

CHAPTER-III

THE CINEMA OF SATYAJIT RAY

The cinema of Satyajit Ray is a rare mixture of emotions and intellect. Ray's thirty seven films are an authentication of his varied and multi-faceted creativity. The master storyteller that he was has left behind an unmatched cinematic heritage. A great auteur, who put Indian cinema prominently on the world map, Ray is known for his humanistic approach to cinema. *"Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon"*- said by Akira Kurosawa is the most apt tribute to Satyajit Ray's sheer brilliance. Satyajit Ray is an icon of cultural legacy of India. His influence has been deep and all pervasive in Bengali cinema and Indian cinema.

Satyajit Ray usher in modernity into the tradition bound Indian cinema and he remains an enigmatic figure. No labels - "Classicists" or "Humanist" or "last Bengali Renaissance man" – fits him well. Either he or his films cannot be encapsulated in a single phrase. His films defy easy formulations. Though his film are made primarily for Bengali and deeply rooted within Bengal and Ray's cultural milieu yet these films are transcultural in their larger implications. Moreover, his films display such diverse influence such as Italian neo-realism, Jean Renoir, Cartier-Bresson, Bonnard and Mozart. Converged in Ray's cosmopolitan, modernist, twentieth century perspective, these influences reveal a value system that has more to do with nineteenth century. Ray was a product of east-west fusion. As Suranjan Ganguly writes *"Thus his struggle to define himself within the framework of his legacy involves a larger struggle to define India within which he functions as an artist."*

Ray's major works focus on India as a new emerging nation, filtered through the experiences of men and women who seek to define themselves in relation to the larger forces of change. These forces manifest themselves through conflicts between the feudal and the modern, tradition and progress, the village and city, the old and the

new. Through understated and poetic narratives, Satyajit Ray shows how such conflicts shape new forms of identity within an evolving society. While Chidananda Das Gupta writes, “*A purely aesthetic appreciation of Satyajit Ray’s work can hardly be complete one. Ray was a classicist, an inheritor of a traditional Indian approach to art in which beauty is inseparable from truth and goodness. Despite his fine understanding of a very wide range of Western culture –which Jean Renoir in 1949 use to fine ‘fantastic’ – it is his Indianness which gives him his value for India, and for the medium imported from the West in which he worked.*”

The filmmaking career spanning 37 years chronicles social changes of India experienced for a period spreading over more than a century. It encompasses the transition of the impoverished Brahmin movement from traditional to modern Indian (*Apu Trilogy* -1959), Awakening of rationalist ideas among the elites (*Devi* -1960 and *Charulata*- 1964), The beginning of the liberation of women (*Mahanagar*-1963), the Bankruptcy of younger generation in *Aranyer Din Ratri* (1961), the anguish of the unemployed (*Pratidwandi*-1970), death of conscience in a corrupt society (*Jana Aranya*- 1975 and *Sahkha Prashakha* -1990).The last film *Agantuk* (1991) reasserts the basic human values. Final analysis shows a complete circle of creation– starting from the outline of social evolution of Indian middle class and then beyond. *Shatranj Ki Khiladi* (1977) and *Jalasagar* (1958) though made much later yet these two films fit in the circle and as if draw a preamble of the circle.

Commenting on the socio-political commitment of Satyajit Ray Chidananda Das Gupta writes, “*Satyajit Ray never saddle himself with the baggage of Marxist guilt for being born a bourgeois. He never put his faith in any system*”. *Pather Panchali* bore some superficial resemblance to the Indian People Theater Association (IPTA)’s tradition in so far as it pictured the poverty ridden circumstances

prevailing in rural Bengal. But the family's fortunes he followed belonged to the privileged class of a previous era, the village Brahmin priest-poet, now fallen in evil times because of the shift of accent to western education and urbanization to which his son is eventually drawn. Although *Pather Panchali* bid to Bengali cinema what IPTA's stage production *Nabanna* had done to Bengali theatre a decade ago, the comparison cannot be pushed far. Ray was a believer in the uniqueness of the individual right from the beginning and did not have to struggle with the pressures of the socialist collectivity. From *Apu* to *Agantuk*, he saw the ethical development of the individual, the importance of good means to achieve good ends, as the key to social regeneration. This was most clearly defined in *Ghare Baire*. His mentor was not Marx but Tagore. Throughout a period of Marxism-denominated ideological ambience and state power, he worked steadfastly in opposition to one of its basic, and to him most evil, tenets – that the end justifies the means. He repeatedly stressed this in films like *Jana Aranya* and *Shakha Prasakha*, leaving one in no doubt about where his sympathies lay. Thus the heritage he upheld as of the Bengal renaissance and the Brahmo movement beginning with Rammohan Ray and culminating in Rabindranath Tagore. It is the ideology of this reformist movement anxious to make religion compatible with modern science and western democracy on the basis of an upanishadic, monotheistic rationalism that Ray internalized and expressed in his cinema. Today his faith in the individual and the importance of his development and his personal ethics can be seen as the main agenda of the post-Marxist world.”

Lack of anger, distance from the event, and avoidance of overt and direct action in his films treatment invited criticism of the left-intellectuals and younger generation. After *Charulata* he took a turn. Post '*Charulata*', Ray forayed into diverse kinds of movie-making. He travelled from fantasy to science fiction to detective stories to historical dramas. With '*Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne*' in 1969 and '*Hirok Rajar Deshe*' in 1980,

he touched the tender hearts of children. A fantasy tale about two friends, a drummer and a singer, made an immediate connect with kids. In the 70s Satyajit made his famous Feluda series, which he wrote as stories, into two movies. One was '*Sonar Kella*' and the other '*Joi Baba Felunath*'. Ray's first venture outside Bangla films was '*Shatranj Ke Khiladi*'. After *Charulata*, India witnessed the dreams and vision of euphoric Nehruvian era was on the wane, the fruits of development were being siphoning off by handful few – all these brought about a change in the temper of Ray's works. Departing distinctly from his earlier traditional attitude he brought in a new approach in the treatment of the contemporary life. The classicist feel of his works gets replaced by the new panorama of the city- the political meeting, long queues etc. The stylistics took a different looks. The stylistics and treatment of *Pratidwandi* and *Jana Aranya* bears anger, darker side of the city etc. In this phase of his works marked the recognition of the social and moral decay. But such recognition are pessimistic and this pessimism recognizes the compulsion under which compromises with evil are made. In *Shatranj ki Khiladi* Ray shows the decadence of Wajed Ali and his Awadh, the historical inevitability collapse of his empire. Yet this film also recognizes the exquisiteness, the pride and the hint of noble tragedy that envelops the fall.

From *Ghare-Baire* onward a new and increasing inclination to finger at the villain and to allow his statements to become wordy and explicit is witnessed in his works

To understand Ray's works it is necessary to see the contradiction between his overt statements about his relationship with the west and his intuitive links with the Indian spiritual tradition. As for aesthetic, he derived from western musical form and western narrative tradition of cinema, mainly from Hollywood.

SATYAJIT RAY'S FILMOGRAPHY :

- 1955 *Pather Panchali* (A Song of the Little Road), Bengali
- 1956 *Aporajito* (The Unvanquished), Bengali
- 1958 *Parash Pathar* (The Philosopher's Stone), Bengali
- 1958 *Jalsaghar* (The Music Room). Bengali
- 1959 *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu), Bengali
- 1960 *Devi* (The Goddess), Bengali
- 1961 *Teen Kanya* (Three Daughters), Bengali
- 1961 *Rabindranath Tagore* (documentary), English
- 1962 *Kanchanjangha* (Kanchanjangha). Bengali
- 1962 *Abhijan* (The Expedition). Bengali
- 1963 *Mahanagar* (The Big City), Bengali
- 1964 *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife). Bengali
- 1964 *Two* (No spoken language)
- 1965 *Kapurush-O-Mahapurush* (The Coward and the Holy Man), Bengali
- 1966 *Nayak* (The Hero) ,Bengali
- 1967 *Chiriyakhana* (The Zoo). Bengali
- 1968 *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha). Bengali
- 1969 *Aranyer Din Ratri* (Days and Nights in the Forest). Bengali

- 1970 *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary). Bengali
- 1971 *Seemabaddha* (Company Limited), Bengali
- 1971 *Sikkim* ,documentary. English
- 1972 *The Inner Eye*,documentary, English
- 1973 *Ashani Sanket* (The Distant Thunder). Bengali
- 1974 *Sonar Kella* (The Golden Fortress) ,Bengali
- 1975 *Jana Aranya* (The Middleman). Bengali
- 1976 *Bala* , documentary. English
- 1977 *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (The Chess Players). Hindi / Urdu
- 1979 *Joi Baba Felunath* (The Elephant God), Bengali
- 1980 *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (The Kingdom of Diamonds), Bengali
- 1980 *Pikoo* (Pikoo's Day). Bengali
- 1981 *Sadgati* (The Deliverance), Hindi
- 1984 *Ghare Baire* (The Home and The World), Bengali
- 1987 *Sukumar Ray*, documentary, Bengali
- 1989 *Ganashatru* (An Enemy of the People). Bengali
- 1990 *Shakha Proshakha* (Branches of the Tree). Bengali
- 1991 *Agantuk* (The Stranger). Bengali