, by denying it, Mahendra weds Ashalata. Rajalakshmi was not so satisfied by Annapurna's proposal, as she said, "If my son does not bring home a bride, why does it offend you? I have spent all these years raising my son, and can look after him even now. There is no need for anyone else. Mejobou left in tears." (Chakravarthi 5) She used to feel that Mahendra had more affection for Annapurna than for her. Rajalakshmi blames Annapurna for Mahendra's diversion; nevertheless, in the film, Ghosh shows a beguiling association between Annapurna and Rajalakshmi.

In the film, Binodini went to Bihari's home and gave him a marriage proposal. However, as opposed to the film, in the novel, Binodini went to Bihari's home for shelter, not for remarriage.

"Hearing this, Binodini instantly rose from the chowki and flung herself to the ground. With all her might, she clutched Bihari's feet to her bosom and pleaded, 'Please retain that little weakness, Thakurpo. Do not be rigid and pure, like a stone god. Loving an evil one, allow yourself to become a little evil.'" (Chakravarthi 234) Later, Bihari declared to Mahendra that he needed to wed Binodini. "Sensing the deliberate provocation, Bihari grasped Mahendra's hand. Mahendra, I declare to you that I intend to marry Binodini; so, from now on, be careful what you say." (Chakravarthi 355) In the film, the marriage scene between Bihari and Binodini at Kashi, which was not successful, was not known to Mahendra and his other family members.

In the film, Mahendra was not present at the time of his mother's death. After a couple of days, Bihari visited Kashi to tell Mahendra about his mother's death. But in the novel, when Mahendra was in Vrindavan, Bihari came to him and let him know that his mother was experiencing influenza and that she was on her death bed. In the wake of hearing the news, Mahendra, alongside Binodini and Bihari, stayed with his mother and dealt with it. Before his mother's passing, she forgave Mahendra and Binodini for their wrongful relationship.

“That day, she sent for Mahendra and told him: 'I do not have much time left, but I die in great happiness, Mahin; I have no sorrows. Today, my heart is full of the same joy I used to feel with you when you were a child. You are my own son, the treasure of my heart; it is my great joy that I can carry all your distress away with me when I depart.’” (Chakravarthy 374)

Mahendra's mother helped Binodini by giving money, as she was probably aware that being a widow was not that simple to get by in that contemporary society.

“And one more thing, Mahin: don't tell anyone before my death, but there are two thousand rupees in my box, which I bequeath to Binodini.” (Chakravarthy 375) yet, in the film, Rajalakshmi died with a ton of hopelessness and misery in her heart for Binodini.

At the end of the film, Asha was pregnant by Mahendra's child, which was seen by Binodini, eventually, she left and saved a letter for Asha as a token of her forgiveness. However, at the end of the novel, we found nowhere that Asha is pregnant, and after Rajalakshmi's demise, Binodini went to Kashi with Annapurna in the wake of looking for her grace for Asha and Mahendra.

“Taking Asha by the chin, Binodini said, 'Yes, sister, it is time for me to leave. You had loved me once. Now, in your days of happiness, keep a little of that love for me, my friend, and forget everything else! 'Mahendra came, touched her feet, and pleaded:

'Bouthan, please forgive me.' There were tears in the corners of his eyes. 'Forgive me, too, Thakurpo,' said Binodini. 'May God grant you eternal happiness!’” (Chakravarthy 379)

VII. INFLUENCES FROM OTHER FILM DIRECTORS

Very few directors in the Bengali film industry have worldwide popularity, and one of the finest gems among them is Rituparno Ghosh. Ghosh's 2003 film adaptation, *Chokher Bali*, or *A Passion Play*, is adapted from the novel *Chokher Bali* by Rabindranath Tagore. Being an avid reader of Tagore, Ghosh continues to show how much it influenced his creative sensibilities. During his college days, he attended several film festivals, acknowledged how he was moved by Ray's films. In an interview, Ghosh stated, “I am supposed to be somebody who belongs to Ray's school. But I am not defensive about that; I am quite pleased, very happy; I think children should look like their parents [laughs]. I am a successor of Ray, and it is his cinema that we have all been brought up on.” (Shaikh)

To make his film more realistic, Ray often relies on guerrilla filmmaking to avoid unwanted attention. Ghosh also does the same with his films. Ray also adapted well-known literary works such as *Pather Panchali* (1955) and *Aranyer Din Ratri* (1970), originally written by Bibhutibhusan Banerjee, in which the use of natural light and outdoor simplistic conditions were skillfully applied. It is often stated that Ghosh's technique somehow resembles Ray's style.

In a particular scene in *Charulata*, directed by Ray and adapted from Tagore's *Nastanirh*, Charulata (Madhabi Mukhopadhyay) was glancing through an opera glass to her outer world. Ghosh also adapted this scene in his film, in which Binodini repeatedly holds the same posture as Charulata. Ghosh admitted the binocular and sewing scenes are a tribute to Ray, but the purpose of using objects was different from Ray's perspective. Ghosh stated, “In *Charulata*, the glasses were a window to the open world, whereas in *Chokher Bali*, they are used voyeuristically.” (Shaikh) “Unlike commercial cinema, where women are represented in such a way that they become objects of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), Ghosh displaces this gaze by presenting the 'female' gaze so that Binodini becomes the voyeur; it is through her eyes and from her gaze that we become involved in her struggle.” (Macdonald 9) There are several scenes at Kashi Ghat in the movie *Chokher Bali* which is adapted from *Joi Baba Felunath* (1979) directed by Ray.

“Ghosh arrived at a time when Bengali cinema was going through a dark phase. Ray had passed away in 1992, leaving behind him a vacuum which seemed difficult to fill. Although Goutam Ghose, Aparna Sen and Buddhadeb Dasgupta tried to carry forward the legacy of 'intellectual' cinema represented by Ray and Mrinal Sen, they made films far in-between having little bearing on the commercial market. Tollygunge, where the main studios are located.” (Datta, et al.1) “He ushered a movement in which filmmakers such as Anjan Dutt, Kaushik Ganguly, Srijit Mukherji and other pulled Bengali industry back into the elite class of Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak.” (Ghosalkar) Ghosh was also heavily influenced by Ritwik Ghatak and Shyam Benegal. Like them, Ghosh also worked as both a director and screenwriter, “In all my films, I write my screenplays. Ray did this, Ghatak did that to an extent, and Mrinal Sen did it too. I think I have a natural flair for writing, and actable dialogue comes to me very easily. When I'm writing the script, I'm actually constructing the film in my head. So, it becomes very simple.” -Rituparno Ghosh. (Shaikh) In a particular scene in the film, Ghosh paid a tribute to Ray's *Pather Panchali*, in which we see a curd man passing by chanting Doi! Doi! Ghosh uses this scene as a memoir for Ray. It visualizes Ghosh's strength in the sphere of filmmaking and continues to be a source of contemporary social critique in terms of concoction.

VIII. FROM ONLOOKERS' MIND TO HEART A TRIUMPHANT JOURNEY OF *CHOKHER BALI*

Rituparno Ghosh's film *Chokher Bali*, released on October 2, 2003 (running time:149 minutes), significantly affects audiences both in India and abroad. The film has been approved for its flawless cinematography, its nuanced exhibitions, and its investigation of social and political themes. The film has received various awards, including the National Film Award for best feature film in Bengali, the National Film Award for best costume design, and the National Film Award for best art direction. It was nominated for the Golden Leopard (Best Film) award at the Locarno International Film Festival in 2003. The film screened at the 34th International Film Festival of India on October 19. It was the official selection at the 2003 Chicago International Film Festival and was showcased at over 25 international festivals, including the Toronto International Film Festival.

The audience has been deeply moved by the film. Many have commended its touchy depiction of the situation of widows in nineteenth-century Bengali society. The film reverberated with viewers because of its depiction of Binodini, a delightful widow segregated by society. Though in the film, Aishwarya Rai as Binodini's voice is dubbed by Sreela Majumdar, Raima Sen as Ashalata's voice is dubbed by Sudipta Chakraborty, and Shuchita Roychowdhury as Annapurna's voice is dubbed by Rituparno Ghosh himself. Aishwarya Rai's screen projecting invites Bengali viewers for criticism who feel a non-Bengali entertainer will fail to catch the essence of the character. This conflict featured the connection between territorial films and Bollywood's star cast. It depicts Ghosh's capacity to adjust scholarly works of art for the screen, making him capable for future movies like *Noukadubi* (2010), *Chitrangada:The Crowning Wish* (2012), *Raincoat* (2004), etc.

Chokher Bali is viewed as a milestone film in Indian cinema. It is associated with the unique style of Bengali film that revolved around character and plot rather than visualization and style of acting. The film represents Indian films on a worldwide scale, which essentially reflects a well-known cultural dogma. The film's background score, made by Debojyoti Mishra, has turned into a work of art, and, remarkably, it contains no playback singing. But the utilization of Tagore's musical *Mayar Khela (The Game of Illusion)* behind the scenes adds life to the film. Overall, *Chokher Bali* is a strong and moving film that lastingly affects crowds both in India and abroad. The film has been commended for its enabling depiction of women. This film is rated 7.1 out of 10 by IMDB, and there are 1.9k reviews from the audience. (according to June 2024).

IX. CONCLUSION

Rituparno Ghosh's 2003 film transformation of Rabindranath Tagore's *Chokher Bali* explores an uncertain situation between dedication and revaluation. While the center story remains largely flawless, Ghosh demonstrates the film with his own complex twists and unpretentious movements, starting a discussion about reliability in variation. Ghosh evidently uses the source material. The film captures the essence of Tagore's social commentary, especially the situation of widows like Binodini, longing for organization in a male-centric culture. The characters' feelings, especially Binodini's thriving and Ashalata's tranquil torment, reflect profoundly throughout the novel. The film carefully reproduces the period setting, moving viewers to pioneer Bengal with its rich outfits and structural majesty. Ghosh also integrates Tagore's tunes consistently into the story, further fortifying the association with the novel. Ghosh does not avoid rethinking from specific angles. Binodini's complex character is portrayed more vividly here than in the novel; we understand her perfection and rebellious nature more comprehensibly. This resonates with today's audiences, who are tired of stereotypes and want to see a more meaningful portrayal of women. This shift also echoes modern rationality, where audiences are free to contemplate their destiny. Engaged with astonishing visuals, the change is buoyed and soaring in Ghosh's work. The use of light and the management of shadows symbolize the turmoil of the characters on the inside. These contacts acknowledge the existence of the film as another materially different construct. Thus, the assessment of Ghosh's *Chokher Bali* takes the turn for a discussion at various times. In this way, through peaceful ascension to the key subjects accompanied by present-day appreciation, the film successfully rejuvenates Tagore's timeless story. It permits the audience to draw in with the characters' contention and contemplate the difficulties of the completion cycle corresponding to cultural standards and female independence. In this way, we can allow that Rituparno Ghosh's *Chokher Bali* or *A Passion Play* is most certainly not a simple duplicate but rather a wise perception. In refusing to defer to this spirit while simultaneously retelling Tagore's work from the viewpoint of his creative insight, Ghosh creates a film that claims its own ground while enriching the artistic tradition. This adjustment is an instance of utilizing a story to move a huge number of viewers of different ages.

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