

Adalat O Ekti Meye—a social document ahead of time

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Abstract

The world was still in a churn in the 1980s. America and a large part of Europe were fighting to legalize abortion. Almost 25 per cent of the female employees at the United Nations (UN) reported that they had been sexually harassed and pursued for sexual favors in return for a promotion or other job benefit, according to the Ad Hoc Group of Equal Rights for Women. Back in India the anti-dowry movement was gaining strength. People were breaking conventions and talking about the economic plights they faced to keep up with dowry demands. Talking about rape was still a taboo. Rape was more of a social trauma for the victim than the perpetrators of the crime. It was stigmatized as one of the black spots on human life and yet laws and life went along with the apparent notion that no matter how unfortunate it was, it could still happen.

Indian entertainment industry from time immemorial has been the staple diet of the masses. Cinema goers believed their heroes and hero-worshipped them like Gods. Women were esoteric largely in this social fabric and mostly an agent of advancing generation. People could not imagine discussing misogyny, barbarism, influence of pornography in valorising sadomasochistic relations between men and women in public. Kissing scenes meant two flowers tilting towards each other and rapes were unheard of in public life.

It was a matter of shame and a stigma that the victim carried for life and her family for generations. It is in this hardbound Bengali middle-class society that in the summer of 1981 Tapan Sinha's Adalat O Ekti Meye was released. This movie talked about a woman who was gangraped and decided to go to the courts to seek justice.

The focus of my study will be the kind of stereotypes this movie challenged, the glass ceiling related to female modesty that this movie broke and how it was a movie that was well ahead of its time challenging the established societal norms.

Keywords

#Movie #Rape #Stigma #Feminism #Gender Right

Introduction

Women have always been defined from the time history recorded itself. Their roles have been scripted and they have been earmarked to do things as they have been told. They have been allowed freedom but within their Laxman Rekha. If they stepped outside, bad things waited to happen. And then like every Sita they have to go through Agnipariksha (a trial of fire). It is not only true of the orient, but also of the occident. In the celebrated BBC series *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger said, “Men act, women appear...men look at women...women themselves being looked at.” At the cusp of the new millennium a statement like this showed that almost nothing had changed for women.

The abovementioned line says a lot of things at the way women are perceived in the society at large. By saying that men act and women appear we immediately put the emphasis in favour of men where women appear only in relation to men and not as an identity by itself. This has been a crisis for women from time immemorial. They have always been seen as secondary to men qualified mostly for progressing the generations and adding to the numbers in societal progress. Virginia Woolf recorded that when it came to imagination, women was given the highest stature and importance. She can be the muse behind every creation, but not the creator, she can pervade thoughts of a monument, but not the sculptor, she can be the subject of the most alluring painting, but not the brush, she is omnipresent in thought, poetry, literature, art, but when it came to the practicality of existence, she was completely absent, purely insignificant, a mere footnote in history and society. The sporadic names that stand out in the crowd of men are so few and far between that it proves the patriarchal nature of the society and its general bias to the world of men.

The word patriarchy is not to be taken lightly by any means. It does not mean the male elder of the family as the head of the family or that the elder male is heard because he is more travelled and more experienced than the others in the family that includes women and younger males. It means domination. A kind of obscene all pervading domination in the powerplay between men and women. It is a social structure where men have kept women as

their subordinate, as someone who will execute their demands without questioning and will be an extension of their moral and immoral propositions.

It is true not only in society, but also in terms of entertainment. After all films and television, radio, magazines and phones are a reflection of the society we live in. Male superiority and female inferiority are repeated constantly in mainstream Indian films. This stereotyping of women has become a second habit for men. Society has accepted it in the name of social norm and women as their fate. Even in the new millennium when we celebrate Happy Women's Day and say things like every hero has a hero in it, and once you remove it only a big zero remains, nothing has changed at the grassroots level, at the level of the teeming bulging populous middle-class stretched at the boundaries and often brimming over.

And then comes the topic of rape.

Literature Review

For literature review I have taken a paper published in the International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management Vol 20, No 3, 2020 under the title 'A comparative study of depiction of feminism on Indian celluloid in pre and post-liberalization era: tribute to a visionary maestro' co-authored by Arunava Narayan Mukherjee, Kana Mukherjee and Aindrita Mukherjee.

The researchers have pointed out that media, particularly cinema, played a major role in constructing and evolving the image and role of women in their concurrent society and the world they live in. They believe that since the beginning of the new millennium, Indian cinema has undergone a watershed change in the way women's role have been essayed in various movies. They have taken two movies, Pink – a recent Hindi movie and Adalat O Ekti Meye – a Bengali movie made in early 1980s which share the underlying theme of deliberate demeaning of woman as mere object of desire. The reason they have taken these two films is to do a research and make a comparative study between the pre-liberalization and post-liberalization era on the portrayal of women in celluloid.

Through a close look at the themes of the two movies, the researchers concluded that both the movies were entirely devoted to preserve the right and integrity of women. The focal points of the movies were the depiction of shameful mannish acts like gang-rape, sexual assault, the resultant potential stigmatization attached with both of these acts. The research also wanted to study the perception of Indian society towards women who try to swim against the high-tide

of the prescribed societal standards of culture and morality, and how the judiciary react to such acts and deal with it.

The objective of their research was to analyze the socio-cultural context of the two movies one belonging to the pre-liberalization era another post-liberalization era, to study the treatment of the themes – women empowerment and feminism and to understand how marketing of movies is instrumental in promoting the movie and its theme.

The methodology adopted by the researchers was to make a comparative analysis of the contents of both the movies, based on the fact that they were two identical cases carved out of reality, and the contexts in which they evolved. In essence, content analysis was the analysing of messages from various forms of media to make inferences. It is suited for understanding popular culture, such as movie trailers, with the goal to develop interpretations from various forms of media. The approach adopted was to first view both the films and make notes. Then go into a detailed analysis of the films on a focussed path.

The research concluded that both *Pink* and *Adalat O Ekti Meye* ‘have very carefully pictured the deliberate demeaning of women as an object of lust. These visual texts have also critiqued the patriarchal systems as being perpetrators of crime against women and the complicity that consolidates women’s peripheral status as secondary sex...However, due to differences in context, audience, advertisement strategies, cast and most importantly, people’s level of acceptability between the two movies, they were acknowledged differently. Nonetheless at a closer look, one can identify the source of struggle for women empowerment in *Adalat O Ekti Meye* produced back in 1980. *Pink* is only a refurbished version of that struggle.’ (Mukherjee et al., 2020, p. xx)

Research Methodology

A lot of work had been done on feminism and its importance, but hardly anything on the trauma and the resistance to rape on celluloid, that would inspire and fill courage into the bruised and battered lungs of the victim to stand up and fight. In trying to study a film on gangrape, I have concentrated how the society has been defined by Tapan Sinha, who wrote the story and directed the movie, and what a girl faces when she is raped. The first a physical abuse and then the lifelong trauma comes. It takes a look at how society as a whole and people as individuals react to the incident. The idea is to understand what made Tapan Sinha delve on a topic like this and create a movie *Adalat O Ekti Meye* set in the backdrop of a conservative India in 1980s.

My study focuses on two questions: How did a movie like this which was way ahead of its time bring out the inset prejudices of the society and confronted the people in general before a horror mirror where the victims in case of rape faced stigmatization, social-ostracizing, and were punished mentally and emotionally when the actual perpetrators may or may not be incarcerated to a physical prison.

My research will look particularly in this film and try to analyze the movie in the societal context and take note of the broad behavioral patterns of the society and the portrayal of the woman and the resistance thereof.

Tapan Sinha- The Filmmaker

Tapan Sinha was the archetypal Bengali filmmaker in spirit and world-view. Often underrated and overlooked as a man who only made movies about rural Bengal and topics out of literature showcasing a perfect world, he was much more and beyond what he was credited with. Sinha's works was as varied in quality as it was in genres, but like a quintessential auteur his panache and sense of aesthetics remained constant throughout his career. A chronicler par excellence, his movies were intricate, elaborate and meticulous, but seldom one that exhibited celluloid adventure and allusive experimentation. We can clearly call him out as one of the most cerebral and unbending filmmaker outside the orbit of the so called parallel cinema movement. His films were mainstream and yet had enough meat to whip up a thought. He could easily be termed as the 'grand old man of cinema' ("films of Tapan Sinha," n.d.) whose awe-inspiring body of work could only be matched by his more celebrated and renowned contemporaries in Mrinal Sen or Satyajit Ray.

Tapan Sinha went overseas, more precisely, to London in 1950s. The purpose of his visit was to learn filmmaking, and embark upon a career of making good films. On reaching London, he began working in the Pinewood Studios. ("films of Tapan Sinha," n.d.) He was influence by directors like John Ford who was the first American to be recognised as an auteur. He had received six Academy Awards including a record four wins for Best Director for *The Informer* (1935), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), and *The Quiet Man* (1952) all of which were either adaptations of novels or taken from newspaper articles. No wonder throughout his career he depended on literature by masters for his creation and more so in his early life.

He was also a close admirer of Billy Wilder. Austrian Wilder became a screenwriter while living in Berlin. The rise of the Nazi Party and antisemitism in Germany saw him move to

Paris and then to Hollywood in 1934. Wilder received his first directorial nomination for the Academy Award for Best Director with the film noir *Double Indemnity* (1944), based on the novel by James M Cain. He also won the Best Director and Best Screenplay Academy Awards for *The Lost Weekend* (1945), which also won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

In the 1950s, he won his second Academy for screenplay for *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) which he also directed. *Ace in the Hole* (1951), *Stalag 17* (1953) and *Sabrina* (1954) gave him critical acclaim. Wilder was also equally comfortable with romcoms directing Marilyn Monroe in two films--*The Seven Year Itch* (1955) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959). We find their impressions in his tight script and lucid storytelling. A universal worldview was also evident in the body of work left by Tapan Sinha.

A more matured Tapan Sinha became a chronicler of his time bringing to life the angst of the youth in *Apanjan*, the problems of labourers and tea garden unrest in *Sagina Mahato*, and thoughts on exploitations and corruption in *Bancharamer Bagan*.

He next went onto make films on social issues that directors did not dare to touch even with a bargepole in those times. While *Atanka* dealt with acid attack, *Ek Doctor Ka Maut* dealt with red-tapeism and professional jealousy and corruption and finally a film on gang rape *Adalat O Ekti Meye*.

Cinema and Women

Women have traditionally been shown in subordinate roles in the movies. Even when they have been shown as leads it has been leads to voice aspirations, economic struggles or bring to life standouts in the field of art and culture. And all this within the traditional norms and the hardbacked book of social laws. Women have always been representatives of a class and seen as a repository of the values within the community, who authenticate a cultural identity.

The body of the woman is the carrier of cultural signs, like white saree for being a widow, mangal sutra and sindoor on being married. Thus, the woman's identity is constituted within and through the family. The focal trope of creating women characters was in the idea of Matri Shakti. ("Symbolism (Sindoor & mangalsutra) compulsion for Indian women, a reason to fight..... (an experience) Movies though decades have created the ideal of good wife, sacrificing mother, selfless sister and often a helpful neighbour. She is the confidant of secrets, a harbinger of truth and often a moral standard. Indian woman remained the same both in their traditional and modern avatars.

It is difficult to find movies that revolve around a single upright unattached woman who is fighting for her existence, her pride, herself, because with it always came the package of objectifying, worshipping of youth and beauty. This deters the characters from making their own decisions independently; independent of social norms; independent of social domination; independent of powerplay and independent of questions of authority.

Women characters have been created in the films more to look at them than to understand them. It is evident from the song, dance, especially item numbers, which are essential to the sell-ability of the movie. It is thus safe to say that women in Indian films and likewise in Bengali movies have mostly functioned as an object, esoteric to the plot and when they have been integral to the progression of the movie it has been well within the moral boundaries.

India in 1980

1980 was a watershed year for India. Women's Rights movement in India were gaining momentum. "Its genesis lay in the excesses committed by the state repressive machinery during the Emergency Rule in India from 1975 to 1977. For many middle class women it came as a major shock. In the post emergency period, civil liberties organisations also highlighted rape of women in the police custody, mass rape of poor, untouchable and Muslim women during caste and communal riots and sexual molestation of tribal women by Central Reserve Police (CRP), State Reserve Police (SRP) and other para-military forces." (Home: Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, n.d.) The print media gave detailed coverage to the victims of sexual violence and printed their testimonies in great details.

In 1980, when the Supreme Court of India gave its verdict on the Mathura Rape Case, there was a national outcry. The case was of a small tribal girl Mathura who was raped by two policemen, right inside the police station in the dead of the night with her parents and relatives waiting out of police station weeping and pleading for her release. The legal battle began when a woman lawyer took up her case immediately after the event in 1972. (Home: Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, n.d.)

"The Sessions Court blamed Mathura for being a woman of "an easy virtue", and the two policemen were released. In the High Court Judgement, the accused were given seven and half years imprisonment which was reverted by the judgement of the highest legal authority-The Supreme Court of India. It held that Mathura had given a willful consent, as she did not raise any alarm. The resulting nation-wide anti-rape campaign in 1980 demanded reopening of the Mathura Rape Case and amendments in the Rape Law." (Home: Università

Ca' Foscari Venezia, n.d.) This movement alerted the public to the treatment meted out to the rape victims. The initiative came from the middle class, educated and urban women.

These reports had an effect on the Bengal intelligentsia. Tapan Sinha may have been part of that fabric that bled with the general decline of social life. In his own words Tapan Sinha had said, “Many people tell me that there is a certain amount of sweetness in my cinema even if it deals with harsh realities like in *Apanjan* or *Ekhoni*. I don’t deny this. I strongly believe that the hopelessness and sorrow that engulf us today are just a passing phase of life.” (NAG, 2018, p. xx) From the beginning of the 1980s Tapan Sinha had changed his style and become more direct. As the society was rocked by incidents like this, the romanticism with life was almost gone from Sinha’s work; the sweetness subdued and a more real, and tormented director appeared who wanted to bring to the celluloid the constant flux and angst of the society. He began making films that will leave unanswered questions and thoughts for the audience to ruminate on. One such movie was *Adalat O Ekti Meye* (The Court and a Girl) he directed in 1982, the other two being *Atanka* (Fear, 1986) and *Antardhan* (Disappearance, 1992). “A salient feature of these films was that it was heavily influenced by the newspaper reports and the horrible state of metropolitan life...” (NAG, 2018, p. xx)

It was then that Tapan Sinha wrote the story and script for *Adalat O Ekti Meye*. The fervent and taut nature of the script came as a shock for many, who thought that he was being overtly critical of the contemporary social life. Sinha was a member of CBFC at that time and was exposed to a large number of C-Grade Malayalam films which were almost pornographic in nature and had explicit scenes of sex and violence. (NAG, 2018, p. xx) Sinha decided to make a film on the subject of rape. He recalled, “On hearing my plan Hrishikesh Mukherjee told me—you want to make a film on rape! Impossible! That made me more determined and I made *Adalat O Ekti Meye*.” (NAG, 2018, p. xx)

***Adalat O Ekti Meye*—a content analysis**

The movie begins on a quintessential Tapan Sinha pace where a school is going for a break with Durga Puja around the corner. Though we do not see the usual celebrations of Durga Puja anywhere in the movie, the notice board of the school makes it evident that three young teachers are going on a holiday to Gopalpur by Sea. The three, led by Urmila (Tanuja), is the spunkiest of the lot and has a fiancée (Bhiswa Guha Thakurta) and a father (Patanjali Guha Thakurta) who is supportive of the young woman’s free spirit.

Their trip slowly turns into a nightmare though, right from the time they board the train. The coup next to them is occupied by four boisterous young men who are drinking and listening to loud music as they also chug along in the belly of Indian railway. Problem begins when Urmila steps outside the coup to go to the washroom. She encounters one of the youth in the narrow passage who insists on becoming friends with her. She rushes back to the coup and the three young women sit petrified as the youths keep banging their door and starts passing leering comments across the wafer thin partition of the coup. They seek help of a man who seems to be sleeping on one of the two upper berths of the coup.

The man, unimpressive with locks trying to cover his bald and a robust moustache that needs some caring, agrees to help and tries to put some sense in the young men. Having failed he returns to the compartment and takes his bag and leaves. The next time he knocks on the door of the coup, we see him dressed as a police inspector. He gives the four a taste of his ferule and breaks their liquor bottles. He introduces himself as SI Gobinda Halder (Manoj Mitra) better known as Thangare Gobinda (Killer Gobinda).

The three girls reach Gopalpur and enjoy their stay at their hotel. They spend time watching the rolling waves of the sea crashing on the yellow sand. One unsuspecting morning during their walk along the beach, Urmila is left alone by her mates who head to the local market. As she walks along the beach in broad daylight, four young men in orange colour rubber head gear and water glasses gag her, lift her and take her to the water. There in presence of a sea of people enjoying the waves they play music and as if the girl was one of them; they grope, molest and rape her. Then they lift her limp body and drop it on the sand and calmly walk away. When Gobinda Halder asks the doctor treating Urmi, his unmixed remark, "It's inhuman atrocity. What happened was even insulting to animals. Even they follow the law of nature..." leaves the audience gasping for breath and hot behind the ears. ("ADALAT-O-EKTI MEYE (Bengali) (1982)," n.d.)

SI Gobinda Halder is incensed by the crime and the condition the young woman was left in. He works night and day to crack the case and does so bringing the culprits behind the bar even as they try to make their escape. But the problem begins there.

First the father is unwilling to take any step. Then he agrees. Once this becomes a news, media starts writing it in every detail. Urmila's school decides to sack her, Urmila's boyfriend, with whom she was about to get married, disowns her, the relatives start passing wise comments and enjoys the social vilification of the girl, the office colleagues enjoy

asking the father about her raped girl, Urmila becomes an object of discussion wherever she goes and finally in the court she faces ugly questioning from the defense lawyer making life a ball of insults for her.

Meanwhile, SI Gobinda Halder is suspended, falling prey to a conspiracy laid out by the powerful father of one of the accused, on the pretext of taking law in his hands. The boys get bail at the High Court. The movie begins when the Prosecution lawyer begins the case in Supreme Court with a hope of the culprits getting the punishment they deserve. The whole movie jogs on a dull pace in flashback, making the ordeal clear, the journey painful and the cinematic effect horrifying. That is the success of Tapan Sinha. His capacity to take the bull by its horns, making the audience uncomfortable with a topic they are happy to gossip about and toss it like the victim's modesty in ogling addas, but not ready to deal with it as a society and bring change.

In doing this movie Tapan Sinha rocked the foundations of a Bengali middle-class society that took pride in their intellect, culture and sense of being righteous. The adage 'Bangali Bhadrak' was put up on the docks and the judgement was left to the people who were happy to carry the mere shell sobriety with the society decaying below their feet. The general decadence of social life, the lopsided patriarchal values of the society, the rotten value system that the society carried like a monkey on its back and most importantly a failing judiciary standing helpless before a social muddled by corruption, power and power hungry people, made this movie a watershed in Indian cinema.

Sinha's controlled diatribe against the society could be divided into four parts:

Women: Tapan Sinha has portrayed four kinds of women that permeate the society in the movie. The first, school headmistress, who despite having a rank and position in the society conforms to the societal norms and does not have the spine or intention to go against the established system or take on the corridors of power. In the opening scene she is introduced as a respectable professional with a guardian-like attitude. The same headmistress after Urmi's rape becomes a bag of lame excuses with no voice of her own. She becomes a bearer, rather than becoming a creator.

The second kind of women shown in the film are those like Nila (Debika Banerjee) who show some spine as they confront Sujit, Urmi's boyfriend, for disowning her and even goes to the extent of calling him a pseudo-communist. She is the one who races to the hospital to help her friend and stands by her when the headmistress tells Urmi that a commission will

decide her fate as a school teacher. Nila is Tapan Sinha's new modern urban woman who dares to speak their mind and ask the correct questions.

The third kind are the gaggle of relatives who just talk and talk. First, they talk about a girl given too much freedom. Then they talk about a lonely father not being taken care of. Then they talk about how unfortunate it was for the girl to get raped. Then they talk about how she was partially responsible for being so free spirited. Then they also blame the father for giving too much freedom to the daughter. They feign concern, they gossip and then they get the voyeuristic pleasure that no such misfortune had befallen them.

And then there is Urmi. Raised like a boy, by the father, given the independence to choose her life partner, get her education, do a job of teacher and be independent enough to undertake an all-girl trip free of the care and protection of the male folk. In the aftermath of the rape we see her stoic resistance to the incident. Even as she crumbles inside being cornered by the society, relatives, abandoned by her lover, sneered at in the court, she resists. Her only heart wrenching sobbing is in the death of the night, that is heard by her father who consoles her: "Ebar Ami Ki Korbo Baba? Amai Bole Dao" (What will I do father? Please tell me). (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.)

Men: Tapan Sinha also portrays men in four groups, beginning with the group of four college goers. These crop of rapists have been portrayed as heartless and evil, with no sense of guilt or remorse. There is not a fiber in their body that condones their vile act. This is the dark face of the perpetrators that Sinha purposely portrays to show how manipulative, calculating and Machiavelli-ish their act was. They are drunk with power, clout and position that their fathers have and know that no matter how devious their act, they would be protected. When they were eve-teasing the four girls on the train and were rudely stopped by the sub-inspector, they took it upon themselves to show the girls who called the shots in this world. It was just by chance that Urmi happened to be on the beach that day alone when they were prowling for their prey. The same fate would have been of any of her friends instead of her, if any of them were on that each alone that day. Their point was to teach the girls a lesson and prove tat they got what they wanted. In the subconscious it was also an act of patriarchal domination that this society has prescribed for ages. After their shameful act, the way the leader of the group said, "Leave one by one. Do not show any excitement. Act like nothing happened." (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.) This was evidence that this was a premeditated act carried out in broad daylight with zero regard for the society and the societal norms.

Set diametrically opposite to this is the character of Manoj Mitra, Sub-Inspector Gobinda Halder also called Thangare Gobindo. If this movie had a hero, it would be him. Tapan Sinha broke all the conventional notions of hero and hero-worship through the character. Gobinda, a man transferred from one station to another and having gone without promotion for a decade or a little more, is an upright cop who has a pathological hatred for criminals. He has crossed 50 and has a growing baldness that he covers with long strands of hair, he has an unkempt sideburns and a bushy moustache that cries for some attention. His family has left him and he has nothing but the law to protect. He beats confessions out of them and may have crossed the line a few times, but all to uphold the law and the legal system. His agony at the sight of Urmi being raped, his determination to bring the criminals to law and his relentless search for the culprits set him apart from the rest of his tribe who are just happy conforming to the law and assuring their regular promotions by being a yes-man of the system.

He stands alone and without hesitation besides the girl and her father and he is the one who instills them with the courage to file an FIR against the four. His lines, “Why should you be ashamed and hang your head. You are the victim. You have done nothing wrong. They should be ashamed of what they have done. They should be made to feel ashamed.” (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.) speaks volumes about his sense of justice and also a break away from the pattern of patriarchy the society is used to seeing. Even after being suspended and facing an internal inquiry, he stands undeterred. A scene when Urmi rushes out to see Gobinda leaving their premises down the staircase shows the bond between the victim and the protector, much beyond love.

The third kind of men, Sinha sketches is that of her father. The middle-class office going Bhadrakal Bengali. Bhabesh Chatterjee, Urmi’s father, is crestfallen at the plight of her daughter. He hears rubbish from his relatives quietly as he mentally prepares himself for the struggle ahead. He is subject to unlicensed queries from his colleagues and his boss who even suggests that victims become so psychologically affected by rape that they start enjoying unbridled sex. (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.) But in his stoic resistance one night when his daughter cries helplessly before her he says, “Someone has said that every five second a girl somewhere is raped. That means 12 girls every hour. We have other families who have faced this same misfortune. We are not alone. There are others like us.” (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.). He slowly comes to terms with their condition and in a soliloquy agrees with Gobinda Halder on why they should hide in shame when the perpetrators should actually do it. It is here that he and Gobinda become one. After that we see him put up a handwritten sign on his table,

“Me and my raped daughter are fine” (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.) and then takes on the School Board who unjustly want to terminate Urmi’s job. “You either give her back her job, or I will take you to court. What example are you setting as the opinion makers of the society? You call yourself intellectuals and educated? Either you ask the 250 children’s parents to take their children away from the school or allow me and my daughter to go and talk to them individually to make them understand. You leave me with no option,” he said in his stand-off with the world of men. (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.) Set diametrically opposite is Sujit, Urmi’s boyfriend, who disavows his fiancée because what the society would think and when she needed him most, abandons and disowns her. For all his tall ideals, and vaunted philosophy, he is just a coward and a shell of a man.

The fourth type is the Defense Counsel played by Nirmal Kumar. His style of questioning in the court. His lewd offensive style of questioning, his snide remarks, his dirty looks make him the brand representative of that part of the society who enjoy the thought of a young woman being raped and enjoys in tossing up a spicy discussion in public to corner the victim and prove his clients innocent. He is like that old man sitting in the court everyday licking his chops at the expectation of the woman being asked dirty questions and being slut-shamed and being called a woman of lesser character. The defense counsel has no moral pangs. This is just a case and he will go to any extent to win it for his clients. “Law is to ensure protection, not to hurt human dignity” (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.) spoken by the prosecution counsel speaks volumes about the state of mind of the society in general. The Defense Counsel looked to be a man drunk with power as is the nexus between the wealthy father of one of the victims and the corrupted communist politician who could preach the manifesto, but would walk in the muck to ensure victory in the next elections

Adalat O Ekti Meye was the first Bengali film focused solely on a rape incident and its aftermath and not as a vague remote subplot but as the prime narrative, from which the middleclass wished to, but found it difficult to escape. The importance of the film was further elevated as it depicted the rape of an educated, middle-class woman. This was the gentry to which the director himself and his loyal audience belonged.

The plot talked about a grinding judicial process that moved from a lower court, through the corridors of the High court to a bench of the Supreme Court with only one hope that justice will be served. He did not make a commercial potboiler with some unrealistic woman empowerment theme, where the unidimensional characters were surefooted in their thoughts

and action. She rather took up a confident educated young Bengali woman, who is torn to smithereens, broken into a rubble, by the violence and trauma inflicted on her by the four men once and the society in general repeatedly and slowly reorganized her strength, regained her fortitude and renewed her battle.

The smarmy, sycophantic, selfish nature of the middle-class was exposed at its darkest form. “In the court-room we find Urmila being “raped” a second time — not physically but with double-edged questions that bared and vitiated her no less than the crime committed in actual. Sinha’s camera, in a non-didactic way put forward the farcical side of the Indian judiciary when misused and how the great Indian middle-class relished the plight of others.” (Statesman News Service, 2018) (“ADALAT-O-EKTI MEYE (Bengali) (1982) The film however ended with a ray of hope with the convicts given prison terms in the lower court and Urmila getting back her teaching job. Though the opening scene shows there was more struggle at store after the temporary reprieve. There is no redundant or muddying additions to make the plot look more solid, no elaborate introduction or role playing of any character to highlight any one thought or scene in the film, no intentional preaching from the pulpit. There are some memorable scenes though that happens naturally, some dialogues spoken with spontaneity that forced the people to think and one focal point that was bound to make people to sit up and notice. Sinha would not allow, in the words of Bob Dyllan “yes, and how many times can a man turn his head/ And pretend he just doesn’t see?” (Blowin’ In the Wind).

Conclusion

The movie has been termed as a landmark feminist movie. Tapan Sinha took on the society and its established norms by its horns. While on one hand he broke the so called domination of patriarchal society, on the other he took up the cause of a woman violated and showed her slow unbent resistance to this society. The movie also reflected how the society still practiced this son worshiping, both openly and covertly as evident in the Defense Lawyer saying “They are good young men from good respectable families. They have a life and future that has been put to stake by this woman with underlying intentions.” (Adalat o Ekti Meye, n.d.)

This was perhaps the first of its kind movie, a precursor to the movies made to create awareness on female feticide, female infanticide, dowry murders, acid attacks and marital rapes. A year after the movie The Criminal Law Amendment Act (1983) took place. ‘This Act amended the Indian Penal Code, The Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act with respect to the law relating to rape. As per this Act, revealing the identity

of a rape-victim is an offence. Though this Act maintains more or less the same definition of rape, it introduces many new categories of offence of sexual intercourse by persons in custodial situation-such as superintendents of hospitals, remand homes, prison and police officials-with women in their custody.’ (Home: Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, n.d.)

In doing this movie Tapan Sinha laid down a marker for the society, brought them face to face with the ugly truth and also let go a latent warning if they did not react now, it could happen to any one of them. It was the only film in Sinha's repertoire that received an 'A' certification. But the film had a massive response from the audience and mostly in positive nature. Amit Nag, who chronicled Sinha's cinematic journey, writes in his book that a professor of Jadavpur University said that at first, they were apprehensive about the film. But after seeing the film and the content, they asked their daughter to go and see the film. (NAG, 2018, p. xx).

A fitting certificate for an undeterred director and a visionary who dared to bring the society down on its knees taking up the cudgels for a woman deprived, defamed, riled and bro

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