

Brechtian Distancing as a Pedagogical Tool: Developing Critical Spectatorship through the Cinema of Ritwik Ghatak and Dharmasena Pathiraja

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Contemporary cinema often encourages passive spectatorship through emotional immersion and narrative identification, limiting audiences' capacity for critical engagement with social and political realities. Although Bertolt Brecht's theory of distancing (*Verfremdungseffekt*) has been widely examined in theatre studies, its pedagogical significance in postcolonial cinema, particularly in the works of Ritwik Ghatak and Dharmasena Pathiraja, remains underexplored. This study addresses how Brechtian cinematic strategies can cultivate critical spectatorship rather than passive consumption. This paper aims to develop a theoretical argument that Brechtian distancing functions as a pedagogical tool in the cinemas of Ritwik Ghatak and Dharmasena Pathiraja by fostering critical spectatorship and encouraging audiences to engage analytically with postcolonial social, political, and historical realities. The study adopts a qualitative comparative research design based on close textual analysis of selected films by Ritwik Ghatak and Dharmasena Pathiraja. It employs Bertolt Brecht's theory of distancing as the primary analytical framework, supported by Jacques Rancière's concept of the emancipated spectator and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Cinematic techniques—including narrative structure, editing, *mise-en-scène*, sound, symbolism, and performance—are analysed to examine how they disrupt passive viewing and stimulate critical reflection. The analysis demonstrates that both filmmakers employ Brechtian cinematic techniques to interrupt emotional identification and encourage audiences to question ideology, historical memory, social inequality, and postcolonial identity. Rather than positioning viewers as passive recipients of meaning, their films invite active interpretation, transforming spectators into critical participants in the production of meaning. The findings further indicate that these cinematic strategies function as pedagogical practices that promote political awareness and critical consciousness. The paper concludes that the cinemas of Ritwik Ghatak and Dharmasena Pathiraja extend Brechtian distancing beyond the theatrical tradition, establishing cinema as an effective pedagogical medium for cultivating critical spectatorship. By integrating Brechtian aesthetics with postcolonial cinematic practice, the study contributes to scholarship on film pedagogy, spectatorship studies, and postcolonial cultural criticism, highlighting the educational potential of politically engaged cinema.

Keywords: *Brechtian Distancing; Critical Spectatorship; Film Pedagogy; Ritwik Ghatak; Dharmasena Pathiraja.*