

CHAPTER-VI

SUMMERY AND CONCLUSION

The representation of women in Indian cinema offers unique insights into India's modern history, and the shifting expectations placed upon them, both on screen and off.

Women have always occupied center stage in Ray's films. Every woman in his films represents a particular era. She is sometimes Charu in *Charulata*, Bimala in *Ghare Baire* or Arati in *Mahanagar*. Satyajit Ray, known for having the "director's gaze", harboured a "deep respect" for women and portrayed them as having more moral strength than men in various roles other than the stereotyped idea of a "woman belonging to the kitchen",

Women in his films defy stereotyping. In conventional narrative films, forms are complicit in producing women as subordinate, but the creative imagination of Ray has used these forms to present positive, dynamic and alternative representations of the women. The women in his movies always played the roles of strong protagonists who were shown as more courageous and bold when compared to the male characters, something that was completely different than how Indian actresses were seen in those days. The meek and demure were exchanged for the bold and the beautiful in a subtle yet endearing way.

The varied background of the women

Barring Charu and Bimala, all his characters be it Gulabi, Ratan, Sarbajoya, Arati or Dayamoyee belong to different socio-economic backgrounds.

Women in the films of Satyajit Ray are situated in a society where they are silenced, and where their experience and particular insights are undermined or dismissed. Women in his films are different in their historical contexts, their social backdrops, their positioning within the family and their financial status. Most of his women characters have

been treated quite differently. Irrespective of their historical contexts, their social backdrops, their positioning within the family and their financial status they represent the marginalisation of women, sometimes in subtle ways such as witnessed in Charu of *Charulata*. Sometimes, the expression of their undermined status comes across strongly and openly such as that of Dayamoyee in *Devi*. In his entire cinematic works there is no resonance of the former's characterization in the latter film. Arati of *Mahanagar* does not resemble Charu of *Charulata*

Ray's *Pather Panchali* has given Indian cinema the housewife Sarbajaya, who comes alive on screen, adding flesh and blood to the literary character created by Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay. Sarbajaya, Apu's mother, a semi-literate, naive, rustic and poor woman, grows through *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito* from a young mother to middle-aged woman, from the epicentre of her family to a woman reduced to a picture of grief by poverty and the loss of a child.

Sarbajaya is a complete character. She gives free rein to her emotions, yet can pull herself in when she needs to. Sarbajaya has a quiet dignity and believes in the value of honesty. The anger and bitterness are directed at the poverty she is trapped within and can do nothing about. Her innate courage is carried over more intensely in *Aparajito*, when, in illness and in pain, finding it impossible to cope with the reality of the grown Apu deciding to go away, she dies waiting for him. The pathos of her lonely death is expressed through an eerie silence punctured by the soft humming of crickets and the darkness of a growing night dotted with glow-worms. Sarbajaya's life is wasted away waiting for a son who loves his mother very much, but loves his freedom more.

In *Mahanagar* Ray placed Arati at the centre. 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 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, 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 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*.

In *Devi*, Dayamoyee's aborted rebellion against the goddess-image bestowed on her against her will, comes across lucidly just in a single shot. The morning after the dream, when her father-in-law Kalikinkar bends to touch, considering her a human incarnation of the Goddess, Dayamoyee turns to the wall, scratching her nails down its length, curling her toes inwards. The expression on her face, seen partially in profile, registers an uncanny blend of anguish, self-pity, pain, grief and shock.

None of Ray's women characters can be reduced to cliché. Whether it is the proud little Ratan in *Postmaster* of Tin Kanya, who silently ignores a rupee's tip the postmaster offers her, or Charu in *Charulata*, who keeps gazing at the handsome Amal through her lorgnette, her only company in her lonely world, they defy stereotyping.

For Ray, it is a question of cinematic representations of women contributing to, and constructing the understanding of what a woman is. It is a question of a re-thinking and re-conditioning of what generally have been used to in mainstream cinema. He has proved that though conventional narrative film forms are complicit in producing women as subordinate, it is for the creative imagination of a director to use these forms to present positive, dynamic and alternative representations of women.

While structuring Ratan, Charu, Sarbajoya, Arati or Dayamoyee he has kept them out of dominant modes of representation. He has structured

corrective re-ordering of women characters. He has not tried any *avant garde* strategies. By altering the language of cinema to suit his creative ends he has created his unique film language for, and of women. He has not compromised on the aesthetics of cinema to make his statements on women. On the contrary, he has used *aesthetics* to alter modes of female representation

Nation–tradition-modernity

In all the films under discussion, only barring *Abhijan*, it is observed that Ray's concern is nation, nationhood, history, tradition and modernity. In *Aporajito* Ray takes up the dreams of Apu far from poverty and tradition to a new world of rationality and individualism. But its basic concern is education, scientific temperament fusion of east and west. *Devi* is a critique of the feudal patriarchal values and superstition, set against a time of history when the western knowledge and rationality are making in road into the society. *Mahanagar* is set in post-independent India and is Ray's personal statement on the changing values of the traditional. It is Ray's exploration of the relationship between women's emancipation and changing social conditions *Charulata* is set in the period of Bengal Renaissance. Against this back drop he depicts the burgeoning sense of self within a male world. The blindness and shortsightedness of the men she knows and her aspiration to know and connect to the world outside the four walls of home. *Ghare Baire* examines the modernity in the context of Hindu traditionalism and future of the nation. *Aranyer Din Ratri* depicts his disenchantment of the modern India envisioned by Nehru and the artists of his time like himself.

One need to keep in mind that "*Beneath the variety of narrative discourses that he develops, Ray is intent in telling us another story. In film after film, he investigates India's social institutions and the*

power structures to which they give rise, or vice versa. He works out, in concrete terms, the conflicts and issues of his times, both in his own state of Bengal and in the larger Indian nation.”

Rays' exploration of Indian womanhood in his films of the 1960-70s shall observe the operation of all three idea. The sacramental and sociological ideals cruelly trap and imprisoned the Ray women, who has to undertake a long and painful journey to break out of the sita/savitri mold, and to fight for what is her right as a woman. This emancipation is achieved through three crucial stages the fight for women's rights the moral emancipation of woman the liberation in which the very fundamental of the equation of the male female relationship are questioned. The stages are precisely what Ray succeeds in establishing in his women centered films. By implementing them Ray exposes a host for prejudices and customs governing many of the "roles" an Indian woman is expected to perform in her quotidian existence. Her instinctive fight, therefore, is to reassert her position as "woman" over and above all roles. Ray becomes the perfect spoke person on behalf of all the Ratans, Charulata, Bimalas, Aratis etc of Inida.

Ray's analysis of Indian women's struggle also arises out of the historical situation in which they find themselves. Their struggle necessitates a verities of determined responses carved out of the historical changes taking place in India society.

For Ray, what makes India distinctively modern is its hybrid nature, its ability to assimilate divergent influences and reinvent itself while remaining thoroughly "Indian. The context he emphasized in his films are : the dynamics of an east-west collision ;the advent of urban culture and technology ;the importance of education , writing , and language; evolution of new kind of human subjectivity; the solidarity of the family threatened by a reformation of traditional beliefs and gender

roles; the new place of individual and his inevitable sense of dislocation in a world of change; the search for independence by women within and patriarchal society, which is often feudal in outlook.

But the nineteenth century value system in him makes the quest more difficult and it seems that Ray's films seek the answer of the questions such as – *“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 contemporary Indian experience? Or is the modern all about becoming the modern-always in the making – at best, a form of acute self consciousness?”*

Feminist Ray

To show his women as strong and powerful Ray never shows any man, in his entire oeuvre of films, as perpetrator of oppression or humiliation of women. Ray does not project his male characters as negative or hollow rather gives almost equal democratic space to male and female characters in a cinematic sense and also in a narrative sense. But there are many examples of feminist films features in the films under this study such as ‘female gaze’, ‘maternal enthrallment’, ‘masculinity in crisis’ and ‘female desire’ etc. But none of the film turns out to be feminist. This must be owing to the fact, as Asish Rajadhakshy (1995) puts in different context “Ray's films mostly seen as relating to the ideological liberalism of Nehru, and... to Ray's artistic and intellectual mentor Rabindranath Tagore.”

In his films the women do give in true spirit of the Geeta, that, without a thought for the fruits or for returns. The Ray women, therefore, endorses, Cixous's claim that their giving is from spontaneous generosity.

In Tagore adaptation films, in which Ray depicts the Indian women's willful and radical participation in a revolution to gain her emancipation in

these Tagore triad, Ray forces on her attempt to force the Indian men to acknowledge her equality ; to provide her with the necessary opportunities to be a woman; in to view her femininity as an essential part of her personal identity.

Above all in all the films under study brings out female's voice and the voice dominates the narrative and the structure of his film. But female voice alone does not make a film feminist.

In the final analysis , it is fit to say that Satyajit Ray rescues his women by making them in a state of authenticity, or what is existentialist called 'good faith', in spite of being denied the right of their own subjectivity and responsibility for their actions. Simon de Beauvoir's celebrated utterance – 'one is not born a woman ; one becomes one' – accurately applied to the Indian woman. Still there are those like Satyajit Ray, who give their women voices of their own in an effort to make them distinct, unique and triumphant in this all encompassing process of becoming. Ray's giving to, is from spontaneous generosity and not a subtle means of aggression.

With all that being said, the one fact that the researcher cannot overlook is the portrayal of women in Satyajit Ray's movies. His movies went several steps beyond the norms of how women were defined in Indian cinema. The sea of strength and courage that was exhibited through the various shades of female characters puts Indian cinema on a platform which is elevated and refined, and what may be considered as cinematic pride for India.