

MONALI CHATTERJEE

A KALEIDOSCOPE OF MULTISENSORY PERCEPTIONS IN THE FILMS OF BUDDHADEB DASGUPTA

1. INTRODUCTION

Films offer a powerful stimulation of a host of multisensory perceptions by forging creative semblances to the real world. It can seamlessly appeal to the senses beyond the visual, particularly after sound was added in the late 1920s. It can emulate an alternative reality by presenting a multi-sensual experience to the audience. Through his realistic Indian cinema, the renowned filmmaker Buddhadeb Dasgupta has aced this feat with considerable finesse. The portrayal of his multisensory poetry on celluloid stems from the inimitability of its sensory depiction. This research endeavours to analyse the multisensory perceptions in some of the selected films of Buddhadeb Dasgupta that scrutinize the prevalent cultural codes and set examples for individuals to follow in terms of the individual, social as well as environmental responsibility.

1.1 CINEMA OF SENSATION

Before the invention of films, sight and sound could evoke the sensations of touch, taste, and smell, as well as a range of other sensations, such as volume, weight, space, motion, temperature, balance and dimension. Filmmakers have explored these potentials since the inception of filmmaking, yet the cognitive and sensory aptitudes of cinema have assumed the centre stage only in the last few decades. The extensive appeal of films

MONALI CHATTERJEE, Assistant Professor at the Gujarat Arts and Science College, Ahmedabad, India; e-mail: monalichatterjee3@yahoo.co.in; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7993-090X>.

to the senses helps the spectators to engage with the depiction of the films physically, intellectually and emotionally and this has been deftly used by renowned Indian film directors like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Tapan Sinha, Shyam Benegal, Rituparno Ghosh, Buddhadeb Dasgupta and Goutam Ghose.

1.2 BUDDHADEB DASGUPTA

Buddhadeb Dasgupta (1944–2021) grew up in a liberal, middle-class, educated Bengali family. His profound sensibility was honed by Gandhian and Marxist values in philosophy and Brahmo music since his early childhood. He published several volumes of poetry, which won him immediate recognition and reputation. He quit his job as a lecturer of economics to pursue a career in filmmaking.

Dasgupta's films became the most significant contributions after those of Satyajit Ray in the landscape of Indian parallel cinema. His corpus of films includes eighteen feature films, several films for television, and documentaries. *Dooratwa (The Distance)*, 1978), *Neem Annapurna (Bitter Morsel)*, 1979), *Grihajuddha (Crossroads)*, 1981), *Andhi Gali (Blind Alley)*, 1984), *Phera (The Return)*, 1986), *Bagh Bahadur (The Tiger Man)*, 1989), *Tahader Katha (Their Story)*, 1992), *Charachar (The Shelter of the Wings)*, 1993), *Lal Darja (The Red Road)*, 1996), *Uttara (The Wrestlers)*, 2000), *Mondo Meyer Upakhyan (A Tale of a Naughty Girl)*, 2002), *Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa (The Sniffer)*, 2013), *Tope (The Bait)*, 2016), *Uro Jajaj (The Flight)*, 2018), among others, are his notable feature films.¹ Most of his films garnered high acclaim from scholars and critics, in many film festivals worldwide, and won several national and international accolades like the National Film Award for Best Feature Film, Best ASEAN Film Award (for *Mondo Meyer Upakhyan*) and Netpac Award (for *Uttara*).²

The poetic realism of his narration evinces subtle political anxiety and disillusionment and conflicts of individuals pitted against elements that are beyond their power as they encounter the unexpected consequences of their actions and realize the bitter realities of life that equip them for yet another journey. Dasgupta's films like *Tahader Katha* (1992), *Grihajuddha* (1982), *Bagh Bahadur* (1989), *Charachar* (1993), *Tope* and *Uro Jahaj* convey thought-

¹ Premendra MAZUMDER, "Buddhadeb Dasgupta," FIPRESCI: The International Federation of Film Critics, 2021, <https://fipresci.org/news/buddhadeb-dasgupta-1944-2021>.

² "Buddhadev Dasgupta: Awards," IMDb, 2022, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0201949/awards>.

provoking and acerbic messages through their sensory appeal by depicting the bleakest secrets of the human mind and the integral aspects of human nature.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cognitive film theory was established in the 1990s, arguably as an antithesis to the poststructuralist, Marxist, psychoanalytic and semiotic screen tradition.³ The critic Laura Marks points out, “It was Lessing who defined aesthetics as the connection between the arts and the senses—but only the higher senses of vision and hearing.”⁴ According to Luis Rocha Antunes, the medium of film is audiovisual, but the experience becomes multisensory. It is the *experience* of film that is inherently multisensory and not the medium. He further elaborates, “A multisensory experience is the natural and common way for all of us to perceptually experience film instead of a mere synaesthetic, exceptional capacity to make high-order, intellectual and phenomenal associations among ideas of a multisensory nature.”⁵

Based on new scientific experiments, several philosophical works about the senses have been published, including Mohan Matthen’s *Seeing, Doing, and Knowing: A Philosophical Theory of Sense Perception* (2007), Casey O’Callaghan’s *Sounds: A Philosophical Theory* (2010), Susanna Siegel’s *The Contents of Visual Experience* (2011), and Fiona Macpherson’s anthology *The Senses: Classic and Contemporary Philosophical Readings* (2011). These works of research are largely based on empirical studies probing several aspects

including the number and individuation of human senses; the nature of perceptual experience; the representational character of perceptual objects; the mechanisms that underlie sensation in the brain and body; and the links between perception, cognition, and sensory imagining. Advances of such a significant nature must inevitably affect how we conceptualize art and our interactions with artworks—as both creators and consumers.⁶

³ David BORDWELL, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

⁴ Laura U. MARKS, “Thinking Multisensory Culture,” *Paragraph* 31, no. 2 (2008): 123–37, <https://doi.org/10.3366/E0264833408000151>.

⁵ Luis Rocha ANTUNES, *The Multisensory Film Experience: A Cognitive Model of Experiential Film Aesthetics* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016), 4.

⁶ Cynthia FREELAND, “Aesthetics and the Senses: Introduction,” *Essays in Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (2012): 399, <https://doi.org/10.7710/1526-0569.1427>.

This applies to both the filmmakers and their audience. Freeland further notes: “Film studies is generally restricted to the role of sound and sight, but Antunes notes there is an emerging *cinema of the senses* which pays broader attention to other sensory systems,” like the “cinema of walking”.⁷

1.4 AIM OF THE RESEARCH / RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to Martine Beugnet, the cinema of sensation “unsettles narrative and visual perception and calls into question the distanced, objective apprehension of the film world, encourages a different kind of viewing, one that engages with the materiality of the works, with film as an event in itself.”⁸ This paper explores how this is achieved in Dasgupta’s films and what purpose it fulfils by this medium.

Secondly, the paper aims to show how and by what means Dasputa draws the viewer inside his story. This is achieved through this research by analysing how film characters’ fantasies, relationships and crises impact the viewer’s senses.

Thirdly, the paper attempts to analyse the multisensory film aesthetics that question the cultural codes and set exemplary models of individual, social as well as environmental responsibility through its unique portrayal of multisensory experiences. This experiential perception of these films creates an alternative reality with the help of the stylistic aspects of narration.

Lastly, this paper also attempts to find out what purpose is served by this multisensory appeal and how it has opened new avenues and genres in the discipline of film-making.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Due to the sheer abundance of sensory cues experienced while watching Dasgupta’s films, it is difficult to associate a film with a single sensory experience.

For this research, some films by Buddhadeb Dasgupta that deploy multisensory film aesthetics were selected. The qualitative research conducts a content analysis of how the fantasies of the films’ characters, their relation-

⁷ FREELAND, 403.

⁸ Martine BEUGNET, “Cinema and Sensation: Contemporary French Film and Cinematic Corporeality,” *Paragraph* 31, no. 2 (2008): 173–88, <https://doi.org/10.3366/E0264833408000187>.

ships and crises impact the viewer's senses. The unit of analysis is focused on the intended cues of sensory perception present in the whole film. For the analysis, only the scenes or aspects that project sensory appeals have been selected and discussed at length.

His films, therefore, can be categorized into three broad areas by combining multi-sensual cues, thematic developments and cinematography. For this research, ten films in Bengali and one film in Hindi have been selected. The criterion of selection is based on the films' projected maximum instances of multisensory appeal.

3. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

To facilitate a better understanding, the analysis of the films is structured as below:

Category	Feature	Films
Multi-sensuality through fantasy	Individuals try to achieve their desires through fantasy	<i>Tope (The Bait, 2016)</i>
		<i>Uro Jahaj (The Flight, 2020)</i>
		<i>Swapner Din (Chased by Dreams, 2004)</i>
		<i>Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa (Sniffer, 2013)</i>
Multi-sensuality in relationships	Experiencing the intricacies of a relationship through various senses	<i>Grihajuddha (Crossroads, 1981)</i>
		<i>Lal Darja (The Red Door, 1997)</i>
		<i>Kaalpurush (Memories in the Mist, 2008)</i>
Multi-sensuality in impending crises	Addressing pressing concerns of sustenance of various resources (ecological), practices (folk-art) and individual rights (privacy)	<i>Charachar (Shelter of the Wings, 1993)</i>
		<i>Uttara (The Wrestlers, 2000)</i>
		<i>Bagh Bahadur (The Tiger Man, 1989)</i>
		<i>Ami, Yasin Ar Amar Madhubala (The Voyeurs, 2007)</i>

3.1 MULTI-SENSUALITY THROUGH FANTASY

This is the first category for analysing Dasgupta's films from the perspective of multisensory experiences. Thematically, the films selected for this category depict how individuals try to achieve their desires (and pursue their passions) through the medium of fantasy. This fantasy has been conveyed through the use of sensory cues that are generated through several

aspects, characters or scenes in the films. The films *Tope*, *Uro Jahaj*, *Swapner Din* and *Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa* have been selected for this category for analysis.

3.1.1 *Tope (The Bait, 2016)*

Tope offers a feast of multisensory perceptions, particularly sight, sound, smell and touch. The Rajah dances to the tune of a gramophone that has stopped playing music. People are busy with their ablutions at the brink of a water body. Rekha sees a woman swimming in the water followed by a man, through a pair of binoculars. Eventually, Rekha recognizes the woman to be the embodiment of her alter ego. Both the characters—Rekha, the Rajah's neglected wife, and Gajanan, the village postman—abandon their respective spouses. Rekha elopes with an imaginary man (whom she “sees” through her dreams and imagination). On the other hand, Gajanan begins to stay with monkeys on a tree. He continues to stay with them even after they scratch, bite or hurt him. Gajanan feels safe with the monkeys. The irony of the tactile senses is evident here. The sense of sound seems strange when Gajanan reads out the villagers' letters to the attentive-looking monkeys. The impact of the auditory senses is intensified when Gajanan's wife, mother and the villagers severely reproach and humiliate him for these idiosyncrasies.

As soon as the Rajah hears music, he “breaks” into a dance. When the Rajah drops Munni, the little girl, like a bait to hunt a tiger, the sight is visually spine-chilling. The audience hears a tiger attacking her which is shot dead by the Rajah. Munni's parents sound a drum and a steel plate to let the villagers know of the Rajah's injustice. The Rajah's toppled reign is depicted through the image of his chair and gramophone dropped into a pond. The multisensuality of experiences of swimming in the water and wind through the trees and forests are depicted with Impressionist deftness and finesse.

3.1.2 *Uro Jahaj (The Flight, 2020)*

Dasgupta's last opus is a rich gallery of sensory experiences. In this film, haptic and synaesthetic influences of desire are deployed to the maximum degree. Through the sense of haptics, the ecstasy of touching a discarded military aeroplane has been surrealistically conveyed. The senses

are often positioned to represent flight and flying as well as communicating with deprived and departed humans who wander into the forests. It characteristically depicts sensorial spatiality that can be construed as a multi-sensual creation of space.

The film opens with a flight attendant offering food and drinks to the passengers on board, which is followed by a long shot of the aeroplane in the sky and is cheered with child-like enthusiasm by Bachchu, the protagonist on an open ground. His little son impatiently waits on the roadside of a rural background to be taken to school. Bachchu is an illiterate car mechanic who lives in a village with his illiterate wife and young school-going boy. He dreams of flying an aeroplane to another planet.

The film abounds in a variety of multi-sensual experiences. Within the first few minutes of the film, Bachchu spots someone painting patterns on the wall of his mud house. He joins the man in painting as well. The active participation of his son in the visual exercise is reflected in his enthusiastic suggestions to his father to paint clouds and rain on the wall. This scene is immediately followed by a short musical prelude on flute depicting a shrubby expanse of land, a horizon and the sky with a flute seller being viewed through the bars of a window while Bachchu is seen asleep beside his wife.

The next scene intensifies the auditory as well as visual appeal Bachchu appears in an open ground with an elevation. He witnesses a small procession of tribal men singing a native song in a chorus. He asks them for directions to a place, but diverts to a thicket in the woods and discovers a rusted, abandoned aeroplane. The following scene is a unique blend of theatrical and symbolic elements to depict a unique idea of quest. Bachchu leaves the place on his bike. A group of people emerges from the thicket and depicts a unique search through their subtly choreographed synchronous movements orchestrated with soft but energetic music. They cross the stream in the twilight and disappear. This scene introduces the audio-visual surreal character of the film.

The next day, Bachchu buys some items and cleans the abandoned plane for the next few days so that he can paint it later. The lurking men quietly emerge from the thicket and watch Bachchu working hard, passionately. He shows the rusted aircraft to his wife and later his employer. His employer tells him that it is probably a Japanese fighter plane that crashed and fell during World War II. The employer feels the plane with his hands and relishes the tactile experience. He suggests that Bachchu should look for an engine for the plane in Kolkata.

Another lurking man or a forest spirit, tells him that he hardly ever returned home before he died. Another spirit, a woman, sings a song about the philosophy of life to Bachchu and also asks him about the plane. She says that her lover, Kanchan, suddenly throttled her to death while she was asleep. Each of these lurking spirits has a painful and didactic story to tell which ultimately leads them to their death. They are departed souls who disseminate insightful messages and their wisdom through their auditory signals. The wandering spirits in the forest are probably Bachchu's manifestations of his alter ego.

In his desperate pursuit to bring the aeroplane alive and make it operational, Bachchu is entangled in a web of permission-seeking procedures. The whole film appears to be a metaphorical depiction of repressed secret desires that are forbidden or even reproached by society. Instead of destroying the dream alone, the dreamer too is gunned down to death by the police who guard the security of the society. However, Bachchu's death is euphemized through the depiction of an imaginary accomplishment of his dream of taking off into a bird-like flight.

Michael Grabowski comments that by using innovative theories of the neuroscience of perception, "audiences experience a film with all their senses and create perceptions before the conscious mind has an opportunity to connect metaphors or make sense of the experience."⁹

3.1.3 *Swapner Din (Chased by Dreams, 2004)*

The film offers a wealth of unconventional but profoundly significant images that evince Dasgupta's sense of irony and wry humour. The film opens with an overcast sky at dawn that lightens while the credits appear on the screen. This is followed by a silent scene of a police jeep with several injured, unconscious and dead police officers on a bridge, probably after a violent encounter. Some passers-by steal their weapons while a squirrel curiously sniffs at the placard that reads "Police". The film centres on Paresh, appointed by the government to travel through the far-flung regions of rural Bengal with his driver Chapal to show films about health awareness to indifferent villagers. Interestingly, while the villagers nonchalantly "watch" the films through his projector, Paresh "sees" the woman of his dreams he wishes to marry, who exists only in one of the films he shows.

⁹ Michael GRABOWSKI, Foreword to *The Multisensory Film Experience: A Cognitive Model of Experiential Film Aesthetics* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016), xi.

Towards the end of the film, he “sees” a similar village woman, who can quench his heart’s desire.

Each major character pursues a nearly unattainable desire. His jeep-driver, Chapal, wishes to work in Dubai with the help of a stolen passport of a person named Makhan Das. Ameena, who goes hitchhiking, wishes to go to her home town in Idrishpur, beyond the border of Bangladesh safely with her baby inside her womb but does not have the necessary papers. She hears her baby and when its movements stop momentarily, she is alarmed. Paresh gently taps her belly and the baby’s movement can be felt again by Ameena. The use of such tactile sense has been delicately deployed in this film.

After both the projector and the jeep are stolen one after another, Paresh, Chapal and Ameena get a lift from an elderly man called Makhan Das who claims that his passport is missing and has asked the Commissioner of Police, Chakravarty to “look” into the matter. Hearing this news makes Chapal uneasy as his stolen passport belongs to this man. The projector is stolen by a dwarfed man, who crosses canals and remote landscapes with the heavy equipment. While crossing the border from India to Bangladesh, Chapal is shot by the guards and he dies in the arms of Paresh. Ironically, Chapal wanted to make a living in a foreign land. The overarching visual sense dominates the mood of the film as each major character “looks” for the best way to reach the destination. The visual appeal of the film reinforces the social and individual responsibility of each of the trio.

3.1.4 *Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa (Sniffer, 2013)*

The film narrates the story of an unsuccessful sniffer who works for a private detective agency. He “sees” every reality through the lens of his fantasy. His neighbours often eavesdrop on his confessional conversations with his pet dog in the evenings when Anwar relates to him the occurrences of the day. His dog is a silent onlooker as he listens to the odd ramblings of his drunken master. During his ineptly undertaken investigations, Anwar is often faced with the “visions” from his memories of his unsuccessful romantic relationship. He is assigned a case that leads him to his homeland situated in a rural area and is compelled to face his romantic tragedy. The film abounds with hallucinations of the protagonist who often questions the verity of the apparent truth that one holds on to.

From the viewpoint of the actor, the thorough involvement with the stimuli should be the focus of one's actions. This is instanced in the case of the protagonist of the film, Anwar, played by the actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui. It is rightly observed that "as the actor becomes more deeply engaged in the process, however, his or her eyes and ears—all the senses—must be focused on the stimuli in the acting environment."¹⁰

The eminent filmmaker and film teacher Sergei Eisenstein puts forth two important questions here: "How to evoke for the spectator's feelings an emotionally experienced image" and "how to make the living feelings and experience emerge within the actor."¹¹ Eisenstein proposes this as answers to the questions: "In both questions, the static elements, the given factors and the devised factors, all in juxtaposition with one another, give birth to a dynamically emerging emotion, a dynamically emerging image."¹² Eisenstein further states, "We see this as not in the least different in principle from the montage process in the film: here is the same sharp concretization of the theme being made perceptible through determining details, the resulting effect of the juxtaposition of the details being the evocation of the feeling itself."¹³

3.2 MULTI-SENSUALITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

This is the second category for analysing Dasgupta's films. Multi-sensuality in relationships refers to experiencing the intricacies of a relationship through various senses. For this group, the films like *Grihajuddha*, *Lal Darja*, and *Kaalpurush* have been selected.

3.2.1 *Grihajuddha* (*Crossroads*, 1981)

Grihajuddha betrays a distinctive sensibility that is characteristic of Dasgupta's films. The film opens with a series of auditory and visual sensory experiences. For example, in the backdrop of the early morning sky, Sudhanshu Ghosh receives a phone call early in the morning from the office of his Managing Director. He is asked to report urgently. The journey

¹⁰ Daniel BERNARDI, *Filming Difference: Actors, Directors, Producers, and Writers on Gender, Race, and Sexuality in Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 235.

¹¹ Sergey EISENSTEIN, *The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leida (New York: Meridian Books), 44.

¹² EISENSTEIN, 44.

¹³ EISENSTEIN, 44.

is shown from the viewpoint of travelling along the tram tracks. It immediately leads the audience to believe that they, too, are travelling with the character.

The visual sensory appeal is intensely conveyed. This prepares the audience for a crescendo of unexpected events. Sudhanshu receives earfuls of a humiliating reprimand from his supervisor in a board meeting room. On the screen, Sudhanshu's face undergoes a slow but painful change of expression upon being severely admonished. The speaker does not appear on the screen. Sudhanshu Ghosh is the Chief Labour Officer and he had written a complaint to the Minister and so the Managing Director reprimands him on charges of letting out company secrets to the Ministry. Sudhanshu expresses his desire to resign. The scene ends with an extremely close shot of Sudhanshu giving a glimpse of his helplessness and refusal to submit.

When Nirupama's brother Prabir stands against corporate corruption, he is killed like another employee in his workplace. Dwijen, his friend, witnesses the scene of Prabir's murder, senses danger and flees to save his life. The series of visual images that depict these happenings in the film offer multitudinous perspectives from the point of view of different characters like Prabir, Dwijen, the assailants and the onlookers in the surrounding areas within a few moments. News reporter, Sandipan Ray's first bike journey is depicted through a short glimpse. The sense of tensed speed immediately tricks the audience into believing that the latter, too, is travelling with the character (visual sense). This offers the audience a sense of momentum.

This is followed by a series of rapid occurrences. Amidst a host of real and fake assurances which stimulate one's auditory sensibility, Nirupama realizes that the true worth of her values cannot be respected by her beloved Dwijen. The reporter, Sandipan Ray, meets Atindra Dutt in his office to enquire about Sudhanshu's death but gets no information. Sandipan spots Nirupama there who comes to tell her father that she could not accept the job at the steel factory. Nirupama receives a call letter for a job interview in Prabir's place and there she meets Sandipan who tells her the true story behind the murders of Sudhanshu and Prabir. Thus, the characters in this episode exchange crucial information through auditory senses and this quickly engages the audience of the film.

Nirupama and Sandipan also discuss about Sheetal Das. Steel Wave gives Sheetal Das a job and gets him to be one of the miscreants to kill Prabir and ransack his house. The use of tactile violence intensifies the sensory experience of the viewer of the film at this point. Nirupama's boss

asks her to withdraw all allegations concerning Prabir's death against Steel Wave Company, now that she has a job in the same company. Dwijen has been working in Nasik. Nirupama tells him that the police are still looking for him but Dwijen denies it saying that they no longer need him. He asks Nirupama to forget Prabir. Intricacies of narrow gullies metaphorically signify the intricacies of life. This is a vivid manifestation of the overpowering visual sense.

Sandipan meets Sheetal who says that he had not received the job at Steel Wave. Sandipan secures his autograph to tally the handwriting with the threat letter received by his coach, concerning Prabir's death. Here, the overarching sense of the optics assumes the dimension of a quest and serious investigation. Sandipan tells Nirupama about all this. The sensory montage of the film makes it thought-provoking and stimulating.

Dwijen meets Nirupama in a restaurant and tells her that Prabir was blinded by illusion and useless romanticism. Dwijen shows Nirupama an apartment he intends to buy in Jadavpar and asks her if she can smell the freshness of the new walls of the building. Nirupama feels that Dwijen has become materialistic and wealthy. The presence of the visual dimensions of the apartment appears to smother Nirupama until she and Dwijen come out into an open space of a veranda. The tactile and visual experiences of this openness offer her a different perspective and she can "see" the reality through the appearances of an illusion which she believed to be true till that time. Nirupama chances upon a gathering of onlookers on a roadside only to find Sandipan's corpse. The visual experience of the roadside accident that was fatal for Sandipan brings her immense sorrow and despair.

3.2.2 *Lal Darja (The Red Door, 1997)*

Through a host of rich imagery of childhood fantasy and the longings during adulthood, Nabin Datta notices a contrast between his failing marriage and his chauffeur's successful and honest relationships with three women simultaneously. As a boy, Nabin notices the little ants and imagines that the red gate can magically fulfil wishes. Little Nabin recites a verse and the gate surprisingly opens ajar. Nabin's parents often convince him that inanimate objects can connect with human beings, if the latter "understands" them and so does the gate. From his mother, Nabin learns that although the trees experience pain when felled, they do not complain. Thus,

the power of multisensory experience ascribed to a gate and trees probably prompts individuals to act more responsibly.

The banalities of everyday occurrences have been vividly portrayed through this film. It is aptly observed that “everyday gestures, acts, feelings, and responses feed from the cinematic machine and recycle through our own perceptions and senses.”¹⁴

Nabin’s wife, Bela, finds his limbs hard and rigid as iron but the orthopaedic doctor whom Nabin consults rationalizes that it probably signifies his inability to accept the way he is. The lack of conjugal trust between Nabin and Bela is materialized through the absence of affectionate tactile experience which characterizes a successful relationship. According to Duarte, “smell has not been codified and is arguably the sense that yields the most profound and involuntary memories of space.”¹⁵ Through the sense of smell and touch, in particular, Navin is haunted by the childhood memories of the rural space. He hopes that his childhood will come to the rescue of the frustrations of his adulthood.

3.2.3 *Kaalpurush (Memories in the Mist, 2008)*

Kaalpurush depicts a sensuous manipulation resulting from a transgressive inclination that disrupts the marital sanctity of two couples. This transgression materializes through instances of tactile, visual and auditory senses that the characters engage in. Sumonto is cuckolded by his wife, Supriya, who plans to move in with her paramour with whom she has two children—Shanta and Shantanu. Sumonto accidentally “overhears” his wife’s occasional conversations with her lover. Supriya later confesses to him about the adultery, but Sumonto receives her words calmly.

Several tactile experiences are illustrated in this film. Supriya feels disgusted by the thought of Sumonto’s urge to touch her or make love to her. This is because her conditional love, founded upon Sumonto’s material success, has faded away. She tries to pursue this material success for herself, by writing travelogues and achieves it at the cost of losing her family. While Supriya traces the shape of North America on a wall map, the unknown land for her, her daughter, Shanta traces the shape of her father’s face on a group photo, reiterating her familiarity and affection for Sumonto.

¹⁴ Amy VILLAREJO, *Film Studies The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2006), 56.

¹⁵ Fábio DUARTE, *Space, Place and Territory: A Critical Review on Spacialities* (Abington: Routledge, 2017), 5.

Similarly, Sumonto's father, Ashwini, emotionally weakens in front of Abha, his erstwhile beloved. When his wife, Putul finds both of them in an enthusiastic embrace, she quits the marriage and leaves Ashwini's house. The tactile experience of an embrace between Ashwini and Abha accidentally "witnessed" by Putul leads to the end of a conjugal relationship. The critic Elisabeth D. Harvey observes that the sense of touch, sometimes described as "the king of senses", was equally likely to be disparaged as the lowest sense in Western culture. She further states that "the sense of touch perhaps most frequently evokes the erotic and seductive."¹⁶ Overcome with guilt, shame and remorse, Ashwini eventually commits suicide. Although Ashwini is dead, he still appears in the story after his death. Ashwini and Sumonto share meaningful conversations through their memories, dreams and illusions, which give the film its surrealist quality.

Shanta's obsession with drawing pictures of beautiful places where one cannot go reflects one's inherent desire to escape to a world of fantasy. However, Sumonto's resolution not to be affected by his professional and marital failures sets him to find his happiness within himself.

Dasgupta's father, Tarakanta Dasgupta, was a railway doctor. Sumonto's father Ashwini, is seen examining his patients. This tactile sense introduces an autobiographical element in the film. According to Harvey tactility is also associated with authoritative scientific, medical, and even religious knowledge.¹⁷

The films in the above-mentioned category unconventionally project the complexities of any relationship through the presence or absence of a sense or a combination of senses. In terms of the tactile sense, Nabin in *Lal Darja* and Sumonto in *Kaalpurush* experience the omission or denial of corporeal intimacy with their respective wives because of the collapse of their emotional bonds.

3.3 MULTI-SENSUALITY IN IMPENDING CRISES

Much of these films convey a crisis that is about to occur and when it does, it abruptly wreaks much greater havoc than is expected. Such films address concerns about the sustenance of various resources (ecological), practices (folk art) and individual rights (privacy).

¹⁶ Elisabeth D. HARVEY, "Introduction: The 'Sense of All Senses'," in *On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Elisabeth D. Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁷ HARVEY, 1.

3.3.1 *Charachar (Shelter of the Wings, 1993)*

Lakhinder (Lakha) derives his unalloyed, blissful happiness by holding his winged companions in his hand and letting them free from their cages. But as a rural bird-catcher, his unshaken empathy for these creatures he traps makes his sustenance difficult and drives his marriage with Sari to fall apart. Lakha's poetic sensibility towards nature and ecology prevents him from engaging gainfully with the material world. The sound of birds' twittering is sublime music to his ears.

The smell of the birds and the touch of birds' feathers lingers poetically in the mind of the audience, while Lakha affectionately caresses and fondles them. The sense of taste gets indelibly lodged when Lakha is treated to the "soft" meat of the wild geese from his village during a grand feast by a bird-dealer. Lakha cringes with disgust and convulses with nausea on finding out. The taste of birds is nauseous to him because he is so personally involved with birds. This reflects his keen sense of responsibility towards ecological sustenance which even calls for his lifelong personal sacrifices.

At the opening of the story, Lakha even complains to an elderly bird catcher, Bhushan that he no longer likes selling birds even though it was his family's profession. The lyrical nature of landscape depiction makes the film a visual treat of moving landscapes. The protagonist, Lakha is torn between his instinctive love for birds and nature around him and his conjugal bond with his wife Sari, who eventually abandons him after being convinced that Lakha would never be able to earn a living. She goes to live with another man, Natobar, who fulfils her basic needs of food, clothes and shelter while Lakha, in the face of poverty and starvation, begins to depend on nature for his emotional and physical sustenance.

3.3.2 *Uttara (The Wrestlers, 2000)*

Through a series of beautiful visual and cinematic appeals, the film shows the rape of a woman and the environment through a spine-chilling chain of events. The friendly duels between two railway guards, Balaram and Nimai, establish tactile experiences that manifest during this rape of a newly married bride who ultimately finds respite with a dwarfed man. The procession of dwarfed people passes silently. The dwarfs look much shorter than other people, but in terms of humanitarian values that are manifested through their actions they appear as stalwarts in their own right. The dis-

parity of a man's height contrasted with that of many dwarfed men makes the visual satire sharp and bitter. This satire conveys serious messages at the levels of the individual, society and the world at large. The world of the dwarfs symbolises hard work, honesty, compassion and order; this is juxtaposed with our cruel and chaotic world. The masked folk performers are also symbolic of lost humanity and identity. They appear as a recurrent motif in the film.

The film is based on the short story "Uratiya", written by Samaresh Basu. Visually, the film offers a feast of visual treats. The clothes of Balaram and Nimai are tossed up in the air before they begin their duel. They quickly gather themselves and dress up in time to show the flags as signals to a couple of passing trains. The film abounds in rural scenes, with serene beauty, along with insular and isolated settlements, accompanied by subtle and tranquil music. This heightens the impact of the tragedy in the story. It has been rightly observed:

The filmmaker expresses his love for Mother Nature right from the first shot and his seemingly endless admiration for it unfolds subsequently. The film starts with a sparse forest with the camera moving so slowly that one can perceive the stillness of time and touch the apparent delightful languor induced by the surroundings.¹⁸

The marriage of one of the rail guards alienates one from the other. The unmarried guard feels despondent every night, craving for a woman's body. The corporeal urges are deftly shown through the absence of such haptics. The guards gradually engage in fierce combats instead of friendly duels as they fight for the woman's body and the nature of the tactile experience changes for them. She starts hating the guards.

In the meanwhile, a Christian pastor who was accused of compelling religious conversions is razed to death by hired gangsters who debauch the innocence of the place. The auditory sense heightens the climax here. The duellers wrestle till death, turning deaf ears to the woman's hysterical calls to save the pastor's life. Mathew is a little boy who lives with the pastor and narrowly escapes the gangsters' assault by wearing a mask given to him by a troupe of masked folk singers and dancers. The woman desires to be liberated from the troubles of her life and is ready to begin a new life

¹⁸ Amitava NAG, "Buddhadeb Dasgupta's Uttara – Poetry on Celluloid," *Silhouette Magazine*, June 12, 2021, <https://learningandcreativity.com/silhouette/buddhadeb-dasgupta-uttara-review>.

beyond the hill in the land of the dwarves but she is brutally raped and killed by the gangsters. The tactile sense of raping a woman is metaphorical rape of the forest, and a consequent destruction of the social, ecological and religious order. Thematically the sensory aspects of the film like the woman's cries pleading for help while being raped, the sound of the approaching train, and the razing of a house reinstate the urge to stand for human rights and justice.

3.3.3 *Bagh Bahadur (The Tiger Man, 1989)*

This film urges the dire need for the necessity to conserve folk traditions vis-à-vis widely accepted imitative entertainment. It is a poignant representation of the continuous obliteration of folk arts by popular and flippant urban entertainment in one of the inner recesses of rural India in the form of a vivacious tragic epic. The central character paints himself as a tiger and dances *Chhau* (a folk dance) in a village in Bengal but is challenged by a circus owner to fight his leopard to prove that his entertainment garners greater value and appreciation. The audio-visual performances of this folk-dance demand sensorial awareness and engagement. The scenes lure the viewers to actively partake in a multisensory cinematic experience through a wide range of imagery. Paul Rodaway uses the expression 'sensuous geographies' to explain the notion that the senses establish a privileged lens through which the physical rapport between the human body and its surroundings is addressed.¹⁹ These sensuous geographies are conspicuously present in this film, thereby creating a sense of feeling all the senses.

The film projects scenes composed of shots which frame the various activities involved in getting ready for the dance performances in extreme close-ups so that the graphic arrangement of the screen as an aesthetic object accentuates the structure of diegetic narrative space. The silhouettes of human figures against the sky render an implied layer of meaning beyond the visual appearances of the film.

O'Callaghan's research about the sources of perceptual evidence has led to this observation:

All perceptual evidence is evidence one comes to possess by seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling. This is a unisensory view of perceptual evidence. According to another answer, a subject's perceptual evidence instead outstrips

¹⁹ Paul RODAWAY, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense, and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994).

what stems from perceiving with each of the individual senses. Some perceptual evidence is evidence one comes to possess using the coordinated use of several senses.²⁰

Both these types of perceptual evidence are best demonstrated in the film *Ami, Yasin Ar Amar Madhubala*.

3.3.4 *Ami, Yasin Ar Amar Madhubala (The Voyeurs, 2007)*

This film shows the urge to “see” others and thereby gain personal information about others. This dominates the action in this film. The story exposes the secret desire of human beings to exercise surveillance over other people. A mishap in a hospital calls for the need to install surveillance cameras in the hospital building. Similarly, a suspicious and morally depraved man gets surveillance cameras fitted into his house to “keep an eye” on his wife, whom he suspects to be cheating. This film portrays how a surveillance-camera technician, Dilip uses his technical knowledge to gawp at an attractive aspiring actress who has come to stay as a new neighbouring tenant, Rekha. The action of the voyeurs takes the stage when they secretly “see” Rekha which is flagrant encroachment of a woman’s private space through optical control. Dilip’s friend and roommate Yasin, who also plays the flute, erects a background of auditory interludes to project the moods of the characters.

The recurrent motif of a group of sauntering people carrying heavy furniture makes the idea of voyeurism more subtle. While the notion of watching over others through a CCTV camera is static and shows a single point of view, the image of these wanderers, contrasts with that of the former, in motion and by offering multiple visual perspectives.

The medium of cinema is “visual” and “juxtapositional”. Hence, while writing for the screen, a story should be visually narrated through images, action, reaction, and behaviour rather than conversation. In terms of visualization, subjects, characters, and settings should be chosen for their visual and behavioural strengths.²¹ On the other hand, Antunes mentions that “there are no visual, auditory or audiovisual experiences of film—only

²⁰ Casey O’CALLAGHAN, “Multisensory Evidence,” *Philosophical Issues* 30, no. 1 (2020): 238–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phils.12183>.

²¹ Michael RABIGER, *Developing Story Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), 222.

a multisensory experience.”²² He further points out that “experiential film aesthetics” is an experience of a film that calls for an engagement with the senses that may have no apparent stimulation but an incidental catalyst through visual and aural perception.

3.4 WHAT SETS DASGUPTA APART FROM THE OTHER FILMMAKERS CONCERNING MULTISENSORY ASPECTS?

Following Antunes’ theory, it can be seen that the medium of film through its usual audio-visual mode ushers in a sensory channel to a multisensory experience. These cues of experiential film aesthetics can help to interpret the experiential aspect of films. Instead of merely witnessing the events of a film, the viewer or the audience evolves into a participant in its actions, if the multisensory experience is realistic, intensive and compelling. Some of the motifs in Dasgupta’s films appear as recurrent images, for instance, a procession of folk dances and their performances, wandering musicians playing different instruments. These are further enriched with a host of colourful visual effects, conveyed within a story through illusions, hallucinations, memories, imagination and daydreaming which render the films surrealistic. Interestingly, all of them relate to the idea of the optical magic that is pervasive in his films. Dasgupta’s films exemplify the sensory modalities that have not yet been examined in film studies. This paper has attempted to address this research gap through its content analysis. His cinema paints the shadow of the moment so beautifully that his films have been said to be made of magic and dreams. Dasgupta says, “‘Put some dreams, magic, reality into a glass and shake it. That’s my cinema.’”²³

Dasgupta remained attached to the red earth soil of the Junglemahal region of Bengal, which formed the setting of most of his films later on, left for Kolkata when he was just twelve, but Purulia and Birbhum districts served as the backdrop of many of his films.²⁴

²² ANTUNES, *Multisensory Film Experience*, 4.

²³ Devarsi GHOSH, “Buddhadeb Dasgupta: ‘Put Some Dreams, Magic, Reality into a Glass and Shake It. That’s My Cinema’,” *Scroll.in*, November 26, 2020, <https://scroll.in/reel/979220/buddhadeb-dasgupta-put-some-dreams-magic-reality-into-a-glass-and-shake-it-thats-my-cinema>.

²⁴ “Remembering Buddhadeb Dasgupta: A Poet, Professor & Film-Maker Who Left Teaching to Pursue His Love for Cinema,” *Economic Times*, June 10, 2021, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/remembering-buddhadeb-dasgupta-a-poet-professor-film-maker-who-left-teaching-to-pursue-his-love-for-cinema/articleshow/83401832.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that while closely filming individuals, the viewers can be brought in proximity to their sensory experience, both in terms of their ambience and their physical connection with the objects that gain visibility in their lives. This potential enables filmmakers to make films with a keener receptivity to the appearance and experience of objects and physical entities—to sense their awareness of the physical world. Such filmmaking involves not only concepts, events and historical occurrences but about the milieu and everyday matters that are experienced in routine life. Dasgupta's films project a cinematic representation through this sensory appeal that we often fail to notice or observe. The audience can engage with the materiality of his films as an event or experience in itself.

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A KALEIDOSCOPE OF MULTISENSORY PERCEPTIONS
IN THE FILMS OF BUDDHADEB DASGUPTA

Summary

In the present age, digital media, particularly films have earned the reputation of successfully forging an alternative reality by offering a multisensory experience to the spectators. Playing a pivotal role in the foundation of Indian realistic cinema, the films of Buddhadeb Dasgupta have conveyed serious, hard-hitting messages through their sensory appeal. His films have been widely applauded and recognized for portraying multisensory poetry on celluloid. His iconic films like *Tahader Katha* (1992), *Grihajuddha* (1982), and *Bagh Bahadur* (1989) reveal the bleakest secrets of the human mind. On the other hand, films like *Charachar* (1993), *Tope* and *Uro Jahaj* convey a unique sense of ethereal existence through their multisensory experience. This paper attempts to analyse the multisensory film aesthetics in some selected films of Buddhadeb Dasgupta that question the cultural codes and set exemplary models of individual, social as well as environmental responsibility through its unique portrayal of multisensory experiences. This experiential perception of these films creates an alternative reality with the help of the stylistic aspects of narration. This paper also attempts to find out what purpose is served by this multisensory appeal and how it has opened new avenues and genres in the discipline of film-making.

Keywords: Indian realistic cinema; Buddhadeb Dasgupta; multisensory; cultural codes; alternative reality; film-making

KALEJDOSKOP DOZNAŃ WIELOZMYŚLOWYCH
W FILMACH BUDDHADEBA DASGUPTY

Streszczenie

Uważa się, że w dzisiejszych czasach media cyfrowe, a w szczególności filmy, skutecznie tworzą alternatywną rzeczywistość, oferując swoim widzom doznania wielozmysłowe. Filmy Buddhadeba Dasgupty odgrywają kluczową rolę w tworzeniu indyjskiego kina realistycznego, niosą poważne i mocne przesłanie, działając na nasze zmysły. Jego filmy cieszą się uznaniem szerokiej publiczności, ponieważ opowiadają historie w sposób poetycki i wielozmysłowy. Jego kultowe filmy, takie jak *Tahader Katha* (1992), *Grihajuddha* (1982) i *Bagh Bahadur* (1989), ujawniają najbardziej ponure sekrety ludzkiego umysłu. Z drugiej strony filmy takie jak *Charachar* (1993), *Tope* i *Uro Jahaj* przekazują wyjątkowe poczucie eterycznej egzystencji poprzez swoje wielozmysłowe doświadczenie. W artykule podejmuje się próbę analizy wielozmysłowej estetyki filmowej w wybranych filmach Buddhadeba Dasgupty, które kwestionują kody kulturowe i ustanawiają wzorcowe modele indywidualnej, społecznej i środowiskowej odpowiedzialności poprzez niezwykley przekaz wielozmysłowych doświadczeń. Empiryczna percepcja tych filmów tworzy alternatywną rzeczywistość przy użyciu stylistycznych aspektów narracji. W artykule podjęto również próbę ustalenia, czemu służy ta wielozmysłowa atrakcyjność i w jaki sposób stworzyła nowe kierunki i gatunki w sztuce filmowej.

Słowa kluczowe: indyjskie kino realistyczne; Buddhadeb Dasgupta; wielozmysłowość; kody kulturowe; rzeczywistość alternatywna; sztuka filmowa

Information about the Author: Dr. MONALI CHATTERJEE is keenly interested in English Literature, Language and Communication Studies. She has been teaching the same for numerous professional courses in several colleges and universities across Gujarat and other countries for about two decades. She has also taught English Language in the UK. An ardent lover of music, dance, poetry and drama, she is professionally trained in Indian classical music, dance and art. She has presented papers in many international conferences and has published widely on higher education, diaspora studies, South Asian Literature and Film Studies apart from poetry in popular dailies.