



The motion of resistance: radical autonomy and the medicalization of the mundane in Shoojit Sircar's *Piku*

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Abstract

This article evaluates Shoojit Sircar's *Piku* [1] within the geriatric medical canon, examining its subversion of traditional aging tropes that equate old age with inevitable decline, loss of autonomy, and passive dependency. Centered on the protagonist Bhashkor Banerjee's chronic constipation, the narrative explores the medicalization of the mundane, where both bowel motion and bodily movement become intertwined sites through which elderly agency is negotiated. Through a gerontological lens, the film portrays the domestic space as a site of conflict between the autonomy of the aging subject and the ethical demands of caregiving. By analyzing Bhashkor's refusal to be governed—manifested in a cross-country road trip and his reclamation of physical agency via a bicycle ride in Kolkata—this study identifies a shift from the conventional senescence-as-loss narrative. It argues that *Piku* reimagines ageing through the interdependence of bodily autonomy, mobility, and caregiving, offering a reimagined framework for filial maturity that privileges the elderly subject's right to pleasure, agency, and negotiated care over clinical safety.

Keywords Senescence-as-loss · Affirmative ageing · Caregiving · Autonomy · Resistance · Old age

Directed by Shoojit Sircar, *Piku* [1] is a Hindi comedy-drama that explores the evolving relationship between Piku Banerjee, an independent architect, and her ageing father, Bhashkor, during a road trip from Delhi to Kolkata. The film received widespread critical acclaim for its realistic storytelling, nuanced performances, and sensitive portrayal of ageing and caregiving. This essay argues that *Piku* challenges conventional gender roles by portraying an unmarried daughter—not a son or spouse—as the primary caregiver, thereby questioning the patriarchal assumption that women must balance caregiving within marriage rather than as autonomous individuals.

The phrase “*Motion of Resistance*” is employed as a deliberate double entendre, referring simultaneously to

bowel motion—the film's recurring preoccupation with constipation—and to bodily movement through space. By linking these two forms of motion, the article argues that both physiological processes and physical mobility become sites through which Bhashkor resists the medicalization and social regulation of old age. The term “*Radical Autonomy*” refers to Bhashkor's persistent assertion of self-determination despite physical vulnerability, medical advice, and caregiver intervention. His autonomy is “radical” because it refuses to subordinate pleasure, mobility, and personal choice to the dominant clinical logic of protection and risk avoidance that frequently governs old age.

Piku centers on the intricate relationship between the septuagenarian Bhashkor Banerjee and his daughter, Piku in her thirties. The narrative is anchored in two distinct geographic and psychological locations; their contemporary Delhi residence and their ancestral home in Kolkata. These domestic spaces function as sites of conflicting perspectives, where the lived reality of aging clashes with the expectations and anxieties of the younger generation. While Bhashkar Banerjee depicts the childlike behaviour of old age as he secretively eats pickle and sweet while being forced to eat boiled and tasteless food, Piku represents the caregiver who sacrifices eating oily food at home, persistently discussing

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