

Article

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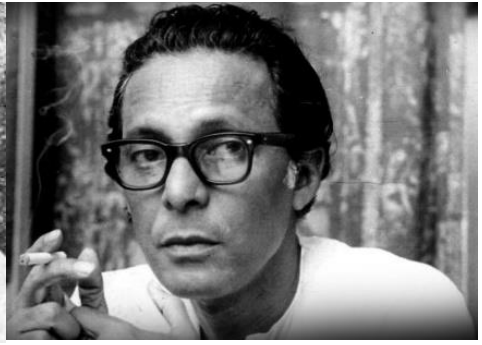
Gandhi & Automation in Mrinal Sen



Winston Churchill



Tarashankar Bandopadhyay



Mrinal Sen

“I can't take anymore. I understand that I am getting old. Day-long chores of running and jumping became unbearable at this age. On top of that, the young boys have come so far in this line...”

Priyanath, lying in bed at night, said these words to his wife Malati and turned to the opposite side.

He didn't want to say more and lost the will to listen to Malati's answer. He is tired and frustrated after being bullied by his boss in the office. He wants a vacation—freedom from all this.

In this special moment of the film ‘Baishey Shravana’, Mrinal Sen shows his audience - the ‘eternal truth of civilisation’.

What is the truth?

Conflict between the old and the new

As mentioned in the original conversation, the film seeks to reveal the ‘Eternal Truth of Civilization’—the conflict between the old and the new. This conflict is

not limited to the characters within the narrative but reflects broader societal changes, making it a timeless and universal theme.

The invasion of Tanks and Soldiers in the serene village portrays the inner truth of eco-political changes in society—the direct impact of the war.

‘Baishey Shravana’—released in 1960—explores the clash between classical elements and contemporary realities.

The movie captures the essence of a changing society and the conflicts that arise when traditional values encounter the challenges of modernity. The classical elements in the film often represent the old ways of life, steeped in tradition, while the contemporary aspects symbolise the dynamic forces of change and progress.

In the period of ‘Ganadebota’

The two stories, Mrinal Sen’s ‘Baishey Shravana’ and Tarashankar Bandhopadhyay’s ‘Ganadebota’, are set in the same period—1942. Hence, the fate of some characters in the two stories is also the same.

Debu Pandit, for instance— a character from the novel ‘*Ganadebota*’— undergoes a shift in attitude influenced by the events of his time. Likewise, Priyanath's attitude transforms in the film ‘*Baishey Shravana*’.

Both families were destroyed by the unbearable pressure created by the historical events described in these two stories.

Hence, ‘*Ganadebota*’ and ‘*Baishey Shravana*’— both stories emphasise the inescapable stress imposed by history that’s passing through a transition— a perplexing and overpowering change.

Conflict between Generations

One of the film's primary themes is the conflict between different generations. This conflict is manifested through the characters of Priyanath and the younger workers who have embraced modern ideologies.

Priyanath's frustration with his work and the changing nature of his profession reflects the generational gap. The younger characters may represent the contemporary, forward-thinking mindset that clashes with the more conservative views of the older generation.

Priyanath's unhappiness with his job and desire for a break highlights the tensions between traditional employment structures and the evolving nature of work in a contemporary setting—1942, in the film.

Modern workplaces' fast-paced and competitive nature challenges the classical notion of job security and stability.

Priyanath's yearning for a vacation and freedom from the burdens imposed on him by his profession can be seen as a metaphor for the broader societal quest for liberation from traditional constraints.

The desire for personal freedom from autonomy is a recurring theme in the clash between classical and contemporary elements.

Pride vs Prudence

Mrinal Sen employs imaginative techniques that bridge the classical and contemporary styles. The film's structure and symbols may represent a departure from conventional filmmaking while still drawing from storytelling traditions. This blending of classical and contemporary artistic elements adds a broader layer to the thematic exploration.

The night before, Priyanath had a conversation with his wife, and the next morning, he found himself in a bicycle race against a young working lad on his commute. Despite his efforts to win, age caught up, forcing him to admit defeat. As he gasped for breath and stopped, Mrinal Sen took his camera away from Priyanath until he became a tiny silhouette on the distant horizon. With this mastery technique, Mrinal Sen, the director, easily conveyed to his audience about Priyanath’s destiny.

With the onset of World War II and the rapid pace of a new civilisation, Priyanath was left behind.

In the next scene, we see a dejected Priyanath sitting at the door of a local train. A little later, the terrible incident happened.

A young hawker brother took his bag on his shoulder and left the train door (at the foot of which Priyanath was sitting). He risked his life by climbing the window ledge to the next compartment. Seeing the hawker, Priyanath was disappointed and sad and tried to save his job one last time.

At this very moment, his sense of self-conceit and the urge to survive are lost for a moment. Priyanath forgets that he is no longer young. He forgets that his youthful agility is no longer in his muscles. So, despite the impossibility, he wanted to follow the young hawker brother to reach the next compartment of the train.

The moment Priyanath moves forward, an oncoming train from the opposite makes a loud noise and stops his course. At that time, Mrinal Sen shows his audience the real fear on Priyanath's face. The fear of death. Along with the loud noise of the huge monster train, a flash of light came from the gap in the train compartment and fell on Priyanath's face. That dance of light and shadow on Priyanath's face symbolises the swing of his perplexing mind. His mind still hesitates to make the move.

Priyanath gathers courage again to take an adventurous risk when the train on the opposite side disappears.

But his foot slips. Priyanath became disabled for life.

Mrinal Sen has compared life here to the ocean. As in the calm waters of the ocean, a wave coming from a distance disturbs everything. In the same way, the self-conceit of many self-reliant people like Priyanath is

swept away by the fast-moving waves of the new society.

Here, the question arises: can it be self-conceit, right?

When a thinking man comes to a new decision, what is the moment when self-conceit is born? And when that self-conceit is crushed in front of society, maybe just then, the thought of suicide comes.

The famous mathematical philosopher Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am".

People think while sitting or lying down. Sitting or lying down seems lazy, but this vast human civilisation was born due to this laziness because only these thoughts and the thoughts of many people have resulted in a plethora of new ideas.

So, we can arrive at this formula - that "from self-conceit is born thoughts of suicide"?

If someone holds onto a lot of ego, they're more likely to become self-destructive.

This is exactly what happened to Priyanath in '*Baishe Shraavan*'. In this film, Mrinal Sen may have shown this philosophy of the spiralling curve from self-ego to self-destruction. Early in the story, when Priyanath was earning well, his mother called 'Ghatak Thakur' the 'Matchmaker' to arrange the marriage.

But the following day, while going to work, Priyanath said to his mother, "*Send the man away first and see.*" After crossing the door, Priyanath says the final dialogue of that scene, "*I can't get food for an elephant.*" (Here, he is talking about the extra expenditure regarding his would-be wife).

This is where Priyanath has published self-conceit. The fall of this self-conceit gradually approaches in this classic cult of Mrinal Sen.

The film explores the clash between classical elements and contemporary forces, portraying the tensions that arise in a transforming society. It also serves as a reflection on the perennial struggle between tradition and progress, capturing the essence of the human experience in the face of evolving cultural landscapes.

Priyanath's Mother, a Gandhian Soul

In the context of the film "Baishey Shravana," Priyanath's mother's character embodies the Gandhian soul archetype. This archetype is characterised by principles and values that align with Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of simple living, non-violence, and a commitment to community and societal well-being.

Simplicity and Humility

The Gandhian soul archetype often embodies simplicity and humility in their way of life. Priyanath's mother, in all likelihood, adheres to a modest lifestyle and demonstrates humility in her actions, mirroring Gandhi's emphasis on living a life free from materialism and ostentation.

Commitment to Truth and Non-Violence

Gandhi's philosophy was rooted in the principles of truth (Satya) and non-violence (Ahimsa). Like Priyanath's mother, the Gandhian soul archetype would likely uphold these principles, advocating for peaceful solutions and truthfulness even in the face of adversity.

Community and Social Service

Gandhi emphasised the importance of serving the community and working towards the betterment of society. The Gandhian soul archetype, embodied by Priyanath's mother, might be engaged in community-oriented activities or demonstrate a commitment to social service.

Resistance to Modernization

Gandhi was known for his scepticism toward rapid modernisation and industrialisation. The Gandhian soul archetype may resist the changes brought about by modernity and hold onto traditional values, reflecting a concern for the potential loss of cultural and moral integrity.

Spiritual Depth

Gandhi's philosophy had a strong spiritual component. The Gandhian soul archetype may exhibit a deep spiritual connection, possibly reflected in the character's values, ethical choices, and approach to life.

While Priyanath, as depicted in the film, may be grappling with the conflicts between old and new, the archetype of his mother as a Gandhian soul serves as a reminder of timeless values that resist the erosion of tradition and embrace a more profound connection with humanity and spirituality. In this sense, the character of Priyanath's mother becomes a symbol of continuity with the Gandhian ideals amid the societal changes portrayed in the film.

In the last portion of the film, a limping and selfish Priyanath once said with agony and frustration, “You died and survived, mother (*Tumi more giye beche gecho Maa*).”

This dialogue directly portrays that Priyanath’s Gandhian soul-type mother is a non-fit for society's ongoing turmoil.

The Series of Dangers

Mrinal Sen has shown in successive stages how the danger approached Priyanath one by one. The level of this danger has increased step by step. Which, in numerical language, can be called a series. Now let's see how the series.

Danger 1 -----Wet matchbox

On the way home from work, the crowd was drenched in the rain and sitting under a tree; when Priyanath took out the matchbox and went to light a beedi, the wet matchbox was damped, and all the sticks came out.

In this incident, a depressed Priyanath had no choice but to throw the matchbox in a helpless face and watch the torrential rain.

With this incident, Mrinal Sen shows the inception of helplessness in Priyanath's life. Matchsticks are the source of fire. Fire is the symbol of human civilisation. The development of human civilisation began with the mastery usage of fire. In this scenario, the source of the fire, the matchbox, is soaked by rainwater and rendered useless.

Mrinal Sen shows the symbol of the 'Wet-Matchbox' to illustrate how even the modest origins of domestic fire refuse to adhere to Priyanath's control. With the help of a small but wonderful symbol, Mrinal Sen

explained that the shadow of impending death is approaching in Priyanath's world.

Danger 2-----Getting old for his job

Danger 3-----Lost wife for a moment amid the storm in the village fair

Danger 4-----Death of his mother

Danger 5-----Accident of his leg

Danger 6-----Sell his Bicycle

Danger 7-----Death of his wife

We clearly understand the intensity of the audiovisual impact of these scenes, which rises gradually one after one like a mathematical series (i.e. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8,). This is pure science transformed into artwork, and Mrinal Sen, the master director, made this very consciously in this film.

Self-Surrender

Here, we are talking about self-surrender. The bicycle is a metaphor for motion. Why the speed? In rural Bengal in 1943, vehicles other than bicycles were bullock carts and palanquins. Those who didn't have those necessarily had to travel on foot. So, the bicycle became a symbol of speed at that time. Priyanath used to ride this bicycle to and from the Railway Station every day. Again, he was forced to sell that bicycle because of hunger.

At the last moment of Baishey Sravana's bicycle-selling scene, Mrinal Sen rang the bell of the bicycle. Hearing that, Priyanath's chest burst out, and he screamed. The sound of the bicycle's bell is the premonition of Priyanath's death bell.

Priyanath understood that it was impossible to keep up with the speed of the

new wave of the coming civilisation. His favourite bicycle said that. The death knell of his existence. This bike is now the pride of another young man. A symbol of the dynamic life of that young man.

Here, the question may arise: Why are people proud? If one becomes more proficient than others in a subject, then is pride born for a moment?

Priyanath could not keep up with the speed. Still, he tried—tried hard. Priyanath tried to go from one compartment to the other

motion, and the plastered leg of Priyanath is the symbol of motionlessness. It's a great master touch of Mrinal Sen, the movie's director.

A Bicycle is a symbol of speed. And a broken leg is a sign of stagnation, so here he has created a combination of stagnation and jungle. Mrinal Sen's worth.

Like lying down. He lies down and chases away the lizard with a stick while the lizard stays at home doing his work.

But Priyanath has no work anymore; he is



of the train by holding the window frame and the door handle. But his hands were not empty because he had a cosmetic bag with him. As a result, one day, he fell from the train and lost his leg. Priyanath's loss of limbs is the result of not being able to keep up with the speed. This result was inevitable.

Since Priyanath is a hawker, his legs are his main capital. Today, he sells cosmetics but could sell flutes after the war! In this shot, Mrinal Sen clearly shows Priyanath's agony. This is a true art form when two opposite things come across each other and are put side by side. Here, the bicycle is the symbol of

lying on the bed and clearly understands that his work is done. He understands that he is blocking everyone who works and trying to deny anything, any establishment, any structure, because he has nothing to accept. Looking for a lizard with a stick, they are looking for a lizard. Lizards live in the house, eat insects, and keep the house free of pollution. This scene depicts the doom of Priyanath as he becomes less effective than a house lizard.

At the end part of the film, he cries,

“If I had a healthy leg, I would have tried to survive. In front of this globalisation, in front of this speed, in front of all these things.”

This cry is like hearing the worries of millions of common people in Bengal, whose future seems as uncertain as Priyanath’s.

Contemporariness of the Content

With the arrival of artificial intelligence in today's era. The same problem occurs in all cases because the speed is slow. The speed at which the war came. The advent of World War II and the rapid military. High-speed fighter jets drop bombs at high intensity. The whole world is obsessed with speed and the new generation of showing power. There is no place for normal life here. Hence, Priyanath’s healthy life gets affected and shattered. Mrinal Sen realised that this motion would not compromise the stability of rural Bengal. Then, this wave of global momentum will swallow the independence of rural Bengal.

Priyanath is the victim of this crime formula.

Here is the formula below:

Profit ∞ **Time** ∞ **Crime**

The East India Company was formed by clinging to this principle. This company policy gradually destroyed this village, and the effect of the same policy was only changed by the Second World War.

A military camp is now sitting in the quiet story village. The softness of the village is being destroyed.

His family perished in his storm. His mother died at home, and his wife killed him

because he could not eat. Priyanath became lame and selfish. He did not feel the need to leave a share for his wife. Slowly, the existing values were swept away by the scourge of globalisation.

Automation & Mrinal Sen

Why is Mrinal Sen's *Baishe Shravana* relevant even in 2024? Artificial intelligence has come, and everywhere, it is the reflection of more speed. It has accelerated the whole system. Now, more speed is the new fashion. Speed in writing, painting, graphics, and song can all be manufactured by AI machine-based tools. Everything gradually becomes machine-dependent.

This is the wave that is taking away everything, the whole world.

The wave of artificial intelligence coming across the world today has no such thing as morality. How things are going now— people are doing hybrid work. Some will be done by humans, some by machines.

This combination of man and machine will create a new form of work, Hybrid work. But Mrinal Sen always wanted to fight for the people who were trying to survive with their human skills.

Hence, he meticulously depicts the village fair in the film *Baishye Sravana*.

All the little things are made by human hands at the village fair. A Crowd of people, they are fighting, gambling, they are doing whatever joy ride they need. Many folk artists are there with their artwork. As if the fair becomes the soul of rural Bengal.

But this beautiful village was swept away by a heavy storm. That storm battered heavily and blew everything away from the

fairground. After the storm, the fairgrounds were empty, and only the rides and the winding were spinning. The wooden horse's neck was hanging, waiting for any child to ride, but it was empty.

Today, due to the influence of artificial intelligence, millions of ordinary people are like Priyanath when their jobs are in danger. The moan of that dear night is like everyone's moan. It is as if this lamentation is spreading in all directions; the values of human civilisation and its infrastructure are being destroyed.

The big waves are washing away the small pond filled with water lilies in rural Bengal. House ducks are still swimming in it, but there are no people left in this village to see them.

Sitting somewhere far away in England, he drew the smoke of a Cuban cigar and created on paper the death warrants of countless innocent people like Priyanath. He only dreamed of happiness living with his mother, daughter-in-law, and acquaintances. But the fat-bellied Churchill smelled the sweet smoke of Havana cigars

The attraction of these two was for the re-establishment of England over the corpses of 50 million Bengalis.

As a result, on the streets of Calcutta -- in groups, the skeleton living body cries -- "Fan Dibi Ma".

Mrinal Sen showed great devotion just before this disaster. How many Bengali people like Priyanath turned into street beggars in the cities?

These people had it all, but in the end, there was nothing. The relentless tide of profit-driven globalisation washed them away. A civilisation rich in values, art, culture, and style lost its soul along the way. What remains are barren lands and shattered buildings—once majestic, now resembling rows of fossils.

From the Jamindari system to worldwide Globalization— 'Baishye Shravana' the film, meticulously portrays every detail of this transformation through its characters. Where the village itself portrays a changing persona.

Snehasish Mistri is a film scholar.