

## AND QUIET ROLLS THE DAWN

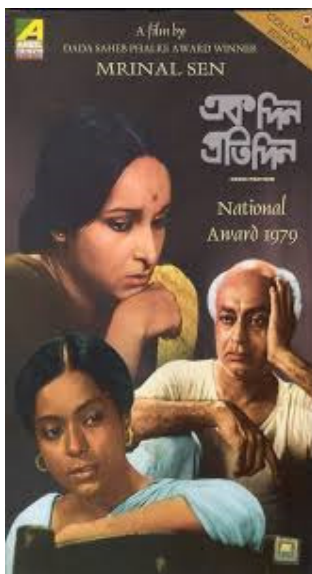
### Bauddhayan Mukherji

Ma generally returned home by 7.30 pm.

I would stand at the balcony of our north Calcutta house and see a tired figure trudging wearily, coming home from school. Her pace would be slow... much slower than her frantic mornings.

That evening ma did not keep her date with 7.30. As the clock struck 9.00, the 12-year-old me started getting worried. I would come back to my room, try to study in vain and would run to the door at every doorbell that rang but it was never her.

Baba was getting worried as well. I called up ma's school from our landline but the phone went on ringing. Standing at the balcony I could see our Gouri Bari Lane slowly slipping into slumber. Shops were shutting down; life was calling it a day but ma did not take her usual walk back home. And strangely enough amidst what I was going through, I remembered Mrinal Sen. And a film, which for me would become a completely different piece of art over that night.



*Ekdin Pratidin* (And Quiet Rolls the Dawn).

Based on Amalendu Chakraborty's novel by the same name, this film was made in 1979 and had an impressive festival run ranging from Cannes to New York. It even won three National Awards in India. The story goes like this – in a lower middle-class household a young woman, Chinu (played by Mamata Shankar) who is also the bread winner of the family does not return home one night. What follows is a night of speculations, anxiety and insinuation. The story revolves around Chinu's family and that endless night. While her brother visits the



morgue and the judgemental whispers echo in that crumbling house, the lady returns the next morning... a car drops her home. What is remarkable is that Mr. Sen shed no light on what actually happened to her that night. He left it to our interpretation, to our own curiosity.



A scene from *Ekdin Pratidin* (1979)

The film came alive that night for me. And possibly shaped my love for open ended stories.

We love to be spoon fed. 'Show and Tell' is our mantra.

As an audience, we love to be told what happened at the end. We love to see stories that end conclusively. And all of these primarily stem from the fact that we look at film as entertainment. And in our search to be entertained it would have been a sacrilege if one expected us to exercise our grey cells.

My brush with this brazen side of Indian audience came during the question answer sessions of *Teenkahon*, my debut feature. Post its world premiere at Kosovo, *Teenkahon* was primarily screened in film festivals abroad and the questions (from the foreign audience) were what I expected them to be. But that was not the case when the film got exposed to Indian audiences across the globe. Most of the questions were around the second story (*Teenkahon* was a triptych) which had an open ending. And Indians were baffled. They could not reconcile with the fact that the filmmaker had not shown a definite resolution (the proverbial 'happy ending'). I was grilled, I was asked what I had in mind but never did people come up with their own interpretation. Laziness? Inability to think? Not really. Over years of being exposed to stories (*Jataka*, *Upanishad*, *Ramayan* & *The Mahabharata*) which have moralistic and conclusive endings and years of being exposed to 'happy endings' in films majority of us have lost our sense of interpretation and rarely have we given a shot at our own inferences. We, the filmmakers, are to be blamed for this as well. We have not created our audience the way we should have... instead we have catered to market forces and to the perception of what the common man will accept.





A scene from *Ekdin Pratidin* (1979)

There was uproar when *Ekdin Pratidin* released in Kolkata. Mrinal Sen would be mobbed by cine-goers who would demand to know what happened to Chinu that night. Mr. Sen, in an interview had said, people would not accept his humble submission that he did not know what happened to her. Audience would go berserk. 'You HAVE to tell us' – people screamed at him, they HAD to know. At times he was even gheraoed and had to run for cover. So much for an open-ended story...

Is it necessary for filmmakers to have answers? Is it important for a filmmaker to conclude his/her film? Do films really get concluded? Ever? Or is an open-ended film a mere attempt by the filmmaker to involve his/her audience in his storytelling? Is it more inclusive? Is it a revolt against the practice of taking sides? Is it an effort to include greys in our storytelling moving away from the proverbial black and white?

Through the night I had drawn up a list of hospitals to visit, ma's colleagues to knock on and a list police stations to enquire about any road accidents. I had barely left home early morning and was walking towards Khanna cinema when I saw ma at a distance. She had an apologetic smile on her face. I had mixed feelings seeing her - a sense of relief mixed with an overwhelming anger of putting us through this.

I did not even ask where she was. I did not want to know. She was back and nothing else was more important to me. In fact, I quite enjoyed that incredible night of anxiety and helplessness and regaled in that night of how a film took a completely different meaning under the circumstances.

C'est la vie. C'est le cinéma.

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Popularly called ‘Buddy’ in the Indian advertising world, Bauddhayan Mukherji runs his own production house *Little Lamb Films* which he founded in 2007 with wife Monalisa. Bauddhayan directed an advertising film for *Bell Bajao* campaign launched to raise awareness about domestic violence in India; the film won the prestigious Silver Lion at Cannes (2010). Maiden Indian winner of two back-to-back awards at New York and Spikes Asia Golds at Singapore, he went on to win another Silver Lion at Cannes Health (2015). Bauddhayan ventured into feature films in 2013 and has since directed two internationally acclaimed Indies produced by *Little Lamb Films* – *Teenkahon* (2014, Bengali) & *The Violin Player* (2016, Hindi). Both films had wide international film festival screenings. Winner of the *Aravindan Puraskaram* for the Best Debutant Director (2015) for *Teenkahon*, and the Best Feature film at Durban IFF for ‘*The Violin Player*’ (2016), Bauddhayan is prepping for his film ‘*Marichjhapi*’ which was part of the L’Atelier, Cannes Film Festival, 2020.

