

**Blowing the Trumpet of Feminism: Raj Kapoor's Ram Teri
Ganga Maili (1985)**

By

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Abstract: The research article titled “Blowing the Trumpet of Feminism: Raj Kapoor’s *Ram Teri Ganga Maili (1985)*” attempts to bring to the fore the feminist elements in the epoch making movie of Raj Kapoor that made its mark as a revolutionary item in the respect of both its plot and dialogues. The luminous saga of love, struggle, and the family reunion is thrilling in nature. The female protagonist, namely, Ganga’s radiant character and her magnificent display of self-respect is amazing in the history of Bollywood cinema. By way of bringing under question the patriarchal structure, double standard of the so called affluent class, political vanity, sexuality and cultural rendezvous, the article finally proves that the stateliness of a pure woman reigns supreme despite numerous impediments on the way.

Key words: Philosophy, prostitution, male dominion, antagonist

“**Sita:** Oh, my loved husband! Ah deceived

By evil dreams I call on him. How! gone!

Left me alone! Asleep! Well, well;

I will be very angry with thee, Rama.

I will be henceforth be mistress of myself;

Suppress my foolish fondness, and will learn

Henceforth to chide thee. Who attends? How now!”

(Bhavabhuti’s *Uttara-Rama-Charita*, First Act, 311)

"For when we imagine a 'woman' and a 'keyhole', it is usually a woman

on the other side of the keyhole, as the proverbial object of the look, that comes to mind but rather asking ... what happens when women are situated in both sides of the keyhole. The question is not only who or what is on either side of the keyhole, but also what lies between them, what constitutes the threshold that makes representation possible"(Judith Mayne 9).

Nobody had thought that the very script that found its cinematic expression in the directorship of time tested actor Raj Kapoor would prove to be a super hit thanks to its avant-garde plot, art of characterization, magnificent music, lyrics, and daring dialogue delivery. Yes, it was *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* that gave a new height to Hindi cinema. It was not merely a cinema, rather it was a philosophy of life; an audacious expedition of self exploration, self assertion and ultimately, self gratification. Since cinema is a form of literature that gives voice to the social way of life, convention, and moral paradigm, the movie under study proves itself to be a vehicle of the viable ideas. Life runs as it flows like the holy rivers going to meet their end. The movie takes its recourse in a simply lucid style; however it reacts against the hollowness of social morality that bears two faces throughout-- one that is sober and sound in a public planet and another that is crude and ugly in personal place.

The plot locates its setting in the culturally strong city of Calcutta (now Kolkata) where two families tie a knot to address their political interests. Jeeva Babu and Bhagwat Choudhary were the two pillars of the two families. The simply pure at heart son of Jeeva Babu, Narendra, is after a way of life that is natural, lively and far from the maddening crowd. He is, in the company of his friends, willing to go to Gangotri, the origin of the holy river Ganges. His father is a little reluctant to let him go. At the initiation of his grandmother Narendra got opportunity to go to the blessed land. On the way he comes to meet a glamorously pretty woman named Ganga, an embodiment of lustre and glamorous disposition. A poor girl, however, Ganga, a lady of fine heart attracts the simplistic youth of Narendra. She saves the life of Narendra and develops intimacy with him. Her romantic temperament is obvious when she at one place says to Narendra, "*Dil pahad thodi na hai jahan se awaaz takrakar wapas laut aaye ... dil ki awaaz toh dil se takratee hai ... phir wahi bas jaati hai* (A heart is not a mountain from where a sound reflects; the sound of heart reflects with a heart and then gets united with that)". Their love flourishes and as destiny would have it they were tied with the nuptial knot in a local *swayamvar*. Here the *swayamvar* tradition is emblematic of the respect that the society has for the women in the selection of their would-be -husband at their sweet will. However Narendra returns to Calcutta with the

promise of getting back to Gangotri with a view to carrying Ganga with him. When Narendra reaches his city and when his family was informed regarding his unification with Ganga the whole family was under shock. Narendra was restricted to go to Gangotri to meet Ganga. On the other hand Ganga gives birth to a baby boy and was willing to go to Alipore, Calcutta, the residence of Narendra. She moves for Calcutta but unfortunately was taken to the *kotha* of Tajeshwaribai in Benaras. When Ganga shows her unwillingness to live there, Tajeshwaribai asserts the patriarchal way of the world with its perverted mindset against women, “*aurat shauk se nahi thokar khakar kotha pe aati hai. kotha se ek seedhi utrogi to chakla milega. janti ho chakla kya hota hai, jahan aurat ke badan ki rui se bhi badtar dhunai ki jaati hai. shayad is bachche ke baap ka pata hoga tujhe par wahan kiske beej se kya janegi.. wah to swayam Bhagwan bhi nahi bata sakta* (A woman comes to a *kotha* not with her aspiration, rather because of sufferings. If you go one step below you will find a *chakla*. If you know what a *chakla* is! It is where a woman’s body is fully crushed. Probably you know the father of this child but the child that you will bear there even God would not be able to tell her/his father’s name.)” She further says aggressively, “*har choukhat pe baitha insaan tujhe nochne daudega. yah jagah bas naam se badnam hai, yahan paap nahi hota, yahan tan ka vyapaar nahi hota* (A chap sitting at every step would like to smidgen you. This place has got a bad name only, here nothing wrongful happens, and there is no business of body as well.)” The message that Tajeshwaribai, the chief of the *kotha* wants to convey is that women are being treated as a thing of pleasure and that a single woman without a male authority can easily fall prey to male lust.

Later on she comes to meet Bhagwat Chowdhary who happens to be a social activist and politician in public image whereas in reality he is a lecherous and perverted man who is all ready to contaminate humanity as well as the chastity of a woman. See the following give and take of words:

Bhagwat Chowdhary: “*Manilal iski nath utar chuki hai*” (Manilal, has her chastity been ravished?)

Maniram: “*Ek bachche ki maa hai Sarkar*” (A mother of a child she is! Lord.)

Bhagwat Chowdhary: “*Randi ki aulaad ke mathe par baap ka naam nahi likha hota*” (No name is carved on the temple of a prostitute’s offspring.)

Ganga: “*Yun to kisi ke mathe par uske baap ka naam nahi likha hota*” (There is no name written on the forehead of any person still.)

Chamanlal: “*Haraamjaadi kahna chahti hai ki hum sab randion ki aulaad hain. Hum teri tarah paap ki gathri lekar baajaaron mein nahi ghoomte*” (You whore! if you want to say that we are the progeny of prostitutes? We, like you, don’t roam about in markets carrying sinful bundles.)

Ganga: “*Par bazaar mein baithte to hain sahib*” (But you all sit in the same *bazaar*, Sahib.)

This incident brings the daring peculiarity of Ganga’s personality who is well conscious of her gravity as well as that of her son. She could not bear with male dominion. She quite convincingly raises the issue of prostitution in which so called respectful people are involved; the very profession that flourishes at the behest of the socially strong and monetarily robust people who propagate moral standards for their wives but are involved in deriving pleasures in the rapturous arms of courtesans and other women. Sumita S. Chakravarty observes, “Apart from the dramatic potentialities and voyeuristic elements of these scenarios of libidinal excess, these scenes reinforce the sense of female vulnerability in the face of male power and aggression”(Chakravarty 273). Bhagwat Chowdhary takes Ganga to Calcutta as a keep by paying huge sum to Tajeshwaribai. One day when Bhagwat comes in the company of his friend Jeeva to meet Ganga, she was feeding her child with milk. When she tried to hide her breast with saree Bhagwat says, “*rahne do rahne do ye sab kab tak chhupati phirogi, aaj nahi to kal ye sab dikhana he padega*” (It’s ok, for how many days will you hide it? Ultimately you have to show me all, if not today, then tomorrow), she flamboyantly says, “*apni maa ka doodh peete bhi apne aisa he socha tha*” (Did you have the same feel while feeding yourself with your mother’s milk?). Further being so upset with her life she curses Maniram the pimp quite aggressively, “*Tajeshwaribai to kahti thi hamare yahan tan ka vyapar nahi hota phir kiska man rakhne ke lie mujhe bech diya... apne bete ki kasam khake kahti hoon ki jab tumhe dekhti hoon to mere man se ek hai nikalti hai ...aurat ki hai to lohe ko bhasam kar deti hai phir tum to ek insaan ho...darti hoon kahi meri hai tumhe na lag jaye*” (Tajeshwaribai used to say that there was no business of body there, then for whose sake did she put up me for sale? Swearing in the name of my son I affirm that whenever I come face to face with you, a sigh of annoyance comes out of me... curse of a woman is powerful enough to devastate even steel and you are an ordinary man... I am afraid my curse might not prove fatal for you). Here Ganga emerges as a *Sati* who is infuriated at the ill actions of Maniram in duping her to the oldest ever profession; however she is full of sympathy for the elderly Manilal. After having shifted to Calcutta one day she comes to meet

Kunj Bihari, the uncle of Narendra who manages the get-together of duo lovers. On the very wedding ceremony of Narendra and Radha, Ganga pays her visit to the site as a singer cum dancer at the behest of Kunj. Narendra, the lovelorn *Majnu* could not miss his mark in recognizing Ganga whom he loved beyond limit after listening to the heart-rending song, “*ek Radha ek Meera dono ne Shyam ko chaha*”. After a little brawl they unite and set on to make their love nest in the lap of nature, a place where the holy Ganges meets the Sea of Human Faith -- Gangasagar.

The story of the movie unfurls many layers of individual consciousness. On one hand it talks about the simple love story of two lovers who ultimately as a part of *sukhant nataka* (Happy ending play) meets together despite the ill efforts of the antagonists but on deeper level it unfolds the psychosomatic state of affairs of an unfortunate woman who was left forsaken by her beloved; whose brother was no more to take care of her. Ganga, though suffered a great deal, yet did not lose heart. She remained forceful, lovely, sweet, sanguine and sober in all circumstances. Her buoyant temper gives voice to her far-sighted state of mind that does not lose tranquillity even at hard times. It is well said that “the film displays all the status-quo-affirming warts characteristic of Kapoor’s work (and indeed of much of mainstream Hindi cinema): the ultimate reduction of social conflict to family squabbles that can be resolved through “love” and “faith,” and the combination of enlightened messages about women’s agency and honor with the relentless display of their bodies and the stereotyping of their social roles within an unquestioned patriarchal matrix”(<http://www.uiowa.edu/indiancinema/ram-teri-ganga-maili>). As a conclusion it can be said that the movie reflects the dynamics of feminism in its making to the hilt. It is Kapoor’s brilliant effort to propagate female sexuality in a spiritual tone. Ganga’s dashing display of her sexuality in a few scenes shows her consolidated sense of individuality. Choosing a life partner in a public ceremony by Ganga reflects the empowered status of women of the then times. Ganga’s deep faith in the theory of *Karma* and her ability to save her gravity from the clutches of male authority is symptomatic of a new social order that women were to find in new era. The grand finale of the movie develops a sense of trust in the Law of Almighty that takes care of even the poorest of the poor and gives reward to them as and when desperately desired.

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