

Article

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Ray in Modern India



This essay on Satyajit Ray is built around specific concerns and positions. My central focus would be on Ray's deep engagements with Indian, the modern nation-state, particularly the issue of nationalism and several other vital socio-cultural questions. I also attempt to look at how Ray dealt with crucial socio-cultural questions related to his own Bengali and culture and, by implication, to the rest of the country. Ray in Modern India is what I choose to call this presentation. I'm not going to deal with all the films of Satyajit Ray, and so evolved my perspective. It would take several hours, sessions, and classes to deal with the many aspects of Ray's films, requiring several hours of analysis and discussion.

For this reason, I would only be discussing only a few films through which I plan to let Ray's major preoccupations emerge. I will not be referring to the *Apu Trilogy*, *Kanchenjunga*, or *Agantuk*, to name a few. I will not be attempting any kind of historicization, realism, neo-realism, or classical tradition. I wish to deal more with the socio-cultural, political preoccupations. I shall not discuss his films' aesthetic element, which is another huge area that requires several hours of analysis and debate. But I must state that critical issues arise when I turn to his aesthetic structure. I wish to mention in passing that I have several problems with *Devi*, *Ghare Baire*, and *Ganashatru*. I have some issues with the

representation of characters, but I shall not go there. I also do not wish to approach Ray just as I do not approach creative works through theoretical positions and propositions. Some make the texts secondary, irrelevant, and theory is heaped on creative texts. This is particularly true of literature, and we see this tendency in the analysis of cinema. Theoretical positions emerge from a thoughtful, deep intellectual engagement with creative texts. The creative texts create academic positions, and the power of creative texts might even question the dominant theoretical positions. Though not going to let any canonical theoretical positions determine our understanding of creative texts. As I mentioned earlier, creative texts have enough intellectual content to create new academic positions, especially in literature now guided by the pressure of American academia. At the drop of a hat, theory becomes important; theory is not the problem but theory upon theory, metatheory upon meta-theory is a problem. And as the very distinguished theory, Frank Kermode mentioned, “I respect theory but not meta-theory, meta-theory, and meta-theory.”

As much as we deal with western theory and theoretical orders, we shouldn't let western theoretical models push us into Eurocentric positions. We cannot let the west dominate us. We need to understand that heterogeneous classes are created when we turn to what we loosely call 'post-colonial, 'neo-colonial' third world.' We use these categories but must be aware of the homogenizing tendencies of using these categories. My attempt here will only be to look at the contextual frames of Ray's cinema, the cinematic works of Satyajit Ray. I'm trying to contextualize adequately because I believe that Ray responded to several developments and processes that he witnessed regarding what India was experiencing as a political and socio-cultural community.

I attempt to capture the sense of history, politics, economics, and culture of Satyajit Ray's cinema and, through that, try to understand and come to terms with the records of our times. This would also mean refusing to convert Ray's films into political ideology, sociology, or cultural theory. I'm more interested in the creative dimensions, which

enable us to construct several conceptual positions. Concepts matter more than dead-heavy theory.



I wish to begin with three films, *Mahanagar* (1963), *Nayak* (1966), and *Pratidwandi* (1970). I will explain why I put these films together. Ray's engagements with what was happening in Bengal, his response to what was happening there, the politics and culture, trying to capture the ethos of Calcutta with many structures and values, beliefs, and ideologies. To observe these films is also to see how these films juxtapose, creating a rich mosaic that cannot be explained or understood in singular ideological terms. The politics of Ray's films, and we must distinguish between the politics of creative people and political positions. The politics of Ray's films cannot be reduced to a narrow cultural ideology. There is a certain openness in the politics of his films, and the major preoccupation in these films is the struggles of middle-class life in a city like Calcutta, where employment is a significant crisis. Back in the sixties, let's look at the turmoil of the middle class. The struggle for survival is both a political and economic phenomenon. And that itself brings in contradictory elements and dualities in middle-class life. And therefore, we notice the juxtaposition, even as the middle class is struggling for a kind of identity, the preoccupations of Ray's films are with equality, justice and this is one of the significant features of Ray's films even when you come to the last part of his film making career. So, as we look at the middle class, trying to come to terms with their struggles, the sense of history for Ray, which is part of his understanding of the new processes, is opening in modern India of capitalist formations. The misery of the middle class is also to be understood with the

gradual rise of capitalist formations. What is of great importance is that this middle class cannot easily glide into these capitalist circles, which is the duality and dilemma. It would not do to dismiss this as shallow hypocrisy and come to terms with the rising middle class.

Sixty years ago, the story of today's corporatized middle class was very different. This corporate 'Nuarich' differs from the sixties and seventies middle class. But the contradiction, a historical one, is that this middle class cannot establish solidarity with the working class, and therefore, there is a profound existential crisis. It's an existential moral crisis because when we talk about the middle class, we must look at the different contexts in which the middle class exists. Ray's middle class is caught in a context where a new economic order is emerging, which is not a part of the middle-class society. Still, it does not also mean that this middle class can establish solidarity with the working class. Ray's preoccupations are with the middle-class's challenges, struggling for its identity. The middle-class individual as a citizen is challenged in every sense. Ray's films do not mix these existential struggles of the middle class with easy cultural questions or answers. If one observes these films, one can see that Ray does not create a concoction or decoction. There is no easy concoction where cultural values or answers help the middle class overcome its existential struggle. Easy cultural or spiritual alternatives do not enter his framework. These are days where we look for easy cultural and spiritual alternatives. Such an easy recourse to culture or spirituality is not there in Ray's movies.

The choice to look at the world of Ray's cinema made just after the *Apu Trilogy*; we turn to the Calcutta world. Observing these films, particularly *Pratidwandi* and *Mahanagar*, one also notices in the background but quite strongly that Ray's cinema deals with the rise of leftist revolutionary politics. We know the Naxalbari and Naxalite movement-Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal in the 1960s as Mahaswetha Devi Records it in her works. The rise of leftist revolutionary politics and the emergence of ideological working-class resistance figure prominently in Ray's films. So modern India of the

sixties for Ray would mean a very close and immediate engagement with the struggles of the middle class. But the sense of history was such that Ray was also looking at what was happening, particularly in Bengal. What was true of Bengal gradually spread to other parts of the country. Ray's creative sense is of that kind where he does not reduce it to a barren, sterile, or singular ideological position. This does not mean that there is no ideological position at all. Here is an ideological position to convey a sense of the world, an understanding of several forces, a deep engagement with several contradictory paradoxical processes- economic and political processes. Where a particular choice is difficult for creative people, this does not mean an absence of any ideological position. It is wrong to create such a binary. It is not to uphold a particular ideological position with the belief that this position would give solutions to the problems of history. This is the kind of openness that we need to understand when we experience the works of very great creative artists. This is important because Ray's films or any other creative masters' works are not apolitical ethically neutral artistic statements. There is nothing like an apolitical or non-ethical position. Ray's films' incident should be a pointer to Ray's politics.

If you look at Siddhartha's interview, the question is asked about humankind's greatest achievement. The expected answer is man's landing on the moon- Neil Armstrong is the most outstanding achievement. The propaganda of America- America as the champion of Human rights and liberty. But Ray's sense of equality, justice, and history is such that Siddhartha says that the most incredible achievement of humankind is the struggle of the Vietnamese people against the American forces and the allied forces. That constitutes the struggle of the people and the will of the people of Vietnam. Not many were aware of what was happening in Vietnam. After all, it was only western capitalist propaganda. In Vietnam and later Cambodia, what was happening was revealed only through documentaries of two Australian filmmakers, Neil Davis and David Bradberry. The struggles of the people of Vietnam and Cambodia and the conflict, especially after the Pol Pot Regime and the di mare rouge, came and took

over. Siddhartha's reply is the incredible fighting spirit of the Vietnamese people against America and the Allied forces. This isn't a political film, but one must come to terms with the ethical politics, and that's why I insist that creative work has its ethical politics, and it foregrounds it in very different ways.

Ray's films respond to history, politics, people, historical struggles, working-class, ordinary people, young girls fighting on the paddy fields of Vietnam, braving the Americans. If you look at the Melai Massacre, a whole village of old, sick people, children burnt and destroyed by the American forces. This is the ethical dimension of Ray's politics in his films. And by no means can one describe *Mahanagar* or *Pratidwandi* as political films. They may not be political films if you adopt the term as a genre, but there is this ethical and political understanding. Not just dealing with Bengal or Bengali politics, the economics of India but there comes into frames, there comes into the knowledge through the consciousness of Siddhartha that the struggles of the Vietnamese people are to be admired.

There are two intensely worked out alternatives in *Mahanagar* and *Pratidwandi*, and these happen to be very constant concerns of Ray's films. And they are worked out in very different ways in each movie. That is the emergence of the woman. This is a preeminent area of inquiry and exploration for Satyajit Ray. As we deal with history, society, and hundreds of struggles of emerging classes, the woman is very central from the beginning to the end. The woman is a counterpoint, as she gives an alternative vision to the general patriarchal masculinist structures. The emergence of women who slowly move into the modern world and modern spaces. These women emerge as very strong counterpoints to patriarchal notions of the woman's role, issues of suspicion, jealousy, women's innocence, and women's position in society. In very subtle and sophisticated ways, Ray begins to deal with the emergence of women. This is also Ray in modern history as he was coming to terms with several dimensions of our society and culture. The critical part of his films was the women's defiance and the firm position that the women take up. These strong positions also engender or give birth to an

element of introspection in the men. It's almost like men waking up to the new world. A new world where they get a different kind of consciousness through women. In a very artistic subtle manner without resorting to overarching feminist theoretical categories of feminist positions, Ray asks us to look at the existential struggles of women because one generally does not move into the worlds of women.



When we take up broad historical questions, we tend to marginalize women, but the women are central to Ray's films. Ray does this at a vastly different level dealing with the *Bhadralok* framework in *Charulata* and *Devi* about how women build their inner world, struggle with the conflict. *Charulata* and *Devi* again counterpoint the patriarchal world's dominant, overarching, and almost hegemonizing presence. To look at *Mahanagar*, *Pratidwandi*, *Charulata*, and *Devi* is not just to come to terms with more important historical and sociological questions but also to turn to the gradual emergence of the woman as a vital counterpoint to the dominant male consciousness. I ask you to consider how important it was for Ray to situate the importance of education. Education as an entity of conscientization. School teachers and education are central in that education gives out conscientization which means the awareness of our existence and the reality of our realities.

Women, their education, consciousness, a new social order I believe and interpret from Ray's cinema comes from the tradition that Ray chose philosophically. The extraordinary tradition of Tagore and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. My whole argument is this alternative Bengali ethos of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the towering presence of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Tagore, especially in *Gora* and *Ghare Baire*- Home and the world, influenced Satyajit Ray. So, women, the middle class, the rise of

the Naxalite movement, revolutionary politics, and understanding of what was happening in the world. The struggles with imperialism and capitalist imperialism headed by America, reference to Vietnam, and within the domestic and sociocultural framework—the *Bhadralok* world and cosmos, the woman is gradually emerging. Making her presence felt and establishing an identity for herself. So *Mahanagar*, *Pratidwandi*, *Charulata*, *Devi*, and an extension of these, consider and examine *Seemabaddha*, *Janaranya*, *Ghare Baire*, *Ganashatru*. You can see the remarkable convergence, and by convergence, I mean there isn't a glossing over of anything. The woman's question is treated differently, economic questions are treated independently, political questions are treated separately because of interrelatedness.



A society, culture does not mean just looking at one strand of experience or one strand of engagement. I wish to clarify that convergence does not mean erasing something when I talk of convergence. All these coexist in equal measure, the woman, the man, patriarchal society, history, economics, revolutionary politics, their interrelatedness requires an extraordinary sense of history to understand these things without marginalizing any one of them or privileging just one of them. This is the kind of creative balance that Satyajit Ray works with. And my whole argument is that this comes to Satyajit Ray through his critical internalization of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. The preoccupation is certainly with values, and they constitute the ethical politics of Ray's cinema. Of equality, justice, and a socialist kind are of great importance. Through these counterpoints of education and women, Ray critiques the chauvinism and parochialism of his Bengali society.

I argue that these are images, not statements or pronouncements; these are images of deep humane consciousness. A profoundly humane consciousness is lost in the world of monopoly, greed, and manipulation. There is a dilemma that the middle-class individual faces, and the question are how to resolve it, and we can't find answers to very complex problems of history and society. Nor can we allow these problems to defeat us and become dead ends, as it were. The way individuals, communities struggle with overcoming historical problems constitutes the existential dilemma that Ray's creativity comes to terms with. My argument is that Satyajit Ray's models come through the fictional works of Tagore. Not just because he converted *Ghare Baire* into a film but also through characters like Sucharita, Lolita, Paresh Babu in Tagore's *Gora*. There is a lineage that Ray belongs to, a powerful critical tradition. This is Ray's indebtedness to the critical cultural tradition of Bengal. Ray's films can be described as narratives of indebtedness. Indebtedness to a very great critical, cultural ethical tradition. This feminine spirit operates at a very different level when you turn to a film like *Nayak*, where you have the real superstar of Bengali cinema Uttam Kumar acting as Arindam. Ray's intervention and critical engagement with the hollow Bengali Cinema were promoted.

If you turn to Ray's writing, he talks about Bengali cinema's hollowness and vacuity. *Nayak*, the superhero, is vacuous, and Arindam, the protagonist, is a pompous megastar. But the crucial dimension of the film is that there are two counterpoints. One is deep within the alienation and isolation of the superstar. He's a superstar in public life, but Arindam must deal with this alienation and existential angst deep within. The whole film is built on a train journey, and the crucial point is the journalist who has come to interview him. Look at all these lovely juxtapositions, superheroes, and journalists. Here is a woman, a working journalist Aditi played by Sharmila. The third juxtaposition is the emptiness, bareness, alienation, and isolation that Arindam faces deep within. No direct statement is made in *Nayak*. As Arindam journeys, we also journey from the world of success, fame, popularity to the bareness of glory, the emptiness of pomp, the celebration of vanity,

eventually left nowhere deep within and must face the nothingness and void through the sensitive Aditi. The dialogue that Arindam and Aditi have is almost like a Socratic dialogue. As you observe *Nayak*, Aditi doesn't want this story published. So much so that in the film, Aditi even tears up her report; she doesn't want to get it published. It makes no sense when you have comprehended and visualized the emptiness of a particular kind of life; it cannot become a public document. Somebody's suffering is not a public document. It is not for public consumption, and personal stories of individuals cannot be marketed. That's not the age of TRP and parading a young girl getting pregnant only because she's an actress. Of making capital out of every individual and out of every experience. These are the ethical moves and gestures through which a theoretical framework, an ideological framework, emerges from the film. *Nayak* attacks commodity fetishes, idolization, and the superstar image. These are interrogations of kinds of Hindi and Bengali cinema. Ray's writings show how deeply he was troubled by this kind of Bengali cinema, which was hollow, sentimental, and melodramatic.

Ray in Modern India is also the Emerging Woman in Modern India, and I'm very particular about this. As we tell more prominent stories of nations, people of other kinds of processes, we must also look for counterpoints, and the most vital counterpoint about all these forces comes through each woman in each film. Turning to *Seemabaddha*-limited company, *Jana Aranya* made in 1971 and 1975, respectively. Women become essential in *Seemabaddha*, *Sudarshana*, and several influential women are in *Jana Aranya*. The middle class entered the capitalist world and made horrendous ethical compromises to survive. Without being savage or simplistically disparaging, Ray deals with the moral degradation, moral decadence of human consciousness. This is the transformation of the middle class in the seventies. With its existential dilemma, the middle class is also undergoing a significant historical change process, and this is also the historical phenomenon that Ray is emerging. The middle class is gradually being incorporated into the structures of neo-capitalism.

The middle class of the '70s and when you move to the '80s with the globalization period even begins to lose- *Seemabaddha* or *Jana Aranya* or the gradual decline of ethical suffering in the middle class. And the middle class, in an easy way, became an accomplice of the manipulative capitalist structure. Ray records the ethical dehumanization of the middle class and what is essential is that it's done without irony or cheap sarcasm. It's done with a degree of seriousness and conviction. And every film hereafter is built with extraordinary ethical insights that have been generated for us by great thinkers and philosophers.

I'm talking about the ethos in Ray's films. Where did Ray get such an extensive consciousness? Not just through artistry but because of his understanding of great thinkers and visionaries. Joseph Conrad knew imperialism and understood what it is to be a part of the imperialist structure. In one of his works, Joseph Conrad says, "Ambition must not lead to wealth" if it is built on the misery and suffering of other human beings. It's there in the film, but Ray is invoking the ethical consciousness like Joseph Conrad. You will see it; these are the ethos in *Seemabaddha*, *Jana Aranya*, *Ganashatru*, of course, drawn from Ibsen. You notice the kind of literary intertextuality and cultural intertextuality because we deal only with the texts when we deal with intertextuality. But I'm talking about contextual intertextuality and ethical intertextuality.

During this time, the economy is expanding so that none can resist. And the working-class movements have started failing, and trade unions have started failing. That is another massive story of suffering, misery, and the collapse of the socialist movement and its gradual erasure. And therefore, the sharp critique of the opportunism of the middle class goes with the understanding of the other kinds of very complex demonic forces. An emerging global order unleashed giant new demons. This is the advent of globalization in the 1990s. Ray's films anticipate the emergence of globalization. *Seemabaddha* is a limited company, but this company has become a multinational and transnational company.

There is a kind of prophetic statement to Ray's creativity. You must notice that it is slowly

getting incorporated into these impersonal structures. Global structures and the world of global capitalism is impersonal. You can't fight and resist with no single enemy; it's enormous and detached, and there is no enemy. In feudal systems, the enemy was present right before them, and in semi-feudal systems, you could identify and tell the enemy-the owner, zamindar, who was there. But the impersonality of an economic system like the global world order or financial system leaves you with no choice and no tangible opportunities for resistance. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the middle class is getting corporatized gradually but surely but also begins to incorporate and lets those structures incorporate them into its being. If you look at the manipulation of Shyamal Chatterjee, you see this neo-colonial attitude in us again. This is the tie-up and the very complex relationship that Ray creates for us. There is a global impersonal economic order where you don't know how to fight it, and the second is these competent managers and management executives. This is also a comment on the class emerging out of the middle class because there are several layers to the middle class. Of those managers, corporate agents of the new middle class- not the old-world middle class. The new middle class would not stop at anything, destroy trade union movements, subvert working-class movements, or indulge in very heinous crimes, becoming pimps to prominent industrialists.

If we watch *Seemabaddha* or *Jana Aranya* again, we are not going back to the 70s. Still, we turn to the '70s to only look at how Ray's prophetic sense operated in these films and was opening up dimensions in a creative manner. Not as an economic historian, sociologist, or political theorist but as a creative vision of what was to come very soon. So, from the 1970s, if we come to 2021 and travel back to 1970, you will begin to marvel at the prophetic vision of Satyajit Ray in *Seemabaddha* and *Jana Aranya*. And therefore, you will start to see that without ridicule or resorting to very cheap dismissive attitudes, irony or sarcasm. Ray does not indulge in these things.

With a kind of sadness and agony, you begin to look at the monstrous dehumanizing forces. We

become dehumanizing because we are caught in a world that is dehumanized. To understand it requires a great sense of creativity- to watch the collapse of individuals, to look at the moral degradation of individuals is not to be dismissive about human beings. Still, it fuels us with a sense of tragedy. There is a great sense of tragedy that human beings are collapsing, ethically collapsing to be dismissive about people. Great artists and Satyajit Ray, like great artists, is not dismissive and contemptuously dismissive but a tinge of sadness. There is a tragic element when you look at the collapse, moral degradation, the iniquity of people, individuals, and communities with a sense of helplessness. But does it exonerate anybody? The point is it doesn't exonerate anybody, but it does not say anything to punish anyone. Whom to punish when you operate with these complex and impersonal structures. These are the states of tension and dilemma, and out of these states of anxiety and dilemma, we must generate our resources of hope. To be pessimistic is easy, and effortlessly optimistic is superficial and shallow. Out of significant historical contexts and struggles, humanity moves towards possibilities of a different future. And these possibilities come to us, especially in *Seemabaddha* through Sudarshana. It would help to look at those women who critique individuals and men. You also look at the new attitudes and the kind of ethical consciousness these women bring into play. Ray is looking at women, who, interestingly, retain their integral self. Even when a girl becomes a mistress, becomes a call girl, no woman has a divided self in Ray's films. The men are opportunists who are incorporated into the capitalist structures and have a divided consciousness, split selves. The men become schizophrenic, but even a call girl does not become schizophrenic. These very subtle and complex dualities that Ray creates become exciting dimensions. These become exciting dimensions in Ray's films. But what needs to be underlined is that Ray is not simplistically optimistic, nor is he hopelessly pessimistic or cynical.

The significant problems of history must be understood. The struggles of humanity must be adequately understood and out of our understanding, and several layers of experience do we move to the

idea of a different kind of future. The idea of a different kind of a future isn't going to be born today or tomorrow. But there is rigorous scrutiny and a constant preoccupation. Therefore, for Ray, how does a society, community, or nation ever recover or recreate a specific kind of socialist vision. The emphasis is on a socialist idea, and that's a very ethical and ideological position. Still, when we talk of a socialist vision, we do not refer to any political-ideological position. Or, to state it differently, the party built an ideological position. So, we are trying to understand the socialisms in Ray's works.



The two critiques that Ray deals with are questions that we face today. Especially in the last ten to fifteen years. These are questions that scholars in different fields are dealing with, and these are questions people associated with film and cinema writing, which is central to my understanding of Ray. Political activists, social activists, and Indian film theorists deal with these questions. I turn to *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*- 1977 and *Ghare Baire* 1984. *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* is a profound interrogation of the colonial period and phase. But it is very profoundly contemporary in its understanding of Modern India. Satyajit Ray, in this film, drawing from the short story by Premchand, creates a very different idea of history, nationalism, empires, emperors, and kings. The film is about the betrayal, treachery of the British, of the colonizer. I want to turn to the different sense of history that Ray created. One of the most profound critiques of Indian nationalism and British colonialism. Here Ray draws from Tagore and, very importantly, from Gandhi. Tagore's nationalism, Gandhi's Hind Swaraj, and of course, two monumental essays, 'The cult of the charka,' which was an answer and statement to Gandhi where there

are great debates between Gandhi and Tagore. With both respecting and calling each other Mahatma and Gurudev. Gandhi's critique of nationalism in Hind Swaraj and Tagore's critique of nationalism in his text nationalism. 1908, 1909, 1916, and 1917 -when Gandhi and Tagore wrote these. Tagore's 'nationalism' essay was built on his lectures in Japan.

A crucial part of the film *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* is the conversation between Outram and his deputy. Look at the sense of justice that Ray carried, as Gandhi remarked in the Hind Swaraj in the dialogue between the editor and the reader. Gandhi says the Britisher as a colonizer is very different from the Britisher as an individual and human being still with a conscience. But he may not be able to act on it because he is still a victim of the system he belongs to as a British. But make a distinction between the colonizer-the agent of colonialism, and the human being. Not every Englishman as a human being or citizen is a part of the imperial system. We see the example of George Orwell, who was part of the British imperial police but quits. If you look at his works, *Shooting an Elephant* and *Hanging*, you will see these moral dilemmas. Let me approach all this through two situations, in *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*. One is the conversation between Outram and his deputy, played by Tom Alter. With such mastery and understanding, Ray shows that Outram's deputy is in admiration and almost awe of Wajid Ali Shah- his dance, music, and poetry. The British are philistines with no sense of culture or aesthetics. With a tradition of English poetry, here is Outram's deputy. Outram talks with cynicism and is dismissive. But his deputy says that Wajid Ali Shah is an aesthete, a connoisseur of the Arts, and Ray can locate it. And almost redeeming India, Indian sense of creativity, music, dance, poetry. It's a celebration of a certain kind.

The second sequence is when Outram admits that the British have been treacherous, false, and gone back on their words. There is the public Outram- the regent obeying the orders of the crown, and there is the private Outram, the individual. This is the divide, the schizophrenia of the colonizer. Ray can locate this with such mastery and understanding. Outram is almost deeply ashamed and repentant but must execute the order. This is the impersonality-the public

figure. This is where human beings in their divided states do not listen to their voice of conscience. George Orwell obeys this voice, quits the imperialist force, and fights for the socialists. This is the schizophrenia of imperialism that Ray locates. One through the deputy and one through Outram himself. This is the triumph of Gandhi, Tagore, and Satyajit Ray.



The conversation that all must watch with their ethical sense operating—the regent talks to the Queen mother, Wajid Ali Shah's mother, a profound metaphysical conversation. She says, “you are all servants of the queen, after all, a mortal. We are servants of Allah the God, and we obey the will of the divine order. We are not servants.” As Queen mother, she says, “I will appeal to your Rani Saheba to ensure justice is done.” The argument is Gandhian and Tagorian in nature. “We want justice and nothing else, and I am not ready to believe that the Queen and you Britishers have no sense of justice. I appeal to your sense of justice; how can you do this?” It is a moral argument, and you will notice Outram has no answer. This is Ray's take, drawing from the rich tradition built by Gandhi and Tagore. So, she uses the ‘Adil’, ‘Insaaf’ and ‘Insaniyat’. The British Regent has no answer; colonialism has no response to these moral imperatives.

There is another magnificent scene where Wajid Ali Shah confronts Outram. Ray builds up a new kind of history and contrasts it with all this violent, bloody Anti-Muslim communal history of our times. When Outram comes, Wajid Ali Shah removes the crown from his head and hands it over. But most of us miss the scene where he does not sign the decree and document. The crucial point is, “if you want the crown, I will give you the crown, but I shall not submit myself to your lousy, treacherous

document of betrayal.” You notice Outram, Attenborough stunned and paralyzed, saying, ‘what will I do with the crown? What does it mean? And Wajid Ali Shah is not a coward. Ray's sense of history is that he's not trying to show the Mangal Pandey and the other kind of masculinist nationalism. Saying “My people” is his journey towards the common people, personal courage as a great king. But to represent Wajid Ali Shah as the man who understood the futility of warfare and say, “my common people shall not suffer for my glory; I don't want to go down as a heroic emperor; I shall not sacrifice the lives of common people.” If you understand it in ethical terms, here is Ray drawing from several traditions of non-violence, Ahimsa, and understanding of the plight of common people. Wajid Ali Shah says, “I shall not sign the document,” which shows that he's no coward. “If it is the crown you want, so be it; you may take the crown; after all, empires are going to perish and not going to last forever.” ‘The sun that did not set on the British empire’ was fading away gradually, except that the British did not know it. This is the Gandhian sense of people, community, society. Here Ray is creating a different kind of Wajid Ali Shah and one who gives away the crown and throne but will not sign the document because that's a meek, pathetic surrender. This is a fight for ‘Insaaf,’ ‘Adam,’ justice, and humanity. When the British look at the gesture of Wajid Ali Shah, they don't know what to do. Because the western imperialist colonizing sense of history cannot make anything of this non-masculine or, shall we say, feminine understanding of history where nationalism ought not to be built on vanity. Nor is it showing surgical strikes, attacking others, and creating enemies out of them. This is an ethical neutralization of the powers of modern history, and this is an answer and an antidote to the processes of violence.

This leads us to the vision of *Ghare Baire*. When you look at Nikhil and Sandeep, sharp critique by Tagore, it is a harsh critique of these right-wing forces talking about a masculinist understanding of India and celebrating because if you don't fight, you are lazy and slothful; so, you must show your Purushatva- masculinist conception of history if you

turn to Nikhil, Sandeep, and Vimala who is caught between two worlds and making a journey at the center. She makes mistakes and misreads this hypocritical character. When you commit errors and blunders is when you wake into reality. Again, between Nikhil and Sandeep, you have Vimala journeying into the new world, understanding history as Sucharita and Lalita in Tagore's *Gora* step into Modern history, making their way into modern public life. Here is Vimala also stepping into public life and history. If you put these two together, *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* and Tagore's *Ghare Baire*; *Home and the world* is not just Tagore's text. It is built on a deep understanding of what it is to defeat and conquer violence. And to conquer violence requires enormous moral and ethical courage. Satyajit Ray was there, and Tagore drew from all this. The 40s and 50's come into Ray's 70s, and it comes to us today, and we must recreate it, especially in these times.

This was when there was a battle between Tilak, Gokhale, Gandhi, and others. Tilak and the Mahasabha were talking of a strong Hindu Rashtra. This was also when Gandhi wrote a different critique of the Bhagavad Gita. For Tilak and others, the Bhagavad Gita meant 'take to arms-fight the enemy-no brother, father, sister, guru nobody. If there was war, there was war, and you must win it. Kshatra Dharma. But if you read Gandhi's critique, he says Krishna is not asking for Kshatra Tejas. It is an admonition of Arjuna. To say you wanted to be superior, you wanted to be the prime one, the master, and bask in the glory as a supreme archer. Having started a war, if you try to run away, there is no escape from war; it will finish you off; put an end to what you have started. Or, as Gandhi says, don't build a context of war. It takes no mind, no understanding of the mind to start a war, and if you start a war, the logic of war is such that nobody can end it, nobody can talk

of peace. If you have every right to speak of peace, do not talk of war or start a war. Ray's *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* and *Ghare Baire* draw from these rich traditions.

Our indebtedness to Ray during these times, and when I say these times, today, yesterday, and tomorrow, is to begin understanding our history, culture, tradition, and future. The future of India is not as a nation or through nationalism, but the future of India through cultural civilizational stories. Ray symbolizes the best traditions as an adversarial Indian critical cultural thought that valued, respected, and worshipped civilizational life. When we talk of civilizational life, it should mean tribal life, in all its diverse forms and manifestations, not privilege, industry, industrialization, modernity, development, warfare, and this monstrous enemy called the modern nation-state. To draw lessons from the past, which Ray engages with, perhaps create an alternative civilization. A civilization with a sense of ethics carries a sense of Insaaf. To believe in that sense of Insaaf, Insaniyat - humanity, love of humankind, respect for justice, and in that sense to talk of God. Therefore, Gandhi, who began by saying God is truth, changed and said Truth is God. And the truth is that you respect humankind, and you respect humanity. This, for me, represents the creative vision, and that's why I want to conclude with my reference to *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* and then *Ghare Baire*. I made this, keeping very demanding ethical concerns in mind. That's why I've called it Ray in Modern India. This modern India begins in the 60s and has come to us in 2021. And what the future is, built with my understanding of Ray, the future of this country and humanity is built on rich lessons that we draw from Ray.

(Transcribed by Bhagyalakshmi Makam)