

Article**Satya Chaitanya****Satyajit Ray's *Samapti* – Master's Magic on Celluloid**

I hadn't seen the earlier two movies of Satyajit Ray's Teen Kanya trilogy when I saw the last one, *Samapti* – I still haven't seen them as I write this. But it was with the knowledge that this is the third and final trilogy movie that I saw it. Since the trilogy is titled Teen Kanya – Three Daughters, Three Virgins or Three Young Women – I focused on the kanya in the movie, Mrinmoyee and saw the whole movie as centred on her. *Samapti*, to me, became a woman-centred film, albeit centred on a very young woman.

I was fascinated by Mrinmoyee – Minooyee as she is called by most people in the movie – as she is pictured by the great master Ray. The young girl, a nymph, a Lolita, is irresistibly appealing. She bewitches you endlessly – in the most positive sense of the term. As you enter her world, you are enticed by her, her beauty goes straight to your heart, and you become light-headed.

Minooyee is closer to a child than a woman. Hers is a world full of magic and mystery, and as you start seeing the world through her eyes, you go under its enchanting spell. Here is a young female uncorrupted by the world, society, and adult values and perceptions. Perhaps this is what Rousseau

wanted each of us to become when he called for the world to return to nature. She is a child of nature, pure and simple. Hers is the beauty of primal creation, as we are born from spirit, as nature made us, before the sin of self-consciousness – being a self-separate from everything else, having an existence separate from the rest of the world, what many calls 'the curse of the ego' – entered our minds. The original meaning of the Hindi word 'abodh' expresses well what she is – totally unself-conscious. She is as much a child of nature as a bit of fawn, a young tiger cub, a butterfly, a growing tree, and a running brook, as the wind and the rain are.

Kedarnath Agarwal's poem *Hawa Hoon, Hawa Mein* comes instantly to mind:

*Hawa hoon hawa main
Basanti hawa hoon*

I am the breeze
Breeze of the spring
Crazy am I
Crazed with joy
Worried the least
Fearless

Going where my mood takes
Nutty traveller that I am
No home have I
No aim
No desire for anyone
Nor expectations from anyone
I have no lover, no enemy.
Where I wish
There I go.
I am the breeze
Breeze of the spring.

Mrinmoyee is one with all existence. She is a child of the earth, one with the earth.

Her name means made of earth, pure earth. She is the earth.

In all Indian languages, the word kanya means a young girl, a daughter or a virgin. And one of the meanings of the word virgin is uncorrupted, untainted, untamed, which in the case of a young woman can mean undomesticated.

Mrinmoyee is every inch such a kanya.

It is this Mrinmoyee that young Amulya meets when he alights from the boat – the educated, sophisticated man of books and knowledge coming home from Kolkata where he is studying Law. When he first sees her, she is freely, hilariously, spontaneously, wildly laughing at him – he has just stepped down from the boat and slipped on the slush on the riverbank, falling into the mire, amusing her. She laughs at the hilarious sight, like a brook suddenly bursting forth from the mountains, like a freshwater spring bursting out of the earth, confusing him, embarrassing him with her joyous child-woman's spontaneous laughter.

At home, young Amulya's mother has already arranged a marriage for him – the girl has been selected, a young girl from the village. But Amulya insists that he must see the girl he will marry before things are finalised – something unheard of in the town, something only a western educated man would demand. The mother has no choice but to agree.

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It is on his way – alone and not with his relations as is the custom – to see the girl in her home where the subsequent encounter between Amulya and Mrinmoyee occurs. She is on a swing under the tree by the riverbank when he passes by, impeccably dressed, his shoes specially polished for the occasion, and Mrinmoyee is amused watching him. The tomboy in her won't let him pass by quietly – reversing the male-female roles; she has to taunt him as boys do when a girl passes by. She has a toy that makes a sound like the screech of a bird when turned, and she makes that sound wordlessly, making him stop and turn back while she turns her face away and pretends she hasn't done that.

The 'girl seeing' is a somewhat awkward ceremony, Amulya unable to enjoy even the sweets offered to him by the girl's family since he finds that the hungry eyes of several children are looking at him, their mouths open at the sight of the mouth-watering delicacies. Amulya asks the girl what she is studying, and she starts naming all the school subjects she is studying, revealing her abysmal intelligence level. Then, Mrinmoyee bursts into the room where the ceremony is going on – like a shower of fresh rain pouring down from the skies on the scorched earth. She has entered the room searching for Churky, her pet squirrel, and searches for it everywhere, among the people and under the furniture, upsetting the formal ceremony. She finds and captures it, but before leaving the room with it, she doesn't forget to tease and scare the girl Amulya has come to see. As she leaves, Rakhal, her young friend and the girl's brother, whom she has been calling to play with her, goes with her.

She has disturbed the formality and solemnity of the occasion by her entry. We are not sure if the squirrel had entered the room on its own or Mrinmoyee had slipped it into the room on purpose – we have seen her standing just outside the room window with Churky in her hand, her eyes on what is going on in the room.

Not content with all the flurry and flutter she has created, she steals Amulya's shoes and quietly takes them away with her as she leaves, something we – and Amulya and the girl's people – discover only

later when the time comes for him to return and he looks for them.

Amulya, very disappointed with the ‘girl seeing’, walks back home through the miry village road in the host’s oversized, loose slippers that have been lent to him, each of his steps making his feet sink deep into the mire, making it almost impossible for him to walk – he has to pull his feet out after each step. Eventually, he abandons the slippers and starts walking barefoot. It is then that Mrinmoyee throws one of his shoes towards him. She is standing hiding behind the trunk of a large tree with the other shoe in her hand, struggling to control her laughter. Amulya comes and catches hold of her in a scene that is rich in erotic undertones. She runs away, freeing herself from her grip, falling into the mire repeatedly as she does so, and we remember how Amulya had slipped on the wet, clayey mud earlier.

Back home, Amulya curtly tells his mother he wouldn’t marry the girl he had seen; he did not like her. “Have you seen another girl,” his mother asks him, and he says he has. The mother is thrilled and asks who, and he says Mrinmoyee, shocking her deeply. “You know what people call her,” she asks, and he says, “Yes, Pagli.” “Is she a girl or a boy?” asks his mother, and his answer is a single word, “Girl”.

Later the mother sees young Mrinmoyee playing outside. The girl is climbing a tree and hanging from its low branch. She calls the girl into her room and asks her a few questions to find out what kind of a wife she would make – does she know cooking, can she do this, do that – such things. Amulya’s mother brings all the authority she can command into her posture and voice as she questions the girl. Mrinmoyee answers the questions patiently, a little confused by the nature of the questions perhaps – why should the lady ask her such questions suddenly? The mother is satisfied, and the wedding is arranged by the two families involved, as is the custom.

A furious Mrinmoyee revolts against the decision. She is now confined to her home. When she next tries to go out, breathe some fresh air, and be free for a while, she is stopped by her mother—[Her father is

away doing his job and never appears in the movie]. One day finding a pair of scissors, Mrinmoyee cuts off her rich hair in protest, and for that, she is beaten up by her mother.

The movie does not show us the wedding –the staple stuff of Indian film; movie directors never miss an opportunity to offer one.

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The First Night

On their first night, we see the groom and the bride still in their wedding dress. They do not share a bed. Young Mrinmoyee insists she hasn’t married Amulya, the wedding has been thrust upon her against her wish, and no one even bothered to ask her. Eventually, while Amulya is deep asleep on a chair in the room, Mrinmoyee quietly slips out, still in her wedding dress, goes to the terrace, and using the overhanging branches of a tree, climbs down and goes to the river bank, where stands the lonely swing on which she used to swing for hours every day. In the stillness of the night, while the river flows on silently, she starts swinging again. As the dawn breaks, we find Mrinmoyee sitting on the ground with her head on the swing, resting in her deep sleep. The wedding had thrown her out of her orbit, but the solitude of the still night and the swing had reunited her with herself.

The runaway bride is found and brought home. The entire village assembles in Amulya’s house. People are more amused than scandalised by the whole incident. After all, Mrinmoyee is the Pagli of the town, the crazy girl, the girl they all love despite her immaturity and eccentricities. But her mother-in-law is furious and her husband, Amulya, is utterly confused, not knowing what to do. She is locked up in her room where, after angrily asking them repeatedly to open the door, which they do not, she picks up and flings everything in the room on the ground, including Amulya’s precious book collection. Later, much later, Amulya opens the door and enters the room. He is shocked by what she has done and asks her to pick everything up and put them all back, which she does humbly.

Amulya now tells her he is going back to Kolkata, leaving her with her mother, and that is what he does.

In the Indian culture, taking a married woman back to her home and leaving her there is equivalent to abandoning her – if not altogether, at least for the time being. Significant social stigma is attached to it. We now find young Mrinmoyee languishing at home, refusing food, no more playing with Rakhhal as she used to earlier, never leaving her room, as in the days immediately before her wedding. One day Rakhhal brings some fruits, which she refuses. Another day he comes and informs her that her pet squirrel Churky is dead because no one has been feeding it – she accepts the news but hardly reacts to it. She is dead to all that was her world earlier.

Months have passed since her wedding, and her mother is desperate for her and has lost all hope. What will happen to her? She bewails in anguish. Though hardly more than a girl, her daughter is an abandoned wife now. She screams at her daughter and then weeps for her with her head on Mrinmoyee's shoulder.

And then, one day, we find all of a sudden a smile appearing on Mrinmoyee's face. Light dawns in her eyes, and the dark room she confines herself in brightens up. She has taken a decision. We find her writing a letter – to her husband, laboriously putting down on paper the Bengali letters because she is barely literate. At this moment, her friend, the boy Rakhhal, brings the news: Amulya has returned home.

What has happened is that Amulya's mother has been advised to play on her son, a common trick Indian mothers frequently played in those days when they wanted the son to come home, but he wouldn't: send him a letter saying she is very sick. Receiving the letter, Amulya rushed home.

At home, Amulya's mother confesses she is excellent; the problem is that she wanted him to come home and having come, she wants him to fetch Mrinmoyee – she is a Pagli, but a good girl otherwise, she tells him. She is headstrong, but no one in the village speaks ill of her.

In his room, Amulya's eyes fall on the ornaments Mrinmoyee had removed and put inside the

prominent speaker of his gramophone record player on their wedding night. Tenderness for her rushes into his heart. He goes to Mrinmoyee's house to fetch her, but her mother confesses she is not there; she has gone missing. Frantic, Amulya searches for her all over the village through a storm that has just started and the rains that follow. We see him near the swing where she used to swing, but the swing is now empty. He moves to other parts of the village, calling out her name loudly, full of longing, walking barefoot through the mire of the village paths while the rain pours on.

We find Mrinmoyee sitting under a tree, crying silently in the pouring rain. She hears his voice, the despair in his voice, the love and longing for her in his voice, and a thrill fills her entire being as his voice grows increasingly panicky every moment. She is now a woman proudly watching her man searching for her, his heart filled with love and longing for her. She is dressed as a proper Bengali wife. However, she does not reveal herself, and Amulya fails to find her and eventually, shaken and weak, returns home, her ornaments in his pocket all the while.

There is a letter waiting for him on his bed – the letter Mrinmoyee had written so lovingly and painstakingly. The letter consists of just one sentence: "You've come back." And it is signed "Your Pagli".

She is now his. She has accepted him, given herself to him on her own.

He finds her waiting for him by the gramophone player. He can't believe it. All he can say is, "You? Here!" His face lights up in the joy of finding her in his room.

Mrinmoyee is still dressed as a proper Bengali wife. She smiles and says, "It's my desire." She is in his house – in their home – on her own, by her choice.

He asks her how she entered the room. Her shy smile widens, and she says, "Using the tree". And she adds a promise, "I won't go away again."

She comes softly towards him and bows down to touch his feet, as is the custom for a devoted wife when she meets her husband after a long time. He

stops her, protesting and picking her up, and holds her in his arms. “Pagli,” he calls her lovingly, with moving tenderness. She smiles, accepting his love and tenderness and surrenders to him.

It is then that Amulya’s mother comes towards the room, bringing some snacks for him. But he closes the door from inside, making the world entirely theirs, with no one allowed inside, not even his mother.

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Thematic and Narrative Changes by Ray

At this stage, I must say that I was a little confused by the later part of the movie, where suddenly, we see a very different Mrinmoyee – docile, compliant, meek, yielding. As I said at the beginning, I have been watching the movie as one centred on Mrinmoyee, a fiery, virginal girl untamed by society and untameable from her reaction to her marriage. As I watched the movie, she repeatedly reminded me of the movie *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, which I had seen many years ago when it was first released. It was a movie centred on a young stallion that refused to be tamed and enslaved.

To me, young Mrinmoyee was like the stallion Spirit. My confusion was: how did the girl who runs away on her wedding night, escaping her confinement by climbing onto the overhanging branches of a tree, suddenly transform and accept her marriage accept womanhood and wifehood docilely?

And the movie shows it is not a helpless surrender, an acceptance of the inevitable; she has not been beaten by any forces far more powerful than she can defeat, her spirit has not been crushed, she has not been humbled; it is a happy acceptance, a positive growth from what she was to what she has become. We practically see the moment of the metamorphosis – she is lying in her bed in her room to which she has been confining herself for months, refusing to go out and play with her little friend Rakhali or Churky, refusing to eat. She does not even react to the death of her dear pet. And then, suddenly, a happy smile appears on her face. Her eyes light up, and there is joyousness all over her body which lights up her room. What is the reason for this transformation? Is

it some bodily change, the sudden attainment of womanhood? If it is, the movie does not indicate that is the reason.

At this stage, things did not make sense to me.

Puzzled, I decided to read ‘Finally’, the short story by Gurudev Tagore on which the movie is based. A big surprise awaited me there. Apart from other things, the film ends very differently. Here is how Tagore’s story ends:

“Thereafter, Mrinmayee’s mother and all the elderly women in the village counselled her on her future duties day in and day out. And they very successfully gave the whole affair a monstrous mien by severely discounting sporting ability, swift movement, laughter, the habit of playing with boys and eating according to one’s appetite. And Mrinmayee was ill at ease, wondering whether she had been awarded a life sentence with a death sentence to be executed following the completion of the former.

“She stepped back like a wild pony and insisted, “I won’t marry.”

The ‘After that’ here means after the wedding has been decided.

So in Tagore’s story, the ending is entirely different. Mrinmoyee just refuses to marry. And she has been compared to a wild pony in her action – in her refusal to be tamed.

Traditional marriage can frequently be bondage to the free-spirited, whether a man or a woman. While the experience of marriage enriches a person and gives numerous opportunities to them to grow as an individual, it also limits their freedoms. Mrinmoyee is certainly a free-spirited woman who is more likely to see marriage the way the stallion Spirit saw taming rather than otherwise.

Shiv Mangal Singh’s poem, Hum Pancchi Unmukt Gagan Ke, written in an altogether different context, comes to mind. The poet sang that a bird of the free skies wouldn’t be able to sing when caged.

How can the bird of the free skies voluntarily allow itself to be caged?

Tagore’s ending seemed to be the natural conclusion to the story, the inevitable end the tale leads to from

all that has been said about Mrinmoyee's nature. Here is a 'natural' girl, an embodiment of 'prakriti', a virgin, a kanya in the true sense of the word, who refuses to be crushed by society, to accept the yoke of a conventional life, who chooses to live like free wind, as the poet meant when he said "hava hoon hava main, basanti hava hoon...." She reminded me of our Vedic and epic women, the kind of women Gurudev loved and adored, the kind of women who were his ideals, about whom I have written elsewhere: "The women who people our epics are shaktis: each one of them is endowed with power, sure of herself, sure of the choices she makes, sure in her speech, protective, passionate, loving, giving, hungry for life, filled with adventurousness, a fearless wanderer in life's vast fields. They inherit their soul from our Vedic women: Independent, assertive, strong winners who took responsibility for themselves. Authentic women who participated in all fields of life as men's equals." [From my article available online: Shakuntala – Flaming Indian Womanhood]

How did she then happily accept marriage and become the happy wife who, when she meets her husband for the first time after the transformation, bends down and touches his feet? I failed to understand this. I had to reconcile this changed end of the story with Tagore's spirit, which was difficult. A master filmmaker and storyteller like Satyajit Ray will not frivolously change the end to suit some idle fancy of his. There has to be some deep meaning.

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It took me time to arrive at the reconciliation: Gurudev's story is told from the standpoint of Mrinmoyee as seen from her perspective, whereas Ray's movie sees her through the eyes of Amulya, the young man who falls in love with her and remains infatuated by her. The short story is female-centred, whereas the movie is male-centred; she is still the centre, not as she is, but as Amulya sees her. It is Amulya's Mrinmoyee that forms the centre of the movie.

And Amulya is not just fascinated by her but is in awe of her. Her very presence intoxicates him. The more he sees of her, the more she grows in his

perception, eventually coming to dominate his world completely – his world becomes Mrinmoyee-Maya: it centres and revolves around her. He begins to seek the meaning of his existence through her. He is nothing but an empty shell without her, he feels, and it is she who fills that emptiness with purpose, with joy in place of tedium.

There are two kinds of love: love that wants to conquer, to possess and surrender. The masculine and feminine types of love – both men and women can feel.

Amulya's love for Mrinmoyee is the feminine kind of love.

His desire is not to possess her, to conquer her, but to be accepted by her. He wants her to get him, to make him hers, and thus to give meaning to his otherwise meaningless existence. It might sound like stretching things too far, but what Amulya wants is to become one with his little goddess, whom he sees as the embodiment of all that is beautiful in life – she should make him one with her by accepting him as her man, thus lifting him from his mundane existence and elevating him to her world where everything is beautiful, everything is joyous, where life is not a drudgery but a celebration, a festivity, an utsava, a parva.

The meaning of the word Mrinmoyee is 'made of the earth', typically the goddess made of earth, as is done in thousands of towns and villages in Bengal during the annual Durga Puja festival. Mrinmoyee thus is the goddess embodied in the planet – divinity incarnated in mud in the feminine. Amulya would like to be her devotee, to offer worship to her in devotion, humility, in surrender.

Thus we find that on the wedding night, there is no attempt on his part to consummate the marriage in a hurry, for union with her on the first night itself. Instead, he would wait for her to come to him.

Amulya is both the husband and the devotee of Mrinmoyee simultaneously. He is the husband as a devotee.

He is scandalised when she abandons him and their marital bed and runs away to spend her wedding on the swing by the river bank. But there is no rage in

him; he does not explode in a fury but would leave her to herself and wait for her to come to him on her own and make him hers.

Thus we find that while Tagore's story, told from the young girl's standpoint, is beautiful, the girl there is a kanya in the sense of being independent, authentic, rebellious, free, spirited and refuses to be yoked down with the bandhan [bondage] of marriage, in Satyajit Ray she is much more. She ascends to dimensions of divinity, and Amulya is her devotee, seeking the divine feminine in the earthly woman.

He loves her deeply, pangs for her continuously, and goes insane when he cannot find her, yet he will not force himself upon her but will wait patiently for her to accept him.

And that is precisely what she does – though, as a little girl, she does not realise this is happening. Staying at her mother's place, separated from him, she learns to accept his devotion to her, and we are shown the moment in which this acceptance takes place – the smile that suddenly appears on her face, lighting up the darkness of her room. In this growing to accept him, there is no defeat – it is not a question of victory or defeat – but growth.

Samapti thus is a story of growth, of reaching maturity, a kind of ripening. The seed is not defeated when it sprouts and becomes a seedling; the flower is not defeated when it dies and becomes a fruit, and the chrysalis is not defeated when it becomes a butterfly.

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An essential scene in the movie that is deeply dissonant with this way of seeing the film is the scene in Amulya's bedroom the morning after the wedding night. Mrinmoyee was found in the morning sleeping with her head on the swing on the river bank and brought home. Her mother-in-law is furious with her, and what she has done and the scandal that she feels will follow – though the whole incident only amuses the village since they love Mrinmoyee for what she is. By her orders, Mrinmoyee is locked up in the bedroom. The young woman shouts to be let out, but no one responds. In her fury, she picks up one by one everything in the

room and flings them all on the floor. Later, Amulya enters the room and, seeing what she has done, orders her to pick up everything and put them back in their place and Mrinmoyee quietly, sobbing soundlessly, does what he asks her to do. The Mrinmoyee we see here is the broken Mrinmoyee, the tamed one. At this moment, she is not indomitable but meek and submissive.

It is possible, however, to see this as a momentary loss of her power. After all, she is just a very young girl, perhaps fourteen or so, and the events that have happened can be overwhelming to her – the confinement at home before the marriage, the marriage which she has been forced through, her own running away from it on her bridal night and the incidents at her new home when she is brought back. Even a mighty, indomitable, totally independent woman like the awesome Sita of Valmiki Ramayana, who never allows anyone else to take any decision for her but takes them all on her own, once in her life appears weak – back in Ayodhya following the events in Lanka at the end of the war, during Rama's coronation, when she wordlessly asks for his permission to remove and give one of her necklaces to Hanuman who has done so much for her and who is like a son to her. Why shouldn't little Mrinmoyee have the right to lose her strength under the circumstances?

Incidentally, the theme of seeing a woman as a goddess is not alien to Bengali and Indian culture or Satyajit Ray. At the very heart of the movie, Devi by Ray is many characters' perception of a woman as the goddess.

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Cinema has its language and what Ray has done is to retell Gurudev's story in the language of cinema. While in Tagore's story, Mrinmoyee has all the village children as her friends, in the movie, she has only one friend, at least we see only one friend, except just once. Similarly, Amulya's house is isolated, not surrounded by other houses as in the story – what we see is a solitary home occupied by a mother and her son. In the movie, while Amulya is 'seeing the girl', Mrinmoyee does not just come there and drag the girl's brother Rakhai away to play

with her but comes in search of her pet squirrel, who has run into the room. All these changes bring greater focus on Mrinmoyee, reducing distractions.

In the movie, Mrinmoyee cuts off her long hair in protest against the marriage; it is not Rakhal who cuts it off playfully as in the story. I found that a beautiful change adding strength to her character.

We find a few other beautiful changes too. The swing by the riverside is absent in Gurudev's short story. That is addition by Ray, who has added many further beautiful details – like Amulya beginning to eat what is offered to him and stopping, seeing the eyes of several hungry children looking at him. The toy Mrinmoyee has – the one that makes the sound of a screeching bird is missing in the story, as is the squirrel whose death coincides with the old Mrinmoyee as she metamorphoses into the new one. Amulya's mother has no character in the story; she is just a mother, but in the movie, she is a presence we do not forget easily. Mrinmoyee's laughter is more powerful – almost another character with its existence and identity – in the story. It has a being of its own, whereas, in the movie, it is more charming than haunting, tempting in its innocence and carefreeness. Its quality is joyfulness and freedom and not power.

Also, except for the houses of Amulya, Mrinmoyee and Rakhal, it is as though the village is mostly empty. That gives a kind of isolation and abstraction to three places – a dreamlike quality, focusing on the essentials and dropping all unnecessary things, as in dreams. Because of this isolation, everything stands out, as when an image is framed. Reducing the number of friends Mrinmoyee plays around with and showing just one boy also achieves the same effect.

Ray creates a separate world for his central characters – a world that is part of the rest of the world and yet is not.

In the short story, there is a kind of war between Amulya and Mrinmoyee – as though the two are equals and each is trying to dominate the other. Her initial laughter has hurt Amulya's ego – Amulya is trying to restore his ego and recover from his physical and psychological fall. He has to have his upper hand with her, which he has lost, despite being

a male and older and educated, with this village lass. In the short story, he is a competitor with Mrinmoyee, whereas in the movie, he is totally and utterly obsessed with her and is in awe of her. The presence of Mrinmoyee reduces him to nothing. When he desires to make her his, he wants to surrender to her rather than conquer her. He has been reduced, almost wiped out of existence, and for him to come back into being, he needs her. Only through her can he become alive again and regain his presence. Woman as an enigma, as a mystery, as the incomprehensible, eternally fascinating – that is how Amulya sees Mrinmoyee. She is unattainable. She is joy, life itself, which is not so in the short story.

Satyajit Ray's movie is a reincarnation of the short story, not a retelling. Just as in an incarnation, everything is the same and simultaneously different, and so is it in the movie. A younger version of Gurudev's short story, more vibrant for being newly born, each frame visually irresistible for its beauty. The movie moves into dimensions beyond those of the short story, taking us into a world that is at once delicate and has the power of life itself. The movie is not an idea given wings but is a chunk of breathing, throbbing life itself.

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The cinematography of Samapti is outstanding. The movie shows us a tiny chunk of rural Bengal, but that chunk is mesmerised by the camera work, be it the river, the riverbank with the tree and the swing, the rural roads or anything else for that matter. Each frame of the movie has the haunting beauty of a master painter's work under the camera's magical touch, except that here the images are living and moving and not still.

We get to see much mud in the movie – the miry mud of Bengal in the rainy season into which one's feet sink you walk, slip and fall. It is just mud and not quicksand, so there is no danger. You must be careful walking on it, as you must be cautious treading through the village life steeped in tradition. Of course, you can negotiate it if you are careful, as Amulya does successfully. He occasionally slips, making Mrinmoyee burst out in wild laughter, but he does not give up and reaches his goal. Perhaps the

wet, clayey mud is the mire of dead traditions for Ray. Tagore would have gladly approved. Didn't he pray for his country to awake into that haven of freedom "Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way/ Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit?"?

A joyous atmosphere permeates almost the entire movie, barring the period following the wedding. This atmosphere comes back in the film's final moments, making a smile appear on our lips as we watch the movie. And there are occasional hilarious scenes, as when Amulya goes to 'see the girl'. The film begins with the side-splitting laughter of Mrinmoyee and ends in the gentle smile shared by her and Amulya in their bedroom following her return to him.

I liked the movie's realism, including the realistic portrayal of the rural scenes. At the same time, realism is not the dull, monotonous realism of the so-called parallel cinema of later years which suffocates you. It is realism that does not deny the essential joyfulness of Indian life. It is realism that is romantic, realism with which you fall in love. And the fact that there are no flashbacks, no dream sequences, no running around trees singing love songs and no comedians who expect you to laugh with them when what they make you do is laugh at them. Samapti is a love story, and love permeates every movie frame.

I also loved the deep, long stretches of silence marked only by occasional bird sounds spread throughout the movie. These silences communicate much more than any word or sound can and render immense depth to the scenes, inviting the spectator to share with the characters their feelings, inner, unspoken thoughts and the poignancy of the situation.

Under the brilliant direction of Satyajit Ray, all actors have given outstanding performances. Young Aparna Sen proves herself to be a complete natural in her debut performance at age fourteen, both as the

tomboy in the beginning and later as the shy, young wife. Soumitro Chatterjee is controlled in every scene, mature as an actor and his face shows without words the hundred conflicts in the mind of the young man who has decided to walk against the current and make a Pagli his lifelong companion, who insists on challenging centuries-old customs and traditions and yet manages to get away with it. Amulya's mother gives a compelling performance as the dotting, self-important, well-to-do rural mother, almost a matriarch though there are few people for her to rule over. The little boy, Mrinmoyee's playmate Rkhl, has done wonderfully well though the space given to him in the movie is not much. Take the scene, for instance, in which he comes running to hear the conversation between Amulya, who has come in search of his wife and his mother-in-law. There is no 'acting' in that scene; he just lives it. Running at an incredible speed, he reaches the place and stands there at a distance, non-participating, watching and hearing what is happening. It is all about his friend, the 'didi' he admires, but he wouldn't let any emotion appear on his face.

Finally, Ray's movie involves no debate – he is not arguing for or against anything but is just narrating a story.

And he does it with the splendid mastery only a few directors in world cinema can command. He binds us in his spell from the opening scene to the concluding scene, precisely as master storytellers do.

Samapti is a magical movie – no, not supernatural realistic, but magical. It is a small chunk of pure magic that quietly steals your heart away, touches you in your depths, giving you a sense of great contentment for having experienced something as beautiful as this, and enriches your life. It has a purity that we don't usually associate with sanctity, something you silently pray will not be sullied by anything and would remain forever, enriching existence.

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