

him to get down on his knees and look for that one rupee on the floor of the car. The following extract explains his pathetic condition: I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee. (139) When Balram failed to find it, his employer commented, "What do you mean, it's not there? Don't think you can steal from us just because you're in the city. I want that rupee" (139). Balram felt so humiliated that he took a one rupee coin out of his shirt pocket, dropped it on the floor of the car, picked it up, and gave it to him. This clearly reflects the predicament of all Indian drivers who are treated as slaves or servants. This shows the unbridgeable gap between two classes of the society. The way a rich person thinks and acts is very much different from the way a poor person thinks and acts. All the instances quoted here exhibit different forms of moral/social corruption. These examples reflect the sick or corrupt mentality of the so-called upper classes of our society. Balram wishes to take revenge by challenging the world of rich and corrupt people. He feels he is an inseparable part of this fast developing country and he wants to contribute to its progress. He wants every poor man to fight for his rights and secure a good place for himself in the society. He not only wants to think but act also. He wants to roam like a white tiger, not as a lamb. To achieve his goal, he commits the sin of murdering his employer and justifies himself saying:

But isn't it likely that everyone who counts in this world, including our prime minister (including *you*, Mr Jiabao), has killed someone or other on their way to the top? Kill enough people and they will put up bronze statues to you near Parliament House in Delhi- but that is glory, and not what I am after. All I wanted was the chance to be a man-and for that, one murder was enough. (318)

Balram represents the lower class people. The murder of Mr Ashok by Balram is the reaction of his deep-rooted frustration and inability to bridge the gap between the upper / rich class and the lower / poor class. In his search for identity, Balram breaks the family ties and moves to 'Light' from 'Darkness'. Adiga has tried to paint India in its real shades. It was a tough challenge for him to write about the people who were not like him. He told Stuart Jeffries why he wanted to expose the country's dark side. Stuart Jeffries asked Aravind Adiga, "How do you get the nerve to write a novel about the experiences of the Indian poor? After all, you're an enviably bright young thing, a middle-class, Madras-born, Oxford-educated ex-Time magazine correspondent? How would you understand what your central character, the downtrodden, uneducated son of a rickshaw puller turned amoral entrepreneur and killer, is going through?" Adiga replied:

Well, this is the reality for a lot of Indian people and it's important that it gets written about, rather than just hearing about the 5% of people in my country who are doing well. In somewhere like Bihar there will be no doctors in the hospital. In northern India politics is so corrupt that it makes a mockery of democracy. This is a country where the poor fear tuberculosis which kills 1,000 Indians a day, but people like me - middle-class people with access to health services that are probably better than England's - don't fear it at all. It's an unglamorous disease,

like so much of the things that the poor of India endure. (The Guardian, Thursday 16 October 2008) <<http://www.theguardian.com/book>>

His role as a social reformer is to arouse the public conscience to the evils like corruption, poverty, injustice, inequality, exploitation of the poor etc. Adiga's effort is to fight against the social, political, economical drawbacks of the modern century. Though Adiga has been successful in his efforts, some critics accuse Aravind Adiga saying that he has presented only darker side of India and his book does not convey any moral message. Sudhir K Arora comments: "Adiga has dipped his pen in the ink that contains irony, paradox and satire as ingredients. But, the message which his *The White Tiger* conveys seems to be unrealistic as it will lead the country to the road of anarchism. Murder, steal and be the entrepreneur. If all the people follow the dictum, what will happen? Will India be on the road of global harmony? Is he really a messiah of *dalits*? Can crime really result in the prosperity of India?" (202).

Despite all this criticism, one may find *The White Tiger* an excellent book about poor people, the people from darkness which reflects their dreams, their culture, and their ideals. Balram's voice is the voice of every common man who suffers endlessly. This is an inspiration to many poor people who want to challenge their destiny. Adiga challenges the philosophy, "Every man is born free but everywhere he is in chains." He firmly believes that man can make his own destiny. He advocates the philosophy, "Every man is born free and he has the right to remain free." *The White Tiger* is a challenging read that sensitises every Indian to the serious issues like corruption, poverty, caste differences etc. and give him/her the inspiration to fight against such evils to eradicate them from the society.

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Dismantling Gender Bias: *Chena Kintu Ajana* (Known Strangers) - A Documentary

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Abstract: *Chena Kintu Ajana* or *Known Strangers*, a documentary on the last generation of female impersonators in the early Jatra (folk theatre of Bengal) directed by Dipanker Dutta and researched and produced by Debojit Majumder (2014) is an interesting film that explores the issue of gender discrimination intelligently through a meticulous reminiscence of the marvelous contribution of the Ranis (male performers who imitated female roles) which have made them immortal in the realm of entertainment.

Keywords: *Chena Kintu Ajana*. The Documentary Film, Gender issues, Folk Theatre.

'Man' & 'Woman' are the two most prominent binary opposites in linguistics that certainly reflect two distinct gender identities. However, this difference of gender in no way invites any sexist connotations which are the product of myopic minds. Saussure's concept of sign refers to the purely arbitrary association of the signified and the signifier. This means there is no reason that any word needs to mean what it means. For instance, the word 'open' may have different connotations for different people and similarly, the word flower may be connected to various signifieds like smell, color etc. Taken in this respect, if the society has agreed upon the fact that the word 'man' and 'woman' would refer to human beings with distinct sexual characteristics, it simply means that the words are meant to denote biologically different people and this biological antithesis does not have anything to do with the biased impositions upon the either sex through bigoted ideologies that provoke retention of an unequal social setup. Thus, it is often observed that the physical agility of the masculine gender is propagated as powerful and dominant 'Manpower' that is born to rule, which necessitates the men in the society to flaunt their potentiality by curbing their emotions and highlighting their 'masculinity' promulgating their 'manly' voice, their 'manly' physique etc., that could testify their superiority to the vulnerable feminine sex. The natural attribute that woman have lesser physical agility than men is often misinterpreted by the conservative society as responsible for qualities like docility, submissiveness and dirigibility which are nothing but social demands that women subjected to conformist milieu often have to fulfill. Today, such differentiation of gender based on narrow-minded social constructs has been often undermined and even neglected. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the minds conditioned with certain norms of the society don't change easily and gender bias is undisputedly one amongst the prejudiced beliefs that continues to corrupt human conscience even in the contemporary age that apparently boasts the equality of sexes. *Chena Kintu Ajana* or *Known*

Strangers, a documentary on the last generation of female impersonators in the early Jatra (folk theatre of Bengal) directed by Dipanker Dutta and researched and produced by Debojit Majumder(2014) is an interesting film that explores the issue of gender discrimination intelligently through a meticulous reminiscence of the marvelous contribution of the Ranis (male performers who imitated female roles) which have made them immortal in the realm of entertainment. The documentary draws attention particularly because of its implicit demonstration of the potential in the performances of the male artists to denounce patriarchal authority and its narrow-minded precepts.

On the forefront, *Chena Kintu Ajana* is a film made to recall the brilliance of the acting talent of those performers who convinced their audience through their indelible acting skills that they were not men but actually women and thus forced the admirers to surrender themselves in front of them whole-heartedly. The audience laughed and cried with them. They worshipped them in their powerful roles as mothers and also despised them in their roles as villains. Together, the film also narrates the pathos of these actors and those of their kindred after their popularity diminished with the entry of the female actors in jatra. Overall, the film's overt impression is the faithful dedication to the inimitable contribution of the performers who managed to carve a niche in the realm of theatre which still lies unconquered. It records statements of the connoisseurs, educationists and experts who saw these actors live on the stage or worked with them and do not fail to recall even the smallest detail about them which proves the sincerity and veracity with which these actors followed their profession and provokes us to completely forget that the original motive of the performers was to earn money when they entered theatre. However, apart from the apparent aim of rewarding the contribution of the Ranis in Jatra, the film implicitly provides the contemporary spectators the means to question gender bias as the male performers' dedicated endeavors to counter the danger of being labeled effeminate on account of their unusual profession not only appears commendable but also provokes the reexamination of the concrete division of norms related to masculine and feminine behavior. This is because; the seamless conversion of male actors into women on the stage depicted in the movie appears more than simply a mode of acting. In fact, the documentary is very special in its effective presentation of the manner in which the male actors willingly adopted feminine characteristics by observing every minute detail of a woman's attributes for instance putting the left foot forward while walking which they incorporated in their representation and added verity to their acting. They were not bothered about any sort of criticism for appearing to be feminine as reported by their family members. They in fact ignored public ridicule which implies that their inclination towards their profession had made them least bothered about the issues related to effeminacy that usually confronted them. Nevertheless, the interest in the feminine behavior on the part of these performers also undeniably prompts the assumption of the transgender aspect in their personality.

However, the film does not assert any such possibility but pleasantly takes a detour and examines the discussion from the spiritual point of view wherein the dual persona of the Ranis i.e. as commented (in the film) by the scholar Dr. Ananda Lal, “husbands in life but brides in acting” is associated with the *ardhanareshwara* image of *Shiva* (uniting masculine and feminine aspects together). This comment exalts the documentary from its apparent image as a simple film on the female impersonators' dexterous acting skills in early jatra to the transcendental significance of art which enables the artist to establish a sublime union with the undivided self in humans wherein gender differences have negligible importance.

The union of *Jiva* and *Shiva* is a prominent *Hindu* philosophical aspect wherein the human soul is regarded as the fragment of the supreme soul and this concept rejects any sexual differentiation as the ultimate goal of a human being is touted as the realization of the divinity within self which renders all material distinctions unimportant. *Natyasastra* (an elaborate ancient Indian treatise on the nature of dramatic composition) equates theatre with the sophisticated enterprise of a fire sacrifice or *Yajna* which is an integral means towards redemption according to the *Hindu* religious doctrine. The philosophical essence of *Yajna* as described in the *Bhagwadgita* is the immersion of the ingredients or *yajnasamagri* (personifying the material desires) in the auspicious *Vedic* altar and the abandonment of earthly desires for obtaining salvation or *moksha* which is one among the four *purusharthas* or goals of life according to Hinduism. Since *Natyasastra* regards drama as a *Yajna* it implies that the treatise considers that the artistic pursuit is to be devoid of material objectives. This leads to the inference that the successful outcome of theatre is obtained when the earthly consciousness recedes into oblivion. This is the state of heightened bliss wherein everything related to the pragmatic world is erased and the human mind is able to achieve the union with divinity as is often observed in many of the folk rituals practiced in the temples wherein the practitioner goes into a complete state of trance forgetting his socio-cultural identity and experiencing complete affinity with god. This exalted state counters the impositions of the 'superego' (in Freudian terms) and enables the artist to realize the sublime divinity within oneself that constitutes the essence of the *purusha* and *prakriti* or the *Shiva* and *Shakti* which engenders creation. *Chena Kintu Ajana* tries to comprehend the male artists' seamless conversion into female personalities by examining the entire phenomenon from the spiritual aspect of the *purusha* and *prakriti* union reflected in the personality of the Ranis which makes them embodiments of *ardhanarishwara swaroopa* of *Shiva*. Nonetheless, this spiritual point of view does not leave the pragmatic aspect behind and Dr. Ananda Lal's cogent elucidation in the film includes the scientific explanation on the presence of male and female hormones in the human body in equal proportions and implies that the image of *ardhanareshwara* is reflective of this phenomenon. Thus, the documentary mingles both science and