

Reimagining Fredric Jameson: The Subject of Historicizing the History in *Gumnaami*, a Film by Srijit Mukherjee

Dr. Faroze Ahmad Chopan¹, Dr. Paromita Nandy², Rishiraj Ghosh³

^{1,2}Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Peters Engineering College Hyderabad

³Research Scholar, Department of English, St. Peters Engineering College Hyderabad

ABSTRACT

Weakening of historicity remains a big problem of the late 20th century and Fredric Jameson identifies this as a symptom of the postmodern era. Jameson, a critic of Marx, suggests us to historicise our history that, according to him will enable us to overcome this situation. Taking this Jamesonian theory as a cue, the present paper aims to analyze critically a Tollywood film named *Gumnaami*(2019), directed by an award winning film-maker Srijit Mukherjee, and after an in-depth analysis of the depicted historical events in the above-mentioned movie this study will unfold how through his directorial skill Mukherjee historicises the history of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's mysterious death on the silver screen and by doing so how he redefines Jameson through this movie in the context of the Postmodern art(considering film as a form of art).

Key Words: Historicity, Historicise, Postmodern, Film

INTRODUCTION

Lexically, the word historicity denotes historical authenticity. Contextualizing to the condition of the Postmodern(i.e. Postmodernity)Marxist critic and theorist Fredric Jameson in his seminal text *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism*(1993) identifies the issue of historicity as one of the major features of the era. While theorizing the very movement of the late 20th century Jameson not only critiques the age of the Postmodern but also analyses the root cause behind the problem concerning to the historical authenticity. As Postmodernism rejects our conventional forms of understanding(here, we are considering history as a form of understanding), therefore, Jameson being a child of the Postmodern rightly points out our tendency of questioning the Truth as the main reason behind the creation of this problematic situation. Interestingly, in the context of art, such as film, Jameson observes this very state of the age and expressed his wanes about it(i.e. our historicity). Thus, being a theorist of the Postmodern Age Jameson emphasizes on historicising our Past, in order to get rid of this difficult situation, related to the enfeeble state of our historicity. In this way, Jameson turns as an interpreter of the very movement called Postmodernism who not only observes the debilitating condition of the era but also suggests a rational way out to overcome that particular situation of the age. Taking a cue from this theoretical observation of Fredric Jameson this paper attempts to study a Tollywood film, considering film as a form of art named *Gumnaami*(2019) in Bengali language directed by a National Award-winning film-maker Srijit Mukherjee(1977-at present) where he endeavours to trace the history of the mysterious death of our great freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose through detailing out the significant events of Bose's life in a chronological order which not only provides rationality to our understanding about the death-history of Netaji but also bears immense significance in solving of the problem related to historicity in relation to art. The celluloid depiction of the factuality of Bose's so-called debated death based on the hearings of The Mukherjee Commission, from 1999 to 2005, therefore, marks Srijit, the director as a postmodern chronicler, considering film-making as narrating the events in sequential manner who in order to bring authenticity to the death-history of Bose historicises the history of Netaji's eventful life in a logical order that not only makes Mukherjee a re-definer of Fredric Jameson but also shapes the movie *Gumnaami* as a postmodern text, considering film as text.

Identifying the existing three theories(first, the official theory, he died in a plane crash in 18th August, 1945 at Matsuyama Aerodrome in Taihoku; second, he staged his plane crash and escaped to Russia where he was killed in prison; and third, he staged his plane crash, escaped to Russia, came back to India as a monk and passed away in 16th September 1985 at Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh)about the death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, the director dramatises the proceedings of the Mukherjee Commission, formed in 1999 in order to investigate all the three

theories mentioned above. It is noteworthy that after having a review of literature extensively related to the three existing theories, Mukherjee, the film-maker, takes the book of Anuj Dhar titled *India's Biggest Cover Up* and also the book written by Chandrachur Ghose and Anuj Dhar's *Conundrum* as an inspiration to cinematise the historical facts concerning to Bose's mysterious death. From the film we come to know that Srijit has logically set up the significant events in a chronological order related to Netaji's life with reference to his death-mystery keeping a consistent link with the Mukherjee Commission Hearings in 2005. Thus, in order to strengthen the argument in relation to the documentation of history, the timeline of Subhash Chandra Bose's significant life-events can be divided into three specific phases- 1939-1945 as the first phase, 1945-1955 as the second phase and 1955-1985 as the third phase. From 1939 to 1945, this time-frame, details Subhash Chandra Bose's, played by Prosenjit Chatterjee, meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, portrayed by Surendra Rajan, and Jawaharlal Nehru's role played by Sanjay Gurbaxani in Congress Headquarters, Delhi in 1939, and due to the ideological clash between Nehru and Gandhiji, Bose resigns from the Indian National Congress and finally, this eventful period ends in screening the much-debated Matsuyama Aerodrome in Taihoku in 18th August 1945 by Srijit Mukherjee. Similarly, from 1945 to 1955, this particular time-span, cinematically represents Netaji's staging of the death in plane crash dated the 16th August 1945 (two days before the plane crash) and ends in 1955 Netaji's coming back to India via Nepal and staying in Alambagh, Lucknow as a sanyasi after having a short visit to Russia, China and Tibet. Likewise, from 1955 to 1985, this particular period, bears immense significance in relation to filming the history of the Bose's disappearance as the instance of an optical shop in Kesarbagh, Lucknow in 1955 where the Gumnaami Baba gets identified as Netaji by the commoners, and most importantly, after a series of happenings during this time span in 18th September 1985 in Guptar Ghat, Faizabad, Lucknow the body of Gumnaami Baba gets cremated in the presence of only thirteen people. Srijit's directorial skilfulness gets reflected in the film as he keeps the above-mentioned timeline in flash back and places the particular time-span from 2003 to 2005 at the centre where Chandrachur Dhar (a fictitious character blending the name of Chandrachur Ghose and the surname of Anuj Dhar, acted by Anirban Bhattacharya), a journalist and the founder-member of *Mission Netaji*, a voluntary fact-finding organisation dedicated to the cause of solving the mysteries of Netaji's disappearance and death, argumentatively tries to unveil the mysteries of Netaji's disappearance after having a rigorous research on Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose since 2003, and in 2005 he endeavours to reveal as well as establish his third theory concerning to Netaji's disappearance in front of the third commission set up by the Government in 1999, i.e. the Mukherjee Commission where he endeavours to prove Gumnaami Baba as the Netaji with proper facts and figures as well as witnesses, and logically tries to undermine the previous theories vis-à-vis hearings about Netaji's death given by the Shahnawaz Committee and the Khosla Commission that takes place in 1956 and 1970 respectively.

For the sake of argument, the above-identified three phases of one of the leading pioneers of our freedom struggle Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (deriving from the cinematized story by Srijit Mukherjee) can therefore be denoted as in three different terminologies- the first phase as the *dominant* (means powerful or influential) phase because in this period Bose stands as a powerful figure in Indian politics and his resigning from the Indian Nation Congress becomes an example of immense straightforwardness, self-confidence and selflessness; the second phase as *emergent* (means the process of coming into being or emerging) because in this phase Bose's emergence as Netaji and staging the death in plane crash in order to deceive the British government, bears an exemplary instance of his intelligence, courage and patriotism; and the third or the last phase as *residual* (means the remaining part) because in this phase Netaji (according to the storyline of the movie), arguably, as Gumnaami Baba engages in spiritual practices like yoga and tantra, turns him into a man of contemplation, perseverance and calmness. Thus, with reference to these three phases of Netaji's life Mukherjee's (the director of the film) rational as well as purposeful outlook in narrating the events of history with factual details (from 1939 to 1985) in a chronological manner can clearly be observed where the voice of Chandrachur Dhar becomes the voice of the age itself, (i.e. the Postmodern Age) and his doubts vis-à-vis questions about the Truth behind the traditional understanding of history (here, traditional understanding refers to an understanding which remains unchanged throughout the ages) is nothing but his inquisitiveness about the very history of Netaji's disappearance and death which he himself clears by detailing the events of history without dismembering any historical facts from the entire body of history.

Mukherjee's uniqueness in narrating the story has clearly been observed as the text *Gumnaami* not just shows its departure from the traditional forms, for example history as form of understanding and questions the Truth, which itself is a trait of the age called Postmodern, but his, the film-maker's mastery, over the technique of narration solves the puzzle of all the questions related to history of Netaji's disappearance and death. Here lies the significance of this study where a clear indication of the Jameson's theory vis-à-vis the understanding of historical authenticity is observed, and as the film specifies the historical events and details it out with the help of well-researched facts and figures, in a chronological manner, gives us a clear view about the director's endeavour to complete the process of making an improvement to the weakened state of our historicity (in relation to art). In this context, arguably, it can be said that Srijit's skilfulness in writing the screenplay, i.e. the script of the film gives us a clear-cut indication that he does not want to become the sole-generator. Jameson defines postmodernism as an era of *late capitalism* where we cannot have an obvious idea of *centre*, and in this context the *centre* refers to the uniqueness of the narrative technique of the film-maker in order to make the story thought-provoking for the

audience, of meaning from the text(i.e. the film), and thus, he opens a space for a dialogue between the organised historical events(for the sake of argumentation the *organised historical events* personifying as a character in *Gumnaami*) of Bose's life and the audience of the movie in order to provide a scope to the audience to generate new meaning from the text (i.e. the film) itself which undeniably makes this movie a product of the late 20th Century. To conclude, it can be said that in making the film *Gumnaami* the director Srijit Mukherjee, purposefully historicises the history(here, *historicising the history* means not just taking an idea of the historical events but to make an in-depth analysis of the those chronological events in order to dig out the reason behind the confusing state of our historicity and to explore possible solution of this problem, and of course, with a rational viewpoint and Srijit does the same in this film) instead of revisiting the history(here, *revisiting the history* means just merely taking a glance or an idea of the past events) of Netaji's death and by doing so he not only redefines the Jamesonian theory of Postmodernism (in the context of art) but also marks *Gumnaami* as Postmodern film.

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