

CHAPTER-V

**STUDY OF SELECTED WOMEN
CHARACTERS OF SATYAJIT RAY**

Portrayal of women in Indian media has always been, basically, stereotyped. Cinema as mass medium is also not free from such stereotypes. But some of the film makers of post Independent India brought in some earthy memorable women characters in Indian film. Satyajit Ray was one of such filmmakers. He is perhaps the last generation artist of Indian renaissance. As such the Victorian values of his western education and the Brahmo upbringing somewhere converged in him along with the liberal humanitarian outlook of Tagore and Chekov. Further he was a representative of the Nehruvian film makers. So, like some other film makers of his time, critics try to find the Nehruvian aspirations and outlook for reaching out to the world with Indianness.

In the context of value system in a new born country where artists and politicians were trying to etch out news dreams for a new post-colonial and post-feudal society.

The history of Indian cinema is almost as old as the history of world cinema; India is the largest producer of cinema in the world. But it took many years to be matured in terms of content and cinematic treatment. It was in the year 1957 with the making of *Pather Panchali* by Satyajit Ray the Indian cinema overnight shred off its nascent face. Indian audience for the first time witnessed a real world on the screen with natural ambience, earthy people and natural feelings for the audience. No dancing around the trees, no hero-heroine, no theatrical make believe, everything was new. For the first time in Indian cinema the female characters becomes meaty, strong and earthy. That was a new face of Indian women depicted hitherto in Indian screen.

In Ray's films the female characters are always stronger, more determined, more adaptable and resilient than the men in his films. In Ray's word "..... There have been many strong women characters in Tagore and in Bankimchandra. But it also reflects my

own attitudes and personal experience of woman.....Although they are physically not as strong as men, nature gave women qualities which compensate for that fact. They are more honest, most direct, and by and large they are stronger characters. I am not talking about every woman, but his type of woman which fascinates me. The woman I like to put in my films is better able to cope with situations than man.”

1.1 The socio-economic and historical background of the characters

Sarbojya in *APORAJITO*

The film is set around 1920. After the death of her only daughter the family shifts from their ancestral village to Benaras, for a living. The poor husband Harihara starts earning by reading scriptures at the ghats of Benaras. She basically belongs from a family of priests and married to a priest Harihara. Sarbojya is literate and can read. After the death of her husband she takes up the job of cook but and does not see it a job of maid servant (Jhi). To her is this is a profession (chakri). She is aware of the positive values to be instilled in her son and takes care for the right environment for upbringing the son. She has a strong personality.

Doyamoyee in *DEVI*

She belongs to mid-nineteenth century Bengal. Married to science college student, younger son of a respected and influential zamindar Kalinkar Roy. He is a patriarch. She is literate. Kalinkar's family is an orthodox one. The family lives in village. The Renaissance of Bengal is in the air. Her husband Umanath is the representative of this changing time. He lives in Kolkata and studies science. The family follows the patriarchic norms and values. All decisions in general and particularly for the women of the family are taken by the head of the family – Kalinkar. He is almost a dictator in the family. Since he loves

the younger daughter-in-law Doyamaye, so her influence in the family is stronger than the elder daughter-in-law. Traditionally, during those times, the eldest daughter-in-law used to enjoy privileges over other younger counterparts. But in the family of Kalikinar, as he wished to give prominence to Doyamaye, the younger daughter-in-law is placed in importance. She is superstitious and confused. She respects the norms of family and loves his husband like any woman. She wants to be a mother as well.

Ratan in *Teen Kanya* :

Set in rural Bengal sometime during the last part of nineteenth century. Ratan is adolescent girl who works as maidservant of the postmaster(s). Orphan Ratan is caring like a mother. She is illiterate but can sing well and never expects anything in exchange of her service. But she expects love or affection.

Gulabi in *ABHIJAN*

She is a pivotal character of the film. She is a mistress of a merchant in a rural area of Bengal. The striking feature of this character is that she wanted to commit suicide which is not witnessed in any film of Satyajit Ray. No other female characters of Satyajit try to commit suicide. Now the question arises why she was so suffered and why she tries to commit suicide. The reason is that it was not possible to live a normal life by a woman without any guardian. She was guardian less since her childhood. She lost her parents in her early childhood. She was somehow brought up by her grandmother. So, her sufferings were limitless. She did not have food to eat. Sometime she was put into confinement etc. her dreams, her wishes or her fears were never taken care of. So, to her she had no future ahead of her life. She lives in close proximity of corruption. Not only has that she lived with a corrupt men, who is a smuggler she herself also in a profession which

is also vicious. She is a prostitute. It is not to be taken that she accepted the profession easily just by habit because her mother was not a prostitute. She is not used to the life of prostitute and that's why in dead of night she comes out from Sukanram's house to Narshing's shed. The alluring commitment of Sukhanram for comfort and wealth does not stop her. Thus she is a staunch critic of the activities of Sukhanram. Whenever she criticizes Sukhanram she does not act as an agent of Sukahram. She never helps in the smuggling activities of Sukhanram. Though she was raped but we never see her seducing anybody.

Arati in *MAHANAGR*

The film is set in 1960's Kolkata. Vietnam war is going on in international areana. Arati is an educated young woman married to a bank clerk. They live in joint family along with her in-laws. The father in-law is retired school teacher. The family cannot meet both ends beet with the petty income of her husband. So to supplement the husband's income she takes up a job of sales girl at the persuasion of her husband. Her husband is zealous. She is educated. She is caring and responsible. She respects the middle class values of the time in question. Arati a character whose pleasing appearance have strong sex appeal. Her beauty or sex appeal is an asset to her job which Arati accepted easily but her husband cannot accept it. Arati is very honest, laborious courageous woman compared with other women of Ray's films.

Charu in *CHARULATA*

The film is set in Kolkata, around 1880. India is under the British rule and Bengal. Renaissance is at its peak. Bhupati, an upper class Bengali intellectual with a keen interest in politics and in the freedom movement, edits and publishes a newspaper. His childless wife Charu is interested in arts, literature and poetry. She is alone as though Bhupati loves her

yet he cannot give her company as he is busy with his upcoming newspaper. Charu is intelligent, connoisseur of arts and literature, she is romantic, she is serious and creative. She is not conservative like the nineteenth century housewife of western educated well off urban families. Charu is on move, inquisitive and literate. Charu is a modern woman but negotiate with modernity within the traditional setup without any rapture to it.

Apanrna in *ARONYER DIN RATRI*

Set in a forest away from the city (Kolkata) around 1969. The backdrop is forest yet the real backdrop is a city. Ray examines the urban characters against the simple life in forest. The naxalite movement in Bengal is at its peak, a time of widespread chaos and discontents. Apart from the character Duli all the characters are from Kolkata. Duli is a tribal girl dwelling in forest. Joya is a middle aged beautiful looking widow. She is conventional, ordinary, simple and not so intelligent. In contrast to Duli and Joya, the third woman in this film is Aparna. She is young, well educated, smart, and beautiful and she belongs to high society. A connoisseur of classical music she likes pop music as well. An avid reader of novels as well as of philosophy and science she is egoistic and suffers from superiority complex.

Bimala in *GHARE BAIRE*

Set in the backdrop of the swadeshi movement of Bengal in protest against the division of Bengal in 1905.

Bimala is a wife of jaminder Nikhilesh. He is western educated and have liberal views. Bimala is content in the four wall of the house and does not have any desire to explore the outside world. But he is against any oppression on women. He allows Bimala unprecedented freedom – moving around the estate, meeting other men on persuasions by the husband, takes lesson from English governess. Bimala is allowed to

enjoy the freedoms of a modern women but she lacks the experience and social context necessary to use these freedoms effectively.

1.2 value system in the characters

Sarbojoya in *Aporajito*

Sarbojoya is responsible towards the family. Her responsibility as a mother and wife is subtly defined by Ray in many sequences. She is dedicated to the family like any traditional women of that time. After the Dewali night when Harihoru wants to go for a bath in Ganga she asks Harihoru not to go for bath as he is still with fever. Harihoru is gasping in death bed and Sarbojoya sends Apu for brining Ganga's water. But, she does not forget to wrap a shawl around Apu's body. This is an exceptional example of her motherly carefulness. After the death of Harihoru she take the responsibility of the family by taking a job of a maid servant (or cook). She can take care of her and the family. When she takes up a job of cook his uncle from the village arrives and wants her to accompany him back in the village. But she declined it. This shows that she is self conscious and don't like to be a burden or to be considered as burden by others. Days are passing by. Now, both mother and the son Apu work for a family. One day Sarbojoya discovers that Apu is liting the chillum of the master. She stops shocked by her vision of her son's future. They now leave for her ancestral village. The filmmaker does not use any words for her decision to leave for the village. But the suggestion created through the composition of shots when she sees her son liting the chillum. The sound of a train overlaps her face. On arrival at the village when Apu insists for going to school she being a responsible mother cannot stop him .Though she know Apu's going to school means she has to find out a new avenue for earning to keep the family out from starvation. Her responsibility does not allow her to inform Apu about her illness. Because this information may affect Apu's study and dreams for

future. So, when a neighbor shows her willingness to write about the illness of Sarbojya to Apu, she dissuades the neighbor.

She bears a strong moral value as well. While living in Benaras they have a bachelor neighbour – Nandababu. This man tries to seduce Sarbojya. But she turns on him with her kitchen knife. Scared Nandababu leaves the kitchen.

Doyamoyee in *Devi*

She is a traditional housewife of a zaminder family of rural Bengal. She is dutiful like any other traditional housewife of that time. She is affectionate and loves children, though she is childless. She equally loves the pet. Thus, Doyamoyee bears basic human values with all earthy desires. Like any traditional woman of that time she does not give any opinion and silently follows the instructions - be it from the father-in-law or from her husband. This attitude inherited from the traditional values, makes her scapegoat. She is not a victim of situations or conditions or event but of values. Her values do not allow her to disobey the father-in-law's desire to be worshiped as goddess. She cannot protest against the patriarchy. Though the rational outlooks of her husband Umamprasad also put her in dilemma but she gives in to the patriarchal values. These values kill her youth, cheerfulness, her liveliness and humane desires. Finally the patriarchal values makes her mad and vanishes her from the earth.

After the oracle sequence when, in the corridor, the father-in-law bends down to touch her feet she clutches the wall and curls up her toes. On surface level though it seems that she is embarrassed by the action of her father-in-law. This explanation seems valid in her curling of toes. But clutching of the wall clearly shows her desperate effort to get rid of the imposed divinity by the patriarch.

On a moonlit night both husband and wife plans to flee from the

patriarch mansion of Kalikinar .In this sequence , on arriving the river bank ,just before boarding on a boat she changes her mind after seeing a skeletal remain of the idol of goddess Druga half immersed in the water. This makes her change her mind from fleeing .Her doubtful reason is that if she is really the incarnation of goddess Durga then her fleeing from being worshiped will bring omen to the family and her husband. Here again, she fails to break the chain of patriarchal values and the traditional Hindu values.

After the death of her nephew Khoka in her lap, Doyamoyee is seen inexorably drifting into madness brought on by her mourning and her melancholia over that innocent child's death. But she does not express her anger or anguish against the patriarch father-in-law who trapped her in this deadly divinity. Instead she leaves the home with her madness, forever.

Ratan in *Postmaster*

Ratan is class conscious. Thus she knows how to behave with 'superiors' or elders. She performs her duty without any fuss. To her human bond is important than anything else.

Gulabi in *Abhijan*

She is a pivotal character of the film. A mistress of a merchant in a rural area of Bengal. The striking feature of this character is that she wanted to commit suicide which is not witnessed in any film of Satyajit Ray. No other female characters of Satyajit try to commit suicide. Now the question arises why she was so suffered and why she tries to commit suicide. The reason is that it was not possible to live a normal life by a woman without any guardian. She was guardian less since her childhood. She lost her parents in her early childhood. She was somehow brought up by her grandmother. So, her sufferings were limitless. She did not have food to eat. Sometime she was put into confinement etc.

her dreams, her wishes or her fears were never taken care of. So, to her she had no future ahead of her life. The film revolves round the unsecured life of Indian women who have no food to eat, no happiness and future. Grown up Gulabi becomes a kept of a merchant Sukhanram. In this film all the major characters are corrupt in a way or other. On the contrary Gulabi is different, but with grey sheds. Everybody tries to exploit the other who is powerful than other. The exploiters do not have any ethic or value. Gulabi is exceptional. She is exploited. She does not exploit anybody. She stands on the lowest strata of society as such there is nobody less powerful than her to exploit. Gulabi or people like Gulabi does not have any country, no caste, no religion but only the hope for emancipation from exploitation. Thus she follows some kind of ethics. *Abhijan* is built upon the corruption in men's world. In contrast to this world there is women's world built upon Gulabi's world. She lives in close proximity of corruption. Not only has that she lived with a corrupt men, who is a smuggler she herself also in a profession which is also vicious. She is a prostitute. It is not to be taken that she accepted the profession easily just by habit because her mother was not a prostitute. She is not used to the life of prostitute and that's why in dead of night she comes out from Sukanram's house to Narshing's shed. The alluring commitment of Sukhanram for comfort and wealth does not stop her. Thus she is a staunch critic of the activities of Sukhanram. Whenever she criticizes Sukhanram she does not act as an agent of Sukahram. She never helps in the smuggling activities of Sukhanram.

As Gulabi does not have any competitors like Narshing she laughs aloud and spontaneously many a time. This clearly tells that she is more cheerful than Narshing. When Sukhanram offers the partnership in transport business to Narshing with a string to help in smuggling Gulabi cautioned Narshing that these people are not good. While living with Sukhanram she does not help him in his smugglings activities but

she cautioned Narshing – this reflects her value of wrong and right. She does not dream big but dreamt for silly and common associations of rural life of women. For this, on point of her suicide, she changed her mind .Because her dreams and association with rural life began to haunt her. On the contrary, Narshing aspires for a bigger life in the corrupt world. In this film the men get easily succumbed to corruption. Against this Gulabi remains a rural woman who does not get succumbed easily to corruption.

She was forced to be exploited. Though she was raped but the researcher never sees her seducing anybody. The main source of humanity in this film comes out from Gulabi. Loving her makes Narshing find his inner self. On the other hand her love, her sexuality everything revolves around Narshing – she is pious, she is great. She is the most attractive and interesting character of the film. She is a victim of the socio-economic system. She is helpless. She is exploited. But she is humane.

Arati in *MAHANAGAR*

The film revolves around Arati and her husband Subrata. The family is not solvent economically. Arati is educated. To get solvency Subrata encourages his wife to get a job. Every morning they browse through vacancy advertisements in newspaper. At last she gets a job. The director uses a radio news bulletin saying the victory of Vietnam, when she gets an offer letter for job. The news goes on for one minute but they were oblivious of the news. The victory of country over the other in an international front on the radio news and getting a job in personal front is very significant. Her job was of sales girl in a Sewing Machine Company. The husband was very happy at the day of her joining in the job. Significantly from the first day the role of Arati suddenly gets reversed – from family helper to a bread earner. The housewife who used to had her meal only after serving food to whole family now gets her meal along with her husband in the morning. On the first day, just

before she goes out for work the details created by the film maker are superb. The director depicted the hesitation comfortlessness with superb dexterity. On later part, she can be seen, has shed off this inhibition and gets comfortable with her role reversal in the family. Now without any hesitation she eats food before going out for work. Now, the mother-in-law it seems has accepted the new role and family norms, in pressure. On the other hand the husband Subrata undergoing a change he is becoming jealous. The changes in Arati – the smart and independent wife becomes his reason for jealousy. Though he once encouraged her for a getting a job now he is not able to accept her independence. Satyajit created the character Arati which is neither a teacher nor a clerk in government office where male gaze is fathomable but a character which is pleasing in appearance and have strong sex appeal of a sales girl. So her beauty or sex appeal is an asset to her job which Arati accepted easily but her husband cannot accept it. These do not imply that he is narrow minded rather he is a prey of the value system. So they confront each other. By this time she gets transformed – her first transformation - when she gets her first pay packet. The director has again with exceptional dexterity depicted the moment. She enters in the office toilet with shivering hand and she smells the fresh notes. First, when she is using the lipstick in her lips. It is a very significant sequence. Arati's colleague Edith, in the toilet, advised her to use lipstick. Arati was not used to lipstick due to her lower middle class value, so she was hesitant. It was against her middle class value being a mother and being a daughter- in- law. Edith however draws a similarity between the redness of vermilion on Arati's forehead with the lipstick. But Arati's value is different as such she knows Edith equation is not correct. Though, later in the film, she starts using lipsticks and putting vermilion on her forehead. To some critic using lipstick is the symbol of women emancipation. Cinema critic Eric Rhode wrote *“putting on lipstick is an outward sign of*

emancipation.” It is not as simple as they see it .If it is emancipation from her husband then she is again subjugated from the company under which she works. From Marxist point of view there is nothing significant in using lipstick or it does not indicate anything that she fought for her own emancipation. , Rather, one see in the later part of the film, that the emancipation question is class and capital related. Eric Rhode sees further and writes significantly “Arati’s sexuality will no longer be her husband’s property .At the same time, lipstick is a recognition that she will be using her sex, in a sense dishonestly to help selling knitting machines. So, the middleclass value gets shredded off by Arati. The filmmaker indicates that she will sell her sexuality to sell the product. The feudal value now turns to a value of capitalist society where sex or sex appeal is saleable.

On the salary day she comes home with gifts for all members. On her handing over the pay packet to the husband he queries whether she has spent whole pay on the gifts she replies with a naughty tone “this is salary and this is from commission” and turn back. The researcher sees her thin almost transparent blouse making the bra visible. Subrta again ask “do you understand what is a commission’ she replies “Edith made me understand’ Then she quickly comes closer to the face of Subrta and tell that her boss is pleased with her job. This makes Subrta jealous. From this sequence she is undergoing a change which is not accepted in feudal value system. Significantly, when she goes to mother-in-law with a tobacco pack her shoulder and upper body is wrapped properly with saree as is seen then in middle class family. Arati is very honest, laborious courageous woman compared with other women of Ray’s films. So, after hearing the pricking words from her husband some toughness appears in her face but that gets transformed into affection quickly. And comes closer to him and says “Don’t you recognize me?” And coming far more closely shows her mole on face and says” Everything is alright, nothing changed at all”. Satyajit has

excellently depicted the transformation of Arati's emancipation owing to her new job and the fragility of the emancipation as well. As the film progresses it becomes evident that she is really changed now - not anymore dependent solely on her husband, now used to lipstick and gets smarter, got praised for her performance in work. Jealous, Subrata one day finally asked her to quite the job on the pretext that the family members are not happy with her going out from home for the job. Throughout the film one finds her possessing a pleasing personality and Ray never shown her doing anything illicit. Naturally, her success in profession is due to her personality and due to her labour. At this juncture the blow came from her husband to quite the job. She does not revolt because she took up the job for the interest of the family and was encouraged to take up the job by her husband. Her emancipation is, not necessarily, to be seen from western perspective of emancipation rather it is an economic fight for better living condition of the family. It is emancipation from the four walls of home to greater space of society and thus she became the true comrade of men. Jealous and scared Subra finally becomes successful in getting her resignation signed for the sake of the 4 years old son. Being a sensitive mother and being a responsible housewife Arati finally agrees to resign and taking the resignation paper she comes to office. Eric Rhodes comments "*She will be using her sex, in a sense dishonesty, to help selling knitting machine*" need to be examined. Though this comment carries enough weight yet at the same time one must agree to fact that Arati is this type of woman who with her pleasing personality sells her sex in more subtle manner. The effect of which is very limited on men. Any woman who knows she has a pleasing personality in her possession uses her sex appeal in subtle and limited manner and Arati does exactly that. Satyajit has depicted this superbly. When she was about to tender her resignation her husband called her up and told her not to tender the resignation as his bank where he works has failed. She sighs a relief and get an increment of rupees 50 from her boss telling her miseries.

Thus Satyajit makes her won. The character now gets fully transformed into a sole bread earner for the family from a working –housewife. But the inner self of her – the beauty and the human qualities and the bond with the family remains unchanged. Her new role in the family does not make her egoistic rather she is shouldered with more responsibility.

Facing all suspicion of her husband and father-in-law Arati never protests as she is practical and knows well such protests will lead to destruction of the family. Further she, perhaps, does not care about such silly and meaningless suspicions of men. Further she has come out from home just to save those members of her family whom she loves. She protests once against the action of her boss, when her friend Edith was sacked by him wrongly. Thus it can be concluded that she can protest but in family she does not like to do it. By now she knows where and when to protest. This obviously shows she has become more matured. Fighting for an Anglo-Indian lady she proves she is still humane as she was before join the job. She makes one feel that wearing sunglass or putting lipstick does no way mean change. For her protest against the action of her boss she resigns and now she meets her husband on coming out from the office and tells her husband ‘Please don’t misunderstand me like everybody’ this dialogue has many dimensions. By everybody, she in one sense means the antagonizing environment where she lives in and the environment where she works. Now she is a loser. His husband is also loser. Both are jobless. But confident Arati knows that in this metro there are many options for a livelihood. Satyajit uses a music which also denotes that there are many hopes ahead but with obstacles.

Charu in *Charulata*

She carries with her the feudal values and class consciousness as well. Being the wife of a rich man she is harsh with the servant. The first dialogue of the opening sequence she is ordering the servant Brajo with

harsh words. It is no way any expression of anguish born out of her boredom, loneliness or any frustration. Had it been so, in the next shot, she would not have tried to drive the crow by making a gentle sound. In the last sequence as well it is seen she is harshly asking the servant to bring a lamp in the corridor. The manner, in which she deals with the servant, was not very common in rich families. The old servants were treated like any older member of the family.

Though Amal, her brother-in-law does not make any provocation or tries to seduce her she develops an incestuous desire for him. Though there are genuine humane reasons for such desires, as depicted in the film, yet judging from morality's point of view she betrays the trust placed upon her by the husband. But again, she is not unaware of the 'wrong' and 'right' values in human life. After the embezzlement of money by her elder brother, Bhupati telling Amal about the future of his paper and on the rust he placed on the near ones, Charu is seen from Amal's point of view standing in the corridor listening the talking between the cousins, with guilt feeling written in her face. As soon Amal looks back to the corridor she tries to conceal herself. This guilt feeling is manifestation of her human values.

Voyeurism also plays in her character .Watching men in the street through opera glass and watching Amal in the garden clearly shows her voyeurism.

Aparna in Aronyer Din Ratri

Ray depicts her as the most distinguished character in the film. She is enigmatic. From the beginning Ray places her differently in the *mise-en-scene*. As she is altogether different, so Ray makes her sit differently from others in the chair. Though she is a city dweller yet she does not like to meet the city men in the pastoral retreat. As against her, Ray shows her father and sister-in-law well come the four men from the

city.

She, though well educated and supposedly liberal, is not easily accessible by men. When after seeing her private room and the objects there – books, records etc. Aseem tries to make advances to her. But, she diffuses the intension of Aseem just handing over a chocolate to him. She acts on her own initiative and is determined to reject all the submissive roles patriarchy has reserved for her. She is not very emotional but practical, this practicality she inherits from the city and from her education. Though she is not so emotional yet she is humane as well. The concern she shows towards the sick wife of the chowkider. She is honest, does not like the corruption in social life. She questions Aseem the reason of bribing the chowkider for accommodation in the lodge. The desire for the forbidden has a strong presence within her, as evident in her desire to gamble in the marketplace. Writing her phone number for Aseem on a currency note shows her disrespect to the system which may be the result of decay in our value system.

Though she is modern yet she kowtows under tradition by accepting defeat in the memory game, just to win Aseem for her.

Bimala in *Ghare Baire*

Bimala is not modern as is seen on the surface of the film though the traits of her personality tell about the traits of modern personality. On careful analysis of voice over in the opening sequence and from the shots of closing sequence it is evident that she is traditional and remains to be so. Her traditional values are cocooned in the shell of modernity. After her second meeting with Sandip she is seen serving dinner to her husband like any other traditional woman of Bengal only to eat later after the husband finishes. After the death of her husband (shown in slow dissolve of shots-) she stops using vermilion on her forehead and starts wearing white saree. She has low morality. The husband

who loves her and wants to free her from all patriarchal prejudices, she does not care for him and without any hesitation fall prey of the sexual designs of Sandip. She even steals for her paramour Sandip. It will be a mistaken, if one considers her stealing is for the great cause of Swadeshi movement. Because after giving the money she asks Sandip not to leave her.

1.3 The journey of Satyajit Ray and his women characters from tradition to modernity.

Satyajit Ray's filmmaking career began when India was emerging as a new post-colonial country under the leadership of first Prime minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru envisaged India as a progressive, secular and as an industrial democracy. He has firm faith in inclusiveness. To him India's modernity lay in its dynamic fusion of past and present and its ability to assimilate highly divergent traditions and ideologies while remaining single and unified nation. Ray's notion of culture almost coincides with that of Nehru. His notion of culture as hybrid with diverse historical and social components retain their separateness while forming an integrated whole. In an interview he admired Nehru "liberalism... a certain awareness of western values and fusion of eastern and western values". The film made during the life time of Pt. Nehru that is the films made up to 1964, endorse Nehru's nation building. In these films Ray upholds a vision for modern India. While doing so he upholds the values of education (*Aporajito*), the family as a social unit(*Pather panchali*), emancipation of women (*Charulata* and *Mahanagar*). On the other hand the values and system which stands in the way of progressive modernity *Jalsaghar* critiques feudalism and *Devi* critiques orthodoxy. Satyajit Ray's negotiation with modern is to be discussed in six of his major films made between 1955 and 1970. These are – *Pather Panchali*, *Aporajito*, *Apur Sansar*, *Charulata*, *Aranyer din ratri* and *Pratitdwandi*. The first four films were made

during Nehru era. The last two of the list were made in the political turbulent seventies. While observing the films made by Satyajit during Nehruvian era Suranjan Ganguly writes “Some of the questions that Ray’s films possess are: is it always possible to distinguish the modern from the traditional or are they just two sides of the same coin? Does the modern simply embody the contradictory nature of the contemporary Indian experience? Or is the modern all about becoming the modern – always in the making – at best, a form or acute self-consciousness?”

Sabojoya in *APORAJITO*

The film begins with Apu’s family getting settled in Benares. His priest father Harihar dies after a short illness. In Harihar’s absence, it becomes responsibility of Sarbajaya the mother of Apu to earn money for the family. She starts working as a maid. A relative invites them to return to their ancestral village Mansapota. Apu asks his mother to send him to a school. Apu studies diligently and receives a scholarship to go to Kolkata. Sarbajaya does not want to let her son leave. She gives in and helps him prepare to leave.

Apu starts working at a printing press after school. Sarbajaya expects visits from him, but Apu manages to visit only a few times and feels out of place in Mansapota. Sarbajaya becomes seriously ill, but does not disclose her illness to Apu. When Apu finally comes to know about her poor health, he leaves for the village and finds that she has already died. A relative requests him to stay back there and to work as a priest. Apu rejects the idea. He returns to Calcutta and performs the last rites for his mother there.

After the death of Hariharo when Sarbojaya took up the job of a maidservant cum cook she termed it a *chakri* and not as maidservant. This shows that Satyajit is trying to unchain the 19th century belief and pushing it to a new era where profession will be termed as *Chakri* (job)

Sarbojaya finds that Apu is losing interest in his study and gradually becoming the helping hand of her master. He is acquiring bad habits in this atmosphere. Thus she decides to leave the job and takes Apu away so that he can pursue his education. On the other hand when Apu does not want to perform priesthood for interim livelihood she persuades him to do so. Again, she does not inform Apu, living in Kolkata, about her illness so that he can pursue his study without any hassle.

In the face of extreme poverty she does not hesitate to send her only son Apu to Kolkata for pursuing education. If we explore the sequences depicting Sarbojoy's extreme care for her son against her accent allowing Apu to go to Kolkata, an unknown world, one can easily discern that Ray wanted to translate his idea and aspiration of modern India through Sarbojaya and Apu.

This film aspires for education. Both Sarbojaya and Apu aspires for a new life. In this film Satyajit Ray forsakes the traditional Indian professions having roots in Varnashram. The traditional profession of priesthood ends in both life with the departure of Apu for Kolkata. Throughout the film Satyajit Ray connects the traditional world with the bigger world and universe, meaning progress, through various motifs – Rail, globe and Kalpurus Nakhshatra .

Chidannanda writes “.....Sarbojaya is a mother, a timeless myth before she is a person. There are aspects of her personality that are carefully hidden from us, as in the case of her sexuality which we know must be present somewhere in her but which if shown, would reveal her in not the outline stretching one aspect of her character but entire complexity of her being, full shading, perspective and tonality. It would divest her of her timelessness , her mythically and fix her into a particular time and place and a single personality.”

Doyamoyee in *DEVI*

Doyamoyee is not a modern woman. She is a traditional woman and becomes victim of traditional values of patriarchy and Hinduism. The rational outlook of her husband cannot rescue her from the grip of superstitious religious belief. Such belief reflects her traditional values as well. Traditional values hold her back from resisting the imposition of divinity by the patriarchy. Though once she decides to flee from the mansion with her husband.

While comparing Charu (in *CHARULATA*) and Bimala in (*GHARE BAIRE*) with Doyamoyee in (*Devi*) the researchers observes that first two films Satyajit Ray examines the modernity of these two women in the context of changing time while in *Devi* he examines the female subjugation, myths and superstition of traditional society in the context of changing time.

This film exposes the hollowness of *avatarbad* and its inhuman aspect. The tragedy of *Devi* is not owing to any conscious effort of any evil mind but it is the unconscious religious superstition of the society. The film depicts the hindrance posed by religious superstition on the progress of the society. The film shows the conflict between two generations - one which is chained in the tradition and belief of nineteenth century and other which is embracing the modern western education and enlightenment. Satyajit critiques the condition of the new generation, which in spite of having embraced the western education and enlightenment cannot fight the tradition. These handful few, though embraced the science, Philosophy and literature of the west yet were disconnected from the mass. The result is the hollowness and cowardice. Thus Umapasrad, the husband of Dayamoyee cannot face his feudal father with his reasoning and cannot rescue his wife from the clutch of superstition. Feudal patriarch's obsession with religion superstition gets

shatter in the death of his only grandson.

Ratan in *Tin Kanya* : Ratan is a dreamer, ambitious. But this dream comes from her traditional womanhood where females are withers mother, sister or spouse. She seeks to make her educated simultaneously she tries to exhibit her skills in domestic chores. In the visual narrative too Ray does not indicate anything which reflects filmmaker's aspiration for modernity.

Gulabi in *Abhijan*

This is not among the best films of Satyajit Ray. The script was written by him for a friend. On the first day of shooting, he was requested by the friend to call the first shot and subsequently he had to direct the film for the friend. Naturally the film lacks the signature of Ray. As such the researcher does not see any negotiation with modern or with tradition. But the researcher sees his disenchantment of modern India envisioned by Nehru finds it difficult to sustain the Nehruvian idealism as India rapidly succumbed to corruption. Every major character in this film – whether Narshing or merchant Sukhanrm or Rajani Das (government official). Gulabi is also corrupt but she is the victim of fate.

Gulabi have many human virtues but she never becomes a vehicle of Satyajit's aspiration for the modern. The film maker either does not seek to examine the tradition in the light of modern. Neither has he critiqued the tradition in this film. However, he throws light on the plight of Indian rural women, by suggestion, while exploring the character of Gulabi. One of the major reasons of Narshing's attraction towards Neelima is her knowledge of English. This shows Narshing wants to uplift his social status. Satyajit here again, seeks to depict a social condition where an upper cast fallen from his social status owing to his profession tries to regain his status by marrying an educated girl.

Arati in *Mahanagar*

Ray's exploration of the relationship between women's emancipation and changing social conditions is nowhere more subtle than in *Mahanagar*. Indeed, given its setting in contemporary Bengal, newly part of independent India, the film becomes more topical and more relevant than any of the women-centred films Ray made between 1960 and 1965

In *Mahanagar* Ray placed Arati at the centre. She joins the teeming millions of white-collared workers. She shares the financial burden of an extended family. Her retired schoolteacher father-in-law is unprepared for this culture shock. He prefers charity in the name of *guru dakshina* from ex-students to living off his daughter-in-law's earnings. Arati's mother-in-law is reasonable. She has no compunctions about serving a joint lunch to both son and daughter-in-law before they set out for their respective offices, though she secretly wipes off a tear with the end of her sari. Edith, her Anglo-Indian colleague teaches her to use lipstick. She uses it only when she steps out of the home and wipes it off when she comes back. When her husband finds out and is sarcastic, she throws the stick of lipstick out of the window with one small twist of her wrist. It is an expression of silent anger against her husband.

Three shots in the film show the slow change in Arati from a stay-at-home housewife to a working woman: (a) when she gets her first pay packet, handed over in cash, she shows her money first to herself, in the bathroom mirror, her nostrils flared in excitement and in the pride of achievement; (b) she then shows it to her husband; (c) then, in a crude gesture of grandiose generosity, she offers some to her father-in-law, who needs a new pair of spectacles.

This film marked the beginning of the middle-class working wife in

Bengali and Indian cinema. *Mahanagar* can be read as Ray's personal statement on the changing values of the traditional, middle-class Bengali family of Calcutta, a microcosm of changes in urban and social values. This film is a strong, positive and realistic statement on the socio-economic changes in urban Bengali life through the metamorphosis of Arati. Arati is both the sign and the signified of these socio-economic changes. Arati proves that a woman has vast resources of inner strength she may not be aware of. She draws upon these resources when the time is right, when she discovers that patriarchy, which defines a society dominated by men, has failed to solve emerging socio-economic problems that have a bearing on the family, on the economy and on the culture. Therefore, she is modern.

Charu in *CHARULATA*

This character has been depicted by Satyajit Ray as his vehicle of aspiration for a changing time of history, Nineteenth century on the threshold of twentieth century. Ray's aspiration embodied in the character of Charulata is so subtle that it requires a very meticulous and careful reading. It is the first Indian film which tries to formulate a feminist standpoint. In this film filmmaker's PONT OF VIEW coincided with that of Charu and converged in a single point.

Charu is intelligent, connoisseur of arts and literature, she is romantic, she is serious and creative. Taking these outlines Satyajit explores Charu and builds her. She is not conservative like the nineteenth century housewife of western educated well off urban families. In contrast to Charu, Ray depicts another character – Manada who is happy with the status quo of women in family and not into any intellectual or creative pursuits, although the history is on transit. But Charu, as Chidananda Dasgupta describes (In sight and sound) "whose inner seismograph catches the vibration waves reaching from outside into her seclusion".

In short the story of the film is – Charu is a young childless wife of Bhupati, an editor of an English daily. She is alone at home as the husband is busy. To help her out to get rid of the boredom and loneliness Bhupati brings home Charu's brother Umapada and his wife Manada. Along with them he also brings home his writer cousin Amal to stay with them and educate Charu. She does not enjoy the company of Manada and gets closer to the writer brother-in-law Amal. Imperceptibly, she finally, falls in love with Amal. But her incestuous overtures are left non-reciprocated by Amal due to lack of courage. Finally, her love for Amol gets exposed to Bhupati.

The film opens with wordless visual descriptions of Charu's loneliness and boredom. This sequence continues for almost seven minutes and the filmmaker creates a feel that her life is one long routine of endless repetitions. Slowly and with exceptional subtlety Satyajit unfolds Charu's solitude and boredom showing her spending long afternoon lounging in bed, doing embroidery, flipping through the pages of books unmindfully and looking out of the window blinds through a pair of opera glasses to the world outside.

Against the condition of the women of well to do families of last part of nineteenth century Bengal one finds that Charu is different. She is not the prototype of the malady of time like Manada. Manada personifies the malady of time where the women are fully dependent on their husband. They are illiterate, selfish and narcissist, no dealing with outside world, lolls in bed, pass time by fussing over the hairs in front of the mirror and were bore. But they could not conceptualize boredom and takes it as their part of life. Thus they never realize that boredom may destroy one's life.

Studying the opening sequence and as the film progress it is realized that her boredom, though paradoxical, provokes her in thinking, feeling and induced her for self-expression. Her solitude makes her imagine

and dream a life different from that which she lives on. On many occasions, the filmmaker suggests that her solitude helps her to discover and commune with her life, outside the male-defined universe.

In the opening sequence, the compositions, camera movements and Charu's movements all together create a subtext. In one layer, the sequence describes here loneliness, and boredom. The second layer is the subtext of the sequence which suggests that Charu does not like boredom. Her movements within frames and out from the frame, her presence in frames, her coming to living room looking for a book from the cupboard - in all these shots we observe not so much of Charu but of the moving figure of Charu within space that exudes ease and confidence, purpose and vigor. This is not possible for Manada or her counterparts in the last part of nineteenth century. In these sequence we come to the conclusion that Charu is on move to explore a space for her in the changing time. Charu moves from one widow to another with her opera glass and see people on move. Ray suggests her restlessness and the moving world outside the window. One of the significant properties in the space is a bed which denotes and defines her sexual or maternal space. But this important space fails to contain her for long. In this opening seven to eight minutes of the films describes the dialectic between her inertness and vigorous mobility in the space. This suggest that she seeks to reconcile her two facets of personality.

Charu's love for reading and passion for embroidery has been emphasized by Satyajit times and again in this film. Love for reading suggests her need for intellectual stimulation and embroidery points for her creativity. Her love for reading may also enable her to write herself into persona. Her love for looking through opera glass is also very significant. Looking through Opera glass becomes her "gaze". Reading, writing and gazing paves a way to intuitively find her way out of the male labyrinth of

her time. All these shape her most transgressive act - falling in love outside marriage. The woman in her remains invisible to the men around her – husband Bhupati and Amol. But she makes them feel her presence in a new space which is always the domain of men – her writing, her gaze, her voyeurism, and her incestuous desires for Amol. All these have been described either in an understated manner or hinted through suggestion. The cinematic expressions of Satyajit Ray are always very subtle and understated so he depicted Charu's defining her in a new space without any rupture to the tradition. In the final analysis of Charu's character defines herself as a conscious individual when the society is on the threshold of a new century. Therefore Charu is a modern woman.

Aparna in *Aranyer Din Ratri*

She is well educated, liberal, and well aware of her time and the global system in which she lives in. She acts on her own initiative and is determined to reject all the submissive roles patriarchy has reserved for her. Though she is not so emotional yet she is humane as well. A connoisseur of classical music she likes pop music well, an avid reader of novels as well as of philosophy and science. She can play badminton well.

Though she is modern yet she kowtows under tradition by accepting defeat in the memory game, just to win Aseem for her.

Bimala in *Ghare Baire*

Set in 1905, the film depicts Bimala as an educated, creative, socially and politically aware woman. She knows English and can sing English songs playing piano. Within the first thirty minutes of the film Satyajit

Ray establishes these personality traits of Bimala. Within this half an hour of the film, she decides to take the stance on Swadeshi knowing well her husband stands against Swadeshi. These establish her as modern before the audience. All these are owing to her husband Nikhilesh's initiative. He is a western educated liberal man. Though a feudal lord himself, like many western educated men of Bengal of that time he wants to see her wife liberated from the feudal and patriarchal chain and wants Bimala to have every opportunity to experience the world. He even wants her meet other men to know if she loves him. Against this backdrop, Sandip a charismatic nationalist leader comes in the "home" and starts working for Swadeshi. Looking through the chink of window she listens the mesmerizing lecture of Sandip's, in the outer house, for boycotting the foreign made goods. After a day or two, for the first time after their marriage, she goes out of the Andarmahal (the inner chambers) to meet Sandip. The husband Nikhilesh takes her to meet Sandip. In front of Sandip, he declares his wife "free" of her own thoughts and moves. On this encounter, on the persuasion of Sandip, she declares her opinions and accent to join the movement. All this finally paves the way for her falling in love with Sandip.

On surface of the cinematic text of *Ghare Baire* Ray seemingly depicts Bimala as modern. But, film makers concern is not how modern is she; rather, she is a medium through which Ray examines the tradition and modern. She is also not real. She is an object of desires to both men- Nikhil wants her to be seen as modern and Sandip designs to exploit her sexually. Starting from the opening sequence to almost to the end of the film, on many occasions. She is seen mirror – a depthless image. After the departure of Sandip there is not any shot showing her in mirror. Last time when she is seen on the mirror she helplessly clutches her own image – the modern herself – like the paw of animal.

Ray makes her the inevitable victim neither of a history that finally

forces her to occupy a position neither at home nor in the world of her time.

1.4 The feminist approach of Ray's films and women characters

Feminism of Satyajit Ray

Absence of "MALE GAZE", presence of 'FEMALE VOICE', 'MATERNAL ENTHRALLMENT' and MASCULINITY IN CRISIS etc are some of the most accepted parameters of a feminist film. Taking these features a feminist film can also be studied by ascertaining whether a film features a self-identified woman in the lead or co-lead role? Whether the film explores the interior lives of women exploring the everyday mundane moments as well as the larger milestones? Whether the film uses the female characters as instruments of change in the story rather than relegate them to supporting, undeveloped background characters? Whether the film calls for a change in the status of women? Whether the film addresses themes has and/or continues to affect all women sexism, racism, discrimination and issues such as equal economic rights, reproductive rights, women's suffrage etc.? Whether a film addresses concern for the female character's family (biological or chosen) as it pertains to the narrative, acknowledging the significance of inclusion in the lives of women. In the light of the above.

Sobojoya in *Aporajito* on the other hand is a very strong and honest character but she too fails to control the course of the narrative. In this film by depicting the maternal enthrallment Ray brings in a feature of feminism.

Doyamoyee in *DEVI* is a narrative of trapped femininity. Trapped between her own self and the divinity imposed on her. This reduced her to a visible spectacle and becomes receptacle of other people's desires, which her goddess powers are supposed to fulfill. Her desires

can only be expressed secretly or in darkness, But there is none to whom she can express them. On many occasions Dayamoyee is seen suppressing her desires or expressing her desires only in darkness. She cannot escape with his science student husband from the village because of her responsibility to the family or divided feminine sensibility.

Ratan in *Tin Kanya* This film has a subtle female voice but the filmmakers keep Ratan way from driving the narrative. But on many occasions she comes out to be the rescuer of the postmaster Nandababu. She is ambitious, dreamer but her traditional womanhood dominates. She has strong personality and can reject any male from the perspective of a mother, a sister, a lover or as a servant. Her femininity or maternal enthrallment disappoints her as the Post master leaves for the city without caring about her desires or wishes.

Abhijan is a film of feudal and male subjugation. Though the main character Gulabi has been portrayed as honest and outspoken at times. But she fails to control the course of the narrative. Her voice and desires are not heard through the film's narrative or by characterization.

In *Mahanagar* Ray placed Arati at the centre. *The film depicts* the changing values of the traditional, middle-class Bengali family of Calcutta, a microcosm of changes in urban and social values. It is a strong, positive and realistic statement on the socio-economic changes in urban Bengali life through the metamorphosis of Arati. Arati is both the sign and the signified of these socio-economic changes.

She shares the financial burden of an extended family. Arati's Anglo-Indian colleague teaches her to use lipstick. She uses it only when she steps out of the home and wipes it off when she comes back. When her husband finds out and is sarcastic, she throws the stick of lipstick out of the window with one small twist of her wrist. It is an expression of silent anger against her husband.

Three shots show the slow change in Arati from a stay-at-home housewife to a working woman: (a) when she gets her first pay packet, handed over in cash, she shows her money first to herself, in the bathroom mirror, her nostrils flared in excitement and in the pride of achievement; (b) she then shows it to her husband; (c) then, in a crude gesture of grandiose generosity, she offers some to her father-in-law, who needs a new pair of spectacles.

Arati proves that a woman has vast resources of inner strength she may not be aware of. She draws upon these resources when the time is right, when she discovers that patriarchy, which defines a society dominated by men, has failed to solve emerging socio-economic problems that have a bearing on the family, on the economy and on the culture.

Ray's exploration of the relationship between women's emancipation and changing social conditions is nowhere more subtle than in *Mahanagar*.

It could have been a feminist film but as Arati cannot defy the norms of patriarchal society therefore it remains a narrative of femininity in a changing course of history.

Charu in *charulata* is creative, she has the desires of her own, she reverts the notion of male gaze to female gaze and she voices her thoughts and finally changes the course of the narrative. thus charulata bears almost all the features of a feminist film.

Aranyer Din Ratri is a multilayered complex film so the characters are. Female characters are enigmatic. The Ray portrays female and racial subjugation through Duli yet the researcher sees Aparna is a dominant character and she somehow dominates the narrative and all the males become dwarf before her personality. In this film also the females

charters Aparna and her sister in law Jaya reverts the male gaze into female gaze in the bath scene of the males. Jaya easily comes out with her sexual desires. The females become the critique of the bankrupt younger generation of modern India (during the period depicted in the film) But, in the Memory game sequence she willing pull her out to save Asim from defeat.

Bimala in *Ghare Baire*

GHARE BAIRE has many feature of a feminist film. The narrative is woven from the point of view of Bimala .She dominates the narrative as well. She feels suffocated in the comfort of wealth and fulfilled demands. She makes Sandip her object of sexual desires and the same time falls pray of Sandip sexual designs. There are many instances that she cinematically expresses her desires to be attracted to Sandip. Both male gaze and female gaze play a dominating role in the film. Bima is trapped in the desires of two male – one is her husband Nilkhil and to her is his paramour Sandip. One has lofty ideals which set up difficult standards of morality in devotion, behavior and motivation. Sandip on the other hand brings temptation, heat and colour to her life, making her illicit Eros glitter in the dark. But finally Bimala completely emptied of her essential female self before the all-pervasive and judgmental forces of Hinduism. Ray makes her the inevitable victim of history that finally forces her to occupy a position neither at home nor in the world of her time. Ray's cinematic presentation powerfully inscribes how Hinduism finally fixes Bimala and strips her of her femininity and womanhood.