

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Ritwik Ghatak (1935 – 1976)

Life

Ritwik Ghatak was born in Dacca, then part of British India, to a father who was both a District Magistrate and a poet. He and his twin sister were the youngest of nine children. The family moved several times before settling in Calcutta just before masses of starving people streamed into the city as a result of the famine of 1943-44 and the Partition of 1947-48. Those two events, along with the Bangladesh war in 1971, which also brought refugees to Calcutta, would dominate most of his films.

Ritwik Ghatak became politically active in the IPTA (Indian Peoples Theatre Association) in the 1950s before entering the world of film as an assistant director and making directorial debut in 1953 with *Citizen (Nagarik)*, which is considered a classic today. Ghatak joined and was then purged from the Communist Party of India, after which he became a prolific writer of short stories, plays and film theory. He directed one of the all-time great films of Indian cinema in 1960 with *The Cloud-Capped Star (Meghe Dhaka Tara)*. He suffered from mental illness and alcoholism, but continued to produce films and stories that reflected the turbulent politics of his day. Along with Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen, he charted a Bengali film industry that paralleled the industry in Bombay and which surpassed Bollywood in its social realism. Ghatak also directed many high-quality documentaries, which depicted the lives of ordinary and marginal people.

His wife separated from him when he went to a mental hospital, but they had three children, one of whom (Ritaban) is a film-maker in his own right. His daughter Samhita has acted in films. One of his brothers, Manish Ghatak, was also a radical political activist as well as a professor of English.

Achievements

Ritwik Ghatak was honoured with an award at Venice in 1959 for *Pathetic Fallacy (Ajantrik)*. *The Cloud-Capped Star (Meghe Dhaka Tara)* was listed at number 231 in a list of all-time best films by *Sight and Sound* in 2002, while *Golden Lining (Subarnarekha)* was listed at 346. Ghatak also received many awards in India, including the National Film Award for Best Story in 1974 and a Padma Shri from the Indian government in 1970.

List of feature films (as director)

Reason, Debate and a Story, Jukti Takko Aar Gappo (1974)
A River Called Titas, Titash Ekti Nadir Naam (1973)
Golden Lining, Subarnarekha (1965)
Soft Note on a Sharp Scale, Komal Gandhar (1961)
The Cloud-Capped Star, Meghe Dhaka Tara (1960)
Running Away from Home, Bari Theke Paliye (1959)
Pathetic Fallacy, Ajantrik (1958)
Citizen, Nagarik (1952)



(Ritwik Ghatak, at young age)