

# “Gender and Beyond”: Understanding Gender and Sexuality in the Works of Rituparno Ghosh (An Openly Homosexual Bengali Film Director)

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## To Cite this Article

Suvangee Gupta (2024). “Gender and Beyond”: Understanding Gender and Sexuality in the Works of Rituparno Ghosh (An Openly Homosexual Bengali Film Director). *Studies in Indian Sociology*, 1: 2, pp. 63-90.

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts to understand the concepts of gender and sexuality through the work of the famous Indian cinema director, Rituparno Ghosh. The concepts of gender and sexuality have long gained prominence in the discipline of sociology. This dissertation also has tried to find out how Rituparno Ghosh’s works have contradicted the gender normativity and normative sexuality of society. It has been said that both gender and sexuality are certain performances that we enact depending on the social situation we are in. Our society has certain socially constructed norms regarding gender and sexuality, since both of these are extremely sensitive subjects. Like, society considers as having the two genders – masculine and feminine as normal. Subsequently, there are certain attributes attached to these two genders which individuals born into them at birth are expected to follow. Thus, we are either constantly practicing masculinity or constantly practicing femininity. Similarly, only heterosexuality is considered to be the normative sexuality in society. Any contradiction to this is treated as perverse. Now, Rituparno Ghosh, being an openly homosexual filmmaker and an individual who did not identify with his assigned gender at birth portrayed the experiences of such individuals. And his depiction was among the firsts to have shown such individuals in a different light, depicting their desires, their sexual agency, their longing to be a part of the institution of family or marriage and the immense pain of not being able to lead a normal life and the agony of being treated as an abomination to society. The way he has depicted masculinity and femininity in his work is so real that it is commendable. Born as a man but later who had attempted to convert into the opposite gender, how he looked at both these genders and the concept of gender binary is also important. This dissertation is based on three very remarkable movies of his and I have attempted to bring out the prevalent themes in those movies and explain it through a sociological lens.

**Keywords:** cisgender, femininity, masculinity, sexuality, transgender.

## Introduction

When we talk about the city of joy and its love for art, there are a few names we automatically attach to it. Rabindranath Tagore, of course comes first. Then there is

Satyajit Ray and many more. The very acclaimed director, Rituparno Ghosh was at times referred to as the heir of Satyajit Ray. Zie is known to be one of the pioneering elites of intellectual cinema in Bengal. His work was of great interest to many sociologists. This is because zie portrayed the real world as it is. Zie was an openly homosexual director who never confined to performing hir's assigned gender. Zie was a very good example of what happens when an individual does not identify or feel comfortable with their assigned gender at birth and starts performing the attributes of the opposite gender. As Judith Lorber has put it, we, as a society, can never escape the gender binary. We have to either do masculinity or femininity. Even an individual who does not identify with their assigned gender and performs the opposite gender is also following gender binary and not defying it. Zie was aware of this but hir's movies threw light on a different aspect of masculinity and femininity which is an area of great interest for me. Hir's works was a reflection of zie's life, thus zie put forward in most of hir's movies the immense mental agony of being in the closet, that an individual might have to face. This was the first time Bengali cinema showcased these issues which were otherwise considered a taboo to the society. Ghosh, in hir's work, gave voice to the female characters. Not only that, zie also emphasised the need to give women a sexual agency. Hir's work contested the patriarchal structure that exists in society and also simultaneously challenged the relationship between femininity and domesticity that the post- colonial era had emphasised.

These issues were new to the Bengali audiences. Cinema is one of the most important outlet of media. It has the power to influence individuals more than anything else. Thus, it is always of immense necessity that cinema educates each one of us on issues we need to focus more on. Gender and sexuality is a concept that everyone has heard about all the time but few know the depth of it. As someone who wants to continue studying about gender and as a lover of cinema, Rituparno Ghosh's work felt a very appropriate way to start. There are concepts of doing masculinity, femininity, expected gender roles, doing sexuality, depiction of non-normative sexuality – covered in his works. The most remarkable aspect of this is that zie showcased these issues in a country like India, which is ridden with patriarchy. Therefore, hir's work and the way zie understood gender and sexuality and portrayed it to the audience was remarkable to me. It is only fitting that my first research in gender and sexuality are. Understood through hir's works. That is why, I have chosen this particular topic for my dissertation.

Rituparno Ghosh was a very common name among the Upper middle -class household, the cinema lovers and a personality of great interest to various sociologists because of how open he was about not identifying with his assigned gender, about not doing gender in a way that society expects an individual of his biological gender to, an effeminate man adopting the attributes of the gender he identified and felt comfortable with and about his sexual orientation especially at a time when India was still having

trouble navigating the vast ocean, that is gender. There were a number of scholars who worked on the various aspects of hir’s life, few of them would be Opening closets and dividing audiences : Rituparno Ghosh, the queer star of Bengali cinema by Rohit K. Dasgupta and Kaustuv Bakshi, Love, Family-affair of the Bangali in the film of Rituparno Ghosh: The inquiry of social science in Physical relationships by Md. Mostaq Hussain, A room of Hir own : the queer aesthetics of Rituparno Ghosh by Kaustuv Bakshi and Parjanya Sen, Rituparno Ghosh: Cinema, Gender and Art by Sangeeta Datta, Kaustav Bakshi and Rohit K. Dasgupta and many more.

## Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of this particular research :

- 1) Understanding gender and sexuality in Rituparno Ghosh’s work.
- 2) To investigate how Rituparno Ghosh’s work contradicted the gender normativity which is considered to be the natural order of society.

## Methodology

The research question for my dissertation is Understanding Gender and Sexuality in the works of Rituparno Ghosh. The area of research is vast as there are a number of films of hir’s that provide a very good understanding of the gender roles in society to the sociologists. Hir’s works are also an area of interest to many who study gender because zie was among the firsts to make movies on issues that society considered a taboo. Zie educated the Bengali audiences about issues that none would dare speak of. Thus, I had a large number of movies to work on and from those, I had to narrow it down to the movies that I thought would fit my objectives. Since, I also wanted to understand masculinity and femininity in hir’s work and find out how hir’s work contradicted the gender normativity, I reduced my analysis to three very popular movies of hir’s. Zie is known to be one of the pioneering elites of intellectual cinema in Bengal. His work was of great interest to many sociologists. This is because zie portrayed the real world as it is. Zie was an openly homosexual director who never confined to performing hir’s assigned gender. Zie was a very good example of what happens when an individual does not identify or feel comfortable with their assigned gender at birth and starts performing the attributes of the opposite gender. As Judith Lorber has put it, we, as a society, can never escape the gender binary. We have to either do masculinity or femininity. Even an individual who does not identify with their assigned gender and performs the opposite gender is also following gender binary and not defying it. Zie was aware of this but hir’s movies threw light on a different aspect of masculinity and femininity which is an area of great interest for me. Hir’s works was a reflection of zie’s life, thus zie put forward in most of hir’s movies the immense mental agony of being in the closet, that an individual

might have to face. This was the first time Bengali cinema showcased these issues which were otherwise considered a taboo to the society. Ghosh, in hir's work, gave voice to the female characters. Not only that, zie also emphasised the need to give women a sexual agency. Hir's work contested the patriarchal structure that exists in society and also simultaneously challenged the relationship between femininity and domesticity that the post-colonial era had emphasised. These issues were new to the Bengali audiences. Cinema is one of the most important outlet of media. It has the power to influence individuals more than anything else. Thus, it is always of immense necessity that cinema educates each one of us on issues we need to focus more on. Gender and sexuality is a concept that everyone has heard about all the time but few know the depth of it. As someone who wants to continue studying about gender and as a lover of cinema, Rituparno Ghosh's work felt a very appropriate way to start. There are concepts of doing masculinity, femininity, expected gender roles, doing sexuality, depiction of non-normative sexuality – covered in his works. The most remarkable aspect of this is that zie showcased these issues in a country like India, which is ridden with patriarchy. Therefore, hir's work and the way zie understood gender and sexuality and portrayed it to the audience was remarkable to me. It is only fitting that my first research in gender and sexuality are understood through hir's works.

I used Qualitative method for my research. Qualitative method was deemed appropriate because I had to chose from a wide range of movies available and narrow it down to the ones that would fit my research objectives. And then I had to analyse the content of the movies in order to understand the trend that was seen- the way zie portrayed a very sensitive issue of society. It was also imperative to identify the trend of masculinity and femininity that was seen in hir's work which was different from the way we understand it. Quantitative method has also been used because it has allowed me to analyse the content of the movies, study the patterns present and generalise my findings.

Secondary data has been used for my paper. I have depended on content analysis of secondary data.

**Analysing my Data :** The research topic for my dissertation is “ Understanding Gender and Sexuality in Rituparno Ghosh's work”. For long now, Gender as a concept and it's study has intrigued me. As someone who wants to continue studying about gender and as a lover of cinema, Rituparno Ghosh's work felt a very appropriate way to start. There are concepts of doing masculinity, femininity, expected gender roles, doing sexuality, depiction of non-normative sexuality – covered in his works. The most remarkable aspect of this is that zie showcased these issues in a country like India, which is ridden with patriarchy. Therefore, through my research, I wanted to analyse how Ghosh understood and portrayed gender and sexuality while navigating hir's own gender identity and how that had an effect on hir's works.

I required such data which would uphold hir’s view on the movies zie made. And from those, I could outline the major themes in hir’s work. It has been said that Ghosh’s movies reflected hir’s own worldview – on how zie wanted the world around hir to view individuals like hir, who do not fit into heteronormative discourses. Zie also portrayed the real world as it is. Thus, I had to look for data that would cater to my research objectives. I used internal secondary sources, that means, I used the previous researches of extremely known personalities in the field. These included works of Kaustav Bakshi, Rohit K. Dasgupta and many others.

There are many popular sources for collecting secondary data. These include, government statistics, technical reports, scientific journals, literature review of articles and online sources. For my paper, I collected the data from online sources and through literature review of articles and journals by previous researchers. The articles that I had originally found dealt with the cinema of Rituparno Ghosh. They talked about how zie brought a new wave in Bengali cinema, how hir’s movie upholds dainty emotions of daily life. An article by Kaustav Bakshi and Rohit K. Dasgupta talked about the queer aesthetics of Ghosh, where they mentioned how zie is a very popular face among the urban middle class, how hir’s work has the ability to very subtly play with neo-liberal sexual politics and how zie viewed Tagore’s stories through a queer prism. The movies that I have chosen are Bariwali, Chitrangada and Dosar. While looking for data on these particular movies, I came across an article written by Rohit K. Dasgupta and Tanmayee Banerjee on the gendered performance in the Bariwali movie. On the surface level, this movie might appear to be a simple tale about a woman in her mid 40s. But it is so much more than that. It is a movie about the exploitation women by the heteropatriarchal society. Coming to Chitrangada, many say that it is based on Ghosh’s life. It is almost fitting to think so because this was hir’s last released film. Soon after this, zie had died while he was under treatment for sex reassignment surgery. Chitrangada is a tale of love, family and the struggle for identity that the transgender individuals have to face everyday in a society which believes only in gender binary and considers heterosexuality to be the natural order. Dosar was a very important movie and a difficult one to analyse. Because on the surface, it seems like a movie about an urban marriage, a heterosexual couple where the husband is committing adultery. But Ghosh had subtly pointed out, through the wife’s character, the immense pressure on a woman, especially a woman who’s also a wife, the pressure of being a dutiful wife and fulfilling the role of a loving wife so much so that, subconsciously enough women continue to play the part even in extreme adversity. Some of the data that I had collected were originally gathered after interviewing Ghosh. Some were written after extensive watch of hir’s movies. The datas were collected at the time Ghosh was alive. The journals and the articles have all been written by esteemed scholars belonging to elite institutions. Since, I did not have

access to the separate methodology for each of these papers, it resulted in a restriction. The most important criteria that I have wanted to study through my paper is gender and sexuality as portrayed by Rituparno Ghosh. Since, gender is a social construct and individuals are performing both gender and sexuality every day, thus the main theories that I have linked my analysis with are the theories of doing masculinity and doing femininity. I have also tried to study the depiction of non-normative sexuality. There have been quite a few number of studies on Ghosh's work and how zie brought to light hir's queer aesthetics. But not many studies have explored the depiction of normative masculinity and femininity in his work. Ghosh always gave a strong agency to hir's woman characters. They were independent and had a voice of their own. But they were also bound by the patriarchal society and could never escape it. And so was the depiction of masculinity in hir's work. Hir's male characters were subtle but at the same time, exhibiting all the necessary characteristics that any male in a hetero-patriarchal society does. Hir's work showcased the real society, society as it should be, one which should not be bound by the gender binary, the one in which women are given their due sexual agency but hir's movies were also not idealistic. Where he depicted non-normative sexuality or non-normative gender, he also showed society's denial towards these and the immense trouble society puts such individuals through. Where zie gave women agency, zie also showed how men exert their agency on women. I have attempted to analyse all these in my dissertation by pointing out the major themes that zie's movies contained and explaining them sociologically by connecting them to certain theories. Since, there was no way I could get my hands on primary data, I had to depend on information from published studies. At times, it got overwhelming to fit everything into my research question since I had no control over the datas. It took quite some time to investigate properly if all the datas would suit the purpose of my research.

## Limitations

- The articles and journals that I had gathered were obviously designed to cater to a separate research problem than mine. Thus, it was difficult finding all the concepts and ideas that I wanted to study. All of them had different problems and different sociological theories that they were based on. At times, it was difficult to find relevance of my research objectives in them. Unlike primary data, these alone could not provide me with all the answers that I needed. It was also difficult looking for the exact sources that would provide me with the kind of information I needed.
- Some of the data that I found were biased.
- To access certain articles, I had to pay a fees. Thus, contrary to what many may believe, it is not totally cost effective.

- Due to time constraint, I could only work on three films. There were a lot more movies that I could have considered when working on the particular objectives that I had underlined but time proved to be a crucial factor.
- Because I was working only with secondary data, it took me a lot of time to verify the accuracy of many articles which had not been peer-reviewed yet.
- Since, my paper is based on the work of a famous personality who has been a very popular name among Bengalis for years, I had a certain pre-conceived notion about zie and hir’s work before I started my research. Thus, being a student of sociology and having watched most of hir’s films, I had a notion of how zie portrayed the issue of gender and sexuality through hir’s works and I could not be completely free of bias.
- I had chosen to work on an issue which is very sensitive to the society. One through which society still fumbles to navigate properly. Thus, I had to be extra careful when working on it.

### **Analytical Framework**

For this particular paper, I have chosen three movies of Rituparno Ghosh to analyse. The movie are – Bariwali, Chitragada and Dosar. These movies have reflected how Ghosh viewed heteropatriarchal society. I have focussed on the concept of gender binary and how society is extremely affected by it. In trying to point out the themes that these movies uphold, my dissertation has talked about doing masculinity and femininity and depiction of non-normative sexuality. Chitragada has been especially overwhelming to analyse because most have concluded that this particular movie is based on Ghosh’s life. The two concepts that have been repeated quite a few times in my research are doing gender and doing sexuality. Now, Doing Gender is the idea that gender isn’t something that we inherently possess. Rather, we actively perform or do our gender through our behaviours, attributes and interaction with others. Since, society believes in the concept of gender binary, we either do masculinity or femininity. That is, we must enact those attributes in our daily interaction with others which society considers appropriate for our assigned gender. Doing Sexuality is similar to the concept of doing gender. It says that sexuality is not an innate quality present in an individual but rather is shaped by social and cultural factors. Doing sexuality is a concept by which individuals are actively constructing their sexual identities and conducting their sexual behaviours in a given social situation. Thus, it says that much like gender, sexuality is also something that we do. It is dependent on social norms and expectations and includes almost everything, like, how people will express their desires or navigate their sexual relationships or the issue of consent etc.

The major themes that I have outlined from the first movie, *Bariwali*, are the depiction of masculinity and the effect of age on the sexual agency of an individual. My purpose in trying to show the depiction of masculinity was intended at analysing how different men do. Masculinity differently and also how a hetero-normative patriarchal society would always grant sexual agency to a man while simultaneously negating a female's sexual agency. The effect that the age of an individual has on the sexuality of his is major and rarely do we see society talking about it. Whenever a woman reaches middle age, she is attributed the status of a mother-made a mother figure. The reason for this is that there is a tendency to attach asexuality with an individual who is looked at as a mother figure, as if, the woman is not supposed to have sexual requirements because she has reached a certain age. All this is done in order to deny a middle-aged woman her sexual agency. *Chitrangada* is a movie which deals with what it looks like on the surface. Transgender identity. These are individuals who do not identify with their assigned gender at birth and thus, they perform the attributes of their desired gender since it is the one they feel most comfortable with. There are few strategies that these individuals adopt which includes – blending in, masking, naturalising and subverting- which have been discussed later. Thus, naturally, these individuals depict a sexuality which is different from the so-called normative one. Society has never been very welcoming to them. In spite of that, these individuals keep struggling to find their identity. They also are living testament of the idea that gender is a choice, an accomplishment, a performance that we put up every day. It does not depend on biological features. The last movie, *Dosar*, is a testament to the prevalent notion in society that a woman has to perform her gendered role, every day. The concept of a gendered role has become so ingrained in our minds that we subconsciously are always performing our roles. Because the moment, we do not, society punishes us for it. A woman has to perform the role of a wife if she is married, no matter what the husband did. And the effect that this concept has is so strong that a woman can never escape it, rather she is not supposed to, even if the husband does ( in the movie, the husband could not perform the role of a dutiful husband by committing adultery).

Now, Ghosh's work has been of great interest to many sociologists. This is because Zie portrayed the real world as it is. Zie was an openly homosexual director who never confined to performing his assigned gender. Zie was a very good example of what happens when an individual does not identify or feel comfortable with their assigned gender at birth and starts performing the attributes of the opposite gender. As Judith Lorber has put it, we, as a society, can never escape the gender binary. We have to either do masculinity or femininity. Even an individual who does not identify with their assigned gender and performs the opposite gender is also following gender binary and not defying it. Zie was aware of this but his movies threw light on a different aspect



of masculinity and femininity which is an area of great interest for me. Hir’s works was a reflection of zie’s life, thus zie put forward in most of hir’s movies the immense mental agony of being in the closet, that an individual might have to face. This was the first time Bengali cinema showcased these issues which were otherwise considered a taboo to the society. Ghosh, in hir’s work, gave voice to the female characters. Not only that, zie also emphasised the need to give women a sexual agency. Hir’s work contested the patriarchal structure that exists in society and also simultaneously challenged the relationship between femininity and domesticity that the post- colonial era had emphasised.

## Literature Review

Portrayal of non-normative sexuality in cinema.

Gayatri Gopinath, (2008) on the article, ‘ Queering Bollywood alternative sexuality in Indian cinema’ focusses on that range of Indian cinema where obstacles are removed from patriarchy, sexism and homophobia. Female homosexuality has been represented greatly. Some examples have been given. Like in the movie, Hum aapke hain kaun, a woman dresses up as a male and dances in the song, Didi Tera dewar deewana. The song highlights inter clothing of a character and the behaviour of a man by a woman. In many movies or songs such as this, homosexuality is portrayed but heterosexuality gains precedence. Heterosexuality was given the prime authority over homosexuality. Many movies have shown homophobia as a major concern by calling weak men who cannot participate in a fight, a girl. When cross-dressing came into trend, gender stereotypes were redefined. When men dressed as women and walked in a certain way, that was termed as homosexual.

Ibtisam Ahmed, (2017) on the article, ‘ Chitrangada and trans-self determination in Indian cinema’ focusses on the navigation of trans identity and bisexuality by the two protagonists in the movie. Through a very short synopsis of the movie, it is shown how the main characters come to fall in love with each other and henceforth move forward in their journey. In 2011, which is a year before the film released, India was at a critical phase in its legal navigation with queerness. Two year prior, the Delhi High Court had ruled that the anti-homosexuality Section 377 was unconstitutional due to its inherent inequality and prejudice. Despite the court not having full jurisdiction across the entire country the 2009 ruling was seen as a victory for the entire LGBTQ+ community. There were discussions about wider queer rights, including the adoption of children. In the movie, Ghosh’s character had to put themselves through a sex reassignment surgery because two male couples were not allowed to adopt a child. The author has reiterated that one’s biological body is not a testament of their gender. Gender is the performance that we, as individuals, chose to do. The author mentions certain important scenes in the

movie and finally concludes by saying that for Ghosh's character it was the ownership of femininity that mattered and not the appearance of it.

Sabita Shankunni, (2014) in the article, 'Sexuality as represented in the film Chitrangada by Rituparno Ghosh' starts by giving a brief history of how the word 'transgThe word "transgender" itself, which seems to have been coined in the 1980s, took on its current meaning in 1992 after appearing in the title of a small but influential pamphlet by Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come*. First usage of the term "transgender" is generally attributed to Virginia Prince, a Southern California advocate for freedom of gender expression. Prince used the term to refer to individuals like herself whose personal identities she considered to fall somewhere on a spectrum between "transvestite" (a term coined in 1910 by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld) and "transsexual" (a term popularized in the 1950s by (Dr. Harry Benjamin). If a transvestite was somebody who episodically changed into the clothes of the so-called "other sex," and a transsexual was somebody who permanently changed genitals in order to claim membership in a gender other than the one assigned at birth, then a transgender was somebody who permanently changed social gender through the public presentation of self, without recourse to genital transformation. The author then writes about the actual story of Chitrangada from the Mahabharata. The author also writes about certain theorists here, including Butler and her work in *Gender troubles and bodies that matter*, Bersani and his work on how sexuality has to do with the body and not the self and Freud, where he has said that sexual activity is considered perverse if it has given up the aim of reproduction and thus, homosexuality is looked at as something pervert. The author also says that up until recently, homosexuality was considered an illness, a disease and finally concludes by saying that the most radical members of our society are the transsexuals who have sought a new identity in society as a member of the biologically opposite sex.

Homosexuality is as yet viewed as untouchable in India. Segment 377 of the Indian Penal Code which condemns homosexuality was presented by the British in frontier India in 1861 it remains in the nation's books. The local area which has for some time been underestimated and denied of their actual personality and portrayal in the social and social gestalt of society merits basic consideration. The LGBT people group in India faces a large number of battles in day-to-day existence from the absence of acknowledgment in the public arena to segregation. The battle is to observe space in the public arena where orientation individuality isn't being denounced as strange. They are never depicted as an acknowledged individual by the general public. They are significantly depicted as stunning characters who are just there in the film similarly to comic remainder. Questioned, excluded, vilified, and condemned for quite a long time, the sexual minorities are currently venturing out from the shadow of intangibility. As

indicated by India’s census of 2011, which counted transsexual populace interestingly, India has an assessed 4.9 lakh Transgender who distinguished themselves as ‘third orientation’. As per a government report submitted to the Supreme court. Before the sexual unrest of the 1960s, there was no normal non-slanderous jargon for non-heterosexuality; the nearest such term, “third orientation”, follows back to the 1860s however never acquired wide acknowledgment in the United States. The first generally utilized term, gay, was remembered to convey regrettable underlying meanings and would, in general, be supplanted by homophiles during the 1950s and 1960s, and hence gay during the 1970s. As lesbians manufactured more open personalities, the expression “gay furthermore lesbian”. Turned out to be more normal. Eccentric hypothesis recommends that gay-lesbian culture should be visible as subcultures to the hetero standard one. Camp, drag, transvestitism, and dressing in drag are methods of subcultures. Dressing in drag deglamorized the ultra-feminine stars and disguise causes to notice the pretending and built manliness of the body. Such subcultures are suited to being the symbols, signs, and ‘quality’ of the standard culture. Bollywood big names are known to divert inquiries regarding their sexual direction. The Hindi entertainment world is one of the hands of the powers with the ability to bring Indians together and cultivate another general assessment. However, the world’s biggest entertainment world is regularly seen coming up short on a feeling of obligation towards LGBTQ issues. Notwithstanding its ability to affect a huge number of individuals at the same time, Hindi film has picked to satisfy its amusement obligation by scorning gay culture. Getting the given of the LGBT issue passed by the accreditation board is the principal hindrance since the substance of the film is lawfully against what the country acknowledges. The issues of getting the funds required for the delivery, and the probability that the crowd will stay away from the film or more awful picket it, are the best impediment. Gay portrayals have been made in various routes in Hindi movies. The first is hijra, the second is humor, the third is in the structure of mental ailment, and the inclusion is standing out in which it shows the intricacies of the lives gay individuals lead. Times are changing and with that sexual minorities are gradually tracking down a spot in Hindi film. The portrayal of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, hijras, and other people who are shown as ‘eccentric’ in films in a positive way has gone about as a demulcent for the local area.

### *Doing Gender*

Rachel Jewkes, et al, (2015) in their article, ‘Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practise in gender intervention’ has focussed on the theory of hegemonic masculinity by Raewyn Connell. This concept has been used to explain men’s relationship with women. This concept identifies those attitudes and practicea of men which perpetuate

gender inequality and men's domination over women. The authors have also presented a debate that there are a number of men who are structurally subordinated in society, like the working class men. They do not identify with the hegemonic position since they do not consider themselves as having any power in society. Connell's theory says that in society, masculinity as a concept is fluid and dynamic and also multiple. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is not the only kind of masculinity existing in society. The relationship between gender norms, social collectivities and the individual is complex, with each impacting on the other, with different force and effect at different times. Hegemonic masculinity has been largely utilised as a social structural concept to explain the legitimisation of masculinities through social institutions and social groups.

Tamta Shermazanashvii, (2022), in the article, ' Four types of Masculinity' has talked about the four types of masculinity that exists. Hegemonic masculinity is the first one which explains why men hold dominant positions over women. The author has also stated that in present times, hegemonic masculinity in the world besides ruthless competition, anger, violence and aggression includes the inability to express such emotions as: the desire to admit weakness or dependence on another .Be that as it may , hegemonic masculinity is also revealed in the devaluation of women and the hatred of all feminine attributes in men, and most importantly, in homophobia. The next type of masculinity is subordinate masculinity whose victims are homosexual men. These are the men who do not fit into the construction of hegemonic masculinity and are therefore treated as lower on the gender hierarchy. The next kind of masculinity is complicit masculinity which refers to the men who admires and never challenges hegemonic masculinity, even if they themselves do not fit into the said category. The last kind of masculinity is marginalised masculinity which explains how men in marginalized positions experience their masculinity.

Rohit K. Dasgupta, Tanmayee Banerjee, (2016), in their research article, 'Exploitation, victimhood and gendered performance in Rituparno Ghosh's Bariwali ' have focussed on how this movie has marked the beginning of Ghosh's treatment of gender and sexual politics. The movie has a strong female character but in spite of that her sexual agency was constantly being exploited by a male. This movie like many others have also dealt with themes that contradicts what society considers to be the normal order. The researchers have also shown how the two female characters, the protagonist and her domestic help have challenged the heteronormative patriarchal order of society. And they have, through their own gender roles, done so. The researchers have divided their paper into a few themes – depiction of the sexual relationships in the movie, the depiction of masculinity and queerness and the depiction of exploited/exploiter. For each of the themes, the researchers have picked up few scenes from the movie and showed how they are a testament of the said themes. For the first one

mentioned, the researchers made use of the dream sequence of *Banalata* where she imagined her and the male protagonist getting intimate. As a woman who is neither someone’s wife, not someone’s widow, Banalata’s sexual desires were never met and seeing the ever so charming male character give her the attention she never got, she routed her sexual agency towards him. But even in her dreams, it was the man who had the upper agency. The researchers. Have pointed out how Ghosh has depicted two male characters and also presented queerness. Masculinity is a spectrum, on one hand of which are men like Dipankar ( the male protagonist) and on the other are men like Prasanna (the domestic house help who is shown to be an effeminate man). Banalata never looked at Prasanna as a man, that is why she Had no problem changing her saree in front of him. The researchers have talked about a scene which is a dream sequence of *Banalata* where she sees Prasanna wearing a saree and bangles and with vermilion on his forehead, giving the idea of a trans identity of Prasanna , this queerness. Another theme that the researchers explored is the theme of victimhood and the relationship of the exploited and the exploiter. The abuse and the exploitation, here, is emotional. Dipankar manipulates the emotional weakness of Banalata very subtly and the later allows the former to exert his agency over her. Instances of this includes, her allowing him and his crew to use her mansion, her personal items, cooking for him etc. She lets him break through the shackles of conservatism that she had put up. These are the major points that the researchers have discussed. Finally, they conclude their paper by stating that *Bariwali* is one of the first movie of Ghosh where zie has played with the neo-liberal sexual politics. Rituparno Ghosh, being a very popular name among the Upper middle-class household has incorporated this into hir’s work most of the time. In very basic terms, strange means something remarkable, abnormal, or not quite the same as the rest. Nonetheless, it is at present firmly connected with the expanding LGBTI activism which targets destroying the universalized doubles and dismissing heterosexuality, heteronormativity, and heteropatriarchy which appear to overwhelm one’s comprehension of sexuality. Comprehension of sexuality goes much past the classes of hetero and gay. Indeed, it makes elective approaches to being and wanders into better approaches for reviewing life. The impact of the film can be felt in every single corner of the Indian culture. Other than the legitimate element of the Indian Queer Movement, Cinema has been created to be a compelling imaginative instrument or obstruction towards the heteronormativity of Indian culture. The banned topic of transgenders in India which is still much confounded and peered downward on. The movie has gotten huge help and basic recognition from analysts, celebration chiefs, and worldwide crowds for its fruitful depiction of one of the most minimized parts of the general public. It has screened at more than 70 worldwide film celebrations and won a few honors. Strange motion pictures have assisted people with teaching in them

the appeal with the lead characters which have given a portrayal to their personality in the cinema. All things considered, the sensation of segregation and elite, when communicated through imaginative channels like a film; it, not just aids in making a space for orientation of these characters but also helps in giving an agency to them.

Dr. Shoma A Chaterjee, (2023) in her article ‘ Looking back at *Dosar*(2006) and Urban marriages’ has broken the movie down scene by scene and dissected each and every emotion present in it. The author has said that on the surface this Black and White film might seem like a modern take on contemporary husband wife relation with the husband involved in adultery in an urban marriage but it is so much more than that. The author says that this movie represents Ghosh’s interpretation of a Shirshendu Mukherjee story that points out the proliferation of adultery within an ultimately content married relationship which is as fragile as glass. The main focus of the author in her article is dissecting the important scenes of the movie. Two couples have gained focus in the movie, the main couple in which the male protagonist is involved in adultery and another couple which includes a married woman and a younger man, thus, the woman, here, is involved in adultery. The author picking up each scene and analysing it, explaining it is remarkable. The author has also praised the performances of each of the actors in the movie and also the excellence of Rituparno Ghosh as a filmmaker who has successfully portrayed each and every emotion in a very real sense. Zie was the master at his craft. The author has also talked about the strong hold of patriarchy in each and every sphere of our lives. The battle between a woman’s emotions and a woman’s ego has also been talked about in the article. Finally, the author has concluded by making 38 a play at the word, ‘*Dosar*’ which is the title of the movie. *Dosar* means an emotional companion, the author asks the question as to who is the actual companion here – the husband finding companionship in his wife even after he betrayed her trust or the wife finding a companionship within herself after the shock of being betrayed.

Rimli Bhattacharya, (2020), in her article, ‘ Rituparno Ghosh’s *Dosar* : a dissection of dainty emotions’ also focusses on a scene to scene analysis of the movie. The author has applauded Ghosh’s storytelling about relationships, marital infidelity and it’s aftermath on the relationship. The author has presented a synopsis of the movie. A very interesting part that the author has brought up is how Ghosh’s characters echo the real world where it is not easy for a woman to leave her husband. The wife is torn between the betrayal of her husband and her role as a dutiful wife who is supposed to love her husband unconditionally. The author has also focussed on the internal struggle of a woman, the exasperation and the incessant battle that went on within the wife in the movie. She has also presented with a few examples of this, like when the wife breaks the news of the death of her husband’s girlfriend to her husband. The subplot between another couple has also gained importance in the author’s article. Giving a few examples of scenes from

the movie, the author has showcased her admiration for Rituparno Ghosh again and again. She has also raised a very important question – the wife forgave her husband even after he committed adultery and nursed him back to health but would the husband have done the same if the shoes were reversed? This question goes on to show how patriarchy views men and women- women as creatures having the immense. Capacity of forgiveness. Finally, she concludes the article by writing the poem that was recited by Mita (the husband’s girlfriend) in the movie.

### *Neo-liberal Sexual Politics*

Kaustav Bakshi and Prajanya Sen(2015), in their article, “A room of hir own: the queer aesthetics of Rituparno Ghosh” have focused on how zie has given hir’s voice to the characters in hir’s movies. And not specifically to hir’s queer characters. Thus, the researchers have said that when makings an assessment of Ghosh’s films and hir’s queer aesthetics, one’s analysis should not be restricted to hir’s overtly queer films but to all those movies in which zie has challenged the heteropatriarchal norms existing in society. Ghosh was a cultural icon, an openly homosexual filmmaker who underwent cosmetic surgery and also confidently cross-dressed in public. Thus, even hir’s queer films need to be analysed by locating them in a larger discourse. The researchers have analysed three films- *Arekti Premer Golpo*, *Memories in March* and *Chitrangada: the Crowning wish*. These films were released at a time when section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was read down by the Delhi High Court. Thus, the social context played a huge role in shaping the discourses of these films.

The researchers have divided their paper into four parts : a) Ghosh’s self as subject and a neo-bhadralok queer aesthetic. In this first part,the researchers say how the characters in these movies are an extension of Ghosh’s real-life personality. Both in *Arekti Premer Golpo* and *Chitrangada*, there is a bisexual man, a woman and another man who performs the role of the quintessential ‘other woman’. Then the researchers talk about the characters that Ghosh played in both these movies, describing them and how they uphold the image of the ‘other. Woman’. There is a reason why the researchers have called these characters a part of Ghosh, a real-life extension of zie. In *Memories of March*, there are certain terms used to describe Ghosh’s character and the researchers have found a similarity between that and the way Ghosh’s friends have described zie after hir’s death. The conflation of the subjectivity of Ghosh with the reel life of all the three queer characters constitute the characterstion of the same kind of aesthetics characteristic of the earlier Rituparno Ghosh films. Although concerned with non-normative sexual desires, these films, apart from repeating tropes of bourgeois ‘heterosexual’ romance central to Ghosh’s earlier cinema. The researchers think that, Ghosh’s position as a filmmaker was critical of the bourgeoisie moral paradigm. Such

a position combines with the Bengal Renaissance. Ghosh's film, thus, has strong roots in the neo-liberal bhadrak culture but also owes a great deal to the economic and cultural globalization. In the last part of the first section, the researchers have talked about Ghosh's LGBTQ politics and how the third gender have always secured a place in hir's work.

The second part of the paper is b) mythical subtexts as strategy of assimilation. In this section, the researchers have deployed certain quasi-mythical subtext that establish non-normative sexuality. *Arekti Premer Golpo* returns to Gaudi Vaishnavism and the androgynous figure of Lord Chaitanya, while *Chitrangada* is based on a small part in Mahabharata and *Memories in March* deploys the Radha-Krishna plot. Gaudi Vaishnavism has certain similarities with Sufism. The researchers have, here, picked up certain scenes from the said movies and shown how they could be related to these texts. They have also mentioned certain songs in the movie *Memories in March* that allude to the love story of Radha-Krishna. At the end of this section, the researchers write that Ghosh had made use of these popular myths because they challenged the heteropatriarchal normative order of society. The next section of the paper is very important – c) Queering Tagore. In this section, the researchers have analysed how Rabindranath Tagore has always played a significant and a central role in the stories that Ghosh has narrated. In many of hir's movies, zie had viewed Tagore through a queer prism, including in *Chitrangada : the Crowning wish*. Tagore's songs have been a major device to Ghosh's stories. Zie has reappropriated Tagore's tales a number of times to tell the story of same-sex desires. The researchers have further explained how *Chitrangada* has made use of Tagore's invocation.

The last section of the paper is d) An unintended trilogy? This is the part where the researchers explain how the three films that they have talked about in their paper seem like a trilogy- a meta-text. While in *Chitrangada*, Ghosh's character undergoes sex reassignment surgery in order to be able to adopt children with the man zie loved but still got left, in *Arekti Premer Golpo*, Ghosh's character, the 'queer' other loses hir boyfriend to hir's boyfriend's pregnant wife. In *Memories in March* also, hir's character is positioned in opposition to a biological woman and the Oedipus mother trying to come to terms with her son's sexuality. The researchers have presented a synopsis of the movies showing how the three sort of merge into one another effortlessly.

Finally, the researchers conclude by presenting a small summary of their paper and how their work has analysed the queer aesthetics of Rituparno Ghosh vis-a-vis hir's sexual subjectivity.

Main analysis of the paper :

“Bariwali”

Hegemonic discourse of a patriarchal society has either vilified a woman or defied her. Seldom has it attempted to explore the sexual agency of an ordinary woman in her



daily life. By narrating the story of a middle-aged woman adjusting to the extremities that society has imposed on her, Rituparno Ghosh not only had stirred the heartstrings of the neo-bhadralok but also challenged an issue which was long ignored – society’s tendency to associate asexuality with a woman as she grows older. Ghosh has always been a very common name among the Upper middle class of society, his movies have explored themes that have contradicted what society considers to be the natural order. ‘Bariwali’ was one of Ghosh’s most acclaimed work. By making Banalata as hir’s protagonist, zie broke through the shackles of normative gender identity. Banalata was shown to be neither a wife, nor a widow. Thus, a middle-aged woman not fitting into the heteronormative patriarchal discourse and on top of that, being shown as one having sexual needs and the urge to fulfil them, Ghosh not subtly though had touched upon themes long unexplored.

Ghosh’s female characters have always been strong and independent, with a voice of their own. Here also, Banalata was shown to be the lady of the house. In a society, where women are expected to be under the shadow of a man, an unmarried woman in a middle class household is a threat to patriarchy. But, the protagonist’s character alone was not the only threat. The domestic help of the house, the caretaker of the house and their gender performances have also, in their own way, challenged the heteronormative order of society. But, no matter how powerful the female character is, she has been shown to ultimately fall victim to the hands of the dominant male- the handsome, charming and so-called sexually appealing man. The theme of the exploiter and the exploited has dominated most part of the film. Banalata’s vulnerability did not allow her to say ‘no’ to the dominant male. The question of gender privilege and hegemonic masculinity automatically comes here( which will be discussed in detail in the next section). Along with the theme of victimhood, the question of the representation of masculinity and femininity has also gained prevalence. Masculinity or femininity are something that we ‘do’ everyday- it is a performance we put up based on the social situation we are in, and the audience present in front of us. Ghosh has presented two male characters – the director of the movie that was being shot at Banalata’s residence and the caretaker of her house. And through these two male characters, zie has pointed out the two extreme ends of the spectrum, that is masculinity. Both of them are ‘doing masculinity’ but their performances are completely different from each other. Rituparno Ghosh’s films have always treated the issue of sexuality and gender politics in the most sublime way possible but ‘Bariwali’ marks hir’s first movie where zie has shown how female agency is continuously subdued by male exploitation and patriarchy, and how most of the time females are not aware of their agency being routed.

The following section will explore the major themes of the movie:

1)'Doing Masculinity' ( and the dichotomy of the exploiter/ exploited): As a society, we have considered heterosexuality to be the normal order of society. Heterosexual discourses states that there are two genders- masculine and feminine. From the time an individual is born, his family which is the primary socialization unit, socialises him into doing his gender. Goffman had suggested that gender is a performance, an act which an individual puts up in front of an audience. This audience mainly consists of an individual's significant or generalised others. Every single day, each one of us is performing either. Masculinity or femininity, which is evident in the way we dress, talk, sit, eat etc. We embody the socially constructed gender differences and can never escape it, such is the power that gender binary as a concept has over us.

The theme of 'doing masculinity' has gained prominence in the movie, 'Bariwali'. Ghosh has shown two prominent male figures in the film- a masculine, so-called charming and appealing man ( Dipankar ) and an effeminate man ( Prasanna , the caretaker of the house). The two men represent the two ends of the masculinity spectrum. Before we delve into their gender performances, it is necessary to look at the concept of hegemonic masculinity in order to understand how certain men have exercised their position of power over women and other men. The concept was given by Raewyn Connell. This is a widely debated concept which identifies certain instruments through which men perpetuate gender inequality. But, Connell has said that although men predominantly occupy a superior position than women everywhere and benefit from it but still it is his choice as to whether to actively occupy power positions vis-a-vis women and other men. This is called the patriarchal dividend. The choice, however, is restricted because society has normalised subtle patriarchy and most of the times, women not consciously enough allow themselves to be subjugated physically and emotionally because they believe that they are supposed to let men take the upper hand. Connell has identified four types of masculinity and with the help of those, we will try to see under which category, the two characters of the movie fall into. First comes, hegemonic masculinity. This explains why and how men hold dominant position over other gender identities. The hierarchy of power and authority exists here. Hegemonic masculinity will exert it's power position and dominance very clearly. Domination does not always have to be physical. Emotionally manipulating an individual to the extent that the individual does not realise that their own agency has been negated in order to make way for the dominant male's agency. Dipankar, in the movie, was a man- embodying and representing all the qualities that society expects to be present in a man. It was shown that he had a certain sexual appeal to. Him which made not only Banalata but also other women fall for him. Banalata's vulnerability of living alone and not having a husband or a sexual partner, followed by her vulnerability, became the subject through which Dipankar asserted his agency over her. He broke through the conservatism

that Banalata had set for herself( she let him use her house, her personal items, ever helped him through a crisis). Banalata’s vulnerability was exploited and exploiter or the oppressive one was Dipankar, the dominant male. Hegemoic masculinity that Dipankar exhibited gives an answer to the question of legitimacy of patriarchy – yes, men subordinate women and benefit from the power position they occupy. And society makes sure that this practice is guaranteed.

The next kind of masculinity is subordinate masculinity which includes men who do not fit into the construction of hegemonic masculinity and hence are treated as lower on gender hierarchy. Like, homosexual men or effeminate men (Prasanna) . The way Prasanna did masculinity is completely different from the way Dipankar did. He did not fit into the societal expectations of a masculine man. He did not qualify the parameters that Dipankar did. Even Banalata did not look at him as a ‘man’. There is a particular dream sequence of Banalata where she sees Prasanna wearing a saree and bangles.

The next kind of masculinity is complicit masculinity which refers to men who do not challenge hegemonic masculinity even if he doesn’t fit into it. These men admire hegemonic masculinity. The last kind of masculinity is marginalised masculinity which focusses on those men who are viewed as marginal in different institutions like family, school etc and how they experience their masculinity. West and Zimmerman have suggested that gender is something that we, humans, have created. Basically, it is a routine accomplishment which is embedded in everyday interaction. The characters in the films have portrayed their ways of doing masculinity by their interactions with other characters in the film, including Banalata.

(2) *Gender, age and embodiment*: Society never talks about the sexuality of an older adult. We have a tendency to associate asexuality with an individual as they grow old, especially if the individual is a woman. Banalata represented a certain feudal aristocracy. But, she was a middle-aged unmarried woman. Exploring her sexual agency when Dipankar came to her life was a tough spot. This is among the first films of Ghosh where he addresses the sexual politics of very ordinary human beings. The absence of having a husband or a sexual partner for years had repressed Banalata’s sexuality but not demolished it. A single, unmarried woman living alone at her own house is a big blow to patriarchy. More so when the said woman is in her late 40s. Society very carefully tries to put them in a cage lest they try to explore their sexuality and sexual politics. But Banalata was also not given the status of a mother. Ghosh would eventually bring out the sexual needs of Banalata and thus, not giving her the status of a mother would help in ensuring that. Because, society has a tendency to negate the sexual agency of a woman as soon as she is given the status of motherhood. The only outlet of Banalata’s pent up needs comes out through her dream sequences in which she imagined her and

Dipankar getting intimate. Even in her dreams, it is the dominant male who has been given the sexual agency.

In contrast to this, we see another female character, the domestic help of the house. The portrayal of her gender performance and sexuality is completely different. She was a woman probably in her 20s and had a sexual partner. Although she belonged to a lower socio-economic class, Malati (the domestic help) was part of the new world which Banalata was not. Her sexual agency was never tried to be kept concealed. She, as opposed to Banalata, was given the perfect route to channelize it. The reason for that is mostly because Banalata represented everything that our society tries to not talk about as much as possible – a middle-aged unmarried woman, in her 40s, living alone – striking a big blow to heteropatriarchal discourses of society.

“Chitrangada: the Crowning wish”

‘Chitrangada’ was the last released Film of Rituparno Ghosh. At a time when mainstream Indian cinema mocked third genders in India, Ghosh portrayed gender as it is – a social reality. He brought out the immense pain of exclusion that the transgenders face every day. Tagore has always been a central point in many of Ghosh’s works. Among Bengalis, obviously, Tagore is a figure of authority and repertoire of culture. Therefore, reinterpreting Tagore through a queer prism and reappropriating it to tell a same sex love story is indispensable to Ghosh’s work. This movie is iconic in the ways that it has navigated trans identity and bisexuality and its portrayal of the desire to be of a different sex because one finds their own sex undesirable. The title of the movie, as we all know, has been derived from the tale of Chitrangada in Mahabharata. Ghosh had kept the essence of Tagore alive but also added his own touch to tackle the queerness and lingering social stigma. Zie plays Rudra, a sexually fluid choreographer and many have pointed out that zie tried to showcase his own life through the movie.

It is necessary to separate biological gender from sexuality. ‘Chitrangada’ celebrates not only gender fluidity but also deals with the hetero-patriarchal repression of gender identity. This movie came out at a time when Indian legal system was at a critical point navigating queerness. A year before this movie was released, the anti-homosexuality law 377 was reinstated in India. Ghosh’s film was, therefore, like a mirror to society, calling it out on its tendency to fumble about how to handle homosexuality. While portraying the immense mental agony of an individual who hasn’t been accepted by society, his film also asks a few questions to its audiences.

The term ‘transgender’ was coined in the 1980s and since then it has taken a lot of years for them to gain the status of third genders in India. Even today, a trans individual faces difficulties in a family, both consanguinal and in an affinal family. They face violence and threat every single day. Much like gender, sexuality is also a spectrum and not a two-dimensional reality. But the society is so manipulated by the concept

of gender binary that we cannot possibly fathom that the transgender individuals transcend the realities of manhood and womanhood. The film is a tale of Rudra’s quest for gender identity, of them suppressing their assigned gender and adopting the strategy of ‘blending in’ by performing the role of their desired gender and of them coming to terms with the fact that one’s biological body is not a testament of his identity.

The following section will explore the main themes of the movie.

(1) *Depiction of non-normative sexuality*: The old school sociology of gender and sexuality studies is concerned with the antiquated subject of Enlightenment. But more recently, queer theories have come up which offers a paradigm shift. Judith Butler has suggested that sex of an individual is not a condition of him, but it is a process which is materialised with time by the constant reiteration of certain norms. Our society, due to the effect that gender binary as a concept has over us, recognises heterosexuality as normal. Thus, an individual falling in love and marrying one from the opposite gender is what is supposed to happen. The moment we see non-normative sexuality being portrayed, it makes us uncomfortable.

Rudra has been shown to be a sexually fluid character, an effeminate man who has a very troubled relationship with their parents. Now, the first usage of the word ‘transgender’ is attributed to Virginia Prince, an advocate for the freedom of gender expression. It is important here to understand the difference between a transsexual and a transgender. A transsexual is a person who goes through surgery in order to permanently change his gender (assigned at birth) to his desired gender. And a transgender is a person who does not resort to genital transformation but performs the attributes of his desired gender in front of an audience instead of the attributes of his assigned gender. Rudra was a transgender, who did not think of going through gender reassignment surgery till Partha (the man they fall in love with) came to their life. What Rudra had been doing all their life before the sex reassignment surgery was that they had adopted the strategy of ‘blending in’. This is one of the strategies that transgenders adopt in which they behave in accordance with the attributes of their desired gender and not their assigned gender. They do this because they feel the closest emotionally to their desired gender. At this point, the movie is the story of same sex desire. It goes against heterosexuality discourses, against patriarchal norms and normative sexuality. Basically, it goes against everything that society considers to be the normal order.

There is a reason why society is uncomfortable with non-normative sexuality and same sex desire. Freud suggests that a sexual activity which does not culminate into reproduction but is pursued solely for the attainment of pleasure is termed as ‘perverse’. And it is so termed because dominant social norms dictate that that the sole purpose of sexual activity must be reproduction and not attainment of pleasure. But sexuality is not a two dimensional reality, it is a wide spectrum and has nothing to do with the

biological gender. Thus, when Rudra falls in love with Partha, develops an intimate relationship, they decide to bring a child into the relationship. This is when Ghosh has shown how extremely difficult it is for a transgender, or for a homosexual couple to start a conjugal family. A family is supposed to be the safest place for an individual but for a transgender, it is the same place where they are tortured. Most. Mostly emotionally, sometimes physically as well. Rudra's father is not happy with his 'son's' activities. He urges Rudra to consult a doctor. He is not accepting of Rudra's choices. Thus, it is difficult for transgenders in both affinal and consanguinal families. It is for Partha that Rudra decided to undergo sex reassignment surgery and become a woman. This, once again, goes to show how strong the effect of gender binary is on us that a relationship has to include a man and a woman in order for them to start a family. Partha is a bisexual man who ultimately marries a woman and not Rudra. Sexuality, much like gender, is also something we do or perform everyday. It is not an innate quality but comes out due to everyday interaction. Foucauldian analysis suggests that sexuality is a social reality which regulates our inter personal relationships and one's relationship with oneself. The American critic, Bersani, has suggested that sexuality threatens to shatter one's self and it is this self that sexuality shatters that provides the basis for power. It is the degeneration of sexual into relationship that condemns sexuality from becoming an act of power.

(2) *Gender is a choice*: There is a particular scene in the movie where Rudra is speaking with their doctors, urging the medical professionals to acknowledge the trans identity of Rudra specially because it is associated with innate femininity. But they also point out that just because they would become a woman on medical records does not mean that they start wearing conventional female clothing. For Rudra, the ownership of femininity was much more important than the appearance of it. And here comes a very important question, why do we try to put individuals into certain boxes which check our needs of conforming to gender binary?

Judith Butler has suggested that gender, as a natural thing, does not exist. Gender is performative, which means that it exists only when it is performed. We reproduce gender through the way we speak, sit, exercise etc. Now, all individuals are categorised into two separate genders -masculine and feminine. Society refuses to acknowledge the presence of any other type of gender(non-binary or intersex etc). Intersex individuals are usually put under surgery after birth and their abnormal genitalia is removed. Now, transgenders, due to the threat of violence and assault, adopt certain strategies in order to survive in society. These strategies are – 'blending in', 'naturalising', 'masking' and 'subverting'.

Rudra is shown to be effeminate- he is a dancer. Dance, as a profession, is mostly associated with women. This movie challenges the stereotyping of men who dance.

Rudra extracts himself from the performance of masculinity every single day. The way they dress, talk, walk bears no attribute of masculinity. Although they were born a man, their desired gender is feminine. They feel like a woman, emotionally. This, the need to separate biological gender and sexuality. Just like Rudra’s dance is not limited to their gender, so isn’t their identity limited to their assigned gender at birth. Ghosh has beautifully portrayed the agony of the hetero-patriarchal repression of gender identity, the dilemma of wanting to be of the other sex, the fight against one’s significant and generalised others while doing so and ultimately coming to terms with one’s own reality.

But the power of gender binary is immense. So much so that, Rudra decided to undergo sex reassignment surgery so that they could become a woman and give Partha (their partner) a child. Because it is nearly impossible for a transgender to adopt a child. Just like Tagore’s ‘Chitrangada’ where Chitrangada finally stops performing masculinity and starts performing the attributes of femininity after falling in love with Arjun. There is a particular scene in the movie, where Rudra has already undergone breast implantation and is now getting prepared for vaginal implantation. But in spite of that, they are being addressed as ‘Sir’ by the medical staffs at the hospital. This shows how difficult it is for society to accept something which does not fall into its heteronormative discourse. No matter how progressive we become, we can never escape the gender binary.

Another significant scene is where Rudra’s father asks if it is possible to change the name after the sex reassignment surgery, in order to avoid inheritance issues. This shows how extremely manipulated we are by the concept of gender binary that we, as a society, cannot possibly fathom the fact that homosexuals transcend the realities of manhood or womanhood. Although Partha leaves Rudra to marry a “real” woman, Rudra still undergoes the gender reassignment surgery in order to embrace the womanhood they so longed for. The movie ends with the message – Be what you wish to be, thus, implying that gender is a choice and not a biological entity.

“Dosar”

The Bengali word, “Dosar” means an emotional companion. It is a story about the diversified human emotions, marital infidelity and its aftermath. As everyone knows, Rituparno Ghosh’s female characters bear resemblance to the real world, they are strong, independent women stuck in real life crisis. This story has also been told from the perspective of Kaberi, who is torn between her expected role of a dutiful wife while simultaneously bearing repercussions of her husband, Kaushik’s, infidelity- all at the backdrop of an urban marriage. As a society, we have a tendency to either vilify a woman or worship a woman. The times that a woman’s character is not being slandered, she is usually being placed at a pedestal- as a Goddess having immense capacity to love, care, nurture and forgive. The society has set certain roles for women and it is expected that she must always fulfill those roles just because she is a woman. Seldom does one

look at her as an ordinary human being carrying an internal struggle within. The movie is the story of the vexation of a betrayed woman. Kaberi is shown to be constantly battling against herself in letting her emotions overpower her anger. She vents out her frustrations on him, files for a divorce but still cares for him and his well-being. There is a very powerful connotation here- the strong hold that our expected roles in society have over us, as a woman, our societal roles are ingrained in us so much so that, in spite of thinking of leaving her husband and feeling betrayed, Kaberi still keeps on performing her role- the role of a dutiful wife who is supposed to love her husband unconditionally. There are a few other concepts here. A very subtle hint of sexism has gained prominence in the ways that the generalised and significant others of Kaushik and Mita ( his mistress) have reacted to the news of their affair. While the former's wife was shown to let her expected gender role overpower her sense of deceive and betrayal, the later's husband reacted to the news very differently. He was shown to vent his anger on their son and even bring home a prostitute in order to fill 'the void' of the death of his wife and to cope up with the betrayal. Society can forgive a man committing adultery but never will it forgive a woman. The woman's character is slandered but never the man's. He is looked at as a winner, as if he has achieved a good deed. Ghosh's stories are simplistic and real. He paints an image of the real world and perhaps the best testament to it is the way zie did not follow the cliché path and showed the wife taking her revenge and leaving her husband. Zie showed a real world, where things are easier said than done. And in a hetero-patriarchal real society, a woman is expected to forgive her husband and go on loving him unconditionally.

The following section deals with the important themes in the movie.

(1) *Women and their gender role expectations*: Femininity is a performance and a performance is nothing but acting out a series of roles. Thus, femininity is seen as a series of roles imposed by the agents of socialisation. For example, girls are taught to be passive, submissive and not show aggression etc. Judith Butler has made a distinction between gender performativity and gender roles. Women are supposed to be dutiful wives and love their husband unconditionally. Women are socialised into doing so. This is considered to be the natural order of society. Any woman who goes against this normative discourse of society is vilified and her character is questioned. The times that a woman's character is not being slandered, she is usually being placed at a pedestal- as a Goddess having immense capacity to love, care, nurture and forgive. The society has set certain roles for women and it is expected that she must always fulfill those roles just. Because she is a woman. Seldom does one look at her as an ordinary human being carrying an internal struggle within. The movie is the story of the vexation of a betrayed woman. Kaberi is shown to be constantly battling against herself in letting her emotions overpower her anger. She finds out her husband has



been unfaithful to her after he and his mistress face a car accident . She vents out her frustrations on him, files for a divorce but still cares for him and his well-being. There is a very powerful connotation here- the strong hold that our expected roles in society have over us, as a woman, our societal roles are ingrained in us so much so that, in spite of thinking of leaving her husband and feeling betrayed, Kaberi still keeps on performing her role- the role of a dutiful wife who is supposed to love her husband unconditionally. It is almost as if, a woman can never escape the roles that society has imposed upon her. Kaberi does not leave her husband at the end but forgives him. Which is what happens most of the times in reality. Women are expected to bear the immense capacity of forgiveness. Seldom does a woman leave her husband and even if she does, it is her that society judges. But if the roles were reversed, a man would never do the same.

(2) *Sexism* : Sexism is the unfair treatment meted out to a woman because of her sex. It is the prejudice which affects women and girls. Sexism is widely prevalent in society. It is primarily related to the assumption around the roles of men and women in society. It sustains certain social asymmetries in gender relations which typically benefit men of our society. Each and every institution in society, like the family, media, law etc have certain sexist ideologies. A very subtle hint of sexism has gained prominence in the ways that the generalised and significant others of Kaushik and Mita ( his mistress) have reacted to the news of their affair. While the former’s wife was shown to let her expected gender role overpower her sense of deceive and betrayal, the later’s husband reacted to the news very differently. He was shown to vent his anger on their son and even bring home a prostitute in order to fill ‘the void’ of the death of his wife and to cope up with the betrayal. Society can forgive a man committing adultery but never will it forgive a woman. The woman’s character is slandered but never the man’s. He is looked at as a winner, as if he has achieved a good deed. Now, coming to the generalizedOk others. Kaushik was being praised at his office for being able to keep a girlfriend along with a wife. It is almost as if, it bore evidence of his manhood and was an achievement. But his girlfriend, Mita’s, character was the only one that was brought under scrutiny. A dead woman’s character was slandered although she wasn’t the only one committing adultery. Any evidence of her ever working at their office was erased. Through this, Ghosh has portrayed the innate sexism prevalent in our everyday lives. Society refuses to even let a dead women be free from it.

## Conclusion

There is a reason why I have chosen these three particular movies. I wanted to highlight three most important thing that I intended to analyse. These were, the cisgender men of the society and their way of doing their gender, the cisgender women of society and

them doing their gender and the ones who do not identify with their assigned gender; these individuals depicting their gender and sexuality. The first movie that I analysed, *Bariwali* – at the surface, seemed a pretty emotional movie. On a deeper analysis of the movie, the most important theme that I found was the dichotomy of the exploiter and the exploited. That is, how heterosexual men always occupy a power position. They exert their agency on women, and most of the time, we let them. Since, I wanted to show men doing their gender, it was easy to compare how different men do their masculinity differently. It is always easier for heterosexual men to exert their agency over women and other men. They are mostly the exploiters, in scenarios. This movie is one of its first where a middle-aged woman having sexual needs which are yet to be fulfilled was shown. Her agency was not denied or negated. But she also was not given full control of her agency. It was the man who had the upper hand. I have also tried to analyse how age of an individual affects their sexuality. The next movie that I analysed is *Chitrangada*. Needless to say, it is the story of a transgender individual struggling for acceptance and identity. Gender is not biological, it is social. We belong to the gender we perform. Our biological body should not be the testament of our gender. Rather, an individual should be able to identify with the gender they feel comfortable with. But, the most important takeaway from the analysis of this movie is that society is inherently manipulated by the concept of gender binary so much so that an individual has to bear the extreme pain of undergoing a sex reassignment surgery just so that they could have a family with the one they love. Hetero-patriarchal discourses state that a family must consist of a man and a woman along with their children, especially in a country like India. The last movie that I analysed was *Dosar*. This was more difficult than the other two. Because, unlike the other two the themes are not clear here. Apparently, this story is about an urban married couple, where the husband cheats on his wife. Through the vexation and betrayal of the wife, comes out a hidden theme- she was angry and betrayed but in spite of that she never stopped performing the duty of a wife. Thus, this shows that a woman, no matter what, continues to perform the gendered role that society expects from her. The role is ingrained on to her mind so much so that, even subconsciously a woman feels like it is her duty to perform the role of a wife who is supposed to love her husband unconditionally. Such is the power that the heteronormative patriarchal discourse of society has on us.

### *Acknowledgment*

This work would not have been possible without certain individuals who have extended their valuable help for the completion of this paper.

First and foremost, I would like to express my warmest gratitude to and thank one of my professors, Dr. Piyali Sur whose guidance, support and expertise encouraged me to complete this

paper within the specified time period. The immense knowledge she has on the subject naturally instigated an interest in me and her advice helped me in each and every step of my work. She helped me study and find out more about the topic that I have chosen, referring important researches in this field that had been done previously. She constantly encouraged me to work harder and I am indebted to her for that.

I would also like to express my gratitude and thank my parents. I am grateful for the constant patience, support and perseverance that they showed me while I worked on my paper. The understanding that they have and continue to show in me and my work motivates me to work harder.

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