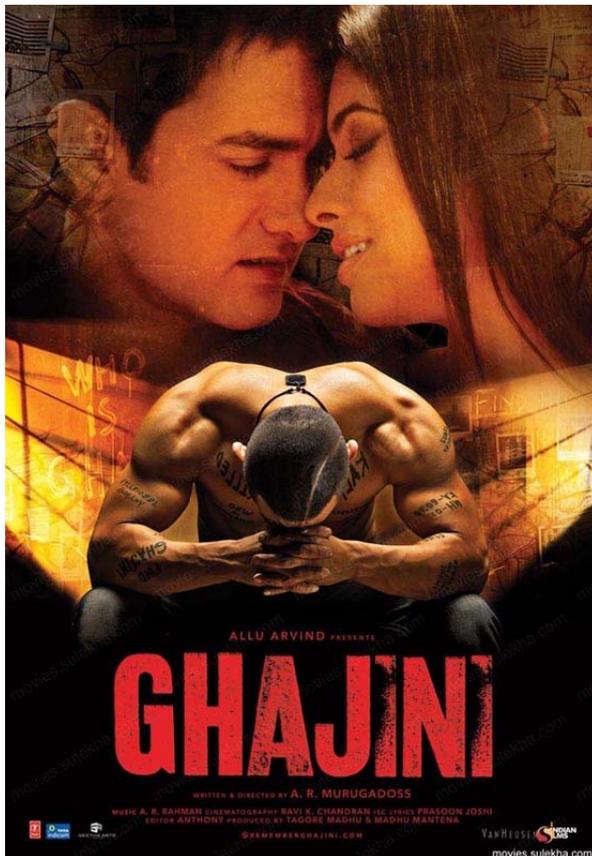


GHAJINI

Fatima Alvi Faisal¹



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At the time when the modern concept of cinema lies between traditional pathos and the personal revelations that dominate 'the confessional' culture of the media, the tragic is a brave theme for Amir Khan to embark upon, a genre that is classical in origin and has been deeply rooted in literature than the visual arts. The 'Tragic' in art, film and literature is not new.

'Ghajini' by filmmaker A.R. Murugadoss starring Amir Khan, has much to thank Christopher Nolan's 'Memento'. 'Ghajini', positions itself outside the mere narcissistic contemporary obsessions such as surface appearances which have in the recent years intensified in films. Instead it focuses on values giving us glimpses of personal history of the protagonist through diaries maintained by him at some point in

time. These revelations into the past endear us to the hero 'Sanjay Singhania' played by Amir Khan.

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The movie is a collage of images borrowed from the west with the quintessential Bollywood romance and songs poured in. The entirely different paradigm instead of blending together stands out. A tale told too many times of a hero seeking revenge for the murder of his lady love whose face he does not even remember.

The film opens with an introduction to Amir Khan's mental condition, anterograde amnesia i.e. short term memory loss. This 15 minute memory leads him to develop new ways of clinging to reality such as the use of Polaroid camera, maps, photographs, notes all recipes for instant remembrance. Then we see him making his way through his day in a very organized and mechanical way. Giving vent to his frustration and anger in an army like regimental way. Exercising like a maniac. Making mistakes, running after people all the time trying to give meaning to his life. Then we glimpse his past and the love of his life the virtuous 'Kalpana', a young ambitious and innocent girl with a heart of gold, trusting and free. She has all the moral qualities that would make any man fall in love with her. Talking endlessly and at times saying things that he wants to say. After that, future becomes a collision of the heroic will with sinister fate where all allies and enemies keep changing faces.

We see him without friends and family surrounded by a horde of subordinates. We see no enemies or competitions in his personal life. The interior spaces he inhabits in this time zone are clean, crisp and minimalist like his life, clutter free but at the same time bland. The quality of light through this time frame is light and one can breathe easily.

It is difficult to relate to his other state of being that is in a constant flux and agony. At many places more like Mr Hyde of 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', using brute force and suffering animal rages. His mental trauma reconditions him to time and speed. The interior spaces of the movie have a close connection with his mental spaces. The mental spaces are reflected in the interior spaces he inhabits, like his mind cluttered and chaotic, though he tries his level best to maintain order by listing and name tagging articles. His life will achieve order after chaos, an order as simple and innocent as that of a child.

His life achieves the tragic quality as we approach the void existing within him, a void of forgetfulness. He could be happy if he lets himself forget. But the tragedy demands death, the event from which there is no going back. But it is not simply the fact of death. Greek tragedy required the death of the hero. Medieval tragedy celebrated the death of the saviour.

In this case the death of memory is symbolic. We live as we remember. Our loved ones are alive as long as they are in our memory. Loss of memory, past and history is the void that manifests itself like a deep chasm throughout the film. But to remember is also to act, because we forgive as we forget. But he can't let himself forget thus the tattooed body.

The past is clean, elegant, beautiful and complete; in contrast the tattooed text on the body, the distortion of expression and animal rage takes on the suggestion of brusque movement in time like quick silver. Reality becomes an illusion like the inverted text on his body only legible through mirror. Surrealist piling up of events and incidents gives way to a dreamlike urban landscape. Juxtaposing snapshots, notes, and maps and trying to give them a context. A context that is displaced shifted and altered after every fifteen minutes.

Amir Khan perhaps gave the most incredible and powerful performance to date as he had no dialogues only expressions and gestures to convey with in the second phase of his life. These fleeting expressions are so tragic and haunting. He becomes a person whose reactions do not get the time treatment and are very intense and volatile. He feels with such intensity compressed in a small time frame and he performed it to the hilt. The raw expression of anger and pain at times as confused and innocent as a child's and than that of a young man in love was no easy task. The hunter and the hunted become one and Mr. Khan performed it beautifully and smoothly. The acting is outstanding. The film leaves one wondering if the ending could have been slightly more devious and deceitful.