

Culture and Sexuality: A Study Through Films

Sudipta Garai

Abstract

Films' being one of the powerful modes of narration remains quite an important Held to explore through its melodrama, realism and the idiosyncratic articulation of thoughts. It has expanded its gaze from the search for meanings in the text towards the sociological play between images and between different cultural forms and institutions. The study of culture has transformed its nature with the changing questions of modernity, post-modernity, the concept of "ideology" and hegemony which from the mid-1970s until the mid 1980s anchored the field of cultural studies within the field of Neo-Marxism mapped out by Althusser and Gramsci, In the present Indian context where same-sex relationships are still not a norm in our society and heterosexuality remains in the fore-front and the homosexuals remain in the marginal group, I wish to study three Bengali films which could also be mentioned as the 'queer trilogy' (Arekti Premer Golpo, Memories in March and Chitrangada: A Crowning Wish) to explore its symbolic meanings and representations, also in reference to the reactions and observations of its audiences. It would also be relevant in understanding whether movies at all play any role in changing the "thoughts and perspectives" of its audience in themes of this kind. It would also be interesting to look at how these representations are being conceived by those who are in the so called group of "sexual-minority". Does it at all give them a 'say' in a public forum and acts as a platform which gives 'them' a space to speak out their inhibitions about their own "selves"? These movies which don't "conform" to the hegemonic societal norms and bring up these issues which are among the "deviant" does speak of a language of protest to some extent and how the silent protests of these kinds have enhanced the societal positioning of the people concerned are also an arena that I would like to enquire into.

Media through its portrayal has always constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed our ideas and images of identities, values, lifestyles and the world-view going beyond certain boundaries mediating easily into our inner thoughts and consciousness. It holds the power to generate new thoughts constructing new images altering the existing book of knowledge which might also lead to a change in the way of looking at things, whereas it can also be a deliberate attempt to reinforce certain hierarchical and hegemonic norms of the society through its representation. Cinema however has always been a powerful and popular mode of narration in relation to the questions of melodrama, realism and the idiosyncratic articulation of thoughts. This research aims to look at critically the questions and notions that are taken for granted in reference to gender and sexuality that needs questioning at every level of its existence and normalization. It is an attempt to understand and examine the complex dynamics between culture, gender and its representations in some chosen Bengali films in the context of the current socio-political situation of India. Reading of cinema in

Sudipta Garai is Research Scholar at Centre for the Study of Social System (CSSS), JNU, New Delhi.

reference to how it is being influenced by the changing social trends and the “popular” art culture remains an important field to explore with the influence of cinema on the society and its people and their imagination.

The three chosen films have a strong Rituparno Ghosh influence. ‘Memories in March’(2010) had him as the script writer, ‘Arekti Premer Golpo’ (2010) was directed by Kaushik Ganguly but the presence of Rituparno in the leading role had its own influence and lastly ‘Chitrangada’ (2012) was a directed and acted film of this wellknown director. Ghosh as a filmmaker has a special place in the hearts and minds of the Bengali middle class household. His films Unishe April, Dalian, Subho Mohorot, Abohoman, to name a few had already made him a celebrated filmmaker who with his creativity, understanding of subtle emotions and his keenness for Tagore in his imagination made the stories loved by the audience. This audience however has always been the Bengali middle class as most of the stories dealt with the culture and ethos of this particular educated class who could very well associate themselves with the representations of either the stories or the characters.

It is interesting to note that Rituparno as an individual or a film maker in his initial films never really talked or ‘reflected’ “queer” characters in his representations. With his acceptance and fame gradually he came out with his so called queer identity. It is only in the later phase that he started ‘dressing differently’ as he wished, wearing kajal, jewellery or attires so to mention a few. These films however were also a production of his later phase which could also have a probable reason of the emerging context of IPC 377 when it became highly debatable as to whether homosexuality has to be legalized in India and became a hugely discussed controversial issue in the socio legal arena of this time. The films of these kinds could also be said as the call of the time to some extent. The other reason and most importantly must have been his personal choice and interest in making these movies through which he could also affirm his own identity in media and otherwise.

Though Arekti Premer Golpo was released a year ahead of ‘Memories in March’ but if we try to understand these films in a sequence of a trilogy, it could also be seen as a personal journey of an individual. In ‘Memories in March’, the character Arnob was a gay lover of Siddharth who passed away in an accident and it is the story of a mother coming in terms with the identity of her dead son in presence and interaction with his partner and colleagues. It is a simple story of love of two men. ‘Arekti Premer Golpo’ was a story of a documentary film- maker making a film on the veteran jatra performer of the then Bengal when male performers use to play the female roles on the stage. The story unfolds with the character of Chapal Bhaduri and his crisis and dilemmas, a man who feels to have been born in a wrong physical body and thus feels trapped to have performed the given roles. The filmmaker as well could associate with this character with the move of the camera and emotional crisis. It is a story of a crisis where one feels trapped in the gender he/she is born with and feels an immense discomfort and struggle in living their lives. Lastly, ‘Chitrangada’, is a story of transformation and a hope to change the given sex to that of one wished to be. It is indeed a bold representation when Rudra decides to change his sex but ultimately calls off the operation till the end of the film. If we see these films in this sequence it does reflect a journey of a so called queer identity when one through their realizations feel immense pressure within to live their lives in terms of the norms of society and then decides to transform themselves to the gender they wish to live in and the dilemma one faces in that transformation as to really change what one is born with and often ends in a bitter remorse when the partner happens to be a bisexual and thus chooses to settle for a “family” life as per the heterosexual norm.

These are three pictures from the three films, the first is of “*Chitrangada: A Crowning Wish*” (as advertised in one of the supplementary of ‘The Telegraph’), the second is from “*Arekti Premer Golpo*” and the third is from “*Memories in March*”.

The cultural sites are very much a constructions of our own manipulations of meanings and constructions and thus in no way a predetermined cultural space which is “given”. The word “cultural” remains a space of contestations and negotiations of specific interventions, inputs and collaboration) Arjun Appadurai would point it as “the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics”; culturalism is invariably ‘hitched’ to certain ‘prefixes’. (Appadurai 1997:15) “Cultural” in reference to “culturalism” becomes even more complicated and therefore it’s a challenging task not just to find and interpret meanings of cultural terms, rather how meanings mutate and metabolize in the course of their transportation,, translation and specific uses in other cultures. Though the term “multiculturalism” was not much popular in the early 20th C, and left out the representation of many marginalized groups, but now the assertion of different alternative gender groups, caste and classes has made us aware of the space we are in which expects us to be more politically and socially aware and sensitive. Rustom Barucha would however pose some questions to himself and his readers to reflect on more critically as to what extent have times changed? Is it a self deception, a politically correct reflex on our part that is not substantiated by any significant alteration in our respect for others? For whom have they changed? In which constituencies? Certainly there is more “cultural differences” than before, but is it really making a difference to the shaping of a multicultural society? Has the largely academic production of new alterities succeeded in the crossing of borders across class and race, or is it reinforcing new insularities embedded in the rhetoric of cultural difference? Do we cross some borders only to close others? It is sometime very important to extend beyond the art form into the actual vulnerabilities of engaging with the “other” not as a tokenistic presence or as a nice foreigner, but as a person with whom one can dialogically redefine the world. These questions are something very intriguing to be dealt with while to deal with any cultural form and its influence over the people.

Thus when we are studying culture or its forms, the location of the researcher becomes quite relevant. It is never possible to do an all encompassing study on culture, thus the area chosen in this study is the representation of culture in media, specifically in three chosen films which has been significant because of its content as it represents ‘alternative’ culture and thus poses a challenge against the existing hegemonic norms and is among the first in Bengali popular cinema.

The study of culture has transformed its nature with the changing questions of modernity, post-modernity, the concept of “ideology” and hegemony which from the mid-1970s until the mid 1980s anchored the field of cultural studies within the field of Neo-Marxism mapped out by Althusser and Gramsci. Thus to study sociology as an art form remains an expanding field of study in recent times, both to understand the ideological representations and reinforcement and also as a creative way of protesting. It has expanded its gaze from the search for meanings in the text towards the sociological play between images and between different cultural forms and institutions. Along with ancient architecture, literature, poetry, cinema thus remains an important agency of expression and thus cannot avoid the hegemonic ideological frame of reference in its existence. Althusser (1977) did a detailed study on the functions, practices and processes of culture. ‘Culture’ came to be redefined as the processes which construct a society’s way of life producing meanings and consciousness through the representation of media and other systems which give images their cultural significance. Culture thus is a system of interconnected meanings and films holds a specific importance in producing and reproducing cultural significance. Among the various forms of cultural representations, films hold a popular reflection of the society and culture. It has always been a powerful mode of narration in relation to the questions of melodrama, realism and the idiosyncratic articulation of thoughts. Ritwik Ghatak, one of the pioneers of “art” movies suggests that it’s the most versatile medium of exchange in comparison to any other art forms where language might not

act as an hurdle and thus reaches the masses easily and have the capacity to bring a change in the mindset of the people or communicate thoughts and ideas more than through texts and novels .It remains a strong medium of expression which also in many cases used as means to protest/ change or at least to put forward certain issues that we don't talk and discuss much in our everyday life. It's a two way process between the 'spectator' and the 'spectacle', and thus the study of the films in a particular context becomes important when we try to critically look through it from the audience's reactions and also the specific ways of representations and the ideas of the "represented".

While studying culture, media plays a dominant role in understanding the creation and destruction of many cultural ideologies and practices where films have its own importance. Though previously film studies were dominated with the perspective of aesthetic analysis where the art form was studied through its reproduction and arrangements of sounds and images particularly. But gradually during 1980s and 1990s, came the interpretation of films as narrative, as a cultural event, to study the social practice through its production and consumption, the reading of its meanings with the factor of entertainment and understanding. In sociological research, one dominant aspect of enquiry was of the 'field', the physical space of doing ethnography, of collection of data visiting the ground etc. The other aspect which also remains equally intriguing is the literary and the creative world of the 'social'. The art and architecture, the paintings and graphiti, the novels and writings, the films and media which makes the so called 'cultural' world of the society also attracts the attention of the sociologists to look the society through these means with a critical and analytical outlook. Sociological research has always been open in its approach from various perspectives which has actually enriched it as a discipline or a school of thought.

Nisbet while discussing on "*Sociology as an Art Form*" mentions that though science since the 19 Century grew up with the idea of rationality and science and thus concerning more on reality unlike the arts which is thought to be eye-pleasing and mostly aimless and abstract, it is also to be noted that no creative endeavour can actually be very far from reality, rather any serious form of art be it paintings, poems or novels are first and foremost grounded on the 'reality'. It not only throws light on the reality but also communicate it with others. He mentions that both the scientists and the artists are actually driven with the desire to understand, interpret and communicate their understanding to the rest of the world. Sir Herbert E Read in "*Art and Society*" mentions that

"The essential nature of art, will be found neither in the production of objects to satisfy practical needs, nor in the expression of religious or philosophical ideas, but in its capacity to create a synthetic and self-consistent world: a world which is neither the world of practical needs and desires, nor the world of dreams and fantasy, but a world compounded of these contradictions: a convincing representation of the totality of experience: a mode therefore of envisaging the individual's perception of some aspect of universal truth. In all its essential activities art is trying to tell us something: something about the universe, something about nature, about man, or about the artist himself... It is only when we have clearly recognized the Junction of art as a mode of knowledge parallel to the other modes by which man arrives at an understanding of his environment that we can begin to appreciate its significance in the history of mankind " (1937: x-xii)

Eugene Rabinowitch, distinguished chemist and science editor mentions in his "*Integral Science and Atomized Art*" (1959) that

"The voice of the artist is often the first to respond. The artist is the most sensitive individual in society. His feeling for change, his apprehension of new things to come, is likely to be more acute than of the slower moving, rational, scientific thinker. It is in (he artistic production of a period, rather than in its thinking, that one should search for shadows

cast in advance by coming events, for prophetic anticipation. I do not mean the forecast of future events, but rather the revelation, in the frame-work of artistic production, of the mental attitudes which only later will become apparent in other fields of human endeavour. Thus the impending breakdown of the existing order of things, of the generally accepted system of values, should be—and often is—first recognizable in a revolt against the values and canons that had dominated artistic creation; a revolution in art precedes the revolution in society. “(pp-64)

The basis of ‘art’ is thus not a creation in vacuum rather something which strongly is based on the times and space on which it is created or develops. Thus if sociologists study the human relations, the complexities of the social values and norms, the organizations and institutions in studying the society, the monuments, the literature, poems, stones, folklores, mythology, pictures, films that talks so much about the society also remains an enriched ‘field’ of enquiry in understanding its culture and symbols. Pierre Bourdieu in his writings on *‘The Field of Cultural Production’* claims that literature, paintings, text can no way make sense in isolation rather can only be interpreted and understood from the social context of their production and the position of their producers within their specific universe. He views the world of art as the ‘field’. *“The space of literary or artistic positions is defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital. The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces.”* The meaning of the work be it philosophical, literary or artistic changes even when the ‘position’ remain identical but there is a change in the ‘field’ within which it is based for the reader or the spectator. His idea on cultural production is that no cultural production is a simple formation rather needs to be understood in reference to the position of the creator, the logics of the production and reception, and the ‘field’ of the art and its relation to the other structures of power and class relations. The cultural field thus remains a space of double hierarchy and power where the ‘art’ itself remains a site of struggle with the one who is creating it. Bourdieu was both critical about just focusing on the ‘charismatic ideology of creation’ which puts the limelight on the internal structure and form alone and on the other hand he was also skeptical about the deterministic view of the Marxist who viewed a piece of art in terms of ideology and as a reflection of the bourgeoisie interest and power. He would rather focus the creation of art in the social conditions concerning with his ideas of ‘habitus’, ‘field’ and capital, leading to the theory of ‘practice’. An individual who is creating the work has his/her own dispositions and position and a social context of understanding and socialization. The position is actually determined by the ‘habitus’ in which they grow up and understands the reality and the ‘capital’ they hold in lieu of their own position. This in turn actually creates the competing subfields of large scale production and restricted production, one in which economy becomes the dominant criteria with the profit motive of its creation and leading to the ‘culture industry’ and popular culture as Adorno mentions, whereas the restricted field depends more on its symbolic capital where the creation is more about the appreciation and importance from an audience of like-minded people. The example which comes in mind in this respect is the commercial Hollywood films creating a havoc in the box office success vis a vis the so called ‘art’ films which remains in film festivals and among its small territory of thinkers, intellectuals or people who holds the power of appreciation. The ‘success’ here is seen to be free from the logic of the market. However, this is why the whole process of the cultural production and its field is seen by Bourdieu as the ‘economic field reversed’ where art is created in the logic of the economy and its distribution.

Adorno (1991) suggests that the commercial nature of art actually starts to blur the reality that it projects. *‘The borderline between culture and empirical reality becomes more and more*

indistinct'. (pp 53) He says that even war has its own poetry but the mass culture seems to have replaces a 'new world' (Neue Universum). *"In cinema this misalliance between photography and the novel, such pseudo-poetry becomes complete, it is now so present in every detail that it no longer even needs to express itself as such. It is solely the power which stands behind this everyday poetry today and impresses us with its colourfat and lavish presentation that can still deceive adult human beings about the extended childhood that is only prepared for them so that they might faction in all the more 'adult' a fashion "*. Reality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful duplication.

In anthropology, the use of photographs of 'visuals' started with 'fieldwork' where the anthropological 'body' extended through photographs or artifacts filling this gap of an invisible object of study in the fieldwork. Though the preliminary pictures gave a distinction of cultures between the "civilized" researcher and the 'native' researched, but gradually this differentiation diminished with time when the visuals were being read as filled with cultural meanings and symbols. The same pictures started giving a new perspective where it was seen as the people being close to nature and their self sufficient way of living lives. With time, photographs itself became a major source and medium of doing sociological and anthropological research. Gradually, with the advent of moving pictures and then the concept of sound in it gave a new perspective in the sphere of studying pictures and visuals. However, Thomas Edison, who was one of the pioneers of moving films emphasized on its domestic information, based usage rather than the mass culture of entertainment. He believes that when something is introduced in the society its use and consumption no longer remain in the hands of its creator and takes its own shape through the interest of its time and space. Films always speaks about something even if apparently it speaks about nothing, the films are an experience in itself. For Metz, all films are texts which have a finite, organized discourse intended to realize communication and sometimes a more programmatic avant-garde deconstructionist perspective of the text. Textual analysis has a great sense of hermeneutics and philology, a close reading of the text and a new critical analysis. The matter of cinema can be divided into images, dialogues, noise, music and written materials which were essentially 'seen' by the 'spectators'. As most of the earlier films in India and the West were narrowly circumscribed by the preference for modernistic, abstract films which bore more similarities with the literary works than the present commercial feature film entertainment, as it was seen to be analogous to literature. With time it was however realized that the audience also wanted the dreamlike separation of everyday life from films and this creation of the luminous images on screen. It thus becomes evident that films in our culture go well beyond that of being simply an exhibited aesthetic object or phenomenon. It provides us with the pleasure of its spectacular show of representations onscreen in recognition of the stars, styles and genres and also with the event of going to watch a film.

Films thus becomes a social practice for its makers as well as its audience, in which the narratives are meaningfully interpreted through the shared knowledge of the society, as the culture makes sense of it. Though there has been a debate that films are no longer the product of a self-contained industry, rather now has become a range of cultural commodities, where the 'spectacle' exceeds over the 'narratives', but yet reading the films as a set of texts representing our social practice is a quite vibrant field of study as it still talks about a reality, probably a imaginative reality but not something beyond the social world that we live in. However, as Walter Benjamin would say that films with its system of repeated production has become an easy commodity of consumption losing the 'aura' of the previous sense of art. There has been a magica Teffect of the previous forms or art with its liense of 'authenticity' which made them distinctive whereas photographs or films lack that sense of 'uniqueness' and the 'authority' that the so called 'art' previously had. Films

seem to contemplate more on its audience rather than being contemplated and the camera seen to give a reality which mostly is fragmented unlike a holistic picture of a painting or a novel.

Though films always has a market orientation so to say but now it has become a cultural commodity reflecting the hard industrial fact that films no longer are the product of self-contained industry rather a range of cultural commodities produced for business rather than the magical narratives for audience to think and reflect. Cinema has always been tried to be oppressed by the vested interested of the people either funding it or in the power in order to justify their position in the society. The 'ideology' that seem to operate within the space of making cinema can no way be avoided and also as Bourdieu mentions the 'habitus' of the creator in creating the piece of art, and also the power that holds control in its viewing and distribution. For instance during the British rule, the capitalist classes however supported the film industry in promoting nationalistic thoughts but as soon as the working class issues came up in movies like *"Mazdoor"* by Munshi Premchand they started banning them and ultimately movies of these kinds were erased from the film archives and the memories of the popular masses. Though compared to the colonial times, after 1947 the journey of Indian cinema was smoother but yet the fractured Indian society remained shackled to its colonial past.

"...Amader bongsheprobhonjon naam e ek raja chilen. Tinipulrer jonnyo toposshya korle mohadeb take hor dilen, tomar bongshe proti purusher ektimatro shontan hobe, amar purbo-purushder putro-e hoyechilo, kintu amar konya hoyeche, takei aami putro gonyo korl Tar gorbhojato putro amar bongshodhor hobe.... " (Chitrangada's father Chitrabahon to Arjun in *Mahabharat: Rajshekhar Basu aha Paroshuram*)

[...the king named Probhonjon in our family pleased Lord Shiva to be blessed with son and was told that they will always have a son as an heir. In spite of that I had a daughter but I treat her like a son. Her son will be the successor of Manipur.]

".... nari hoye emone purushpran mor. Nahi jam kemone elem ghore phire duhswopnobiubwolsomo.....grihe giye bhangiya. phelinu dhonushswor jaha kichu chilo; kinankito e kothin bahu- chilo jaa gorber dhon eto kal mor- lanchona korinu tare nisfol akroshbhore. Etodin pore bujhilam, nari hoye purusher mon naa jodi chinite pan hritha bidyajoto...," (Chitrangada to Modon in *"Chitrangada"* by Rabindranath Tagore, 1892)

[...even after being a woman, I have such a male-heart. Don't know how heartbroken I came back home. I broke all the armours that I had and which made me proud. After so long I understood if I am unable to read a man's heart being a woman, my birth is of no value.]

"Dosh toh amadero chilo. Sarajibon jene eshechi, mante chaini. Amader jed chhele chheleer motoi hobe.....Jarjeta swobhab setai toh swabhabik naa ! S\vbhabero toh ekta icche ache. Oor jeta swabhabik setai jodi amra mene nitam, tahole oor eei nijer sorrier opor kantachera kore benche thaka...seta korte hoto naa!" (Conversation of Rudra's, ihe protagonist's mother with his father in *'Chiirangada: The Crowing Wish'*- the movie by Rituparno Ghosh, 2012)

[...even we are to be blamed. We always knew but denied to accept. We were adamant that a man will behave like a man. But what comes normally is normal, isn't it? There is also a normality of ones own self and that normality has a wish of its own. If we would accept him as he is, he wouldn't have been forced to do the operation.]

"...ekdom choto boyoshta ketechilo aami chhele naa meye, chhele naa meye, chhele naa meye...aami toh meye, aami toh meye eei kore. Tarpur bojhamo hoyeche naa lumi chhele kintu tumi meyer moto bhan korcho, keno hocche, keno hocche, keno hocche! Tarpur holo maar maar kaat kaat dhor dhor dhor, tarpur treatment treatment..... 2011 ei Sananda'te ekta article beriyechilo 'rupantor', seta dekhe amar mone hoyechilo, aami ioh change hote pari, aami ihik hote part, amar chances ache I" (Interview with a Male to Female trans-sexual)

[...my childhood went with the constant questioning of whether I am a boy or a girl, boy or a girl, I am a girl, I am a girl. Then I was made to believe that I am a boy, but I act like a girl. But why is it happening so? ..Then the phase of physical torture following the treatment. In 2011, I saw an article on "sex-change" in Sananda, a monthly magazine which made me decide that even I can be alright, even I have chances.]

Though it is still a concern whether mythological stories and characters could be treated as 'history' but yet it gives us a variety of information and probable relationships that could have imagined to have existed in a certain society or culture. Tagore would say that Mahabharata in the context of India was not a story written by a certain individual rather it is the collective history of a clan. ("*Eha kono byektibisheshar itihasa nohe, eha ekti jatir sworochito swabhabik itihasa*". Tagore: *Bharatborsher itihaser dhara*) (Basu: 1954) The folklores, the beliefs, the imaginations of the Aryans gave rise to this as a text. However, once these orally passed stories and ideas are written down in the form of words and structures, it gives more accessibility of re-reading them as text in different time and space. There lies an immense possibility thus to make sense of the 'social' through the mythological. Sociology in its present context has actually spread out its arena of study expanding its gaze from the search for meanings in the text towards the sociological play between images and between different cultural forms and institutions. The cultural sites are very much a space of our own manipulations and constructions and thus in no way predetermined and 'given', rather, a space of contestations and negotiations of specific interventions, inputs and collaboration.

Chitrangada-the dance drama written by Tagore in 1892, takes us to a different world from the perspective of Chitrangada who was the princess of Manipur and was conditioned to be a man because their family was blessed by Lord Shiva to always have a son as the heir in spite of which Chitrangada was born a girl. Meeting Arjun made her realize that she wants to become a woman. Thus started her journey from "ku-rupa" to "su-rupa" and her wish to be transformed to become feminine, which in contrary to the actual text of Mahabharata was very different where Chitrangada was just a small phase in Arjun's life while his exile for twelve years. However, when Arjun wished to marry her, he was given the condition that their son will be the successor of Manipur and later Babruvahana became the king of Manipur. It basically shows a matrilineal lineage which remains quite relevant in the progress of events in Mahabharata. What Tagore does is to look at Chitrangada in the mirror view where she has a self realization of her femininity her journey to achieve her wish. Rituparno relooked Tagore's text and redefines it in his own terms and imaginations. It shows simultaneously the life of Rudro, the protagonist played by Ghosh himself with the parallel performance of Chitrangada, on stage which ends with the idea that no transition is ever complete and rather an ongoing process. "*It raises the question whether the choice of an identity by the child is self-willed or imposed by society: It had to be an heir, that's all the father knew, to carry on the name and the family pride. And so, the training began. But the child, to be a girl or a boy, did anyone ask or even want to know? Children have dreams beyond their parents' expectations and they wish on stars and fallen eyelashes. Sometimes wishes come true unexpectedly to crown our life and turn the everyday, inside out.*" (02:14-03:14) It is a story of wish, her father's wishes versus her own. Chitrangada is a story of desire, that you can choose your gender. Rudro chooses to be a dancer even after being forced to study engineering by his father. In a conversation with Partho, his partner in love, Rudro says that "*I don't dance with my body Partho. It comes from within. Fortunately, my art form is not gender bound. My dance is not limited to my gender Partho- And neither is my identity.*" (01:0:39-01:07:18)

A cultural analysis reveals the way a dominant ideology is structured into the text and into the reading subject and those textual features that enable negotiation, resistance and oppositional reading of the same. It becomes interesting when the ethnographic study of the historically and

socially located meaning that are made are related to the study of the predominant system of culture in the present context. Texts are produced within a political economy and thus the constructions of representations and the discursively constructed textual social world however require an engagement with the social structuring of practices in order to get a broader perspective of structured social differentiation and their historical transformations in respect to class, status, gender, nationality, ethnicity etc.

The character of Chitrangada as well is seen to have evolved in these different texts in time and space and also a construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of a character in these three different art-forms in the lines of sexuality. The mysterious and mystical ambiguity of androgyny in Tagore's text has always been a treasure in the Bengali literature and this has been a constant source of inspiration to Rituparno which got reflected in his own imagination and ways of expression in his art forms. It is in a way autobiographical where his wishes to become a woman is portrayed with the parallel representation of Chitrangada being transformed. In this respect which remains questionable is one's wish to change one's identity and to be able to live with the new identity forgetting all the socializations and ways of life of the previous. It's a struggle in itself other than the stigmatization and marginalization caused. However in this paper I will try and relate the text of the film with two narratives that faced a similar situation in their lives as well.

Our body is expected to behave in terms of the 'sex' that we belong to, but the major disconnect creates a conflict in the realms of desires and wishes for a person who cannot associate between the body and the soul and thus keeps struggling for the fulfillment of their penetrated desires in spite of the constant resistance and being treated as the 'perennial embarrassment' from home and outside.

Niloja (name changed) is now working in an NGO in Kolkata who would say that "*amar chotobela ta konodin e moshrin chilo naa. Ekdom chotobelata keteche aar panchta bacchar motol kintu amar jokhon panch bochor boyish, tokhon theke aami najeke meyei bhabtam, keno janina, amar mone ache. Julian day school e portam, red house e chilam, kintu chheleder games amar bhalo lagfo naa, football cricket e amar konodin e bhalolaga chhilo naa, aami mistam a meyeder sathe beshi. Ota coed school chilo. Tiffin period e Sharmistha, Tanushree eder sathe boshe boshe kheltam, golpo kortam, tiffin share kortam. Nijer moton thaktam, ghur ghur kortam baganer ashpashe. Aami barite eshe nijermoto ranna bati kheltam, ekhono sajano ache kichu kichu...onek chhoto chhoto purono kichu lohar, finer, aluminum er khelnabati. Eguloi amar bhalo lagto. Aamar dui didir aami chhoto bhai chhiam, kintu najeke konodin bhai bole bhabte partam naa. Chhotdi amake sajiye dilo, kajol pencil, chhuri, putul ta hole niye maa hotam, gamchapontla kore mathai tagatam...*"

[...my childhood was never smooth, though my early childhood was spent like other children but, since five years of my age I started thinking myself as a girl. I don't know why, but I remember. I went to Julian Day- a co-ed school, was in Red house but I never liked boys games. Was never interested in Football or Cricket, rather I was friends with girls. During the tiffin period, I use to sit with Sharmistha, Tanushree and others, chat and shared my tiffin with them. I was mostly by myself, sometimes walked alone around the garden. I use to play "ranna-bati" (kitchen games) after coming back home. I was the brother of two of my elder sisters but I could never think myself as so. Chotdi gave me bangles to wear, applied kajal. I use to play a mother with the doll on my lap.]

She says, "*ektu boro hoye aami chhotdi ke bole dilam. 13-14 years e nanarokom problem holo, amake niye gelo dactarkhanai Treatment koralo. Marlo-dhorlo...Osudh dilo, khelam naa, shee onek kahini. Osudh comod e fele ditam, flush kore dilam. Tarpur SSKM e counselor er hathe thappod o kheyechilam. Ekhon shuni counselor ra naki marte pare naa, kintu amake onek bojhanor por o jokhon aami bujhini aamake merechilo. Bole, drawing koro nijer mukh, ekta meyer mukh*

enkechilam, tip-tup diye, ek thathiye chad merechilo. Tarpur likhechilo prescribed for electric shock therapy. ECT. Amar teente kore session hoyechilo, amar haathpaa sob nyabnyabe hoye gechilo..."

[...when I grew a little older, I told my chotdi. During 13-14 years of my age, there started a lot of problems and I was taken to the doctor. The treatment started. The counselor gave me medicines but I use to throw them. I was even slapped by my counselor in SSKM, though now I hear that counselors are not suppose to slap, but when my counselors tried to make me understand that I am a boy but I refuse to understand, he told me to draw myself and I drew myself as a girl with the bindi when he slapped me and recommended for ECT, electric shock therapy. There were three sessions that happened and I lost all my strength.]

As one grows up from a child to an adult, they try and concretize their wishes that have crowned their lives since forever with their available sources and power at that point of life. Niloja decided to go for the sex change operation when she was around 25 years old and her family was not with her. She also adds that since childhood she always wore different kinds of clothes as in not the usual shirt and pants for boys. *"Chheler jama juto konodin e bhalo lagto naa"*, she mentions. When her father took her to the tailor she use to give different designs to make and one day she remembers, *"dorji najehaal hoye giye baba ke bole apnar chheleta naa ektu onnyo dhoroner, oje sob nokshaola jamakapod pore, shee sob aarni banate parbo naa. Baba bolechilo lor jonnyo maan ijjot sob chhole gelo."* She says that her fight was fought alone where her family was never with her, though she mentions some names of her friends whom she wishes to thank to support her to become what she is today. *"Aami nije nije til til kore jogar korechi Sathi te kaaj korechi, Manosh Bangla te kaaj korechi, aami onekdin dhore kaaj korechi, infact eei karonei. Amar haathkhoror er somoshya konodin e chilo naa, baba amake roj 20-30 taka dito, aami okhan thekeo jomiyechi. Tarpur ektu boro hoye aamijor kore onnyo rokom sajte shuru korlam, chul kata hondho kore dilam, kaan fontalam, naak fontalam. Sheet somoi e amar kono chhobi chilo naa amar barite. Aami thik korechilam, aami hoboi aamijaa chai, jai hok naa keno. Roj sokal bikel oshanti hoto. 8-10 years roj maramari hoto, oshanti hoto kintu aami thik korechialam jodi aami more naa jai, tahole sex-change aami koraboi. 2012 sale, aamar breast augmentation holo. Nijei bhorti hoyechi, nijei bag e kore taka niye gechi, nijei operation theatre e teen din kaliyechi. Tarpur ekjon bondhu chhariye anlo. Aamar nari swotta prokash pelo. 2013, Feb 23rd e finally amar genital reassignment surgery ta holo. Khub kostokor."*

[I have managed the money bit by bit all by myself. I worked in Sathi, Manosh Bangla, infact worked since long to get the money for the sex change operation. I always use to get pocket money from my baba, rupees 20-30 each day, I even saved that money. When I grew up, I pierced my ear and nose, stopped cutting my hair. At that time there were no pictures of mine in my home. I decided then that I will be what I wish to be, whatever happens. The trouble in my home went on for 8-10 years, but I was adamant that if I am alive I will get the operation done. In 2012, I did the breast augmentation. I took the money, admitted myself, stayed in the operation theatre for three days, then a friend released me. My female self came into being. 2013rd February 23rd, finally I did the genital reassignment surgery. It was a very painful process.]

Rituparno had a deep bond with his mother in real life which got reflected in this film as well. Though Rudro's father continuously tried to resist his behavior, the mother however negotiated between both of them, but the film closes with the positive note of the parents accepting them as their own blood, where the father asks, *"amra lawyer er sathe kotha bollam, tomake ekta affidavit korate hobe, tumi ki tomar naam change korte chao.....tumi jeta korecho, seta is a change in entity, seta legally register naa korale, aamake will-twil kicchu change korte debe na.....sekhane my only son and heir lekha ache I Seta modify' naa korle tumi mushkil e porte"*.

One's association with name and identity is a pertinent aspect of one's life. We are all known by our names which gives us the first impression of whether we are a boy or a girl.

Thus it's actually a dilemma where one faces when their sex is changed. Niloja says that *'I changed my name, yet there are people who would call me with my previous name inspite of my protests sometimes to humiliate me and this happens even in my community where one does this intentionally Just to tease me'*. Thus this process of change and adapting the new identity continuously is in progress where though they hold a certificate to be a woman, there is always a constant comparison between the "real" woman who could bear children and be a mother. And thus their continual urge of settling down in a marriage which though again is a conformation to the normative institutionalization, they are unable to fulfill their wish. Thus the perennial conflict remains. In one of the dialogues Partho says to Rudra that *"the man I loved was not this... not this half thing. If I have to have a woman, I would rather have a real woman. Not this synthetic one."*

Culture is to be understood in relation to the existing ideology to which laws remains an important construct to be looked at. Though laws at large gives a space of empowerment for them whom the mainstream looks at as marginalized but laws always doesnot work the same way in the individual level as the ideas and perception of people doesnot seem to change very easily and needs a lot of time to gradually think otherwise than their taken for granted book of knowledge. Rudra decided to ultimately go for a sex reassignment surgery because he wanted to have a child with Partho and the Indian law doesnot allow two males to adopt. Rudra says to the doctor that *"to me, it's a technical necessity. All I need from you is a certificate that I'm a woman. No other changes. I am not going wear a sari. So to me, it's more of a cosmetic surgery."* (01:10:03- 1:10:22) However, Rudro's change could not be graciously taken by Partho and they part their ways, when again Rudro realizes his urge to be what he was rather than welcoming his wish to become a woman in certificate. In the contrary, Niloja would say that the gender reassignment surgery is a complex decision and thus there are phases of counseling that one's goes through before confirming the decision to change the sex because coming back is not something very easy as shown in the film. One cannot go for the operation before they are absolutely sure themselves in going through the process. They are shown the videos of the operations before they are executed to them and are asked if they are ready for such a painful process. And most importantly, one cannot avoid a counselor's grant of permission before the process of change begins and decide to change their sex just to adopt a child. One is only taken to the operation theatre when he/she is absolutely firm in their wish to change their sex through operative terms and not in a state of constant dilemma as a new struggle of accepting the 'new-identity' awaits outside the operation theatre both from the world within and outside. However, there might be a wish to be back to the earlier 'body' as Rana (name changed) would say who changed from a female to male and is not in a good health presently. He spends a lot on medicines and would say that the struggle for a female to male is even harder as he remains incapable of any sexual activities and thus stays all alone in a flat in New Alipore.

The body is said to be the primal identity of a human. For people like Rudra, Niloja or Rana, it is this body that has become a battleground, Rudro while talking to her mother after her breast reassignment surgery would say, *"our own body that we take so much as permanent is not even so"* and thus the whole notion of permanence remains in question and there lies the fluidity of one's sexual expression and their wish of 'doing' and 'undoing' gender. Chitrangada is thus not only the story of one's wish versus their parents wish; rather it's also a journey of one's wish versus the change of that wish in time and space. It's a struggle within and without. It is the journey and the search of identity which never stops rather is a lifelong partner in existence.