

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF COMMERCE, ARTS AND SCIENCE



ISSN 2319 – 9202

An Internationally Indexed Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

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Published by iSaRa Solutions

Decoding The Magic of Satyajit Ray's Cinema Through His Trilogy

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Introduction

I'm interested in human beings. Their characters, the fabric of the relationships between those characters, that just naturally appeals to me.

Satyajit Ray in *Our Films, Their Films*

This confession of Satyajit Ray, one of the greatest directors of the world, is enough to accurately assess the narrative he creates through his films. It reflects the background, the character formation, and the presentation style of his films. Ray has always produced films with a humanistic approach, therefore, he has always been watched and appreciated by cinema lovers. Time can dominate the social, political, economy of a period but not humanity. Humanity is timeless and universal and Rai's films proclaims human and humanity. A prolific filmmaker, during his lifetime Ray directed 36 films, comprising of features, documentaries and short stories. Satyajit Ray has not only enriched Indian cinema by giving three wonderful films in the form of *Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito* and *Apur Sansar*, but has also decorated the treasure of world cinema these with priceless pearls. The universal message of these three films soaked in the local culture has made all these three films invaluable.

Background

When the novel of Bengal's well-known writer Vibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay was being published in a series in a Bengali magazine, then who would have guessed that its characters would land on the silver screen in such a way in the hands of Satyajit Ray, who was famously occupied in the world of advertising and printing then. In fact, it was a wonder for Rai as well. It was beyond anyone's imagination that Satyajit Ray, who grew up in the urban and westernized environment, would so beautifully constitute the characters and typical rural landscape of eastern Indian state Bengal. During a six-month trip to Europe in 1950, he managed to see 100 films, including Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette* (1948), which greatly inspired him. He returned convinced that it was possible to make realist cinema and with an amateur crew he endeavored to prove this to the world. He had fell in love with the film and the setting. It was then that he decided that if anytime he were to bring *Pather Panchali* to the screen, it would also be a realistic cinema with the elements truthfulness. The story does run with a few hiccups, but it lends authenticity to it, as the life story of a rural poor Bengali family often goes like this."

The trilogy of *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apure Sansar*(1959) three films made by Satyajit Ray are the magical classics of Indian Cinema. Satyajit Ray's cinema is a saga of rural India. The trilogy carries the story of Apu, born in a small Bengali Brahmin family, from childhood to middle age. The first film 'Pather Panchali' depicts Apu's childhood, 'Aparajito' reflects adolescence and 'Apur Sansar' tells the story of his youth and married life. 'Pather Panchali', the first in a three-film series, paints a sensitive picture of Apu's childhood, where he is brought up by his sister Durga, father Hariharan and mother Sarvajaya amid privations. In the film, on the one hand, little Apu is getting acquainted with poverty, struggle, misery, on the other hand, the vast world of affection is also opening up in front of him. Father Harihar mother Sarvajaya and sister Durga love Apu dearly. They want to keep him in the cool shade of love and away from the hardships and struggle of their life but sister Durga's death makes Apu aware of many bitter truths of life. The story of Pather Panchali ends with the entire family migrating to Banaras in search of a new future.

Ray's use of place as character

The story of Satyajit Ray's second film, *Aparajito*, begins in Banaras. In his book 'Hamari Films Unki Films', Ray writes in excerpts from Banaras Diary, "There is something wonderful about the atmosphere of the ghats of Banaras that you just want to take in.". Here you feel an energy and freshness. Filming in Banaras is also not easy. He clearly says that it is not easy to include Ganga Ghat of Banaras in the frame. There is so much here. The shade of the morning is different and the view of the afternoon is different. The sunlight spreads different colors every moment. That's why morning scenes should be shot in the morning and afternoon scenes in the afternoon only.

Satyajit Ray's fascination towards Banaras becomes clear from the opening scenes of *Aparajito*. Harihar's new abode is now Banaras. Performing puja for the *jajmaan* here is his livelihood. On the other hand, the ghats and streets of Banaras have become Apu's new playground. Satyajit Ray, a thoughtful filmmaker, uses the environment of Banaras to tell his story. He doesn't get entangled in the beauty of Banaras. he knows that he is supposed to use the right characters, objects, lighting, sound, camera movement and angles to create an impactful scene and weave a sensitive story. He learned this from French American filmmaker John Renoir and then used it very well.

In *Aparajito*, Banaras does not just remain the environment, it also becomes a character. The beautiful depiction of the ghats of Banaras gives a higher dimension to *Aparajito*. Will *Mokshadayini* Ganga be able to free Harihar from poverty and suffering or will she free him from life? Do the crooked paths of the narrow streets indicate difficulties to come? Are the high straight steps of the Ghat giving Harihar an idea of the difficult climb of life? There is so much that Banaras itself says. On the other hand, forgetting all the sorrows of the village, Apu a child,

adopts everything with ease - new house, new friends, new game, Everything. He is happily coping up with the changes but the death of father Harihar again brings him to a new juncture. Ray has created a immortal scene of Harihar's death. Pigeons sitting on the canopy of the ghat give information about the flight of Pran Pakheru by flying together with a loud sound in such a way that the heart sinks. This scene remains in the mind of the audience for a long time. The way Satyajit Ray weaves the fabric of music and visuals is unique in itself.

Ray's Story Telling

In the changed circumstances, Sarvajaya returns from Banarus to her village in Bengal with Apu. She tries to make Apu a priest like his father but he wants to study. He is enrolled in the village school. After getting a scholarship, he insists on going to Kolkata. Amidst all the apprehensions, the mother gets ready to send him away against her wish. A unique story of mother's sacrifice, affection and dedication begins. After the death of Durga and Harihar, the only hope and strength of Sarvajaya's life is - Apu. Satyajit has underlined the mother-son relationship in many ways. Savajaya is the epitome of selfless love of a mother who quietly sacrifices herself for the betterment of Apu's future. Her every effort is seen to save Apu from every pain and suffering from childhood to adolescence. She stands as a shield in every sorrow.

In Kolkata, Apu is dreaming about the future. There are only two obstacles in his dreams, one is financial, the other is emotional. He overcomes the financial obstacle by working in a printing press, and is also getting a scholarship, but the emotional obstacle is his mother. The one whom he has left the village and who waits for him every moment. Satyajit Ray has beautifully shown how Apu's initial focus on coming to Calcutta is only to study and return to his mother, but gradually the strings of emotions begin to crack due to the illusion of the metropolis and the desire for freedom. His indifference for his mother's words, his indifference to village games during his visit to village seems to point towards increasing distance between mother and son.

Apu's character itself seems to represent every person who moves away from their roots and moves to the cities in the search for better future. Ever since position, money and degrees have become the scale of success, every person feels this duality sometime or the other. Metros offer the illusion of better opportunities; this draws many to the city. At this juncture the story unfolds a universal truth. How the difference between urban and rural environment takes the youth away from their roots and makes them wander in the world of dreams. Aparajito is a distinctive example of this. Even the string of mother's affection is not able to hold this bond and finally Sarvajaya sacrifices her life. Even after his mother's death, Apu does not want to stay in the village and returns to Kolkata as he still has dreams to fulfill. Before her death Sarvajaya had written a letter to Apu requesting him to come home but Apu decides to stay on in Calcutta instead of going home during the holidays. When asked by the friend, he says that he has sent two rupees to the mother and has 'managed' everything. This word

'manage' says a lot. Can mother's emotions, feelings be managed? Can a mother's affection and sacrifice be worth the two rupees that Apu wants to send to get rid of all his emotional duties? Is he taking the mother's unconditional love as secondary? Through this dialogue, did Satyajit Ray want to show the impact of western culture and colonization on Indians, in which the devaluation of Indian cultural and social values is also hidden somewhere? Is this context and dialogue not relevant even today?

It is the specialty of Satyajit Ray that he does not show any character as positive or negative. He shows some incidents, shows some aspects of the character and leaves it to the audience to decide what they think about that character. It is the same with Apu. If seen from mother's point of view, Apu's character seems to be insensitive, but if seen from Apu's point of view, a young man who wants to dream, who wants to move ahead in life, who wants to overcome his economic scarcity, he looks genuine. Does he do wrong if he makes a realistic decision to stay in Kolkata? Was he right or wrong? Satyajit remains subtle in his approach and leaves decision on the audience.

Satyajit Ray himself writes that cinema scenes become memorable if they highlight universal human truths while saying small things. The film portrays Apu's confusion, the moment he looks shackled by feelings and emotions and wants to break free from the bondage of past and relationships. Apu has seen the struggle and sacrifice of the mother. He has also seen her attempt to save him from every sorrow. There has also been an urge to keep her first, but his world is expanding after going to Kolkata, in which mother seems less important. After getting the news of mother's death, Apu rushes to the village but by the time everything is over, mother, relationship, and bond.

Ray's actors and Characters

Satyajit Ray was expert in carving out untold things and emotions. The kind of expressions that keep rising and falling on Sarvajaya's face throughout the film is unique in itself. Feelings of apprehension about Harihar's death, expressions of fear, helplessness and anger on the Nanda Seth's advances after Harihar's death when he crossed the kitchen door, apprehension on seeing Apu lighting a hookah, without saying a word Sarvajaya expresses everything. Sarvajaya's whole world revolves around Apu, but still she does not want to let her affection fetter Apu's feet. A vortex of hope and apprehension about Apu rises in his heart that reflects in his eyes and gestures in such a way that the audience gets attached to her character.

Surely it is the magic of Satyajit Ray's careful direction that he makes each and every character of *Aparajito* unforgettable. It is also necessary to remember that he got all this acting done by non-professional actors. Impressed by *Bicycle Thieves*, Satyajit Ray decided to cast all new actors. Satyajit Ray believed that the director should patiently explain the nuances of the events to the actors and then the actors themselves display expressions on it, then an excellent scene can

be created by the joint effort of the director and the actor. However, he admits that with children the case is just the opposite where as a director he has to control every gesture and expression. The actions and behavior have to be determined and told, only then the right and desired scene is created. He does a great job with both Bal Apu and Kishore Apu. In Banaras, when he shows the first glimpse of Apu peeping through the wall, then the heart goes out for that innocent boy with big eyes. And the audience begins to feel a connection with Apu.

Ray's Language of Cinema

Needless to say that Satyajit Ray understands the language of cinema very well. In the book 'Speaking of Films', English translation of Satyajit Ray's Bengali articles on films by Gopa Majumdar, Satyajit Ray has written that a good story is necessary for film making but a great film is made only when that story is filmed in the perfect language of cinema with the artistic and aesthetic manner. He believed that the biggest reason why cinema has got a special place in the medium of expression is that it has included many small and big arts with it. In this, there is a combination of many arts like poetry, music, painting, drama, architecture, which gives shape to the abstract form of human imagination. And for this difficult task, the director of cinema should be given cinematic liberty.

The depiction of *Aparajito* also confirms his view. Satyajit Rai mixes the music with the visuals throughout the cinema in such a way that it embodies our impulses. Satyajit Ray also used to say that cinema is an audio-visual medium which is produced by a beautiful combination of sight and sound. Satyajit Ray was an excellent painter as well as had a keen interest in music. In one of his articles, he has compared film to music. He writes that the classic music of India moves slowly towards intensity and ends by giving joy and peace to the heart. A listener who knows Indian classical music already knows this speed and direction but it is not so in western music. Dramatic ups and downs of tone and tune in between make it attractive, Cinema needs such ups and downs. *Aparajito's* story is also full of such ups and downs. Just when everything seems to be going well in his life, a new storm shakes his life and takes a new turn. New challenge, new place, new people. Each time dealing with such sorrows, accepting the changes, adjusting to the new circumstances, Apu moves forward with his life. Apu moves on with his life while adjusting to the new circumstances. This story of the daily struggles of human beings keeps moving forward amidst all the ups and downs taking the audience along with it. Apu moves on with his life while adjusting to the new circumstances. This story of the daily struggles of human beings keeps moving forward amidst all the ups and downs taking the audience along with it.

In *Apur Sansar*, the last film of Satyajit Ray's trilogy, therefore, when Apu is devastated by the death of his wife and feeling alienated from the world, wants to get away from all the sorrow and suffering, the audience who have seen the first two films, this reaction seems natural. It does not come as surprise when Apu gets disenchanted with life, loses faith in dreams and becomes

disillusioned with relationships while fighting with circumstances & battling with the death of all his close relatives. Ultimately, Apu takes time to recover, he is not defeated by the situation. He returns to his son Kajol to raise him, with renewed hope and expectations.

Ray on dialogues

Satyajit Rai used to give special importance to dialogues in films. And he was a big fan of Vibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay's lively dialogue writing style. Satyajit Ray believed that if you are making a cinema based on real life, then the dialogue of the characters should not feel the presence of the writer. Only the naturalness of the dialogues can give authenticity to the film. At a time when Bengali cinema was all about smart dialogue writing / cheeky dialogue writing, Satyajit Ray preferred life-like, emotion-filled, realistic dialogues. Needless to say that is why each and every character in *Aparajito* and the other two films seems alive. Like the dialogue, Satyajit Ray has given importance to keeping the environment natural. *Aparajito* has been shot in the real streets of Bengal and Banaras. Analyzing his filmmaking style, Satyajit Ray clarifies that the filmmaker does not have any made-up real environment which he goes and directly photographs for the film. Take it. He has the raw material – in the form of place, in the form of people, in the form of dialogue, in the form of objects, in the form of angles and motion. By carefully selecting these according to the purpose of his story, a director can tell his story better. It is part of his creative process. This creative process should be accomplished by making the ability to hear and see a strength. This art of excellent choice of all to suit the story of the film makes Satyajit Ray one of the best directors of the century.

Ray: Objects in Cinema

The presence of objects in the frame also has a special contribution in Satyajit Ray's story-telling style. It is not possible to mention these three films of Satyajit Ray and not mention the train. Don't know how many symbols emerge in the form of migration, life speed, displacement, hope, waiting and apprehension. The train first appears as a symbol of hope in *Aparajito* when we see Harihar reaching Banaras with his family. The decision to settle in the city after Durga's death is certainly an economic one, It is also emotional. The train is seen for the second time in the film when after the death of Harihar, Sarvajaya is returning back to her village in Bengal in desperation. The lights of hope in her eyes have been extinguished. Ganga Ghat and Banaras all seem to be left behind. There are hundreds of apprehensions in the mind but it is compulsion to return. Sarvajaya's grim face with the fear of an uncertain future makes the audience clearly feel the inner conflict going on in her heart. Time passes, Apu has got a scholarship and wants to go to Kolkata to pursue further studies. Sarvajaya tries to control her anger, her only support, between the sound of the train, the fantasy of going far away and the fear of getting lost in the city But the slap she gives on Apu's face, It seems as if it has fallen on itself. She is overcome with remorse and soon forgets her own fears and joins in Apu's dreams. The film again has a

train which is taking Apu to meet his future, then there are hopes and expectations to move forward leaving the past behind. After this the sound of the train becomes the support of Sarbojaya's life. The train passes by sitting under a tree. The glow that fills her tired eyes with the sound of Apu's arrival touches the audience. The train has brought happiness this time, but will this happiness last forever, it has also brought with it the question. When Apu has returned from vacation for the first time and is eager to go back to Kolkata from the village, he reaches the station, the train arrives but he leaves. No, he returns home. Mother's affection, Mother's affection and mother's appeal to stop compels him to return. After a few days, Apu again returns to Kolkata. Now begins the endless wait for Sarvajaya. The sound of the train heralds Apu's arrival but in vain, the train passes but Apu does not come, Sarvajaya's wait goes in vain. Every day the train waits for her to meet a son. She gives but as soon as she passes she pushes her into the pit of despair. There are many trains in Aparajito, the past as well as the future, the present as well as the time that slips out of hand.

Why only trains, the globe in Apu's hand also says a lot. Apu's globe symbolizes the dream of a teenager full of Apu's desire to see the world, to achieve the world, to conquer the world. He also symbolizes the modern and scientific thoughts of Apu. His father used to have a Kamandal of worship in his hand, Apu has a globe in his hand. It is also a decent presentation of the difference between the two generations. While going to Kolkata for the first time to study, Apu is sitting in the train with a globe in his hand but when he is returning to the village after getting the news of his mother's death, the globe is missing as if his whole world has been robbed. Clearly, Satyajit Ray is not known for his cinematic use of random objects. Only seasoned directors like Satyajit Ray can show such subtlety in visual structure.

Conclusion

Satyajit Ray does not end the film on a negative note. He wants to suggest that one has no other option but to struggle to survive as a human being. The character of Apu portrayed in the trilogy of Pather Panchali, Aparajito and Apur Sansar gives this clear message. , This life journey of Apu, underlining the importance of duty and work, gives the message of walking in every situation without worrying about the result and reward. This is the message of Shrimad Bhagvat Gita as well. These three films, despite being the story of a single human being, give deep lessons of life to the entire human race. This is what makes these films and Satyajit Ray special and great.

Apu's life journey is a story of struggle and compromise with circumstances. But this struggle is not his alone, every character of the film is facing the circumstances of life in his own way. The character of Sarvajaya, Apu's mother, has been wonderfully created by Satyajit. Sarvajaya is amazingly alive. By burying all the sorrows in the heart, trying to bring light in Apu's life, there is a reflection of such a mother who is an embodiment of sacrifice, tolerance and affection. She does not want to let the shadow of her troubles fall on Apu. To fulfill his wishes, she keeps her emotions and tide of affection inside her heart. She does not express her pain in front of

Apu, Even Apu is unable to read her thoughts. Savjaya simply goes to heaven without achieving any happiness in life. This is a hard and tough reality of rural life, there is a struggle even for the small joys of life. Many lives are spent like this in the absence of big happiness and in the hope of a better tomorrow.

Time magazine, while analyzing Satyajit Ray's films, once wrote that Ray's films take time to live a life of their own. They are in no rush to happen. This is the truth of Satyajit's cinema because he does not show incidents in films, he shows life. His characters go deep into the heart of the audience and then settle there. That's why the magic of Ray's cinema is still working on the audience and will continue to persist.

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