

Film Review

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The Troth Crusade: *Barun Babur Bondhu*



"Who will go with the car?"

-I will."

- Soumitra Chatterjee in *Barun Babur Bondhu*.

Gently anatomised truth, unexaggerated and controlled emotion, aesthetically ruthless narrative of Socio-Political and familial concerns, crafted mediocracy and ethics of commitment, irrespective to a king or a kid, pragmatic projection of life are the hallmarks that have marked a film as a work of art beyond a reel work in frames- that is, an Anik Dutta venture- *Barun Babur Bondhu*. The film uses life portals as its backdrop, where every character is moving in their specific spheres, sometimes attached to their created comfort zones and sometimes, to the veritable bedlam of the world, individually or being societally connected to time and situation. No loud melodrama is created to bring out the subtlety of the human emotions, projected. Anik Dutta has framed "what is life", and not "what or how it should be." A basically introvert octogenarian, his strong sense of self-esteem,

his kith and kins, the extended family, all carry their entirely human follies and virtues through neutrally exercised sense of responsibilities.

The entire cinematic text revolves round a hardcore idealistic gentleman, Barun Babu- rather, a "devastatingly honest, off beat, rude fellow", who does not properly fit into the frame of the very common journey of the another components in his surrounding circle. Nowhere throughout the film, the audience can feel any synthetically imposed cinematic ambience except some very illuminating and minutely crafted postures of Barun Babu, in the cam frame. What is projected here, is a sincere mediocrity life. A bed ridden wife, her complains regarding not preparing "fish with poshto" for Barun Babu and not taking proper care of him, that as a wife she used to do, a maid with all her common neutral and commercial postures, the sons, arguing over

the share of money spent for their parents' medicinal and allied expenditure, the heavy-hearted father who listens to them, the daughter in law, planning cheap gifts for him on his birthday, denying to gift him a Pashmina shawl as it is too expensive and instead buying low cost flowers to make a bouquet that "looks big", the son in law, who very oddly denies to visit him on his special day, making excuses of being too busy, a granddaughter, forcibly talking and wishing the birthday wish to an old man, whose nerves do not match her time and temperament, the elder son, discussing for reference and priorities with his friend for a promotion- all these do not essentially bring either a fragile or a loud filmy film to the screen, but assembled diaspora of life itself, which is ascended to the cult frame of cinematic craft. The central character, that of Barun Babu, incredibly rendered by none other than Soumitra Chatterjee, is not projected as a perfect one in spite of his obdurate honesty. Rather it is shown how sometimes his adamancy and stubborn attitude create trouble for the other members of his crew. He does not use a cell phone and does not means never. Flexibility, which is a necessary component of adjusting life to its changing frame and network is absent in Barun Babu's character to some extent, but simultaneously it does not malignantly effect the journey of the others, except making him aloof and alienated. He is such a controlled and self-restricted man that nothing sweet or bitter can create any superficially loud impact on him. Just stated in the scriptures of *Sri Mad Bhagavad Gita*, it is inbuilt in him to live a neutral type of life:

*"Yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehas tat prāpya śhubhāśhubham
nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā
pratiṣṭhitā"*

(One who remains unattached under all conditions and is neither delighted by good

fortune nor dejected by tribulation, he is a sage with perfect knowledge.)

(Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 2, Verse 57, Sankhya Yog).



But it can never be said that his love nerves are dried up, only thing is that he was rooted, not loud. After his wife's demise, the way he assembles the scattered packets of her daily dose of medicines, touches those as if he is touching his ailing wife's hands, folds her wheelchair, sits alone staring at the distant sky through the window, silently sheds tears in the condolence ceremony- all reflect his integrity and love towards his wife. His wife (Madhabi Mukherjee) too shared equal emotion as he does. In his birthday, she says to her grandson to tell his mother to offer kheer to the Kali temple and to be careful of not messing up the puja flowers with it, because Barun Babu did not have much trust in all these external customary affairs.

The entire film revolves round two central characters. One is the concrete protagonist-Barun Babu and the other is the one who is not physically present, but much awaited by the whole community, that is the friend of Barun Babu, "**Barun Babur Bondhu**". But who is this person, what is written in the letter carried by Sukumar, the only friend and regular visitor of Barun Babu (Paran Banerjee), the news of whose probable approach has changed the entire ambience and upgraded the status of Barun Babu from a neutrally accepted, outdated old man to a cherished figure overnight?



It is a very general ethic, we may say, just like a Chivas Regal effect, that when a person is very common, without any strong or influential connections or without any effective background, then his entity or common existence is generically regarded as insignificant or taken for granted one type. But if somehow, he or she possesses some power, influence or jaw dropping connections, they are praised, given importance and celebrated like a star. Barun Chakraborty, a retired teacher, a straight-from-the-shoulder political analyst and columnist, possesses that rare human trait, that is considered as a misfit in the contemporary social circle. He possesses formidable honesty, utter self-esteem, noncompromising attitude and to some extent and productive and irritating arrogance, for which he is somewhat avoided by his kith and kins, except until and unless, something unavoidable. But it is also true simultaneously, that internally everyone respects him. He can either be hated or loved, but not ignored. That strength of this character, created by the director and the original fictionist ("*Chhad*" by *Ramapada Chakrabarty*) and its cinematic charm, astoundingly rendered by Soumitra Chatterjee is what makes "Barun Babur Bondhu" an experience beyond a film. He was taken so ordinarily by everyone, but as soon as the news of that Big connection of this gentleman has spreaded, and his probable visit was scheduled on his forthcoming birthday, everyone became so drastically over concerned that now Barun Babu has started feeling irritated, because he knew it very well

that no one is unconditionally concerned. Anik Dutta's uniqueness lies in the fact that he can express the bitter truth, he wants to speak, through minutely projected free flowing satire and this film is no exception.

All the mortal elements in the familiar and extended circle, the petit bourgeois family members of this strictly anti propagandist octogenarian, start contouring their designs to avail some benefits from his big deal friend. The daughter in law, who once refused a pashmina shawl as gift on his birthday, showcases odd generosity now, in front of camera, by covering him with that expensive piece of cloth, no strings attached; requests from every curve is thrown towards him. If a son plans to use the influence for his promotion, the grandson wants a stunning job in a media house, if the daughter in law thinks to use the connection for her transfer, the colony grocer requests for a sports scholarship for his daughter, if a distant aunt requests him for a seat in engineering for her grandson, the maid speaks for an auto rickshaw permit. From big deals to the most trivial one, everyone gets ready with an agenda, except his youngest daughter in law and their son, the little grandson- Nemo. Barun Babu is quite aware of all these and so, as usual, neutral. Even on that marked day, when everyone and the ambience appears to be so excited, he has no such extra curiosity, but his love for his friend reflects here when he asks him over a call, "Do you have any diet restrictions?"

The man next door has clear political views, politics generated by honesty, fearless attitude, idealism, liberalism and with a tint of first line communism(as he replies to his friend Sukumar, when he said to Barun Babu's daughter in law that Punu's political career was first generated by Barun Babu only, that he has left no stone unturned to teach him communist literature of Immanuel Kant, Hegel and Marx to "Punu", but he understood

absolutely nothing). He says that we may leave politics, but politics does not leave us till the date we live. It is stated:

"One day, Barun babu wakes up to see a Pro-Government Op-ed in the newspaper, which praises a problematic policy, and writes an acerbic Letter-to-Editor in response. When a poet, who has turned into a Government stooge, comes visiting Barun Babu, making a thinly veiled offer to join them—'You'll be an asset to us,' he tells him—the way he asks him to leave is as acid-tongued. (A meta reference too, given Datta hasn't been in the good books of the West Bengal government, and that Chattopadhyay has been a lifelong CPM supporter). All of which earns the disapproval of his family members: his sons, their wives, their children, who think that Barun Babu could use some of his contacts, and they could benefit from it. The film begins with his 80th birthday and ends the morning after his 81st birthday, the two dates bookending a year of his life, during which the hypocrisies of the Bengali middleclass family is exposed" 1

His words to a group of young, enthusiastic students with keen interest in progressive politics have much catching up to do here, when he read a poem, written by a German priest, during Nazi regimen:

"... then they came to get me, then to protest on my behalf, there were no one".

That big connection, for whom all the arrangements were made so enthusiastically, could not turn up due to some political issues, and again the octogenarian's value was radically pulled down by rewarding him as "egoist, arrogant, stubborn" etc. But his son and his daughter once stated that at the time of 1970 emergency, Barun Babu had to go to jail for some political issues and at that time as a Minister, Punu did not help him and might be, Barun Babu, as a man of strong self-esteem could not forget this. It is depicted in the film

too, that how sometimes Barun Babu dreams of that incident that he is dragged away by some policeman and "Punu" is watching indifferently (camera captures the powerful friend's well-dressed back view). Simultaneously it is also a fact, that this thing did not interrupt their friendship. The whole visual establishes the value of commitment, loyalty and honesty. He was sent a government car by his "friend", but he refused to go, instead has sent a hand written letter that he has already committed a "we time" to another person, and he cannot break it anyway. Life moves on and so does the circle. Barun Babu remains as staunch as he always has been.

The surprisingly beautiful cinematography by Avik Mukhopadhyay is a major strength of the film. *"Barun Babur Bondhu, a film mostly shot indoors, verbose. Instead of silent actions or moods, dialogues create the situations and characters".2*

The camera frames capture the daily life, their chores, Barun Babu's lone face, specially his movements and activities in their room after his wife's demise, the color projection in black and white to suggest their then time with Suku and Punu, the wooden box of Royal ice cream with the seller with a dhoti, a British woman posing for photograph, the close shot of Barun Babu in various moods, the long shot of Nimo and Grandpa at the Princep Ghat at the coastal Ganga, the camera network rendering the chiaroscuro effect to intensify the pain of the old man- all these have elevated a common journey of a middle class family with its allied extension, to the status of a pure cinema. *"Barun Babur Bondhu"* creates an ambience, beyond a film.

The outstanding background score of the film created by the music director Debojyoti Mishra is a nexus DNA of the film, as if a fresh, fragranced drizzle of breeze amidst all the relationship crisis of the time.

The smooth, fine back score, sometimes a little partially merged with the melancholic tone of Rabindra Sangeet pays off ultimate grace to the course. The film consists of the plain rendition of Rabindra Sangeet by Bidipta Chakrabarty.

The entire cast of the film is a perfect right fit for its visual eloquence. The veteran Paran Bandopadhyay, Koushik Sen, Ritwik Chakraborty, Arpita Pal Chatterjee, Sreelekha Mitra, Madhabi Mukhopadhyay, Samantak Maitra (child artist as Nemo)- all are stars in their own accord. When Paran Bandopadhyay's effortless body language and free flowing dialogue delivery exposes the weakness and follies of Barun Babu, Nemo's character is projected as the voice of conscience. These are the two people with whom Barun Babu talks from his core. Ritwik Chakravarty's incautious mien perfectly complements the character of Barun babu's younger son, Paramartha, who is often mocked as a feeble one. Likewise, Kaushik Sen's polished physiognomy suits his character who is nonchalant about his father. Arpita Pal Chatterjee plays the decency to project the honesty of her role as the younger daughter in law of Barun Babu and mother to

emo, whose love and innocent obligation towards his grandparents seems to flow genetically from her mother's good nature. All these characters are depicted in a curated cinematic circle, but simultaneously, somewhere, introduction of so many characters might function as a spoiler for the common audience.

An Anik Dutta venture and a Soumitra Chatterjee film, introduced as "*Anik Dutta's different film*"- *Barun Babur Bondhu* is different from the director's other films as *Bhooter Bhabishyat*, *Aasshorjyo Pradeep*, *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo* etc. in its theme and treatment, but what is common in all his films is, he is never preachy. *Barun Babur Bondhu* is a pragmatic projection of ubiquitous mediocrity, no loud emotional drama, no imposed attitude to frame any character as "great" or "perfect", or not any trending, spicy success components have been rendered anywhere. In a phrase, it's a gentleman's film, and after watching it, the audience is sure to offer a sincere ovation to the entire charisma of the course, specially to the incredible benediction, the "tall man" of Bengali cinema- Soumitra Chatterjee.

References:

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