

Dreams as Narrative Pullers: A Look into Buddhadeb Dasgupta's National Award Winning Films 'Mondo Meyer Upakhyan' and 'Kalpurush

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Abstract

Eminent film makers have used many of the unreciprocated phenomena's of human life as a device to construct their quality narratives. Buddhaded Dasgupta's use of dreams (rather than dreaming sequences) as a device to pull off his narratives needs a special mention , for it is holding power of the central premises and establishing lucid presentations, also making the distinction between manifestations and reality. An analysis of his placement of dreams to the central characters also gives us a picture of how effectively he uses it as a metaphor of emerging culture and human conditions as a whole. The present article is an exploration of how the diverse characters of Dasgupta's films- 'Mondo Meyer Upakhyan' and 'Kalpurush' are loaded with pivotal dreams that force them to jump out of their existential problems, thereby acting as able narrative pullers.

Introduction

There are hundreds of studies on dreams and their purposes to mankind. While some researchers suggest that dreams serve no real

purpose, many others believe that it is essential to dream for a proper mental, emotional and physical well being. Freud was fond of repeating that dreams provide a royal road to the unconscious activities of the mind. In his masterpiece, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud makes consistent use of the metaphor of a journey. Sigmund Freud's theory of dreams suggested that dreams were a representation of unconscious desires, thoughts and motivations. According to Freud's psychoanalytic view of personality, people are driven by aggressive and sexual instincts that are repressed from conscious awareness. While these thoughts are not consciously expressed, they find their way into our awareness via dreams. (Freud,2000)

While this theory suggests that dreams are the result of internally generated signals, Hobson(1999) does not believe that dreams are meaningless. Instead, he suggests that dreaming is "...our most creative conscious state, one in which the chaotic, spontaneous recombination of cognitive elements produces novel configurations of information: new ideas. While many or even most of these ideas may be nonsensical, if even a few of its fanciful products are truly useful, our dream time will not have been wasted"

Ernest Hoffman, director of the Sleep Disorders Center at Newton Wellesley Hospital in Boston, Mass., suggests that "...a possible (though certainly not proven) function of a dream is to be weaving new material into the memory system in a way that both reduces emotional arousal and is adaptive in helping us cope with further trauma or stressful events.(Hartman, 2006)

Though the discourse over the actuality of dreams is yet to find proper resolve, they are made use of and interpreted in multitude of ways in various art forms propagated by humans. Filmmakers use dreams as essential helping points in their narration of their plot. *Narrative* is such a way of comprehending space, time, and causality. Since in film there are at least two important frames of reference for

understanding space, time, and causality, narrative in film is the principle by which data is converted from the frame of the *screen* into a *diegesis* - a world - that frames a particular story, or sequence of action, in that world; equally, it is the principle by which data is converted from story onto screen (Branigan, 1992) Dreams often can be used to mislead the audience by making them believe that some events are actually taking place but in reality are only dreams.

The films often illustrates in dramatic fashion that our dream environments (composed of, say, buildings, natural scenes, or fantastical landscapes) are all creations of our brain, somehow. Some of these creations are as enchanting as a science fiction film by Lucas or as dramatic as a tragedy by Coppola. In our dream world, we do not consider such landscapes and other creations to be 'self-generated,' though of course both the dream setting and the image of ourselves within the setting are fabricated by the same brain. Other components of the dream world, such as decisions, preferences, and 'action selection' can be construed as 'self-generated.' Aspects of these self-generated processes resemble those of waking life: Deciding which alley to run down when escaping a foe is a similar deliberation in a dream or in waking life. (Morsella, 2010)

By expressing a life problem metaphorically, the dream impels the individual toward his goal (often an unsocial goal) with increased emotional power. For illustration, the writer interprets dreams of falling, flying, paralysis, examinations, and other common dreams. The dreamer, self-deceived, does not recognize the purpose of his own metaphor. When he does, dreams have no further danger for him. The more courageously and realistically one meets the

problems of life, the less one dreams, but absence of dreams may also be due to lack of imagination (Alder, 1936)

Many film makers around the world has used dreams as a device to pull on the narratives and built on it. Budhadeb DasGupta, one of the most renowned filmmaker of India is one who presents dreams as a narrative device to hold the movie and to 'pull' the narrative through a chain of events. His two recent surrealist films 'Mondo Meyer Upakyan' (*Life at the Throw of a Dice*) and 'Kaalpurush' (*Memories in the mist*) which also won the highest accolades of India, the National awards for best films, rightly exemplify how this technique can be wisely used by the filmmakers of caliber, extraordinary. In all of his films, the poetic notion of dream has a prominence, rarely if ever to be found in the political or social film. Every character are planted with a definite dream, much varied from their immediate materialistic circumstances, one which is quite difficult to attain, the struggle for which propel the entire plot to a more phantasmagoric finale.

The moon landing to flare up child dreams

Mondo meyer Upakhyan' (2002) tells about the fourteen year old Lati's pursuit for liberation from a type of life that has been programmed for her by her mother Rajani, the mistress of unfashionable brothel. Rajani on the other hand is not wicked or ruthless as you expect of her. She is but is trying to give her daughter a better living status than that of any usual whore residing in the brothel. She locates a wealthy middle-aged man named Natabar Paladhi, who finds it the most lovable hobby to watch pornographic films in his own theatre. Paladhi is also hoping to take the adolescent Lati as his mistress, along with her mother in a house that has been built especially for her. The girl is but disgusted at the options of a life offered to her where she is remain as a plaything of a man who is more than four times her age. She is more focused on her own ambition of pursuing her education than to approve such

an agreement. However, Rajani has already taken Lati out of her school as a first step in preparing her for the new career. But Lati tries to keep in contact with her learning exercises with the help of her young friend Shibu and the teacher Nagen whom she greatly admires. Her desperate attempts to learn, finally forces her to renounce a life of prostitution and to run away to Calcutta with her teacher who has been promoted to a school there. The most interesting aspect of the movie is its narrative technique where Lati's story is narrated parallel to the man's attempt to land on moon and finally her liberation from the village and the brothel is interestingly placed on the same day as the man's first moon landing.

In two of the subplots of the movie are three young prostitutes who are also seeking to break free from a profession that binds them in thralldom, and an infirm elderly couple who are forced to be on Ganesh's Jeep (driver of Paladhi), travelling around hidden in its dickie to find a hospital. It is more than a poetic connotation to say that for Lati's dreaming of being in Calcutta for pursuing her education from a distant, isolated village is more like what had been the dream of being in moon to Neil Armstrong and the entire mankind. It even seems further away and harder to get into Calcutta than the moon landing itself. Also depicted are the other moons to be reached for by the other characters on screen, such as the promotion in Calcutta to which the country School master is headed. Interestingly, in the entire film, the school teacher of Lati is shown always in a bicycle travelling across frames, but never is he shown teaching in some school.

The three young prostitutes in the movie realize of their 'moons' only in the finale of the narratives- the desire of ultimate freedom from exploitation where there is reciprocal love and wholesome satisfaction. The entire characters in the movie, except Lati and

Rejani does not seem to have solid ideas of how to reach their moons (dreams) and the journey to it's fulfilment is likely to be as subjected to probabilities and chances, as the elderly couple finally settle down in excitement and fulfilment with the play of ludo rather than looking for proper medication. They were traveling far and wide hiding in the jeep in the dreams of locating a distant hospital, the possibility of which is mentioned intermittently but never ever shown. But it seems that the entire travelling for days, the rarest of the things that may have happened in their life, has transformed them from ailing seniors at decrepitude to young minds who could even enjoy the childish games. Whether they are ultimately successful or not is of no interest; what matters is that they from their adverse conditions are human enough to dream and courageous enough to realize their fulfilment and their dreams in a Ludo board.

The sphere of acquisitiveness and venality that is Rajani's moon depends entirely on others for its attainment. It can be reached only if circumstance out of her dreams can change, but Lati's journey to her moon is clearly determined. (Hood,2005) Perhaps Nadaber Paladi enriched in his world of fantasy and drowsiness is altogether unaware of his definite moon and so is comfortable, remaining in his cinema hall repeatedly dosing in front of the pornographic loop, which doesn't in fact bore him even after repeated views, and in him the filmmaker suggests the possibilities of a subtle moon(dream) which goes satisfied with his repeated vision of the same stuff.

Nevertheless, the capriciousness of the world in which Dasgupta has placed this young girl, Lati, is hardly minimized by the execution of her intention, for the most prominent determinant in this film is chance. Film advances the idea that maybe life does progress by chance as though it is determined by the throw of a dice. The importance of chance as a determinant in the life is determined in a number of ways, across all the characters in the movie.

Mystic memories around an American dream

'Kalpurush' is all about the life of Sumanto, a selfless and generous government servant, who eventually wins over the grim circumstances of his life. Belittled professionally and betrayed in his marriage and treated as a figure of ridicule by almost all he meets in life, Sumanto but make adjustments to life suprisingly different from the regular ones.(Mehta,2008) The movie opens in a tram at night with Sumanto and Ashwini seated on different chairs. And when the tram comes to a stop, Sumanto gets down followed by Ashwini down the deserted lanes of this para city. Ashwini begins to narrate the story where we understands that Sumanto is his son and that he has yet to tell him a lot. An element of suspense creeps in as the audience is left in doubt whether Ashwini is real or apparitional. The narrative, almost immediately, jump-cuts to a rugged village where Ashwini is seen talking to his wife Putul, under a leafless tree that has gathered the twilight grey. Ashwini tells her about his meeting with their son and asks about how she is keeping these days. Ashwini's conversation with Putul gives us a feeling of dejavu: they seem to have met after a separation of a few days, or a few days, or may be a few months. The suspense deepens as the narrative leaps back to Sumanto's routine life of a plain and honest Govt. employee married to a school teacher, Supriya -a visibly irritable lady without any respect for Sumanto, who she believes, epitomizes failure. She converses with her lover over the land phone, evenwhile Sumanto is in the vicinity. It is, however, not made clear whether she is aware of Sumanto's presence or she underestimates him so much that she does not care whether he is in-the-know or ignorant of her extra-marital liaison.

If honesty defines Sumanto's basic nature, a loveless world around forces him into worshipping human bonds. He appears naïve and

open up to his father Ashwini about how his eyes were up tears as he sees someone wiping the tears off the cheeks of someone else. Very submissive and docile, he almost makes a fool of himself as he admiringly gazes at a couple making love in the public park, and even surprises the television news reader whom he meets on street by asking him immature questions about the business of news reporting. Even when Supriya almost blandly tells him that he is not the father of his children, he hardly reacts and never let this information dwindle his love for the two kids. We are often made to think that Sumanto has already known about this information, which has no effect on his equation with them.

Sumanto appear irritable and upright while he upset the hierarchy by not penning a favorable inspection report to support one of the business men. Making his unconventionality, a mode of rebellion, he with a greedy and cruel world around is shown with a penchant for connecting with love. This aspect of his character recalls the network of electric cables with which the film open, this network metaphorically signifies the importance of human bonding. The sequential convergence of two separate historically and personally relevant time periods of Sumanto and Ashwini also helps Dasgupta to reveal Sumanto's and Ashwini's behavioral pattern of anonymous affairs, emotional isolation, and inner chaos, paralleling their self-destructive behavior with the national crisis of identity, and cultural disconnection.

There are two dreams that act as the primary determinants of the narrative routes of 'Kalpurush'. The first is Supriya's obsession with "America" – a land to which her longing is so much intense that she hardly recognizes the routine bests available around her, including Sumanto or her kids. From the opening reels Supriya is obsessed with her impending two-month sojourn in the United States at her brother's. And towards the end, Supriya is shown to have reached her dream winning a prize to be in her dreamland.

The second dream is a fallen one, about Kusumpur, the imaginative land which Ashwini looks for all his life. Nobody knows the geographical location of this land, suggested as an impossible knowledge. Placing diametrically opposite to Supriya's realization of her America, the Kusumpur(s) of the mind, appear as a Utopian destination which means different things to different people. As in Das Gupta's earlier movie *Uttara*, where a group of illiterate, underfed, haggard old men embarks on a journey by foot to America, the land where nobody starves, here Kusumpur is Ashwini's America, the land of overabundance, prosperity and nourishment. This highly politicized representation of America as the dreamland, the land of wish-fulfilment, projected so in every popular discourse of an average Indian has etched upon the collective unconscious of the masses, especially of the Third World. Therefore, Supriya, a mundane school teacher almost goes berserk as the invitation of his brother to spend a couple of months in the States. She urges Sumanto to buy her every possible Bengali book available on America. The titles available, to Sumanto's astonishment, are countless, and underscore the authors' sycophantic reverence for the country.

While Supriya revels in the golden opportunity of flying to this dreamland, which also becomes her Kusumpur, the regional television channel airs news about America's imperialistic designs almost unemotionally. Only once, does the newsreader lose control and intersperse the news with unspeakable abuses, giving expression to his anger directed to "butcherng" America. However, all this happens is Sumanto's imagination/dream, the newsreader's outrage actually a projection of his feeling.

The 'Other' as Hero

Simple, concrete and pictorial images of the poet turned filmmaker in DasGupta, is affected with an economy of language. The presentation of image and idea bears meticulous attention to an appropriate relationship with form; and the piece has a clear integrity which accommodates the emotions as much as the intellect. (Hood, 2005) His Naxalite sympathizing and hope for a class-less equi focal world has created a notion of 'distance' in his films, with its ramifications of detachment, alienation and remoteness governed by a poetic perspective. This might be the reason for the formulation of a distanced 'Other' that is often the ultimate destination and hoped for in all his movies.

Moving close to the setup of neo-sociopolitical and moral binaries America/ the rest of the world, city/country, cinema/other forms of popular art, dishonesty/honesty, so on and so forth, DasGupta's films offer a lot of codes that stands apart for its placement of opposites. (Hood,2005) In 'Mondo Meyer Upakhyan', Calcutta with its immaculate freedom, wisdom and knowledge is set as a binary to the isolated brothel housing Lati and Rajani, with hardly any freedom or space for learning. And ultimately, the schoolmaster Nagen is destined to join the 'other' with the ever aspiring strong willed Lati, who seems like wrongly placed in the opposite part of the esteemed elements. Even as Neil Armstrong finally clinches his long chased moon, his one of the binary here is the jeep and its driver Ganesh who transverse through isolated unending landscapes, seeking to look for what is not to be found (this case, a hospital).The three young prostitutes, who long for an escape from their life of deceit and humiliation in the brothel is looking for an other possibility of a life without men.

Honest and idealistic, with his root firm on a craggy village with its share of mythological ballads and myths, the protagonist of Kalpurush seldom shows any inclination to America, which his wife

finds as the best of the world's that she can accomplish. That's enough reason to look upon him as the 'Other' . Another similar reference is of an ideal 'Kusumpur' a place long ago and far away, which beckons us when life's complexities beckons us to return to nature's solidities, the perfect other space than the couple's, contrasting life . But by Ashwini's mention about this place that cannot be travelled, DasGupta also cites that life is not that full and perfect, even in the most idealistic 'Kusumpur 'or in 'America'. Dasgupta also travels an 'Other' in a typical Bengali folk art 'Jatra' with its share of heavy emotions, glittering costumes, and loud make-up, which forms the central to the narrative of 'Kalpurush , even while dealing through the most dazzling and powerful of the modern media - cinema.

In both these movies the maverick filmmaker seems to have shown his affinity to deficient and entirely unattainable conundrums of our romantic social structures, that is the family. At the risk of generalization, it may be said that DasGupta' attempts to establish counter-hegemony of the 'Other' of complete, well served families with the placement of incomplete fundamental social group in its settings through his films. In fact, DasGupta seems to be looking on for very prosaic conceptualization of 'concept of lack'. This 'lack' is their in Mondo Meyer Upakhyan, as Lati is presented with a mother, but not a father. And Shibu, the child of washerman is presented with a father, but not a mother. Natabar Paladhi makes mention of his wife and family, but is never shown one. There is no reference to the family life of Ganesh or Nakul or Nagen. The old couple is rejected by their larger family and is left now in the mindset of venturing children. Similar is the fate of the inmates of the brothel, whose 'lack' is infuriated with every one night stands. In 'Kaalpurush', Sumanto is not dissatisfied or regretful with his fate of being alone with adopted children, after his wife walks out of his

life. Supriya is more than happy to lead a life with avarice and materialism, even lonely, but in America. Putul and Ashwini's women friend working with Jatra is also shown isolated and trauma-filled for their existence. Dr. Ashwini continues with his work after being left out of his wife and is attempted to be killed by his son, but in his later spiritual talks, express his nostalgia for a life that he put an end to without knowing its value. And this remains the only point where Dasgupta constructs the values of form of their relationship more than the relationship itself. However, such an observation is also subject to debate. In the ultimate analysis, what one sees in a Dasgupta movie are welcome minimalism and ordinary individuals with mostly unattainable dreams, shorn of weird dramatization, so regular in Indian cinema.

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