

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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COMPANION (DOSAR) 2006

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Bengali Language

Contents (Overview – Plot – Themes – Characters)

OVERVIEW

This quiet, affecting film tells the story of Kaberi, a young wife who finds out that her husband has been having an affair only because he is injured in a motor accident in which his lover dies. Kaushik, the unfaithful husband, is nearly killed in the crash, but he recovers, while Kaberi's emotional recovery is slow and painful. A second strand of the story involves another extra-marital affair, between the married Brinda and the unmarried Bobby. A third strand involves the husband of the woman killed in the car crash, who comes to have an understanding with Kaberi, as the two betrayed spouses. The film explores a wide spectrum of emotional responses to marital infidelity, much of it hurtful and cruel. In the end, though, Kaberi accepts a reconciliation with her husband, and Brinda appears to leave Bobby. Shot in black-and-white and set in contemporary Calcutta, this film is a penetrating examination of marriage and its discontents. In that respect, the film-maker has taken inspiration from another Bengali film about marital infidelity in nineteenth-century Calcutta, Satyajit Ray's *Charulata*.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Marriage and extra-marital affairs would seem to be a trite storyline. We've seen it all before in Indian cinema. But not like this. Not in black-and-white. Not with a near-total absence of song, with a slow-moving story, without any sensational scenes, without beautiful landscapes and without a hint at comedy. The film is bleak, but it is nuanced and frighteningly honest. Once or twice, a distinctive slice of Indian culture intrudes; for example, a basket of fruit is blessed by a god and taken to the patient in the hospital. But otherwise this story could be set in any modern city in the world.

STORY

Companions The story begins with a couple leaving a luxury hotel on a lake. They seem downbeat as they talk about another possible holiday and prevaricate about whether they should stay in the hotel for another day or two. They seem afraid to go and are unsure when they will be free again.

Car crash In the next scene, we watch the reactions of onlookers to a car accident that occurs offscreen. Next, a woman, who we learn is the man's wife, receives a phone call from the police, telling her to come immediately to a hospital. She is Kaberi Chatterjee. Her husband, Kaushik Chatterjee, is in the intensive care unit. A woman he was travelling with is dead. She is Mita, his lover.

Bobby and Brinda Bobby and Brinda, who are themselves extra-marital lovers, comfort Kaberi in the hospital. They are close friends, who are also in the same theatre group with Kaberi. Brinda, the woman of the illicit couple, telephones Kaushik's parents to tell them of the accident, but does not mention the lover. They also try to persuade Kaberi to sign the hospital forms so that more blood can be ordered for Kaushik, who has multiple serious injuries.

Kaberi Kaberi does not want to sign because she no longer feels she is Kaushik's wife. When an office colleague arrives and says that the office will take care of the money and all paperwork, she asks sharply, 'Why? He didn't go on office work.' During the next three days, when her husband is fighting for his life, she is broken by grief, anger and disbelief. She is also shocked when television

news reporters interview the dead woman's husband and son. At home, she is all alone until her aunt comes to comfort her.

Unforgiving Kaberi delegates authority to Kaushik's brother to change the insurance policies and other legal documents. Angry and humiliated, she makes it clear that everything has changed, nothing is forgotten or forgiven. When Kaushik regains consciousness, she is taken to his room but leaves without saying a word to him.

Kaushik When Kaushik recovers enough to speak, the first thing he asks about is Mita, his lover. What hospital is she in? he asks and is told that she died in the accident. An office colleague scolds him for his 'silly' behaviour but says that all will be forgiven because he is such an important member of the business.

Bobby and Brinda Their extra-marital affair is put under strain after the revelation of Kaushik's infidelity. Brinda's husband is suspicious of her friendship with Bobby. He thinks their activity in the theatre group is a cover-up for an affair (which it is and isn't). The husband claims, Brinda says, that he has proof of their affair.

Mita's husband Kaberi is called to the police station to collect Kaushik's 'things,' among them a piece of jewellery that belonged to Mita, the lover. Kaberi signs for it and takes it to Mita's husband. The meeting between the two betrayed spouses is uncomfortable. He is as disturbed as she is, incommunicative and hurt. She shows him the necklace but he doesn't recognise it (presumably Kaushik gave it to Mita, who kept it secret). Then the husband gives her a book of poetry with Kaushik's name written inside in his wife's handwriting. Observing his hurt, Kaberi begins to soften and has an affectionate interaction with his son. But the meeting ends on a sour note, when the husband gives Kaberi a packet of condoms found in his wife's handbag. 'She won't need them now,' he says, 'but your husband might.'

Change Following the meeting with Mita's husband, Kaberi begins to show some feeling for Kaushik, who is still lying in hospital with pain. She speaks kindly to him, saying she'll get someone to shave him. At the same time, she is considering filing for divorce.

Kaushik home Kaushik is discharged from hospital and goes home. Now, husband and wife must live together, again under one roof. He needs her more than ever because he does not want to undress in front of the nurse assigned to him. She bathes him, like a baby, and they regain some rapport. But her wounds have not yet healed. When he offers to get office money to sponsor her new play, she asks if it is 'compensation.' 'You mean alimony?' he asks. 'No,' she answers. 'If it comes to that, don't worry. I'll manage on my own.'

Second meeting Mita's husband now comes to Kaberi's place. Again, it is an awkward conversation. He reveals his problem: 'I can't fight with her, can't demand explanations. Because she's dead.' Kaberi considers this and says, 'And if someone is alive [Kaushik], but lives with the memory of someone who is dead? Then what?'

Recovery Kaushik improves and wants to sleep in the marital bed, but Kaberi mocks him, saying, 'Oh, so you're missing those weekends now.' Still, she grows closer to him as she helps to nurse him.

Pregnant Brinda finds out that she's pregnant, but she doesn't know who the father is. Kaberi advises them to tell her husband about the whole affair and have it out in the open. Now, Bobby realises that Brinda only loves him in order to escape from her unhappy marriage.

Reconciliation After Kaushik tells Kaberi all about his affair with Mita, and swears that it was the only time, she says that she is no longer angry. In the final shot, she lays beside him on the bed. They are reunited.

THEMES

Marital infidelity The obvious, yet subtle, theme of this film is marital infidelity and its consequences. Not an uncommon theme, but the story complicates what could be a trite film by exploring the emotional toil of 'cheating' on the betrayed spouses (a wife and a husband) of the illicit lovers. What's more, we have two types of grief and anger. First, there is the wife's coming to terms with her deceitful husband, but he is badly injured and almost dies, which engenders sympathy for him in the viewers and (eventually in the wife). Second, there is the reaction of the betrayed husband; his wife has died, which means, as he says, 'no longer fight with her, demand explanations.' That husband seems likable, until, halfway through the film and scarcely a month since his wife's death, he entertains a prostitute at home. We sympathise more with Kaberi's anger and disbelief when she discovers her husband's infidelity, but she is somewhat compromised by her open and unquestioning acceptance of her friends (Bobby and Brinda), who are also carrying on an extra-marital affair. The film also includes a wide variety of reactions from those not directly involved in the infidelity. Kaushik's office, for example, simply 'silences' the whole matter, expunging Mita from office history. And Kaberi's aunt wonders, 'Why do they [women] do it? She has a husband, a son. Must be for promotion. 'My niece's husband is like that, too. Good job in a bank. Happy with his family and then he met this girl.' The media, of course, feeds off the tasty morsels of the sensational story of a lover killed in car crash. What is missing is any idea of Kaushik's reaction to the incident. We sense that he is 'sorry' and that he 'loves' his wife, but he is largely inarticulate. Certainly, the film does not condone infidelity, which seems fairly common, but neither does it condemn it. Perhaps a hint is supplied in the title: *dosar* could be translated as 'friend,' although the official translation is 'emotional companion' or just 'companion,' which suggests that the film highlights the human need for companionship whether inside or outside marriage.

Memory A second theme is an understated commentary on memory and forgetting. After a car crash kills one person and leaves another severely injured, how does that event live on in people's memory? Should we completely wipe out the tragic past and 'move on', as the therapists recommend (and as Kaushik's office does in removing Mita from their books)? Should we dwell on the lost future we will never have with a dead spouse? Should we forgive a loved one who has betrayed us? If so, after how many weeks or months? In small details, the film shows how different characters deal with these questions. Both Kaushik and Kaberi use his mobile phone to hear the voice of the now-dead Mita. Kaberi agonises over the fact that her husband is (she assumes) constantly reverting back to his memory of Mita. Brinda, the cheating wife in another marriage, is unable to forget her tender reminiscences of her husband. Everyone in the film is slowly dragged back to memories, both good and bad, of the past. Even the angry Kaberi drifts back into some kind of companionship with her husband.

CHARACTERS

Kaberi Kaberi is the wife, who also belongs to an amateur theatre group. Kaberi dominates this film from start to finish. It is her story, which unfolds in various stages of an emotional transformation. From stunned numbness, hurt and cruelty to understanding, empathy and reconciliation. She is a sort of everywoman, although she is a completely convincing individual, too.

Hurt When Kaberi first finds out about what her husband has been doing, she retreats, shuts down emotionally and withdraws from him. This reaction to the hurt she has suffered is illustrated in a long sequence at the hospital, where she is comforted by her friends, Bobby and Brinda. She is asked to sign a hospital form (to provide consent for treatment), but she refuses. It is not so much a refusal in anger as a refusal from numbness. She simply doesn't want to assume any responsibility for her hated husband. 'Let his family take over, she says. 'I don't want to be involved.' It is also a refusal to subject herself to humiliation. When a relative again urges her to sign the form, she snaps, 'Why should I? So everyone can point at me and say "That's her. Her husband is the one." I can't take that.'

Unforgiving For three-quarters of the film, Kaberi is unwilling and unable to forgive Kaushik his infidelity. A clear example occurs about halfway through the story while talking to her husband's brother. She tells him to call a lawyer and change the nominees on the insurance policies. When her brother-in-law protests that that would be going too far, she screams at him, 'What! Day after day I

was lied to. Cheated!' The brother-in-law says that's all in the past, she replies, 'Oh, because she's dead? Is that it? All forgiven? Nice and cosy?' Kaberi will not easily forgive, nor, we feel, should she.

Cruel Kaberi's hurt and anger curdles into cruelty at one point in the story. She is in her husband's hospital room, with Kaushik's boss and wife as visitors. When there is a lull in the conversation, she says to Kaushik, still bandaged and lying in some pain, 'By the way, the orchids which you asked about were sent by Sandra.' (Kaushik had earlier asked about the orchids because they were Mita's favourite flower). 'And, Mita isn't in hospital, anywhere. Because she's dead.' (Kaushik did not know this.) When the others in the hospital room react with disapproval, Kaberi says, 'Why shouldn't I tell him. The nurse said he'd asked about the flowers and about her. Since others didn't have the guts to tell him, I did.' She intends to inflict pain on him and she succeeds.

Apologetic After humiliating Kaushik in front of his boss and his wife, in the scene described above, Kaberi telephones them to apologise. 'I'm sorry for the other day,' she says to the boss' wife. 'You came to support him and I didn't appreciate that at the time.' This is the first indication that she is able to consider someone else's emotions, and it seems to spring something loose in her that gradually builds into an acceptance of Kaushik himself.

Kind Kaberi's transformation from cruelty to compassion unfolds over the entire two hours of the film, but a key moment occurs when she visits Mita's husband and meets his young son. When the young lad asks his father how to write 'four', he is perplexed but Kaberi immediately understands his question. 'Oh, you mean the roman numeral four,' she says and tells him how. Then she gives him a bar of chocolate and pats his head. That gesture is the first kind thing she has done since the accident and revelation of her husband's deception.

New perspective The change in Kaberi is nearly complete when she is able to take a new perspective on the problems of her friend, Brinda. Although Brinda has been 'cheating' on her husband for a long time, Kaberi has never criticised her. Now, after her own emotional upheaval and examination of her own marriage, she tells Brinda, 'You have to tell him [your husband] everything. Did you ever consider him? That you're hurting him? It's not fair.' Her own hurt has alerted her to the hurt in others.

Kaushik Kaberi's husband. Kaushik is a closed character for most of the film. Apart from a few sentences before the crash, we barely hear him speak until the very end. His invalid condition seems to be symbolic of a deeper incapacity to feel, or at least to articulate feelings. He cheats on his wife, but he is not portrayed as insensitive or cruel.

Bureaucratic Kaushik rarely expresses feelings and is tight-lipped in general. He is a businessman who tends to see things in terms of procedures and policies. A good illustration of that quality occurs when he is in hospital and still in pain. After Kaberi humiliates him with information about the orchids and Mita's death, he interrogates his nurse. She explains that she told Kaberi those things because the hospital is accountable to her, as his wife. 'You're not accountable to me?' he asks sarcastically. 'I want a list of your priorities. In writing. I need to know the rules of this nursing home.' When there is a problem, he thinks, it's best to blame someone else. He certainly does not want to show any emotion.

Tender Kaushik has a tender side to his character. Otherwise, we suspect, Kaberi would never have fallen in love with him in the first place. We see his tenderness emerge slowly as he recovers in hospital and then at home. It is poignantly displayed near end. He hobbles from his sick room into their shared bedroom. 'Let me stay with you,' he says. She grants him five minutes. He eases himself down onto their bed. She says she wants to get undressed. 'I'm not a stranger,' he says. 'Let me listen to you brush and gargle.' That is a tender request from an invalid both physically and emotionally reliant on his wife.

Brinda Brinda is Kaberi's friend, also in the theatre group and married but having an affair with Bobby. Brinda is a reliable friend to Kaberi, a romantic companion to Bobby and an enigma to herself. She doesn't seem to know what she really wants or how to get it. She is constantly reminiscing about memories with the husband she is cheating on, while at the same time complaining that he is prying and suspicious.

Supportive Brinda is Kaberi's best friend. Her support for her is immediate and unqualified, as we

see in the early scenes in the hospital, right after the accident. Brinda sits on a wooden bench in the corridor, with her arm around Kaberi's shoulder, her face a shifting ocean of concern and confusion. They all know that Kaushik was with a woman, who must have been his lover. When Kaberi starts to call Kaushik's brother to tell him what has happened, Brinda realises that this is not a good idea, takes her phone and introduces herself. She gives him precise directions to the hospital and says. 'No, I can't explain right now. It'll be better when you're here in person.' Then, she sits back down and coaxes Kaberi into signing the hospital form authorising treatment for Kaushik. She has taken control and given her friend the support she needs.

Trapped Brinda is caught between her love for Bobby and the security she has with her husband. Although she gets companionship and sexual pleasure with Bobby, she does not seem entirely happy. But she is unable to break off the affair or to tell her husband and start over with him. Her incapacity to decide is illustrated in a scene where she is with Bobby in his flat. He starts to make love to her, when she says, 'I've got the blood test results. It's positive [I'm pregnant].' Bobby asks what she wants to do. 'Up to you,' she says, again unable to make up her mind. She isn't even sure who the father is. That ambiguity is symbolic of her whole life.

Mita	Mita is Kaushik's lover.
Husband	Mita's husband is unnamed.
Bobby	The unmarried Bobby is Brinda's lover.



(Kaberi with the invalid Kaushik)



(Kaberi and Kaushik reconciled)



(Kaberi waiting for an answer)