

**CHAPTER-IV**

**STUDY OF SELCTED CINEMATIC  
WORKS OF SATYAJIT RAY**

**Aparajito (The Unvanquished)**  
**(1956, 113 min, B/W, Bengali with subtitles.)**

Set in 1920 , this film is based on the novel “*Aparajito*” by Bibhutibhushan Bondopadhyaya . Harihar, Sarbajaya and their ten-year-old son Apu, live in Banaras (Varanasi). Harihar earns a meager living by reciting religious scriptures. Harihar’s sudden death after a short illness leaves mother and son to fend for themselves. After a while they leave Banaras for to live in Monsapota village where an old uncle of Sarbojaya works as a priest. Apu’s mother works to support the family. Apu is initiated into priesthood and takes over the shelter provider’s work. He is unhappy because he wants to go to school. Apu persuades his mother to send him to school. She makes sacrifices so that he might pursue his studies. Apu, now sixteen, wins a scholarship and goes to Calcutta, leaving back the mother alone. It breaks Sarbajaya’s heart, but she relents. Her health is failing, and the loneliness in the village takes its toll.

Apu grows away from his mother in Calcutta ( Kolkata) studying during the day and working in a printing press at night to pay for his expenses. His visits to mother get shorter as the time passes. This emotional distance unnoticed by the growing Apu, hurts Sarbajaya deeply. She waits silently for her son’s visit as her illness accelerates and falls into a depression.

On a night, Sarbajaya dies. Apu comes back but soon leaves the village forever.

The second film of Apu trilogy, is a deeply moving document of the multi-hued relationship between mother and a son. The widening distance between them, as Apu grows from childhood to adolescence. According to Chidananda Das Gupta, “*The most significant chapter is the relationship between an adolescent son drawn to the outside*

*world and the mother seeing him unchanged from his boyhood, full of resonance of a complex ,unspoken ,Oedipal tension that all man must , in their growth , overcome. Apu's release is perhaps more important than the poignancy of his mother death."*

The economy of expression makes *Aporajito* a cinematic epic. For example after the death of Harihara, Sarbojoya is offered with an option to come over to Monosapota village by a relative but she opts for working as a maid-servant and so is Apu. One day while coming down the staircase in her employer house. Sarbojoy sees her so, at a distance, lighting the Chillum of the Hookah of the bosses'. She stops shocked by her vision of her son's future .The sound of a train overlaps her face. Cut to the train entering the bridge over a rive .They are going to the village of Monosapota where Apu will now go to school. Enters the theme music of Pather Pnachali. The flow of the film is, repetitive, ruled by mood, more like Indian music compared to Ray's later works.

British Documentary maker John Grierson has observed documentary styles in the first part of the film - the Banaras part. The way Satyajit Ray captured the city of Banaras, the ghats, the chantings, the incidental sound of the ambience are essentially bear the characters of documentary filming.

**Awards:**

Golden Lion of St. Mark, Venice, 1957

Cinema Nuovo Award, Venice, 1957

Critics Award, Venice, 1957

FIPRESCI Award, London, 1957

Best Film and Best Direction, San Francisco, 1958

International Critic' Award, San Francisco, 1958

Golden Laurel for Best Foreign Film of 1958-59, USA

Selznik Golden Laurel, Berlin, 1960

Bodil Award: Best Non-European Film of the Year, Denmark, 1967

### **DEVI ( The Goddess )**

**(1960, India. 93 min, B/W, In Bengali with subtitles.)**

Based on the short story by Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee of same title, the film is set in 1860, in rural Bengal. Doyamoyee a young housewife lives in a traditional joint family with an elder brother-in-law his wife, the nephew Khoka and wealthy father-in-law, Kalikinkar Roy. Doyamoyee's husband Umaprasad, is away to study in Calcutta. Kalikinkar Roy, the patriarch, is an aging widower, a respected landlord and a devotee of the goddess Kali.

Roy has a revelation in a dream that his daughter-in-law Doyamoyee is an incarnation of the goddess Kali. Thus, he insists Dayamoyee be worshiped and the family is forced to worship her. One day, a dying child is placed at her feet and he is miraculously cured. As the news spreads, thronged in hundreds; seeking cures and comfort. The husband Umaprasad learns about the events and returns home to her rescue. Umaprasad tries to reason with his father and tells him that he has gone insane. The father is unmoved. To him, the miraculous cure corroborates the truth of the beliefs.

Umaprasad tries to take her away, but to his surprise finds that she too has become convinced of her divine status. Doyamoyee's nephew, the child Khoka, falls ill and is placed in her care but the child dies for lack of medical treatment in her arms. Her husband tries again to

persuade her but it is too late by then. The child's death has shattered her. Doyamoyee, becomes mad and comes out from home

The film generated some controversy on its release in India. It was seen as an attack on Hinduism itself by a few protesters. But the film is essentially a depiction of conflict between rationality and superstition. To many critics, from east and west, it is a period cinema. But, the truth is that the film shows a transition of society from belief to rationality and myth to rationality. It also hints the ushering in of western education which is depicted through the deep observation of the character of Umaprasad. The motif of flowing river ,boat and sails used in the film gives enough hints of progress and change of time. The conversation between the college professors with Umaparasad on freethinking overlaps with the sound of rail engine gives hits for an imminent transition to a time lying ahead. In a sequence, Umaprasad tries to convince his father that Doyamee is not any incarnation of goddess Kali ,and such believe is nothing but superstition, the father comes toards him as if to attack him but suddenly fall. The background reveals a gothic structure. This also indicates the old values and beliefs are about to fall.

Commenting on the essence that underlines the film Chidanada Das Gupta writes *“Clearly, Ray’s attitude to the mother Goddess myth is tempered by his rationality. The view that underlines the films is that Indian lives too much by myth and too little by fact; unless a balanced interaction between the two could be restored, myth would do more harm than good.”*

Stylistic wise the film is different from his other works. The film has Bergmanian gloom, dominated by night scenes, dark silhouettes and deafening music. The composition and camera-angles somewhere resemble the works of the early masters of Russian cinema.

Both, Paulin Keal and Chidananda Das Gupta traces some strain of Freudian undertones in the film while analysing the father-in-law Kalikinar's character.

**Awards:**

President's Gold Medal, New Delhi, 1961

**TEEN KANYA (Three Daughters )**

*The Postmaster 56 min.; Monihara 61 min.; Samapti 56 min.*  
**(1961, with subtitles )**

The title of the film Teen Kanya means three daughters (or girls), however the international version of the film is titled Two Daughters. Though the feature film has three different stories, only two of them were included for the international release—The Postmaster and Samapti

***The Postmaster***

Nandalal a young postmaster arrives from city posted in small village, a pre-adolescent orphan girl Ratan, is his housekeeper and maid servant as well, she cooks, cleans and cares for Nandalal.

The city bred young Nandalal, finds him difficult to fit into the village life. He is bored. He begins teaching her to read and write. She also responds eagerly. A tender bond develops between them.

Nandalal falls sick. Ratan nurses him back to health and resigns his job. He prepares to leave without realizing how attached to him Ratan has become. Ratan heart is ripped off.

Nandalal offer her some money as a tip for her services. She has been crying but too proud to accept the tip. Overwhelmed Nandalal, putting

the money back in pocket, walks away. A few moments later we hear her voice. She is informing the new postmaster that she has brought water for him.

Postmaster is a significant film drawn from the original by Tagore. Satyajit Ray, from this film onwards composed the music of all his later films. In original story Ratan is a young woman but Satyajit Ray avoided it and etched Ratan as a child thus kept the story confined in a strange bond between two individuals. Although the bond was strong from the side of Ratan. He also aptly depicts the dichotomy between city and village.

### ***Samapti (The Conclusion)***

Amulya while returning to his village after passing his exams in Calcutta to spend some time with his widowed mother encounters a tomboyish teenager Mrinmoyee

The mother has arranged for him to marry the daughter of a respectable family. Much against his wishes he goes to visit the girl in a nearby village. Again he encountered her in a very unusual amusing situation falls in her love.

Against his mother's wishes, he marries Mrinmoyee. On their first night she escapes by climbing down a tree and spends the night on her favorite swing on the riverbank. It is scandal. He returns to Calcutta and she is sent back to her mother's house.

His mother makes Amulya come back on a false pretext of her illness. On coming back home Amulya finds she is no longer a childish madcap but a grown woman in love.

### ***Monihara (The Lost Jewels)***

A village school teacher recounts a story to a man veiled under a shawl,

siting near an abandoned mansion. It seems that the house was inhabited by a childless couple. The wife had unsatiating greed or fondness for ornaments. She is very cold to him. The husband keeps buying jewels for her in hope of gaining her love.

A fire destroys his business. She offers to sell her jewels for investment in the business. But when the husband shows some interest in the idea she retreats in panic. When the husband is away to raise money, she calls her cousin to escort her to her parents house but she disappears while going to her parents house. At the end the man listening the story, tells the narrator that he enjoyed the story but it has many errors as he is the husband in the story. While commenting on this film Chidananda critiques Ray *“As a craftsman, Ray justifies himself well enough, but it is an area in which he has formidable competition, from the Nordic Masters Carl Dreyer, Paul Wageener, Robert Wiene, et al to later day experts like James Whale and Alfred Hitchcock.”*, Ray left this film while sending *Teen Kanya* abroad.

**Awards:**

President’s Silver Medal, New Delhi, 1961 (for *Samapti*)

Golden Boomerang, Melbourne, 1962 (for the *Two Daughters*)

Selznik Golden Laurel Award, Berlin, 1963

**ABHIJAN (The expedition)**

**( 1962, 150 mins., B/W, In Bengali with subtitles)**

Based on the novel “Abhijan” by Tarasankar Banerjee the film is set in around 1930, somewhere in Bihar-Bengal border. It is a story of Gulabi, a mistress of a smuggler-merchant and a taxi driver Narshing a proud and hot-tempered Rajput. His passion is his vehicle, a vintage



1930 Chrysler. For reckless driving his permit is taken away. This forces him to take shelter in a small town somewhere on the borders of the states of Bengal and Bihar.

He is aggressive, frustrated and joins hand with a smuggler-merchant for a better tomorrow who tempts him to join him as his partner in a transport company. Meanwhile the smuggler's mistress Gulabi who has been forced into prostitution by circumstances finds herself attracted to Narshing who in turn falls in love for a Christian school teacher Neeli. She loves a son of a Christian priest. Eventually she uses Narshing, whom she considers just a friend; to help her eloped by her lover. Now, Narshing gets more attracted to the smuggler's mistress Gulabi and finally rescued her from the smuggler-merchant.

This film unlikely of Ray's works, spells out much and suggests less. It was his first and only melodramatic film. It is not considered or accepted either in India or in abroad as one of his major work. But the Satyajitian human touch is not absent. Though the subtext has some strength yet it cannot stand well. British film Institute in one of their folder published on the occasion the exhibition of Satyajit Ray's films, in May 1978, commented that this film is more in the line of Indian popular cinema. Off course some scholars in Bengal, such as Amitabha Chottopadhyaya, do not buy this view. The film has a fight sequence as well.

Abhijan was Satyajit Ray's biggest box-office success in his native state Bengal. The film was originally conceived by his one of producer friend, Bijoy Chatterjee was to direct it. Satyajit has penned the screenplay for this friend. But, finally he has to take up the responsibility of directing it.

**Awards:**

President's Silver Medal, New Delhi, 1962

## **MAHANAGAR (The Big City)**

**(1963, India. 131 min, B/W, In Bengali with subtitles)**

The film set in Calcutta, during mid-1950s based on a short story “Abataranika” by Narendranath Mitra .It is a story of a young lower middle class Bengali house wife, Arati , in Calcutta. Encouraged by her Bank employee husband Subrata she took up a job of sales girl, to supplement the family’s income so as to keep the family’s day to day requirements fulfilled. The couple lives with three other members of the family- Subrata’s parents and sister. Arati much against established custom and opposition of the elders finds a job of selling sewing machines door-to-door. Going out from the four walls of the home to work, Arati discovers a new life. She gradually encounters the outer world of the metro confidently. Arati is like an anchor holding the family together. But the husband who once encouraged her for a job, just to meet the middle class aspiration of better life becomes jealous of her smartness and her performance in profession. His father too puts pressure on his son to force Arati to quit the job. He becomes suspicious as well but Satyajit Ray does not show her doing anything illicit. Now she confronts the world in the four wall of home and the outer world of metro. To save a colleague’s job she resigns and at that point the husband also losses his job. Now both of them are unemployed yet are optimistic

In Mahanagar, for the first time in Indian cinema, the woman is not the shadow of man but an individual. From this film Ray concentrated on women oriented subject on his two consecutive films – *Charulata*(1964) and short feature *Kapurush* (1965). Both these later films show the women as individuals. In this film, for the first time in Indian cinema, a woman awakens to the possibility of determining the future course of her life.

The treatment of the film is not simple as it seems to be. With full of cross currents among the members of the family of three generation the family. The complex plot falls into three well-knitted sections. The uses of property, such as the rope or the mirror in the washroom etc. are remarkable. In last scene when the camera moves from street light to the sky it evokes pessimism in the mind of the audience.

**Awards:**

Certificate of Merit, New Delhi, 1964

Silver Bear for Best Direction, Berlin, 1964

**CHARULATA (The Lonely Wife)**

**1964, India. 117 min, B/W, In Bengali with subtitles.**

Set in Calcutta in the late nineteenth century the film narrates the story of a lonely housewife Charu. Her husband Bhupati runs and edits English daily. Bengal Renaissance is at its peak and India is under the British rule. Bhupati though loves her yet spends a lot more time at work than with his wife. Charu is interested in the arts, literature and poetry. Feeling her boredom, Bhupati invites Charu's elder brother Umapada and wife Manda to live with them. Umapada helps in running of the paper and the printing press. Manda with her silly and crude ways is no company for the sensitive and intelligent Charulata. Bhupati's younger cousin Amal who has a literary ambition comes on a visit. Bhupati asks him to encourage Charu's cultural interests. Amal is young, handsome and is of the same age group as Charu. Charu and Amal's feelings for each other move beyond those of a mentoring relationship but simluteniously he also becomes uncomfortable with Charu's higher intellect that he has helped nurture. On the other hand in Charu begins a latent sexual attraction towards Amal. Amal is

unwilling to betray his cousin's trust that has already suffered at the hands of Charu's swindling brother. He leaves unannounced, to marry and go away to England for higher studies. He leaves behind a letter to Charu. Charu is heartbroken but hides her disappointment. Bhupati accidentally enters her room and finds her crying over Amal. Bhupati realizes Charu's feelings for Amal. He is broken, shocked and bewildered by it rushes out of the house, wanders aimlessly in his carriage. On his return, Charu and Bhupati make a hesitant gesture to reach out, but their extended hands remain frozen in a tentative gesture.

The film is base on a story *Nastaneed* written by Rabindranath Tagore

### **ARANYER DIN RATRI**

**(Days and Nights in the Forest) (1969)**

**( 1969, India. 115 min, B/W, In Bengali with subtitles)**

It is a story about a group of four friends, quite unlike each other and yet bonded together deeply set out for the tribal Palamau, , to tear themselves away from their regulated city life.

Full of the confidence of the big city, and with little respect for the rural villagers, their conceited worldview is challenged by their experiences with the local girls of Palmau.

“Breaking rules”, they manage to stay in a forest rest house by bribing the chowkidar, burn a copy of a newspaper in a symbolic gesture of cutting ties from civilization, deliberate on whether to shave or not and walk through the forest to get drunk at a country liquor shop. They encounter two city ladies there in the forest and a wild tribal woman.

Each time their confidence takes a solid blow. Ray neatly gives the upper hand to the women. Much to the embarrassment of the men,

the two ladies happen to spring up coincidentally at the wrong moments – once while three of them are enjoying a bath by an archaic well in their briefs; the second time inadvertently when they are doing a twist in the middle of the dark night forest in a hopelessly drunk state; and the third time when the two women save them from an embarrassing eviction by the Forest Ranger from the rest house.

*The film explores the vagaries and vicissitudes of the “new generation.*

### **GHARE BAIRE (The Home and The World)**

**(1984, 140 min., Color, with subtitles)**

Based on a novel by Rabinrdanath Tagore the film is set in the winter of 1905, Bengal - the chaotic aftermath of partition of Bengal. Lord Curzon has decided to divide Bengal; one for Hindus and another for Muslims. In protest the people launch a nationalist movement - Swadeshi, appealing to boycott of foreign-made goods. In this turbulent backdrop, the story unfolds. Western educated Nikhilesh has liberal views. His wife Bimala is content to live in seclusion of her inner apartments and has no desire break the custom to explore the outside world. Nikhil is faithful to the ideals of the Bengal Renaissance. He lives happily with his beautiful wife Bimala They share a loving relationship. Nikhilesh wants her to come into the world outside the seclusion of home., he convinces her that he will never know if she really loves him unless she has opportunity to meet others and prefer him over other men. She begins to take lessons from an English governess. Nikhil introduces her to his radical friend Sandip who is a charismatic nationalist leader. Staying in their house he leads the boycott of foreign made goods. But his ire seems to be directed against traders who sell imported goods who are mostly Muslims. Sandip is a passionate and active man, in contrast to the peace-loving and somewhat passive Nikhilesh. He easily

attracts the innocent and unsuspecting Bimala, creating a love triangle. Encouraged by her husband to be a “modern” woman, Bimala is seduced by Sandip, She gradually recognizes the duplicity of his motives and behavior. This helps her understand that it is indeed her husband Nikhilesh who really loves her.

### **Awards**

Best Bengali Film, New Delhi, 1984

Best Costume design, New Delhi, 1984