

A Bewildered Call from the Mystic Sea: A Study on the Bangladeshi Film *Hawa*

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Abstract

This paper instigates an intense study of a Bangladeshi psychological mystery-drama film *Hawa* (released on July 29, 2022) directed by Mejbaur Rahman Sumon to parse the way the boatman Chaan Majhi's horde experiences the improbable chain of episodes after the arrival of the mysterious, ophidian woman Gulti. For a broader sense of 'Mysticism', it commonly refers to the enduring state of consciousness over transient experiences. Mystic experiences are partly stipulative, sometimes, these are a narrow sense of conceding acquaintance of realities or state of affairs and standard introspective. The dialogues, plot, music, and visual treatment are very much contributing to the mystic approaches of *Hawa*. Central characters convey hunches of unknown, omen, and void incidents, specifically after Gulti is found inside the fishnet of Chaan Majhi's boat. Mystic world, from its history, has contained a charm of terrestrial mythologies, silence, shadows, the beauty of darkness, prologues of characters, suspensive motifs, and mother nature's forces. *Hawa* has exhibited all the above-mentioned elements with utmost supremacy in conjunction with myriad antagonizing assessments. The portrayal of the darkened beauty of the Bay of Bengal, contact among Ibrahim, Gulti, and Chann Majhi, references to Bede (water gypsy) and the unseen Devi (Goddess) mentioned by Gulti, reels *Hawa* as a mystic story in a high-end scale. The paper not only concentrates on the modern-day visualization of the film's mysticism but also aims to study the issues of how and why mythologies, folklore, and paradoxical-natural elements grant a call for audiences till date.

Keywords: Folklore, Mysticism, Mystery, Mythology, Reality

Introduction

The Bangladeshi film *Hawa* perceptively unites myth, folklore, and mysticism into its story, fashioning a strong bond with Bengal's rich cultural legacy. In this cinematic masterpiece, the wind and water serve together as a portal to an ethereal experience, bringing mysticism to life. The movie mirrors themes found in provincial folktales and mystic myths by utilizing dialogue, music, and the unsettling attraction of the wind, sea, and water. The film connects the spiritual and metaphysical domains with the human psyche by effectively using personification, symbols, and metaphor, which intercedes the spectators' knowledge of the mystic world. By means of metaphor, the movie acknowledges the inexpressibility of

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mysticism and the timeless significance of myths, folktales, and mystic beliefs. It skilfully brings these classic components back to the modern theatre, sparking a fresh appreciation for the weighty cultural perception they contain. By deed so, the movie creates an assembly between the past and the present and reinforces the idea that myths, folklore, and mysticism are not artefacts from the past but rather timeless teachings that still influence how we perceive the world today.

Stories and Folktales related to myths and mysticism are bound to evolve to narrate our present lives. Folk and Fairy tales can lack virtues in need but they can play the role and height of the Bible to uncover our sinful vis-à-vis blissful instincts. Stories are used to connect with times we do not belong to anymore and they instigate as the driving force to see the world beyond the time frame. (Shamsuddin, 2018) William R Bascom has mentioned “No culture can live without mythology and folklore practice, culturalists will rejuvenate myth and folklore to keep their existence alive” (Bascom, 1953) Mystic stories, folklore, and myths can be the supreme guide of modern life as they contain the deeper level of truth, inheritance, power, wisdom, and the idea of the universe. The understanding of the layer concepts of mythology and its counterparts might be positioned beyond the science of the human brain and mind. Myth is important as it is described as a personal social unconscious process, and mythologists use personification with metaphors. One example is the construction of the universal epics where the stories channel and connect the human psyche; the inner layer of the psyche is the mirror reflection of the perception of the world. (Dryza, 2020) Any survival of human society suggests a tight link between historical and modern attitudes; somehow refers to myth and mystical beliefs of a particular land. The narrative of any story which is transmitted from generation to generation and is listened to again and again with hero-villain-homecoming periods and supernatural or a/natural forces are known as ‘myths’ and a certain class of myth can be referred to as true stories when their significance becomes apparent. (MEng Xue, 2021) Mejbaur Rahman Sumon’s visually stylistic yet a blend of beauty and horror film *Hawa* is a pioneer in the Bangladeshi film industry which has opened a gate for the newness and simultaneously raised anticipation about the core of using myths, mystics, and folk in one single spread of modern film. Film reviewer Mr. Siam Rahman from Bangladeshi leading news daily Dhaka Tribune states,

“It is a modern-day fairy tale which takes our mind to roam around waves, sea, trawler and the ancient essence of Bengal Myths and folktales” (Raihan, 2022)

The story has a fusion of regional dialogue, music, horror of the blue wild of the sea, and active motifs which can be found in the local folktales and mystic

stories. Filled with metaphors, *Hawa* triggers the audiences to voyage with a surrealist journey through the lens created by the talented cinematographer of Bangladesh Kamrul Hasan Khosru. The movie is an experience of mystic travel where the sea is taken to a whole new world along with sending a strong message of Karma and Cosmic bliss. For scrutinizing the impact factor of the laws of beyond nature and universal rules it has been mentioned, that "People act as the basis of what they want to believe or reject as true or false from their myths and stories". (Bascom, 1953)

Mysticism is a popular study of understanding the human mind and how it generates thoughts about different layers of the phenomenal world. Based on psychologist Ralph Hood's argument, the remarkability of mystic experiences can be different as per the acceptance of nature and natural forces in different communities. (Jones & Gellman, 2022) A mystical background can partially determine alleged mystical experiences; the content not only shares or influences but rather, a reinforcement works in spacing our cognitive innards. (Jones & Gellman, 2022) Mysticism can be experienced through analogy or metaphor and art, it can turn mystic motives into phenomenal objects and they might ultimately be denied. Denial about any character or incident of the story refers to the ineffability of mysticism. The difficulty of describing any episode of the story through literal terms rather than by any metaphor refers to the appreciation of analogy and symbols. Mystic language does assume logically offensive forms when actual absurdity may not be intended. (MEng Xue, 2021) Contradictory expressions of mysticism are often removed by the device of 'unsaying' Or concealing that propels discourse into the nondiscursive realm. Our consciousness concentrates on something of a subject and necessarily contains some dualistic contents. Mystic gives us messages as per the experience that reflects cultural ideas but the experience itself is a pure consciousness; even if a subject honestly reports on a pure consciousness episode, there may have been continual events the subject either kept pressed or experienced in a nebulous way. (MEng Xue, 2021) Mystic gurus want to affirm something of the nature of what they experience, but they must utilize language originally for phenomenal rituals. (MEng Xue, 2021) The movie *Hawa* is a parallel perception where the human psyche is connected with the world of mysticism and the personification with the use of metaphors in the movie helps to mediate and to observe the world of reality and beyond.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how the uses of mystic motives in a rural story; decoding the appeal of the timeless unnaturally, questionability, mythological intensity, and suspense can take birth from an ordinary, convenient yet gradually grown phantasmal plot with twists. Characters of *Hawa* have been seen to cling to their habitats and regional beliefs. It is so intriguing to find out that

mindful uses of elements of folklore, mystic messages, and a showdown of undying desire to go for myths of Bengal are positive for studying the reason of myths being timeless rulers and it is notably absolute to bring them back to the modern theatre with a thriving dive.

Analysis

Diving deeper into the film, we can see that the modern-day visual of the film's mysticism has beautifully combined mythology, folklore, and paradoxical natural elements into the modern-day life of fishermen and sea life. Everything in the movie seems to be happening in current times but the actions can't be explained by the modern-day belief or practices. At certain points in the film, we find unexplainable things happening in Chan Majhi's boat that appears mystical yet feel real. The film seems to be a journey from reality to a mystic world. The way it ends shows that the entire boat has no connection to the real world anymore, rather than waiting for the sea to engulf it.

If we look into the name of the film- *Hawa* (Wind), we find a gentle yet potentially strong element of nature. Now, the wind can be soft, can be wild, or it can be mystic, as we find in the film. The symbol of mysticism gets intense when the wind is running over the vast unknown sea. During the run time of the film, though sometimes wind seems to be in the favour of Chan Majhi's boat, it is taking him towards his end. In the beginning, both the wind and the sea seemed generous to Chan Majhi. He finds some fish, and sails without any troubles, and receives some help from other boatmen too. But gradually he slips into the demise of his desires and nature becomes adverse for him. At 1 hour 19 minutes of the film, we find that the anchor of the boat was lost and was carried away by the wind to some unknown place. Ija panics, "নোঙ্গর ছুইটে গেছে!" "The anchor has slipped." (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) Also, when Chan Majhi falls short of fuel, he tries to use the sail, which is futile, as it gets broken suddenly by the turbulent wind amid the mysterious sea.

It was not only the wind that was getting the better of Chan Majhi but the sea joined as well. Where the land failed, the sea seems to serve justice to the female protagonist, Gulti in mysterious ways. As soon as Chan Majhi's boat enters the sea at 5 minutes into the film, someone from the boat just says over the phone, "নেটওয়ার্কের বাইরে চলে যাব" "We will go out of network." (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022). A seemingly simple statement here drops a hint that they are entering the mystic realm of the sea. In the beginning, we find Chan Majhi stopping his boat sensing that they might find fish there, which they do. He seems to be a man who knows the sea. But later on, at 1 hour 4 minutes 9 seconds of the film we find once confident man losing his prediction power, "আমি দরিয়ার পানি দেখে কয়ে দিতে পারি, মাছ আছে কি নাই! সেইখানে আমার সব হিসেব উল্টাপাল্টা

হয়ে যাচ্ছে।” “By seeing the sea water, I can predict whether there are fish or not! There all my calculations are going upside down.” (Sumon, Hawa 2022)”. Later on, we find that they were entirely at the hands of the sea and the mercy of the wind blowing over it! These elements of nature that nurture us, turn against Chan Majhi who goes on to disrupt the law of nature. We come to understand that all these events are tied by a saying, “দরিয়াতে কোন সাইন্স খাটেনা” “There is no science in the sea.” (Sumon, Hawa 2022) which was uttered by a hawker at 2.44 minutes of the film. Unknown to us, this sets the philosophy for the entire setting of the film, where natural elements reflect the power of the divine and the justice of nature.

The film takes support from myths in the form of folklore to portray the core desires of the human mind which needs cleansing time and time again. Khristina Dryza, in her lecture in TEDTalk, says, “Myths are one of the unseen which influence shaping us; they can enslave or liberate us in the span of the era. Myth illuminates the human condition which modern life can’t due to the oblivious nature of today’s human bliss.” (Dryza, 2020) It is also known by experts of folklore studies as, “Not to despair, not to give up and not to stop common people conversation, doing societal balance are the achievements of folktales.” (Shamsuddin, 2018) The striking characteristics of myth, portraying the core desires of the human mind that can’t be explained, effortlessly add to mysticism in Hawa. In the film, the female protagonist Gulti is the daughter of a water gypsy. Mystery around water is reflected in their myths, beliefs, and culture to which Gulti is no exception. She comes with her mysterious self, sometimes as a fish, sometimes as a snake, and sometimes as a woman. Her whole package equally offers innocence and experience. To be analytical, we can reflect on the quote, “We looked and still look at our personality in folks and for sure, there can be found a place for us because the past is the most innocent time travel and folktales are the mirror vessels of the past. Folklores help us to see the unseen, unspeakable gaps and behaviour of a land.” (Shamsuddin, 2018) She enters the boat at 18 minutes 18 seconds into the film as a corpse, then Nagu imagines her as a Surma fish at 20 minutes 37 seconds, and right after that, she comes back to life! We also find her disappearing at 1 hour 38 minutes 35 seconds in the film after Chan Majhi kills Iba, while she is tied with rope. After that at 1 hour 46 minutes 18 seconds, her appearance of the Surma fish is seen again gliding underneath the boat. Not only that, after Iba’s murder, while the crew of the boat started dying one after another, we found some of them dying from bites of poisonous snake which was never on the boat to begin with. It feels like that was Gulti too, and this becomes clear at the very end when we find a snake affectionately sliding the corpse of Iba, and then transforming into our female protagonist. All these events together and myths related to water gypsies forge a mystic aura around Gulti. While replying to Iba’s inquiries we find her saying, “যার ইশারায় বিষ সব বশে আনি, সেই দেবি আনিছে আমারে এই বোটে!” “At the behest of whom I subjugated the poison, the goddess brought me to this boat.” (Sumon, Hawa 2022). Curious

Iba at some point tries to understand her by asking, “তুই মানুষ না জ্বিন পরী?” “Are you a human or a fairy?” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) to which Gulti replies, “আমি মানুষ! মানুষই তো! তয় দেবী কইছিল, দরিয়ায় বাপ দিলে আমারে মাছ বানায়ে জালে আটকায়ে দিব!” “I am human! I am! The goddess said, if I jump into the sea, I will be turned into a fish and be caught in a fish net!” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022). We understand, that her intention to board the boat was nothing but revenge. She came as an agent of nature to bring down the person who was creating imbalance in it. At one-point, curious Iba asks Gulti, “আর তুই মাছ হইয়া আমাগের বোটে আসছিস কেন? এইটা কি কিছা?” “And why are you coming to my boat as a fish? What tale is this?” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022), and this leads us to the bread crumbs of folk tales. Iba could connect these mysterious behaviours with folk tales (কিছা). This hints at how human minds are rooted in myths and folktales. “Folklore is generally considered to reinforce a system of belief about humankind, the universe, and society. It is an open secret that once recorded, it can enunciate traditional narratives through transmitting cultural values.” (MEng Xue, 2021) Whenever we fail to reason something, we take the shelter of myths. Myths like, “গজব” “bad omen”, “ভালো লক্ষণ না-বোটে লাশ” “Not a good omen - dead body on boat” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) at 18 minutes 44 seconds, “মাইয়া মানুষ নোউকায় রাখা যাবেনা। পাপ হইয়া যাবে” “A woman cannot be kept in boat. It will be a sin” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) at 22 minutes 11 seconds, “মাইয়াডা নৌকায় ঠাঠার পর থেকে জালে কোন মাছ উঠতিছে না” “No fish have come up in the net since the woman got on the boat” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) at 1 hour 4 minutes 9 seconds, “বোটে গজব পড়িছে!” “The boat is jinxed!” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) at 1 hour 5 minutes 46 seconds, “বোটে মাইয়া মানুষ নিষেধ! আমাগের আগেই সেইটা বুঝা উচিৎ ছিল! এইটা একটা কালা জাদু!” “Women are prohibited in boats! I should have understood that before! This is black magic!” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) At 1 hour 26 minutes 15 seconds are heard at different situations in the film from the boatmen. This way, the existence of Gulti’s character brings the flavor of folklore and myth in the film that goes beyond logic.

The film also introduces some paradoxical elements and dialogues like “বিশ্বাস নিয়ে বিষ খাবেন, মরবেন না। অবিশ্বাসে মধু খাবেন, মইরে যাবেন” “Take poison by faith, you will not die. Take honey in disbelief, you will die.” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) at 2 minutes 3 seconds, and “এই দরিয়ায় আগেও দুইবার মইরা গেছিলাম। আমার লগেরগুলো মইরা ভূত হয় গেছে। আমি বাইচা গেছি” “I have died in this sea twice before. My men are all dead. Yet I live.” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) at 2 minutes 31 seconds from the hawker which drop a hint of mysticism at sea. Similar event is also heard from Iba during his conversation with Gulti, “এই দরিয়ায় কতো কাহিনী হয়! একবার সামাদগো বোট ডুইবা গেছিল মাঝ দরিয়ায়! তারপর তারা কেমনে তীরে ফিরিয়া আইছে, কেউ কইতে পারেনা! খালি বুঝবার পারছে, কেউ তাগোর ধাক্কায় ধাক্কায় তীরে লইয়া আইছে! মাইনশে কইছে, এগলা ডলফিনের কাজ! কিন্তু তুই তো জ্যান্ত মাইয়া! তুই কেমনে মাছ হইস?” “How many things happen in this sea! Once Samad’s boat sank in the middle of the sea! Then how they returned to the shore, no one can say! They only knew, someone has pushed them to the shore! Locals said, it’s the work of the dolphin! But you are an alive woman! How can you be a fish?” (Sumon, *Hawa* 2022) We also encounter para

doxical events like “দরিয়ায় তো মেলা লাশ দেখলাম। মাইয়া মানুষের লাশ দেখি নাই! পাপটা কারা করলো?” “I saw many dead bodies in the sea. I have not seen the dead body of any woman! Who committed the sin?” (Sumon, Hawa 2022) at 20 minutes 3 seconds in the film, where they are associating the murder of a woman religiously sinful. Oblivious to their own sins, they continue this discussion. While true wonder takes place in their minds regarding others’ sins, ironically, they are committing their own, including the plan to murder Iba in the same way.

While the setting, time- period, and events of the film portray modern-day characters and take the story to regular places, little interjections of paradoxical elements and dialogues, and a character like Gulti emerging from folklore and myths take us on a ride toward modern-day visual of mysticism in the film. The film takes place in no fantasyland. It is the same old sea, where all the other fishermen go. But this seemingly simple setting starts to hold mysterious events as if they were coincidences. “How motif speaks to a particular trait and its presence or absence in a group’s oral tradition together explain how inclined a certain oral tradition is towards a particular trait. Human subjects play a vital role in holistically digesting motifs. Their participation is essential to assess the relevance of a motif for high-level abstract concepts, such as trust, risk-taking, and perception of women. Folklore suggests that there is a historical component to modern cultural values that persists in folklore.” (MENG Xue, 2021) The entanglement of the fishing net when Gulti was coiling a wire around his hairlock, failing to catch any fish right after Gulti was found in the fishnet, starting to catch fish again in the same spot which was devoid of fish for days once Chan Majhi decided to return to shore, Gulti’s convenient vanishing when a fisherman from other boat came to inspect the fish-storage of Chan Majhi’s boat, a poisonous snake’s appearance in front of Iba’s corpse to protect it from Chan Majhi- all these are too many to be considered coincident happening in such a short period. Aiding to the strangeness of these seeming coincidences takes place other events that can just be called a bit unusual when taken into account separately, but too many to ignore while happening at a go. Starting with Nagu’s finding of Gulti as Surma fish while others see her as a woman, everyone is bitten by a snake in the game of snake and ladders except for Gulti who wins, other boats find abundant fish in the sea while experienced Chan Majhi’s boat is failing to catch any, losing the anchor without any visible reason, oil spilling out of the container for unknown reasons, Iba’s corpse remaining intact while Mora’s corpse starts showing the symptoms of rigor mortis, sudden breaking of the mast and finally the appearance of Gulti’s hand out of nowhere where just a moment ago a snake was sliding at the same place_all these incidents hints at the presence of mysticism in Hawa just like Iba says, “এই দরিয়ায় কতো কাহিনী হয়!” “How many things happen in this sea!” (Sumon, Hawa 2022) This is where Mejbaur Rahman Sumon has brought changes to the presentation of folktales and myths in his film Hawa which is very subtle. Here

chain of events containing coincidences and strange things is not as loud as the regular presentation of folktales and mythologies.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, this Bangladeshi film *Hawa* directed by Mejbaur Rahman Sumon, offers an intriguing fusion of myth, folklore, and mysticism that goes beyond the bounds of conventional storytelling. The ageless impact of mythology and mysticism on our comprehension of the universe is reaffirmed by this cinematic masterpiece, which acts as a link between the past and the present. The huge sea and the lives of fishermen are shown in this seemingly everyday environment, yet the story is laced with a web of mysterious happenings and mystical experiences. The film's magical charm is derived from its characters, conversation, and visuals, which immerse the viewer in a universe where mysticism and realism coexist.

Gulti, a figure from myth and folklore, personifies the ethereal quality of the movie. The impression that the film is a journey from reality to mysticism is furthered by her mysterious changes, such as her change from a corpse to a fish and her link to the elements of nature. Gulti appears to be directed by the divine powers of nature in her deeds and presence, intending to uphold justice and balance.

The movie also highlights the intricacy of human nature and the secrets of the sea by using contradictory aspects and language that contradict the beliefs and acts of the characters. These inconsistencies make it harder to discern between the supernatural and the actual world, adding to the story's mystique.

The way that folklore and myth are presented in *Hawa* by Mejbaur Rahman Sumon is nuanced but deep. Instead of depending on overtly supernatural themes, the movie incorporates mysticism into daily living. The film's series of incidents and coincidences—such as the unexpected arrival of snakes, the disappearance of anchors, and mysterious occurrences—deepen the sense of mysticism and leave viewers in awe.

Hawa basically asks viewers to investigate the ageless realm of mysticism as well as the continuing influence of mythology and folklore. It makes us re-evaluate our views of mysticism and reality and serves as a reminder that these concepts are still relevant now and are not remnants of the past. Mejbaur Rahman Sumon's cinematic masterwork shows how the blending of myth, folklore, and mysticism can give contemporary narrative a fresh new lease on life. It is a visually spectacular and thought-provoking experience that stays with us long after the credits have rolled.

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