

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Anwasha Maity, PhD.

ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE / Ganashatru (1990)

Satyajit Ray

Bengali language

OVERVIEW

Ray would be able to direct only two films after *Enemy Of The People (Ganashatru)*. After the heart attack Ray suffered in 1983, he was greenlit to return to filmmaking by his doctors only in 1988, but no location shoots were allowed yet. As such, *Enemy Of The People* is filmed entirely indoors and feels like a “drawing-room drama” in many ways. Gone are the lyrical silences and evocative locations that are a hallmark of Ray’s cinema; those are replaced by a claustrophobic, verbose and sometimes grating singularity of purpose, repeated over and over in varied settings among varied characters—perhaps, the content shaping the form. In fact, all three of his last films are sombre in tone and deal with morality and corruption in society as their central theme.

Adapted from Henrik Ibsen’s 1884 play of the same name, Ray’s film retains the major plot points such as a physician protagonist, contaminated water regularly used by a large populace, first acceptance and then betrayal by the local newspaper, opposition from the town bigwigs, failure of the public meeting and vandalization of the physician’s chambers and his descent into disrepute. But he thoroughly localizes the plot by introducing two significant deviations— religion and hope. Adding the religious angle lends a more electrifying charge to the question of whether concerns about public health, say an impending epidemic, supersedes certain religious customs around ritual purity and practice. Recently, the COVID pandemic vaccine debate (2020-2022) brought a similar issue into the limelight. The second deviation from the play is the introduction of hope on the lines of a (communist) utopia. The play ends very differently, with Ibsen’s protagonist alone but unafraid; Ray’s film gathers around his protagonist a small but determined group of family and friends, not to mention a crowd chanting his name outside.

The contentious issues of contaminated *charanamrita* (“blessed water from the deity’s feet”) is quite realistic in the Indian context. In fact, just such a case from the South Indian Tirupati temple was published about a month before Ray began shooting. In 1992, after Ray’s death, his instinct was confirmed by a public health survey in Bengal that revealed high counts of faecal coliform bacteria (usually found in sewage) in the water of many temples. “Life appears to have imitated art”, commented a newspaper report with the headline, “Holy water could be unholy”! (Quoted from Robinson)

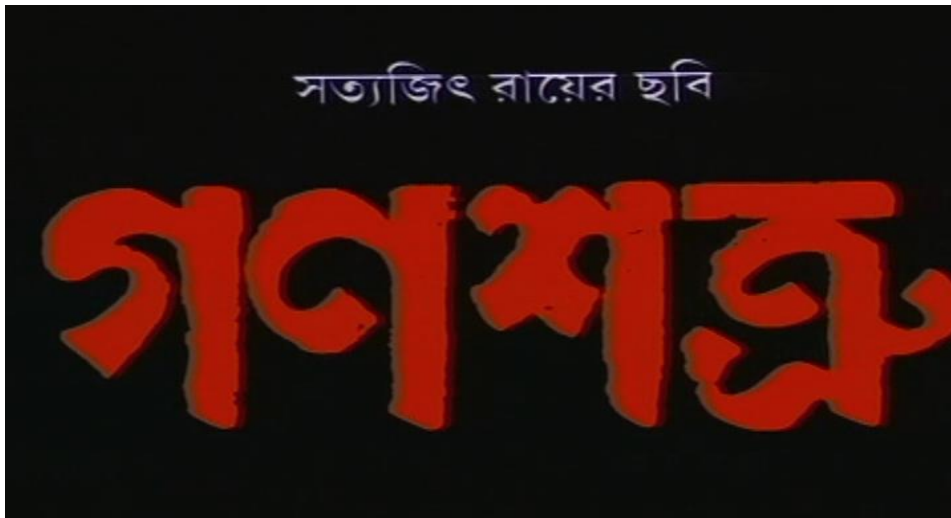
As to be expected, neither domestic nor international audiences and critics received the film warmly. For instance, Aparna Sen, one of Ray’s long-time actresses and a renowned director herself, said, “Ray has moved towards stark and unsentimental prose, towards boldly underlined characterisation, towards absolute clarity of expression. Maybe those of us who yearn for the old Ray just need to get used to the starkness of his new language.” Andrew Robinson put it this way: “It was as if Ray, having come close to death, had become committed to speaking urgently about the political and social issues that agitated him, whether his Bengali audience was willing to listen or not.”

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Ashok Gupta	An honest doctor and the titular “Enemy of the People”
Nishith Gupta	The municipality chairman of Chandipur and Ashok’s younger brother.
Maya Gupta	Ashok Gupta’s wife
Haridas Bagchi	An assistant editor of the newspaper <i>Janabarta [Peoples’ News]</i>
Indrani Gupta	Ashok’s daughter, a schoolteacher and theatre worker, engaged to Ranen
Ranen	A bank employee and theatre worker, engaged to Indrani

SYNOPSIS

Dr. Ashok Gupta, a renowned physician in a small town Chandipur, is alarmed when he sees a sudden increase in water-borne diseases and many deaths. He suspects that the source is the *charanamrita* ("blessed water from the deity's feet") from the local temple, which is the local tourist hotspot, generating much revenue for the city. He wants the temple to be shut down and the pipes repaired, but every influential figure in town, beginning with his own brother cum Municipality Chairman Nishith and the industrialist-sponsor of the temple Bhargav, oppose him, citing religious grounds. They make it impossible for him to spread his warning and his long-time friend and newspaper editor Haridas also betrays him. The contentious situation comes to a head at a public meeting which is sabotaged by Nishith and Ashok is ostracized as an Enemy of the People. However, at the end of the film, we are left with a ray of hope when Ashok's allies gather around him.



PLOT

Opening scene Dr. Ashok Gupta phones an assistant newspaper editor, Haridas Bagchi, asking him to publish a story on recent waterborne diseases like jaundice, typhoid and gastroenteritis in his town Chandipur. Haridas says it's likely that a local paint factory is responsible and he will send a reporter for more details.

Haridas and Nishith visit Haridas himself visits Ashok's home and Maya Gupta, Ashok's, spends some time chatting with him in their living room. She says she's happy in this small town Chandipur. Nishith Gupta, the doctor's younger brother, also visits. They discuss how the tourist business is booming at the nearby Shiva temple; the resident deity there is popularly considered to be "awake". Unlike his older brother, Nishith is pious and supposedly his spondylolysis was cured after going to this temple for a week.



Ashok returns Ashok returns home after seeing a patient, with Ranen, a theatre worker, in tow. He is worried about the waterborne diseases and suspects a source in the locality, but there is no proof yet. He is proud of his home town, Chandipur and praises the town amenities such as his hospital and the cultural climate, with theatre groups and arts magazines, one of which Ranen runs. His daughter, Indrani Gupta, is also a theatre worker with Ranen. Nishith asks if the magazine leans right or left; Ranen replies that it is left-leaning, like most of their contemporaries.

Son-in-law to be Maya returns to the living room from the kitchen with tea and reintroduces Ranen to Nishith as their daughter Indrani's prospective groom. Haridas urges Ashok to write a fluff piece to support tourism in Chandipur; Nishith agrees, but Ashok is hesitant and says that while he loves his hometown above all else, he is too worried about the circulating contagious diseases. Nishith then leaves.



They discuss Nishith

Ranen says he was put in a spot by the "left or right leaning" question. Ashok says Nishith has always been conservative and they hardly see eye-to-eye, but as the three-time municipality chairman, he is largely responsible for building the temple and hospital to increase tourism in the area. Nishith is also a partner in the local rice mill, cold storage and other businesses.

Indrani returns

Indrani is tired and in a bad mood after a long day of meetings at her school. But she soon cheers up, saying that she will proofread Ranen's magazine copy and that teaching at the new school is going well, especially when she gets paid. She doesn't have much of a choice in the topics she teaches, many of which she does not believe in, but the others care for her there. She promises to complete an English translation of a story for Haridas soon.



Ashok receives bad news Ashok had previously sent water samples to a Kolkata laboratory, and a letter Indrani brought contains the results that confirm his suspicions. Most of the waterborne bacteria were in the sample from Bhuban Pally, the neighbourhood with the temple, where people were drinking the contaminated water, believing it to be 'holy water' offered at the temple.

Action plans Ashok is angry and disgusted that there is contamination from poorly built water system. He plans to ask Nishith, his brother, to turn off the water until the leak is identified and fixed. They decide that Haridas will print the report without mentioning the locale, Bhuban Pally. Haridas says Ashok will "soon be recognized as a national hero". Ashok says he wants no such fame, but this was the bare minimum he should do as a physician.

At the temple Ashok visits the Bhuban Pally temple to see that the populace is indeed receiving the contaminated water as holy water.



Tough decisions Ashok returns home and tells Maya that a favourite acquaintance and patient had died of a waterborne disease and others are dropping like flies. Haridas and the "Printer and Publisher" of Haridas's newspaper, Adheer, arrive. Adheer offers encouragement and community support, then departs. Haridas says that some important local leaders visited him at work to warn him about slandering Chandipur's good name. These leaders are definitely lining their pockets from the temple's profits and Haridas wants to unmask them. Maya is sceptical about Nishith's support, saying that he is envious and selfish and only helped them after he had amassed enough wealth and influence for himself.

A stern warning Nishith brings Bhargav, the businessman who funded the temple and hospital. They relocate to Ashok's home office/ chambers. Bhargav angrily insists that all the temple water is holy and purified by *tulsi* leaves and thus cannot be contaminated under any circumstances, offering Ashok a sample for testing. He calls Ashok irreligious and warns him against slandering the good name of his temple at his own peril.



An argument and another warning Nishith and Ashok argue about the issue. Nishith says that closing down the temple services to locate the leak for the contaminated water would be disastrous for Chandipur's tourism economy. He promises the municipality will convince people to boil their drinking water. Nishith is angry that Ashok has a tendency to use the newspaper as his own trumpet whenever he has a new idea and lacks proper consideration; now his job at the hospital is on the line. Nishith promises to do everything in his power, which is significant, to prevent Ashok from disrupting the temple's business.

A conversation with Maya Both Maya and Ashok are distressed with Nishith's "vile" behaviour, but Maya is not surprised. She knows that many people, even those who are educated, believe that *tulsi* leaves can purify water of any toxins. She confesses that she was unhappy about Ashok's atheism earlier, but has come to accept this and support her husband in every way now.

Indrani's thoughts Indrani proofreads her father's essay that that temple should be shut down. She is unsure that the newspaper will publish it; particularly, she doesn't trust Adheer, the publisher. Maya is also anxious about backlash from Nishith. She reveals to Indrani that her grandfather had left a lot of debt, which Nishith did nothing to repay; it all fell on Ashok's back.



News published Ashok's essay is published and receives support from a few rationalist thinkers, like Haridas's junior co-worker Biresh, but Haridas has received many complaint letters from the general populace about Ashok's irreligious claims. Biresh is very impressed, begins to respect Ashok and promises his support against the "religious fools".

Compliments and opposition Ashok arrives at Haridas's newspaper office and receives compliments from Biresh. Ashok reassures Haridas that there are some logical, scientific minded citizens who will support him against the religious voices, and those are the readers he should seek out. Adheer steps in and reminds him about the backlash on him as the publisher, Ashok tries to convince Adheer by saying that any danger to him personally is much less significant than the danger Chandipur faces.



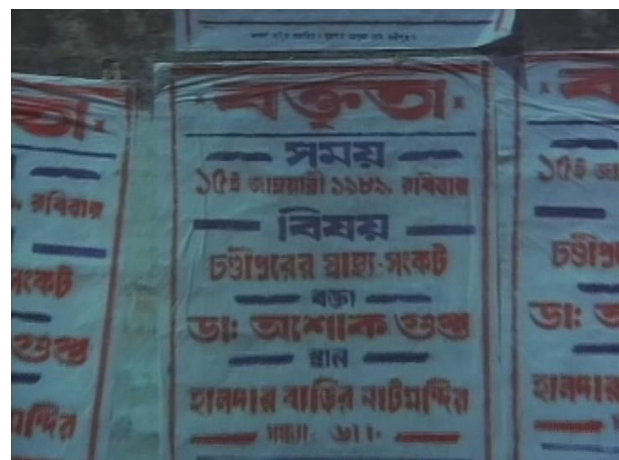
Indrani visits Haridas Indrani returns the book that Haridas gave her earlier to translate, saying it was utter trash, spouting nonsense about a scared object that punishes evildoers and helps the pious; she will not translate it. Haridas says that as a poor newspaper editor, he has to publish such pieces to keep readers happy. He then confesses his true intentions— he only publishes Ashok's essays because it's her father and he is attracted to her. But when she rejects him, he indirectly threatens to pull the piece.



Opposition mounts Nishith visits Haridas and Adheer. Nishith is angry and shouts, saying that printing Ashok's essay will ruin the paper's reputation. Nishith then frightens Adheer by appealing to his religious and cowardly side, convincing him to not print the essay. He also reads from a municipality circular, which lied about the water test reports and accused Ashok of trying to cause panic.

Conflict Ashok returns a second time, confident that paper will publish his piece and that people will heed his warning about the imminent epidemic. Haridas chickens out in the face of Nishith's intimidation. Ashok tries to convince Haridas but fails. Haridas offers to print the essay if Ashok removes the section on the temple. Ashok is angry and saddened. He wants to hold a public meeting, but Nishith says he won't find an auditorium for it. Ashok walks off in a huff. Biresh chides Haridas but is reprimanded and his plea to publish Ashok's second essay is rejected.

New Plans Indrani, Ranen and Maya discuss recent developments. Ranen has organized their theatre hall for Ashok's public meeting and is unafraid of any backlash. Ashok says that Haridas wears a mask of progressiveness but is spineless and has no courage to speak the truth. They organize a public lecture.



Ashok's public lecture disrupted

The public lecture hall is chock-full, with the "enemy camp" of Haridas, Adheer and Nishith, who forcefully take over. Nishith says Ashok shouldn't be allowed to speak and slander the temple. Haridas derides Ashok. Most of the public supports Nishith's side and negates Ashok's appeal to at least hear his argument, even though he was the one who organized the public meeting.

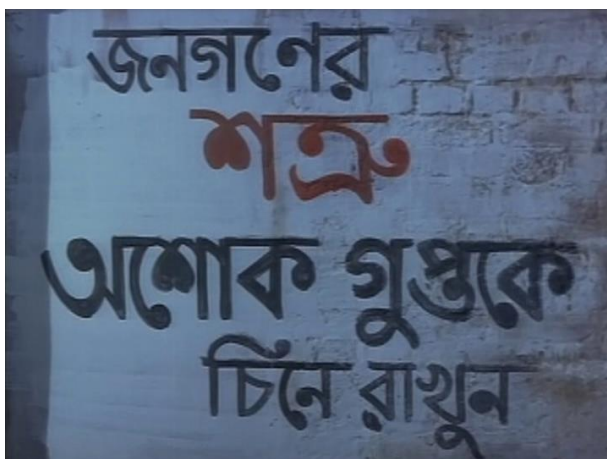


Debate, explosion and Panic

Nishith asks Ashok if he's a Hindu— quite a loaded question. Ashok admits he isn't comfortable with many Hindu rituals as science has taught him otherwise, but he would never dream of hurting others' religious sentiments. Contaminated holy water at the temple is not a religious issue; it is a public health and safety issue. Nishith plays the numbers game, saying an epidemic would have made more people ill. The assembly erupts into chaos. Suddenly, there is an explosion outside and the people all panic and disperse.

"Public Enemy"

Graffiti appears outside Ashok's home, calling him a "public enemy", and hired goons throw stones at his house. Maya suggests they leave Chandipur, but Ashok does not want to go. Under public pressure, his landlord comes to evict him. Indrani has been fired from her teaching job after students' parents complained. Ashok also loses his hospital job. He finally breaks down, but Maya and Indrani support him.



A ray of hope Ranen brings Biresh, who has quit his job at the newspaper in protest of how Haridas treated Ashok. Biresh wants to publish a report revealing the campaign against Ashok, along with his interview, in leading Kolkata newspapers. Ashok perks up. Ranen assures Ashok that he will publish the essay as a pamphlet and his theatre troupe will campaign for his cause. Suddenly, there is loud chanting outside, "Long Live Ashok Gupta". It's a procession led by Ranen's theatre workers and some scientific-minded youth of Chandipur. Ashok, overjoyed, exclaims, "I'm not alone!" and they all applaud each other. The film ends to uplifting music and the sounds of the chant as the camera focuses on a small bottle of holy water next to a stethoscope.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Ashok Conscientious (Responsible, Trusting, Angry)

The titular 'Enemy of the People' and protagonist of the film, Dr. Ashok Gupta is a middle-aged and widely respected doctor in his home town of Chandipur. With the exception of publishing various reports and essays on public health, he leads a rather humdrum life with his small family, until many people suddenly start getting ill. His efforts to warn the public of an impending epidemic of water-borne diseases nearly destroys his life, as he is pitted against influential and conservative local bigwigs, led by his own brother.

Responsible Ashok's most defining character trait, as he himself reiterates throughout the film, is that he is first and foremost a physician. As such, he holds himself responsible not only for his own patients' health but the general public health and safety of his beloved Chandipur. All his efforts to warn the public meet opposition from every quarter, but his innate sense of responsibility won't let him stop trying to do what's best for everyone else, even at the cost of his own livelihood and even the roof over his head, not to mention his reputation. Beyond his professional persona, too, he is a loving and responsible father and husband who has mellowed with age, as we see from his interactions with Maya and Indrani.

Trusting Ashok is overly trusting, particularly towards his younger brother, Nishith, and long-time friend and editor, Haridas. This makes him somewhat oblivious to their intentions and ultimately underscores that he is a bad judge of character. Even when Maya voices doubts about Nishith's support for his plan to reveal that the temple holy water is the source of infection, he initially believes that his brother, just like him, will hold public good over profit margin. Indrani is sure that the newspaper man Adheer is not to be trusted, but Ashok sees nothing awry in his behaviour. And finally, none of them could have predicted Haridas's betrayal, given that he was a long-time friend. In the end, Ashok is heartbroken and dejected as the editor's rejection of the seminal essay takes him completely by surprise, after which he can only berate himself for his lack of judgement.

Angry The emotion Ashok displays the most is a righteous and somewhat naive anger. He raises his voice, repeats himself stridently and warns the “opposition” that they cannot “make him shut his mouth”. Overall, he behaves as if the justness of his cause, supported by a few pieces of scientific paper, is reason enough for everything else to fall in place. Time and again, he tries to convince the “opposition” that any damage to their own reputation or profit margin is well worth it in the face of an epidemic, but fails, because that logic is crippled in the face of overwhelming and irrational corporate greed, public opinion and a mob mentality. This is demonstrated in the repeated arguments in every single scene, be it with Haridas or Nishith or Bhargav and, of course, in the climactic scene. There, Nishith cleverly stokes Ashok’s anger and he, initially thwarted from speaking at the public meeting that he himself organized, almost erupts, before being tricked into admitting that he was not a “practising” Hindu, immediately discrediting his entire line of reasoning and logic.

Nishith Disagreeable (Selfish, Persuasive)

Nishith Gupta is the municipality chairman of Chandipur and Ashok’s younger brother. They have long been at odds and rarely see eye-to-eye on any given issue, though they maintain some semblance of social civility before the issue of contaminated holy water from the temple, arises. Professionally, he is quite powerful within the community and does not hesitate to use his clout as required.

Selfish Even before the contentious events in the film begin, Nishith’s background, as revealed by Maya, demonstrates his selfishness. Years ago, Ashok and Nishith’s father had passed away leaving a large debt, which Ashok worked hard to pay off, with no support whatsoever from Nishith. Instead, Nishith spent his energy climbing up the social and bureaucratic ladder, likely taking bribes along the way, to secure his own wealth. Only after that does he help Ashok get his job at the hospital. With the case of the contaminated water, too, his main contention is not religious belief (though he is devout) but the monetary loss from repairing the sewer pipe leaks and from shutting down the tourist business. This would tarnish his reputation along with the town’s and might reveal that somewhere down the line, the municipality had hired subpar contractors for shoddy pipe-laying, leading to the leak. So, he selfishly chooses uphold his own status quo rather than public health and safety.

Persuasive Another notable character trait is his persuasiveness. He turns Haridas and Adheer away from publishing the essay, stokes Bhargav’s religious sentiments and inflames both the city officials and common public and so on. For instance, with Haridas and Adheer, he warns that they will likely have to shut down their livelihood, the newspaper, for publishing material that wounds the common man’s religious sentiments. Granted, his powerful position automatically gives him access to most public and private spaces in town, but without his ability to use the right piece of information or argument to convince the other person to defect to his side, most of his efforts would fall flat. He is also cunning, wielding his power and knowledge well, for instance, to have Ashok and Indrani fired and have their landlord evict them. In contrast with Ashok’s righteous anger and strident harping on a single issue to little effect, Nishith’s persuasiveness wins the day in all cases except the handful of Ashok’s “allies” who have nothing to lose.

Haridas Disagreeable (Disloyal)

Haridas is the editor of Chandipur’s local newspaper as well as Ashok’s long-time friend and supporter; he is also secretly enamoured with Indrani. He initially supports Ashok’s agenda of warning the public about the impending health crisis. But Indrani’s refusal to acknowledge his feelings hurts him, plus he is warned off by Nishith. Deepankar De, a character actor best known for playing shifty or outright villainous roles beginning with Ray’s last films, depicts Haridas well, alerting the audience that’s something is amiss early on, even before he shows his true colours.

Disloyal Haridas is seen only in a few scene and is best remembered as a traitor, a betrayal that is completely unexpected. After having won his trust within Ashok’s household over the years, particularly with the sceptic Maya, not to mention a good working relationship with Indrani and Ashok, it does not take much for him to abandon them. He goes back and forth on the topic of including the warning about the temple in the essay and may just have risked his livelihood and reputation to the tipping point. But when he is utterly rejected by Indrani, he decides to play it safe and succumb to

Nishith's persuasion. That said, he does maintain some semblance of civility despite this betrayal; he does not, for example, condemn Ashok too harshly during the public meeting and even brings Adheer to Ashok's house later on, perhaps to apologize, but is shooed away.

THEMES

SOCIETY (Religion, A communist utopia/hope)

Religion Introducing religion into Ibsen's plot was Ray's master-stroke; it makes the film as topical and relevant today as when the film was made. In the first few scenes, the characters discuss how the resident Shiva deity of the temple is popularly considered to be "awake", which lends the entire town of Chandipur an aura of health and holiness. The single belief at the core of this film is that nothing holy/blessed by the gods can be contaminated or impure. Broadly speaking, religion is an undeniable facet of South Asian politics and it is nearly always posited in opposition to science—though that is, of course, a false opposition—something that Ashok points out. In fact, the last shot of the film visually encapsulates this opposition with a bottle of holy water shown next to a stethoscope, perhaps indicating that both can coexist but only uneasily and science has definitely not overpowered religion in this case.

Dialogue from the climactic scene, which reveals the hypocrisy of organized religion and irrationality of blind faith, is worth quoting:

Nishith: Do you call yourself a Hindu?

Ashok: What sort of question is that?

Nishith: There is a reason. Answer.

Ashok: I say most emphatically that I am. There can be no doubt about that.

Nishith: Have you visited our temple in the last ten years?

Ashok: Not in the manner you mean.

Nishith: In other words you don't pray.

Ashok: No.

Nishith: Don't you believe in such rituals?

Ashok: I'll tell you the truth. I do not follow certain customs of Hinduism. Science has shaped my beliefs. But that is personal. I cannot dream of opposing the faith of someone who worships at the temple and drinks the holy water. It has been proved that the temple water is infected. So I say to drink holy water there now, or any water, is dangerous. It is a question of hygiene, not of religion. I insist that the water supply be purified immediately. Then there can be no danger in restoring temple rituals.

Nishith: Do you know how many people drink the holy water every day?

Ashok: I find from the crowd I see at the temple, about a thousand.

Nishith: How many cases of water-borne illness have come to you?

Ashok: You cannot look at it like that. I am not the only doctor in town.

Nishith: Answer my question.

Ashok: In the last fortnight, I've treated about 150 patients; many have died. I'm only talking of myself. You must ask the other doctors, too.

Nishith: Shall we say about 500 in all?

Ashok: Yes, certainly.

Nishith: In the last fortnight, 15,000 have consumed the holy water – and 500 have fallen ill.

Here, inevitably, the meeting swings against Ashok before he has a chance to explain the concept of immunity. For the time being, at least, irrationality is victorious and he is ostracised as an "Enemy of the People".

The interesting point to note here is that in order to be credible, Ashok has to emphasize his faith—this was in fact suggested by Ray's wife, Bijoya Ray, who argued that making Ashok an atheist would skew the viewer's opinion of him (and the film). Instead, he should be agnostic, holding the faith but not necessarily following all rituals— a configuration far more acceptable among Bengali Hindus than

a complete denial of religion. Moreover, Ashok must also emphasise that he has a high regard for other peoples' beliefs and support for rituals, so long as they are not causing public harm. Regardless, Nishith's curveball questions put Ashok on the defensive and the resulting public furore doesn't help. No matter how credible the science or how articulate its few proponents, the Hindu majority opinion has won the day. As such, this is a stark, memorable and entirely realistic depiction of a meeting where someone challenges public religious opinion— few real-life public figures have dared to do this in Bengal.

Hope/ A communist utopia?

The film draws stark boundaries between “allies” and “enemies”. And given the charged political situation in Bengal at the time (with a ruling Communist party), it is not at all surprising that they respectively espouse “left” versus “right” ideologies. So while the ideology is there, intact, it is to Ray's credit that he doesn't directly identify any real-life political groups. Ranen and his theatre troupe are openly “left-leaning” and have Ashok and his daughter's full sympathy. The “conservative/ right” side is represented by Bhargav, the newspaper man Adheer and the landlord among others. Nishith and Haridas are clearly ideological opportunists, swaying with public opinion and danger to their status quo, though Nishith is more “right” wing and Haridas more “left” wing. As to be expected in a deeply humanistic but socially didactic story of this sort, the “allies”/ “left-leaning” characters are on the side of morality and public good, whereas the “enemies”/ “right/ conservative” group are anything but. Still, the film does more than this and introduces a completely new ending from Ibsen's play in gathering the “allies” together in support of Ashok's moral vision of public good, with a broader, though unseen, support from some of the community youth. In the chant, “Long live Ashok Ghosh” (“Ashok Ghosh Zindabad”), the usage of the word “*zindabad*” immediately links it to the procession chants of left-leaning political parties (though this has later been appropriated by all but the most right-leaning groups). But as the communist vision of utopia itself is illusory, so is this hopeful ending. We are not shown any real impact or change in public policy or whether this support will stand further waves of opposition from wealthy and powerful conservatives.

POLITICS (Corruption, Censorship)

Corruption True to the stark realism in this film, most powerful figures are unabashedly corrupt, privileging their own profits and status quo over public health and safety, while using religion or majority opinion as a crutch. A prime example is of course Nishith, who is selfish, power-hungry and opportunistic, losing no opportunity to “butter up” more powerful bigwigs like Bhargav. For his part, Bhargav seems to be genuinely convinced that the temple water is indeed holy and cannot be contaminated on principle. Indeed, since he is extremely wealthy and the sponsor for both the hospital and the temple, it stands to reason that the thorn in his side isn't as much the loss of tourist profits, but rather the religious sacrilege. And he's willing to pull all the strings he can so that Ashok does not ruin the reputation of his temple. He promises that Ashok will lose his job at the hospital, which is one of the last nails in his coffin. Apart from Bhargav, other powerful community members take Ashok's outspokenness as an affront to their beliefs and, as a result, punish the entire family. Indrani loses her job as a schoolteacher, while their landlord decides to evict them. Not to mention the newspaper team, Haridas and Adheer, who utterly betray Ashok's faith in them.

Censorship Much of the plot is charged by the “opposition's” efforts to censor Ashok's mouth (and his pen). For the first piece that the newspaper published (something that Biresha later raves about), Ashok himself accepted censorship by not mentioning the temple directly, as he did not yet have proof but only a strong suspicion. But with the second expanded essay, he faces censorship on all levels. Adheer, the publisher, refuses to typeset something so incendiary, and Haridas only concedes a little when he agrees to publish an abridged version without any mention of the temple, which would completely defeat the purpose. Nishith prepares a fraudulent municipality circular that denies Ashok's water sample results, further undermining his efforts to warn the public of imminent danger. And a final example is the climactic scene, when Nishith does not let Ashok speak more than a few sentences, those too in a fully defensive mode. As such, censorship is a central theme, where corrupted, power-hungry and money-motivated bigwigs of the community shut down Ashok's honest and responsible attempts to warn the public in order to maintain their own privilege and continue lining their own pockets. Censorship has always been a hallmark of corrupt governance and this film shows us one more instance.

RELATIONSHIP (Desire/Lust)

Desire/Lust Desire is present in the short but significant scene at Haridas's office when Indrani visits in order to return the book he wanted her to translate. She refuses to translate it on ideological grounds, but Haridas is more practical and wants to keep readers happy. Then comes the bombshell— something the film only barely hinted at previously— Haridas desires Indrani, after spending time with her over the years. He is fully aware that Indrani loves and is engaged to another man, but that does not deter his own feelings. In fact, he states that the main reason he had been publishing Ashok's writing was because "he was your father". Though he doesn't attempt any indecent proposals, his betrayal towards Ashok is certainly triggered by Indrani's rude refusal to deal with him any further. Since at the core, this film is a testament to morality in stark black vs white tones, with few greys, Haridas's desire is portrayed as essentially immoral and shameful— coveting a woman who "belongs" to someone else. And this shame is borne by Indrani as well in that she does not reveal Haridas's confession to her to-be husband or parents. Balancing Haridas's immoral desire is the wholesome, comradely relationship between Ranen and Indrani, where Ranen, as a loyal future son-in-law, does everything in his power to help Ashok not because he's her father, but because he believes in the same ideals.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) How does the indoor setting of the film affect the plot? Do you think the film suffers from being a "drawing room drama"?
- 2) Do you think the core issues raised in the film are relevant today? Discuss with comparison and examples.
- 3) Analyse the moral compass and vision espoused by the film with three examples.
- 4) Do you think Ashok is a likeable character? Why or why not?
- 5) Who do you think is the most corrupt of all the "opposition" characters we meet? Why?