
**MAN MACHINE AND CAMERA: A STUDY OF RITWIK GHATAK'S
"AJANTRIK"**

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the complex relationship between human beings, machines and cinematic expression in '*Ajantrik*' (1958), directed by Ritwik Ghatak. In this film the director Ritwik Ghatak shows an unusual emotional bond between a man and his car, stimulating traditional ideas about technology and humanity. Through innovative camera techniques Ghatak highlights themes of loneliness, attachment and social alienation. Through Bimal's character the director shows that a person turns to machine when obsession turns into profession. At the same time a machine can possess human emotions, as represented by Jagaddal. Overall, this article highlights the film's deeper philosophical meaning.

KEYWORDS: *Indian Cinema, Man-Machine Relationship, Loneliness, Alienation, Symbolism, Film-technique.*

INTRODUCTION

Ritwik Ghatak remains one of the most distinctive voices in Indian Cinema, known for his deeply emotional storytelling and strong socio-political concerns. He was born in Dhaka in 1925. His works are deeply influenced by the trauma of the Partition of India. Through his cinema Ghatak expresses social, emotional and historical realities as a powerful medium. His films often explore themes of displacement, identity and loss, reflecting the collective anguish of a fractured society.

- The most suitable medium to get hand his all collections is through new media.
- Ghatak expressed deep sorrow over the separation from his homeland and people.

'*Ajantrik*' (1958) is one of his earliest and most experimental films that centres on an unusual relationship between a taxi driver Bimal and his ageing car Jagaddal. The title itself means 'non-mechanical' or 'beyond the machine', hinting at the central contradiction of the narrative – a machine that appears almost human and a human who behaves like a machine. Ghatak imbues Jagaddal with personality and emotional presence.

This paper seeks to analyse '*Ajantrik*' through three primary lenses: the emotional bond between man and machine, the role of cinematic techniques in building this relationship, and the broader socio-cultural consequences of the film. By doing so, it aims to illustrate how Ghatak converts a simple story into a profound meditation of human existence.

Plot Overview

The film shows Bimal, a taxi driver in rural India, who owns an old, broken-down car, named Jagaddal. Though the car is as useless junk to the society, but to Bimal it is a living companion. His attachment to the car proceeds from his deep loneliness and emotional isolation after personal loss.

Through various episodic events, the film portrays Bimal's daily struggles, his communication with passengers and his enduring bond with Jagaddal. He refuses to abandon the car, emphasizing the intensity of his emotional dependence.

Jagaddal is anthropomorphized-given personality, agency and empathy. Bimal talks to the car, cares for it as a loved one.

This relationship challenges the ruling paradigm of machines as objects of utility. Ghatak presents a view where objects possess life and spirit. Bimal's emotional bond can be explained as a form of opposition to modern capitalist logic, which decreases everything-including human labour- to commodities.

This point of view integrates with posthumanist theory, particularly the ideas of Donna Haraway, who challenges the rigid separation between humans and machines. In her conception of the cyborg, the boundaries between the organic and the technological collapse, giving rise to hybrid identities. Similarly, in '*Ajantrik*' Bimal and Jagaddal form a hybrid existence-each incomplete without the other. The film does not simply dictate human qualities onto the machine; rather, it questions the belief that emotion, agency, and subjectivity are exclusively human attributes.

Man and Machine: A Psychological Relationship

One of the central themes of “*Ajantrik*” is the obscured distinctions between man and machine. Bimal’s relationship with the car Jagaddal goes beyond any purpose; it becomes emotional and spiritual. He treats it as companion rather than an object, with whom he can share his joys and sorrows.

Bimal is socially isolated, unable to form meaningful relationships with people, and instead finds solace in his car. Jagaddal becomes an alternative for lost relationships, symbolising relief, recollection and identity. But to the outside world, Jagaddal is only a damaged vehicle, a source of humiliation and ridicule. Bimal has sole connection with the car.

This alienation can be comprehended within the context of post-independence India, where industrialization and modernization took place rapidly and tensions between tradition and progress were created. Machines were often seen as symbols of both advancement and dehumanization.

At the same time, Society tags Bimal as peculiar, strange, erratic and even mad. The society failed to understand the unconditional attachment between a man and a machine. Ghatak thus critiques a society that prioritises practicality over emotional depth.

This bond challenges the traditional belief of machines as lifeless objects. Bimal as a living companion treats Jagaddal, and protects it against criticism. His attachment is not based on functionality but on emotional connection. This indicates that the value of an object is not intrinsic but constructed through human experience and perception.

Ghatak uses this relationship to question the strict differentiations between animate and inanimate. If a machine can evoke emotions and become an essential part of someone's life, can it still be considered merely an object? The film does not provide a definite answer but instead invites viewers to reflect on their own presumptions.

Bimal’s emotional connection to Jagaddal thus creates a deeper existential crisis. Bimal exists in a transitional point between tradition and modernity, unable to fully choose one side. His connection to machine becomes a substitute for human connection, highlighting the psychological impact of modernization.

The Role of Camera and Cinematic Technique

In ‘*Ajantrik*’ Camera is used as expressive tool. Ghatak uses innovative thematic techniques to increase the emotional and thematic layers of the film.

- *Close up shots* depict Bimal’s intense expressions, highlighting his disturbance, anxiety and attachment for the car.

- **Wide-angle shots** disclose the rough topography and frail condition of Jagaddal, symbolizing struggle and tolerance.

The juxtaposition of long shots of landscapes with close-ups of the car creates a visual dialogue between nature and machine. This contrast stresses the tension between organic life and mechanical existence.

Sound design plays a vital role. The car's mechanical noises are manipulated to resemble human expressions-laughter, sighs and cries.

This technique transforms Jagaddal into a quasi-human entity. The camera, combined with sound design, becomes a tool that meditates between reality and imaginary, allowing the audience to perceive the machine as alive.

Ghatak's use of montage displays his modernist delicacy. Abrupt cuts and fragmented series disrupt narrative continuity, highlighting Bimal's fractured mind.

The camera constructs meaning, does not show any reality. Camera only shows viewer's perspective on man-machine relationship.

Animism and Indigenous Worldview

A substantial part of "*Ajantrik*" is its engagement with native cultures, particularly the Oraon tribe community. Their presence establishes an alternative worldview that differentiates with industrial modernity.

Objects are believed to have life and spirit, in animistic traditions. Bimal's relationship to Jagaddal is an example of this. His behaviour is not entirely absurd but established in different cultural logic.

Through this perspective Ghatak challenges Western notions of rationality and progress. This film suggests that modernity is not the only way to understand the world, but traditional belief systems propose valuable perception into human existence.

Symbolism and Metaphor

- ***Jagaddal as a symbol:*** Jagaddal is not only a vehicle, but it is a powerful symbol. It represents.
- ***Memory:*** A link to Bimal's past and emotional history.
- ***Resistance:*** A denial to comply to societal norms.
- ***Humanization of technology:*** Suggesting that machines can bear emotional significance.

The final settings, where parts of the car remains alive even after its annihilation, suggest that emotional bonding continue beyond physical existence.

The Child and the Horn

In the film's final scene, a child plays with the car's rejected horn. This moment signifies rejuvenation and succession. It suggests that life lasts beyond decay and that objects can secure new meanings in different contexts.

Humour and Pathos

"*Ajantrik*" includes elements of humour and pathos. The ridiculousness of Bimal's behaviour often arouses laughter, but this humour is tingled with sadness.

Ghatak reaches a delicate balance between comedy and tragedy, creating a 'bitter sweet' tone. This duality reflects the complexity of human emotions and enhances the film's emotional impact.

Alienation and Loneliness

This theme of alienation is closely - linked to the socio historical context of the film.

Post -Partition India was marked by displacement, loss, and a breakdown of traditional social structures. Many individuals found themselves detached from their roots and communities, leading to a profound sense of loneliness.

In this context, Jagaddal stands for stability, security, and a continuity in Bimal's life. It's constant presence that provides him with emotional support. The machine becomes a symbol of resistance against the dehumanizing effects of modern society.

Narrative Structure and Style

The narrative structure of '*Ajantrik*' is episodic, consisting of a series of encounters between Bimal and his passengers. These interactions reveal different aspects of his personality and his relationship with Jagaddal.

Ghatak's storytelling is striking by a blend of realism and expressionism. While the setting and characters are grounded in reality, the emotional and symbolic elements add a layer of abstraction. This combination allows the film to handle on both a literal and metaphorical level.

Humanism in Ghatak's vision

At its core, '*Ajantrik*' is a deeply humanistic film. It focuses on the importance of empathy and understanding, even in unconventional relationships. Bimal's affection to Jagaddal may seem irrational, but it is rooted in a genuine need for connection.

Ghatak's portrayal of this relationship challenges viewers to broaden their definition of what it means to be human. If humanity is defined by the capacity to feel and form attachments, then the boundaries between human and non human become less rigid.

This stand point reflects Ghatak's broader artistic vision, which seeks to highlight the shared experiences that connect individuals across social and cultural divides.

The Machine as Subaltern

An equally compelling explanation arises when we read Jagaddal as a subaltern entity .Drawing upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question-"Can the subaltern speak?"- we can argue that Jagaddal portrays a voiceless yet expressive presence within the narrative.

The car does not speak in language, but it interacts through mechanical sounds, breakdowns and movements. These forms of expression can be understood as a kind of non- verbal discourse . Jagaddal's resistance to being abandoned, its persistence despite decay, and its eventual fragmentation all recommend a form of subaltern existence- marginalized, exploited and yet enduring.

Ghatak's cinematic technique allows this subaltern 'voice' to emerge.By concentrating on the sounds and visual presence of the car,the film grants it a form of agency that challenges its status as a mere object. In doing so, '*Ajantrik*' develops the concept of subalternity beyond human subjects to include non-human entities."

Marxist Reading :Commodity and Emotional Value

Karl Marx's concept of '*Commodity Fetishism*' is applicable here. The film redefines this idea by transmuting the machine into an object of emotional investment rather than economic exchange. Ghatak's portrayal is not merely negative; it is enigmatic vibrating between sensitivity and constructive feedback.However, for Bimal, the car holds immense emotional value that can not be quantified in economic terms.

This tension reflects Karl Marx's "*Critique of Capitalism*",where objects are reduced to commodities valued only for their market exchange. In '*Ajantrik*', Ghatak resists this reduction by foregrounding the emotional and experimental dimensions of the object.

The film thus critiques a system that discards what it deems unproductive. Jagaddal's eventual dismantling is not merely the end of a machine; it symbolises the violence of a Capitalist logic that prioritizes efficiency over attachment, memory and emotional continuity.

The Car as Archive of Memory

Jagaddal functions as a repository of memories. Each journey, each passenger and each breakdown provide to its history, The car becomes a mobile archive, carrying traces of past experiences and emotional imprints.

This idea can be linked to memory studies, where objects are seen as carriers of personal and collective memory. Unlike static archives, Jagaddal is dynamic-it moves, interacts, and evolves. Its physical deterioration resemblances the accumulation of memories, suggesting that decay is not merely loss but also a form of preservation.

When the car is finally dismantled, its memory does not disappear. Instead, it is transformed. The famous final scene where a child plays with a part of the car, symbolizes the continuity of memory beyond physical destruction. The machine 'dies' but its essence persists in new forms.

Ecology and Industrial Modernity

Although not overly environmental, '*Ajantrik*' can be interpreted as an early ecological text. The existence of Jagaddal within a rural, natural landscape generates a visual thematic contrast between industrial modernity and organic life.

The car is both an intrusion and a companion. It disrupts the natural environment but also becomes integrated into it. This duality mirrors the complexities of technological development, particularly in postcolonial contexts where modernization is uneven and often dictated.

Ghatak does not present a simple critique of technology. Instead, he explores its ambiguous role-simultaneously destructive and intimate, alienating and connective.

Comparative Perspective

To further understand '*Ajantrik*', it is useful to match it with global cinematic texts. For instance, modern times depicts the dehumanising effects of industrial machinery, where humans are decreased to mechanical functions. In contrast, '*Ajantrik*' reverses this dynamic by attributing emotional depth to the machine.

Similarly, her explores emotional relationships between humans and non-human entities. While her focuses on digital technology, 'Ajantrik' deals with a physical, decaying machine. Yet both films challenge the boundaries of intimacy and subjectivity.

These comparisons highlight the global relevance of Ghatak's work and its anticipation of contemporary concerns.

The Political Context

Ritwik Ghatak's work is deeply persuaded by Marxist thought, but he often departs from orthodox interpretations. '*Ajantaik*' does not represent a transparent critique of capitalism, rather than, it explores emotional and cultural proportions of technological change.

The film can be spotted as a response to controversies on industrialization in post - independence India. While leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru encouraged technological progress, thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi criticized machinery for its dehumanizing effects.

Ghatak's film possess a middle ground, neither fully approving nor declining modernity. It presents a nuanced view that accepts both its limitations and possibilities.

Breaking Cinematic Conventions:~

'*Ajantrik*' is memorable for its experimental approach. At a time when Indian cinema was subjugated by melodrama and realism, Ghatak launched elements of Surrealism and modernism.

The film '*Ajantrik*' is different from mainstream Cinema through episodic structure, unconventional narrative ingenious use of sound. It anticipates later progress in world cinema, including the French New Wave and modernist filmmaking.

Man, Machine and Identity

The relationship between Bimal and Jagaddal erects questions about identity. Bimal's sense of self is intimately connected to his car. When the car is demolished; he is forced to face, his own dilutions and reviewed his identity.

This system reflects a broader human experience. It highlights technological and social change of society.

CONCLUSION

'*Ajantrik*' is an innovative film that surpasses its simple assumption to explore intense philosophical and cultural questions. Through the relationship between Bimal and Jagaddal, Ritwik Ghatak reviews the intersections of man, machine and modernity.

The film's inventive use of camera and sound remodels the machine into living entity, challenging the conventional beliefs of reality and perception. Ghatak creates an alternative perspective on the man-machine relationship.

Ultimately, '*Ajantrik*' is not just a story about a man and his car; it is a reflection on the nature of existence, the impact of modernity, and the perpetual human need for connection. '*Ajantrik*' ultimately reminds us that attachment, even when unconventional, is an essential part of the human experience.

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