



## Satyajit Ray between tradition and modernity: A critical study of the Apu Trilogy

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### Abstract

Satyajit Ray is well known as one of the greatest film director or filmmaker of the world. He directed thirty-six movies in which there are twenty-nine feature films, five documentary films, two short films. He was inspired by a Hollywood film named 'Bicycle Thieves' also known as 'The Bicycle Thief' directed by Italian film director Vittorio de Sica during his trip to London. Returning back India Ray made his ultimate decision of making his first film 'Pather Panchali (Song of the Little Road)(1995). He became famous for his three films 'Pather Panchali'(1995), 'Aparajito'(1956), 'Apur Sangsar'(1959) also known as *Apu Trilogy*. *Apu Trilogy* is one of his masterpieces. This paper targets to bring up Satyajit Ray's contribution and his reflection in Indian Film Industry.

**Keywords:** *Pather panchali*, satyajit ray, tradition, modernity, hollywood film industry, *apu trilogy*

### Introduction

Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) directed thirty-six films that includes feature films, documentary films, and short films. Besides of being a fiction writer, illustrator, graphic artist, he was a publisher, composer, and a film critic. Ray and his films received so many popular and honorable awards in the film industry and it includes thirty-two Indian National Film Award and Bharat Ratna Award from the Government of India, also Satyajit Ray is the only one Indian receiver of an Oscar for Lifetime Achievement (Ray,2013) [2]. In 1963 "Calm Without, Fire Within" (Our Films Their Films), Rays formative years is referred by him at university of Rabindranath Tagore in Santiniketan. For learning the Chinese calligraphy rudiments, Ray writes:

"We rubbed our sticks of Chinese ink on porcelain palettes, dipped our bamboo steamed Japanese brushes in it and held them poised perpendicularly over mounted sheets of Nepalese- parchment. 'Now draw a tree', our Professor Bose would say (Bose was a famous Bengali painter who made pilgrimages to China and Japan). 'Draw a tree but not in the western fashion not from the top downwards. The stroke must be from the base upwards'. (Cooper, 2000) [1]

Satyajit Ray is one among the greatest twentieth century fictionist of cinema, writer, a Bengali film director, and a illustrator and set Indian cinema's new standard as well. Among his works *Apu Trilogy: Pather Panchali (Song of the Little Road) (1995)*, *Aparajito (The Unvanquished) (1956)* and *Apur Sansar (The World of Apu) (1959)* are the paradigm of his masterpiece. His work received admiration for its humanism. Attention to detail, versatility, and the skill of using music in his film. He was praised not only as a film director but also as a critical and intellectual writings writer. His writings mirror the wide-range grasp of history, precision, aesthetics, and culture (Ray, 2013) [2].

Satyajit Ray's work hugely concernfree of Ideology and is noted for its profuseness of humanism. British colonialism and Indian nationhood deeply marked his film and stories, and his film has a distinctively Bengali variety of liberalism. Ray grew up in a nationalist milieu and nationalism and the preoccupation with colonialism marked Ray's earliest unrecorded scripts and was emphasized by him which shows about mature works by Ray which continued for

combining an anti-colonial viewpoint and stirring perspective on nationhood of India and a manifest commitment to culture of cosmopolitan with the case studies of Charulata(1962), Kanchenjunga(1962), First class Kamra(1981), Agantuk(1991), Pratiwandhi (1970) and Robertsoner Rubi(1992) (Sengoopta,2011) [3].

### Ray's Perspective between Tradition and Modernity:

"Avant-gardism is a luxury we cannot yet afford in our country."

Satyajit Ray, our films, their films (Ganguli, 2010) [4]

As a man, Ray's life is centred among his relation just like a traditional Indian. Most of his creative preoccupations circulate around family relationship. Only four films of him have aberrant from this customary pattern, Nayak (1965-66), The Postmaster (short film), Abhijan (1962), Gupi Gyne (1968-69). Ray's film contains the history of old generation of family that reflects the changes in Bengal. Satyajit Ray's film has a changeless background that contains bamboo groves, landscape of coconut forests and spreading raintrees a lush greenness reflection in the tanks of eternal temple round which the lineage or the family dwellings have clustered (Seton, 2003) [5].

"I am taking the cinema more and more seriously" was written to Clare by Ray in 1948. He used to be an admiration for stars but after graduating from Shantiniketan, he turned into a focused director. He began to make 'hierographic notes' especially in the dark on the various cutting method of the Americans (Robinson, 2010) [8].

### Tradition, culture and Modernity in Satyajit Ray's Film

In the famous film of Satyajit Ray 'Pather Panchali'(1955), Multiple sense of time inaugurate the sequence of Apu's excitement of sighting rail-line and train and the relationship between Sarbajaya and the grandaunt Indir is inward, inanimate and conflicted, In fact Sarbajaya had to expel her from the household because of family endurance. Finally Indir leaves the Ray house out of encompassing and dwarfing nature and there she will find her final resting place (Vasudeban, 2001) [7].

In *Pather Panchali*, Ray introduced neo-realist tradition, which actually use non-actors and shoot on location by

using an undecorated style of photography. The novel *Pather Panchali* by Bibhutibhushan Bandhyopadhyay from which the plot and the overall theme and characters was adopted by Satyajit Ray, was a sprawling saga, and very traditional and simple whose leisurely deonument caught the perfect rhythm of rural Bengal of 19s (Sen,). The governing of naturalism has been celebrated carefully in this film. Though it is a pretence of naturalism whose high investment is equiposed formally and displaced by the viewer's concentration and attention on the emotions and perspectives on the character rather than what frames them (Vasudeban, 2001) [7].

The film 'Aparajito'(1957) by Satyajit Ray is located in the Benaras, a spiritual and cultural city in north central part of India. This film is the second of the series of *Apu Trilogy* by Satyajit Ray. The first one is *Pather Panchali*(1954) which is already discussed above and the third masterpiece of this series is *Apur Sangsar*(1960). This Trilogy has been a popular allegory and shows the struggle and the journey of a boy (Apu) who belongs to an Indian hieratical ordinary family and hence to the reign of modernity. The set of Aparajito in Benaras is one third. Here Ray shows Apu's life(about age 9) with his parents Hrihar and Sarbojaya in Banaras and after his father's death Apu leaves Banaras with his mother (Mehndiratta,2002) [10]. So Ray's modernity reaches everyone another kind of narrative if the earlier narrative can be questioned successfully as the movement of development can be describe very well in the mid-fifties of the last century. (Battacharya, 2006) [6] Thus Ray's perspective towards new generation and society has been reflected through the composition of culture, tradition and modernity in his film.

**Hollywood Influence in Ray's Cinema:** Ray has been hugely influenced by Hollywood industry also and tends Bengal into a modern film industry. As the British filmmaker and critic Lindsay Anderson once said "I would compare Satyajit Ray to Eisenstein, Chaplin, Kurosawa, Bergman and Antonioni. He is among the greatest in world of cinema." In 1978, He was adjudged one of the three all-time masters of the cinema by the Berlin Film Festival committee. During his trip to London, from Jean Renior, the first European Director, Ray learnt a major fact that the most important thing to a film is the emotional integrity in human relationship in the film. Ray said he had seen *The Bicycle Thief* by Vittorio De Sica within three days after arriving in London which furthermore inspired him to make his decision of making his first feature film *Pather Panchali* where he used natural location and unfamiliar actors and so was the same case of *The Bicycle Thief*. Ray says:"All through my stay in London, the lessons of *The Bicycle Thief* and neo-realist cinema stayed with me." (Sen,)

### Conclusion

Satyajit Ray was one of the greatest directors of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Who made so many cinemas which influence our society by then till now. But The *Apu Trilogy* is a masterpiece created by Ray. He dreamed of a film industry which will adopt modernity with respecting Indian tradition and culture which he created by himself. Except *Apu Trilogy* there so many famous film of Satyajit Ray such as *Gupi Gayen Bagha Bayen, sonar kella, Charulata, Jalsaghar*, etc. His *Pather Panchali* and *Apu Trilogy* still inspire filmmaker worldwide. Ray was not only a Indian

Director but also a great writer, publisher, and contributor of India. At the end, no need to say that Ray indented to make a film industry in India which concerns Indian culture, spirit, and moving on of India to the modernity at the same time which will catch the excitement of the audience in which he succeeded in the extreme.

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