Siddiqui\_REM\_Ghatak

**RITWIK KUMAR GHATAK** (b. 4 November, 1925, Dhaka, Bangladesh; d. 6 February 1976, Kolkata, India.)

Ritwik Ghatak was an Indian Bengali filmmaker known as one of the proponents of Indian parallel cinema, also known as the Indian new-wave. His family migrated to Calcutta from East Bengal during partition and his work bears the imprint of the political and cultural climate of post-independence, post-partition Bengal and gives his films the tone of despair, angst, and critique of the nation-state. Ghatak was a member of the Indian People Theater Association (IPTA) and wrote plays as well as adaptations of works by Bertolt Brecht and Nikolai Gogol before he started writing and directing films. The left-leanings of IPTA and its promotion of political avant-garde art, the influence of Indian mythologies as well as Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein and modernist playwright Brecht, and his own theater background combine to provide the staging of modernist melodrama in his films. Ghatak’s career as a director contains only eight films and includes the famous trilogy that deals with lives of refugees: *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*Cloud Capped Star*, 1960), *Komal Gandhar* (*E-Flat*, 1961), and *Subarnarekha* (*The Golden Thread*, 1965). Certain themes that cut across his films are about post-colonial modernity, alienation, displacement, and nostalgia tied with refugee experience. His films also present a crisis of masculinity and exploration of resilient femininity.

Ghatak uses film’s various elements to represent social and political concerns; at the same time, his films are aesthetic experiments with form. The form and content are brought together to create a sense of political urgency as well as a distanciation effect that engages the critical faculty as well. The dominant style marking his films is that of melodrama, which is conveyed through expressionistic use of camera angles, dramatic lighting, montage, and disjunctive repetitive sound. For example, in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, the sound that resembles crackling fire (while cooking), along with the closeup of her mother’s face, often jarringly accompanies conversations that Nita has with her brother. Another example is of the sound of the whiplash that slashes across the film at odd times, forcing an analytical view instead of immersion into the world of his film; a sound that, according to scholar Ravi Vasudevan, conveys the weight of social and historical forces weighing down on Nita. In another film, *Ajantrik* (*The Unmechanical*/*Pathetic Fallacy*, 1958), Ghatak explores the relationship between man and machine, between a taxi-driver and his Chevrolet named Jagaddhal, but unlike the modernist fear of machine and technology, this film stages a different relationship with modernization—the taxi is infused with life and feeling and breaks down when its driver is attracted to a woman. Ritwik Ghatak’s influence can be seen in the works of his students Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani.

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**Selected Filmography:**

Director

*Nagarik* (*The Citizen*, 1952)

*Ajantrik* (*The Unmechanical / The Pathetic Fallacy*, 1958)

*Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Cloud Capped Star*, 1960)

*Komal Gandhar* (*E-Flat*, 1961)

*Subarnarekha* (*The Golden Thread*, 1962)

Writer

*Musafir* (*Traveler*). Dir. Hrishikesh Mukherjee (1957)

*Madhumati.* Dir. Bimal Roy (1958)

Paratextual Material

* Link to an iconic image from *Meghe Dhaka Tara*

(<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-wFaN6wNe2jU/TcJx6tpLIuI/AAAAAAAACS0/qqKeVn1r_Do/s1600/cloud-capped-star1.jpg>)

* Detailed descriptions of Ghatak’s seminal films:
* (<http://www.filmref.com/directors/dirpages/ghatak.html>)
* Full filmography of Ghatak’s works on IMDB

(http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0315547/)

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