



Social and historical scenes from Satyajit Ray's 'Jalsaghar', 'Devi' and 'Shataranj Ke Khiladi'

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Abstract: The film is an art medium where the realities of daily life can be elevated to the level of art. However, Bengali filmmakers have not been able to grasp this truth for a long time after the beginning of the journey of Bengali cinema. Some educated youth formed the source of daily communication between people, society, economy, and politics with the film. Ray was one of them. With the help of Satyajit Ray, a new consciousness came into the world of Bengali cinema's construction techniques and industrial ideas. Bengali cinema became acquainted with the international film world. Ray did not stop at the smooth narration of the story in his films, but also provided an intellectual explanation through his filming. He directed a total of 36 films. Each deserves special praise. One of the films directed by Satyajit is 'Devi' based on the short story of Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee. Through this film, he highlights the clash of feudal and religious superstitions with bourgeois rationalism. Jalsaghar was released in 1956. Based on Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay's story, the film depicts the collapse of the dying feudal aristocracy and the rise of the bourgeoisie. One of his movies is 'Shataranj Ke Khiladi'. The film is based on the short story of Munshi Premchand and has the history of Nawab Wazed Ali Shah losing power to the British in 1757. In parallel, the chess games of two wealthy Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Raushan Ali continued differently. All three movies talk about social change. Satyajit Ray was almost loyal to the main story, but he also presented a scene of social change in front of the audience.

Keywords: Ray's movies, historical films, feudalism, social context

Introduction:

Movies are one of the most popular media in human civilization. A film is an art form that can publicly portray the reality or illusion of human society. The importance of film in human life is immense. Although Bengali cinema, especially the silent Bengali cinema of the 1920s, aroused interest among the people, it became widespread after audible dialogue and music were added to the cinema in later times. The early filmmakers couldn't realize that even through film, the general realities of human life could be elevated to the level of fine art. Most of the movies of that time were very emotional, full of unreality and exaggeration of events. In the early days of Bengali cinema, we can identify three types of movies in the form of 'Jatra' or drama - 'mythological', 'historical' and 'social'.¹

Some of Kolkata's film lovers and intellectuals, who wanted to shape the world of film realistically, formed the basis of daily communication between Bengali film and people, society, economy, and politics. The Calcutta Film Society was formed in 1948 on the initiative of all these famous intellectuals.² It was started by Satyajit Ray and Chidananda Dasgupta. Later they were joined by Nimai Ghosh, Banshi Chandra Gupta, Harisadhan Dasgupta, Radhaprasad Gupta, and many others.³ It was through this film society movement that Satyajit Ray deepened his film. His curiosity, imagination, and realism made it possible to make international quality Bengali films. Satyajit Ray's hand gave a new impetus to the world of Bengali filmmaking techniques and artistic thinking.

Ray's 36-year long filmmaking career from 'Pather Panchali' in 1955 to 'Agantuk' in 1991 is made up of 28 full-length short stories, three short films, and five documentaries for television.⁴ Sometimes he has collected material from the writings of contemporary writers and sometimes he has written stories and screenplays in his style for the needs of the films. In his films, Satyajit did not stop at the smooth narration of the story, but through his filming, he provided a socio-political, historical, and above all intellectual interpretation. Satyajit Ray's first released film was Pather Panchali, which was released in 1955 in Kolkata. Open to the viewer is the visual reality of the film. Pather Panchali first showed how individual and social life and nature hold hands, how art accepts the promise of life. Pather Panchali also became an endless journey from village to town which follows the normal course of social history.⁵ Ray was well aware of the so-called nineteenth-century renaissance. The result was films set in the nineteenth century, such as

Jalsaghar, Devi, and Shataranj Ke Khiladi. 'Jalsaghar' was released in 1956. The film is based on Tarashankar Banerjee's famous short story 'Raibari' and 'Jalsaghar'. The central character of the story is Vishwambhar Roy. In the first story, we see the glory of the ancestors of Vishwambhar Roy, that is, the glory of feudalism. In this story, we see the construction of the Jalsaghar of the Roy family. The next story is 'Jalsaghar', which is the story of the rise of the emerging neo-liberal class with the decline of the decaying feudal system. When Satyajit Ray directed Jalsaghar, he combined the story of 'Jalsaghar' with the story of 'Raibari' in the screenplay, as a result of which the screenplay needed to move away from the original story. In Jalsaghar, Ray portrayed the tragedy of feudalism with incredible skill.

Nineteenth-century is not directly portrayed in the picture of Jalsaghar. However, echoes of nineteenth-century trends can be heard in the movie. Vishwambhar Roy and Mahim are clear representatives of two social classes. Where Vishwambhar Roy is the symbol of the dying feudal aristocracy and Mahim is the representative of the emerging merchant bourgeoisie. Mahim is indifferent to art and beauty but rich and arrogant.⁶ At the beginning of the story, Vishwambhar Roy is seen in the early hours of the morning. This reminiscence runs about half of the film. This memory is an attempt to survive in the pride of the judgments against the crumbling economy of feudalism. Vishwambhar Roy recalls the first meeting of Mahim Ganguly. In this meeting, Mahim wants to lease a piece of land belonging to Vishwambhar's zamindari for sand business. Despite the need for money, Mahim was driven away with great pride, but Vishwambhar was forced to sell his family jewelry to show his false prestige. The thread ceremony (Upanayana) of his boy was consummated with great pomp. Party was held at Jalsaghar.

The second party was held at Jalsaghar only to express the erroneous aristocracy at the beginning of an imposed Punyah ceremony. The economic breakdown became more apparent. Vishwambhar Roy did not go to Mahim Ganguly's house entry ceremony (Grihaprabesh) on the holy day of the first of Boishakh, rather he declared an immediate Punyah ceremony in feudal pride to show that Mahim Ganguly's house entry ceremony has faded. On the same night, the zamindar lost his wife and only child in a natural disaster. Despite losing almost everything, Vishwambhar was driven by an indomitable insistence not to give in to the neo-bourgeoisie Ganguly. All these feudal lords like Vishwambhar want to deny the change of the age even when the bourgeoisie is rising, urbanization is taking place, and factories are emerging based on the development of capitalism. The last blow is seen in the last part of the picture of the sharp conflict between the mechanical age of the motor vehicle, electric light, and business-dependent economy and the decaying zamindari. Vishwambhar was able to maintain social pride even after losing everything.

The last Jalsa held in the Jalsaghar. Mahim's hyperactivity in the hope of establishing himself in an elite society makes him ridiculous. Viswambhar stops Mahim's reward (inaam) giving hand with his stick to make him remember that the tradition of Jalsaghar is that the owner of the house has the right to give the first prize. Even though Viswanbhar was ruined, he manages to beat the rich attitude of Mahim. When everyone left at the end of the party, he enjoyed this victory. After that, the tragic moment is depicted in the light of the extinguished Jalsaghar. Burning the last flame of arrogance, he rides with his favorite horse Tufan, in the last scene the zamindar dies after falling from the horse's back. The reversal of history took place by the side of the river silently.⁷

The ambient music of Jalsaghar determined the mood of the film. Raga music has a historical connection with this special environment.⁸ Music indeed became a character in this film. Begum Akhtar, Salamat Khan, Bismillah Khan, and Roshan Kumari collaborated with Bilayat Khan as a music director. As a result, the idea of the picture is reflected in the right way.

Satyajit Ray made the film 'Devi' in the context of the nineteenth-century renaissance. The film was released in 1970. Here, Satyajit Ray has clearly shown the conflict between logic and reform. The main story is 'Devi', a short story written by Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee. Contradiction with the prevailing superstitions of Hindu society was at the heart of the story. Judging from the Indian context, Devi is a revolutionary film. The film challenges the way religion has been practiced in remote areas of Indian villages for hundreds of years.⁹

In contrast, Kalikinkar, a veteran zamindar in Devi, is obsessed with the idea of incarnating his daughter-in-law Dayamayi in the form of a goddess. Kolkata was the main center of the nineteenth-century Indian renaissance. Umapasrad, the youngest son of Kalikinkar, also went to Kolkata to study modern education. Umapasrad here is an English educated man of the nineteenth century without any social prejudices. Modern-minded Umapasrad dreamed of working abroad without relying on feudal zamindari after completing his education. He expressed his desire for a separate family by being supportive of his wife Dayamayi.

Kalikinkar's position is on the complete opposite end. The pious Kalibhakta, the protagonist of feudal aristocracy in the film . The two opposite genres of the nineteenth century are filmed in 'The Goddess' (Devi). The story begins with a picture of a happy family where Umapasrad privately tells Dayamayi about Rammohun Roy and the importance of modern education, but she is mercifully incapable of understanding that. Umapasrad returned to Kolkata. The Kolkata-centric cultural practices of that time, the theater are skillfully presented here. Umapasrad enjoys the moment with a friend in the theater. On the way back in a horse-drawn carriage, the issue of widow marriage and

Vidyasagar came up in the discussion of two friends. Umapasrad strongly supported the idea of widow marriage with his friend. The new era was beginning in Kolkata with the help of all these youngsters. Umapasrad had to return to the village after receiving a letter from Harsundari, the eldest daughter-in-law of the family. On his way home, Umapasrad saw his wife Dayamayi in a state of worship in the seat of the goddess. On that day, coincidentally, the only grandson of a village beggar was cured by drinking the 'Charanamrita' of Dayamayi. Kalikinkar's faith is further strengthened - the incarnation of his daughter-in-law as 'Devi'. Umapasrad wants to bring Dayamayi out of the patriarchal conservative environment. At the last moment, Dayamayi asks out of immense medieval dilemma 'If I am a goddess'. Merciful psychological problems are reflected in a great way. The effects of social awakening in Bengal never reached the roots of women's society in the medieval cultural sphere. That is to be proved again and again. In the last stage, the only child of the family, Dayamayi's darling baby died in her lap without any treatment. Can't save his dead baby with her 'Charanamrit'. Under the pressure of the situation, Dayamayi loses mental stability.

The cruel and inhuman attitude of imposing divinity, religious superstition, and supernatural powers on Dayamayi has been highlighted by Satyajit Ray. In the main story, Dayamayi commits suicide by wrapping her sari, but in the film, Satyajit Ray shows Dayamayi going to the river bank, highlighting the failure of educated Umapasrad. Umapasrad's helpless call 'Daya Daya' resounds with the paralysis of the entire middle-class awakening.¹⁰ He was accused of insulting Hinduism by arguing that he was a 'Brahmo'. Ray only showed the contradiction between logic and reform.¹¹

If Satyajit Ray presents the context of the nineteenth century through the story of 'Jalsaghar' and 'Devi', then the story of 'Shataranj Ke Khiladi' presents the history of the nineteenth century in the connotation of the film. The main plot is taken from the short story 'Shataranj Ke Khiladi' written by Munshi Premchand. The setting of the story is Lucknow, the capital of Ayodhya in 1857. The high cultural environment of Lucknow, especially the interest in classical music and dance and the story of Premchand in the context of 1958 attracted Ray to make this film. Although he had earlier said that he would not make films in any language other than Bengali, Shataranj K Khilari made films in Urdu. It is Satyajit Ray's biggest budget movie.¹²

Ayodhya was one of the states that were formed due to the weakness of the Mughal Empire. How the twists and turns of subordinate alliances have been distorted by the growing imperial greed of British imperialism and the enslaved attitude of the rulers of Ayodhya is clearly seen in 'Shataranj Ke Khiladi'. Sadat Ali Khan was forced to pay Rs. 76 lakh annually to the company as a subsidy to sit on the throne. In 1801, a part of Ayodhya was taken over by the company to stabilize the collection of subsidies. Even after that, the exploitation of money from Ayodhya did not stop. The

company's office in Lucknow almost became a center of alternative power. In 1856 the company took over Ayodhya on the charge of misrule. This was only the result of a long process.¹³

In Satyajit's eyes, Nawab Wazed Ali Shah in 1856, was indifferent as an administrator, but his other personal qualities were perfectly portrayed in his films. Nawab Wazed Ali Shah was endowed with various aesthetic qualities. He was a singer and dancer, patron of classical music.¹⁴ The Nawab had a significant role in adding thumri and ghazal songs to the Kathak dance. In the first part of the film, we see the people of Lucknow accustomed to a luxurious life. Nawab is seen playing drums in the festival of Muharram, sometimes he is playing the role of Krishna in Kathak dance drama. The correct filming of history has enlivened 'Shataranj Ke Khiladi'.

Conclusion:

On the other hand, Mir Roshan Ali and Mirza Sajjad Ali. They are engrossed in chess. Both are hereditary feudal lords. Shown here is that their patriotism is so nil, when the British are capturing their Nawab, the city of Lucknow is in bondage yet these two feudal lords Mir and Mirza are busy playing chess with endless laziness. The chess game was going on from two angles, Mir and Mirza were playing chess but the real game was played by the resident General Outram. As a result, the Nawab had to leave the throne without a fight. The Nawab's meeting with the Prime Minister failed. Even when General Outram was entering the palace, due respect was shown to him by the Nawab. Attempts are made to protect the atmosphere of peaceful negotiations. In the end, Nawab Wazed Ali handed over his crown to General Outram and said that the English authorities could take his crown but could not take away his dignity. The Nawab disagreed with the signing of the treaty. We do see any protest neither in Mir nor in Mirza. They are only identified in the film as an opportunistic class. None of them are worried. Only Kallu, the rural boy, was in silent anxiety. Munshi Premchand's story shows that while Nawab is losing power, Mir and Mirza are quarreling among themselves and are falling to their deaths. However, another image has been depicted in Ray's film. Mir and Mirza got rid of their quarrels and immersed themselves in chess again. They come to terms with the changing reality.

Satyajit Ray's artist entity was able to surpass the individual entity of the characters in the story. Ray himself was able to create a distinct genre. The selection of the story, the screenplay, the selection of the characters, and the format of the picture all have their imprint. As a result, his characters became a living document of society and history.

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