

Article

Shoma A. Chatterji

An Evolving Calcutta in Satyajit Ray's Films



Aparajito (1956)

Introduction

A city does not revolve around just geography but it has other aspects. Its uniqueness is affected by its history, language, society, time and inner conflicts. More importantly, when a creative person finds himself 'displaced' in geographical terms, he does not immigrate as an individual who exists and functions in an emotional, cultural and social vacuum. He brings along with him the baggage of his past into his present, a past that has shaped him

into what he will infuse into his present that will determine, in a manner of speaking, his future and his destiny.

Satyajit Ray was born in Kolkata though his origins lay in then-undivided East Bengal which later became Bangladesh. In a manner of speaking therefore, he was a Calcuttan right through his boyhood and his growing years, as if he felt 'one' with the city as it was a part of his very being, his identity, his persona. Though his earlier films did not

have any links with the city of his birth and his upbringing, their locale, setting, period and ambience demanded locating them away from Kolkata.

The first two films based on Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay's trilogy namely *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito* demanded locations away from Kolkata while *Apur Sansar* reflects a Kolkata completely different from how most of us have seen appear in many other Bengali films, be it Ray or Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Tapan Sinha and others. *Jalsaghar* again, based on a Tarasankar Bandopadhyay story, needed him to move away from Kolkata and the same applies to *Kanchenjunga* where the setting is rooted in the hills and the film traces how the geographical and scenic ambience including the hilly terrains affect the inner psyches of the characters and their relationships. *Devi*, *Teen Kanya*, *Abhijan*, *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*, *Shatranj Ke Khilari*, *Aranyer Din Ratri*, *Ganashatru*, *Ghare Baire*, *Sadgati*, *Sonar Kella*, *Shakha Proshakha*, *Agantuk*, are far removed from his beloved city. The focus of this paper stresses on glimpses of Calcutta **away** from Ray's self-proclaimed trilogy – *Pratidwandi*, *Seemabaddha* and *Jana Aranya*, adapted from rich works of Bengali literature.

Calcutta – The City

Apur Sansar

In common understanding, the word 'city' is also referred to as dwelling or a place where someone has lived for a long time and has imbibed the social and cultural values of that region including creating and functioning within a social network of the neighbourhood.

Among some creative thinkers, writers, artists and filmmakers, dwelling as a sense of place refers to the idea of ownership. But one look at Ray's films which has Calcutta in it, never carries the idea of ownership at all.



Apur Sansar details the grown-up of Apu living in a low-middle-class neighbourhood in Calcutta, where a grown Apu gets acquainted to a city which has almost no place for him in the employment scenario. He spends his hours reading his books, playing on his flute, living in a very low-standard shanty with a window with torn curtains. He lands a mundane, low-paid job and begins to write his autobiography. Into this very dark scenario located in some shanty near the railway tracks in Kolkata, Apu brings his lovely wife Aparna, who, shocked to find the kind of dwelling she has stepped into, hides her tears behind the torn curtain on the only window. But soon we find fresh new curtains hanging on the same window as she has turned the shanty into a home. We see a little of Kolkata when a strap-hanging Apu reads a letter from his wife away for her delivery, or, working at his table in a mundane

office, throwing up bits and pieces of a city we have read about but not experienced in real life.

We are not shown the city through its crowds and quarreling masses. But Apu's and Aparna's tiny abode creates a completely new world of a Calcutta we never knew. The subtle scene of intimacy between the husband and the wife early in the morning where Apu toys with a hairpin that fell off Aparna's hair, while she is in the kitchenette suggests the sweet exchanges they are now sharing as a newly-wed, much-in-love couple. Apu opens the packet of cigarettes but does not pull out any as he is stopped by a warning in the inner flap written in Aparna's childish scrawl. "You promised just one cigarette after meals." One location shot shows Apu and Aparna riding in a horse-drawn carriage returning from a film show. We see the very-much-in-love couple exchanging a few lines underscoring the love they shared also telling us that Aparna will soon leave for her delivery to her parental home. The brief glimpses of Kolkata we get reflected not just through the backdrop but also through the ambience.

Parash Pathar (The Philosopher's Stone, 1958)

Another interesting facet of the Calcutta trilogy is that they were *not* made in sequential order. *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito* were punctuated by a sharply satirical comedy called *Parash Pathar* (The Philosopher's Stone) in 1957 and a compassionate study of obsessive decadence, *Jalsaghar*, (The Music Room) in 1958. The first is a celebration of a poor clerk's eternal dream of winning the lottery ticket and the limits drawn to his riches by his own

innocence and lack of imagination. It has great moments of gentle humour. Ray tried his hand at something very different from his first film, working with well-known actors within studio walls. Both films are remarkable for the performances of their lifetime given by Tulsi Chakravorty, a stock comedian of Bengali films and Chhabi Biswas, its impressive "big shot" character.



Parash Pathar has two outstanding back stories which should never be forgotten. One, that of the writer on whose story the film is based. Two, the main actor Tulsi Chakravarty, who portrays the historic role of Paresh Dutta, the protagonist. The story was written by Rajsekhar Bose, who became very famous as Parasuram, his pen name. He was one of the most venerated figures of twentieth century Bengal. He is still known as one of the greatest satirists in Bengali during the post-Tagore era. Ray made significant changes to the original story to fit into the socio-political and economic milieu of Calcutta in the late 1950s. Paresh Chandra Dutta, 53, a bank clerk, finds his services abruptly terminated.

In the original story, Paresh Babu is a lawyer. Ray depicted him as a clerk to essay the real backdrop of the escalating conflict between bank workers and their employers for better pay-scales. The graphic design of

the film, conceived and executed by Ray himself, consists of two diamonds, one white and one black. This throws up the contrast between two diametrically opposite values--evil and good. Basic ethical and universal values are symbolised by the magic stone in the film.



The script traces Paresh Babu's relationship with this stone that changes the socio-economic map of his life, his network and raises him to a social platform he could never have imagined in normal course. Narrated in the style of a docu-fiction, with a voice-over stepping in to narrate some changes, *Parash Pathar* was read by most of the audience as a satirical comedy. It is also a socio-political document based on real-life incidents of significant importance. With sudden affluence, Paresh Babu has dreams of making it big in the political scenario, to be included in the inner circle of 'high society' people with their drinking parties. But he finds that he does not quite fit into this changed scenario. The affluent, Westernised Bengali snobs refuse to accept him in their fold and snub him openly, taking potshots at his humble roots and lifestyle.

One day, as Paresh Chandra Dutta passes Raj Bhavan, thunder showers began unexpectedly and his torn umbrella cannot

protect him. So he steps into Curzon Park and takes shelter under a column constructed by the British. He suddenly sees a stone rolling towards him in the rain water. He is yawning and very drowsy, and whether he actually sees the stone is not clear at this juncture. The next shot shows a rain-drenched Paresh Babu walk through a narrow alley towards his home.

Soon, the Duttas are among the richest citizens of Calcutta. From a modest dwelling, the childless couple move to an opulent mansion. Paresh now has a personal secretary Priyatosh Henry Biswas, a young man preoccupied with his girlfriend. The source of Paresh's sudden wealth is a mystery and Paresh is very careful to keep it a secret. He is now much sought after in social and political gatherings.

There is one comical scene where Paresh Babu is looking at a statue of some prominent figure in a city square. As the camera zooms into the statue, we find that the head is that of Paresh Babu himself, smiling and nodding his head as if in acknowledgement of an invisible crowd looking up at him! This is one of the most ironic scenes in the film.

His secretary's discovery has a larger impact on the price of gold in the market. The price of gold begins to fall drastically, creating panic in the bullion market. People begin to sell off their gold in a tearing hurry. One scene shows a very poor woman digging the gold she has hidden in a hole in the ground only to find that it has turned into stone. No one knows what hit them.

Parash Pathar presents several facets of Kolkata, the city as it prevailed in the 1950s. One is the rain-washed city where people are running helter-skelter to avoid

being lashed by the surprising showers. Another is the shocked reaction of the common man when the price of gold begins to fall suddenly and one finds an old woman trying to retrieve her gold from a hole in the ground. The third is when we are witness to the changing economic upliftment of Paresh Babu as we are witness to a happy Paresh Babu travelling in his own car and looking through the window at the city passing by with new eyes he did not possess before. The fourth is at the cocktail party where Paresh Babu gets drunk to his teeth but shockingly discovers that the so-called elite crowd refuses to accept him in their fold as one of them.



Mahanagar (The Big City, 1963)

Mahanagar is a strong, positive and realistic statement on the socio-economic changes in urban Bengali life, more through the metamorphosis of Arati than through other characters in the film. Arati stands as both the sign and the signified of this slow but steady socio-economic evolution.

The credits come up against shots of a cable-line atop a Calcutta tramcar. The camera then zeroes into the tram to focus on Subrata Majumdar. Two points are established at once. One, the story is set in Calcutta; two, it is centered on a man who commutes to and from work by tram. When he gets off the tram, he steps into the street,

where neighbourhood boys are playing cricket. Subrata works as a clerk in a bank. He is the only breadwinner in a family composed of old parents, a school-going sister, wife Arati and a little son.

The long queues outside the bank when it declared it had failed throws up a different glimpse of Calcutta with crowds screaming at the top of their voice and Subrata suddenly finds himself jobless. It is not an easy life. *Mahanagar* defines a marked departure in Ray's oeuvre till then. Before *Mahanagar*, his films were confined either to literary classics, (*The Apu Trilogy*, *Devi*, *Parash Pathar*, *Jalsaghar*, *Teen Kanya*) or, to a film based on his own script (*Kanchenjunga*.) Though *Kanchenjunga* dealt with the urban Bengali of Calcutta, the RoyChoudhurys came of affluent and aristocratic stock.

With *Mahanagar*, Ray took his first step inside a low middle-class Bengali family home in a narrow lane in the city of Calcutta. When pressures on the single earning member begin to mount, Arati is persuaded to take up a job. Arati and her sister-in-law pore over the classified columns of the newspaper with great enthusiasm. Arati lands a job as salesgirl for a knitting machine company. The lives of the Majumdars change forever.

The interiors of the Majumdar household reflect Ray's genius for detail – detail that reaches beyond the borders of physical reality to underscore the emotional underpinnings in the relationships between and among the different members of the family. The clutter within the small flat, the sister-in-law drawing the tape that hangs the mosquito net, a slightly disturbed Subrata smoking inside the mosquito net, the close-up of Arati and her sister-in-law joking over the

classifieds in the newspaper, the sister-in-law proudly scribbling *Dada-Boudi* in chalk on the kitchen floor as they lunch before stepping out, the sister-in-law shyly showing off the new *sari* Arati has bought for her with her salary, are a few examples. Ray's visual conception is so economical that a mirror and lipstick become objects that acquire emotional, cultural and political resonance. Through his use of close-ups, he turns claustrophobia into intimacy as the camera captures, at close range, the subtle interactions of this typical Bengali family. Thus, like every great artist, he takes constraints and, working within them, turns them to his advantage.



A sociological reading emerges from the Calcutta backdrop the narrative is set against. The tram car, the graffiti on the walls, the angry depositors at the bank, the interiors of the Majumdar's home, Vicky Redwood's home with its typically cluttered Anglo-Indian décor, Arati's self-complacent and arrogant boss, the father-in-law's snobbish pupil and his patronizing wife, the homes Arati visits to market her knitting machine, the barking Alsatian outside one of these homes, the gay camaraderie among the saleswomen – all point out to a richly textured collage of images in the backdrop, subtly reinforcing the message of a sociological transformation of the city and of its people

and offers a glimpse into the surely changed personality of Arati.

Subrata changes too, as he discovers the happy expression on his wife's face when she comes home from work while he is forced to stay back at home. From being a happily married man openly in love with his pretty wife, Subrata turns into an unhappy man who stoops to eavesdropping into a conversation between his wife and the husband of a friend of hers, in a roadside tea-shop. Instead of approaching her up front, he hides behind the newspaper he is reading, peeping out to see them walk out, talking cheerfully. Arati too, weaves a fairy tale to her friend's husband hinting that her husband is in "business" keeping the details vague.

The closing shot smoothens out the fracture in the marriage brought in by Arati's employed status vis-à-vis Subrata's unemployed one. After giving her boss a piece of her mind, Arati walks out of the building to join Subrata. They are both jobless at that point of time. As they walk and merge with the teeming crowds in the distance, the camera moves back to include a street light above. One of the two lights is not functioning suggesting the half-done maintenance of the city lights even way back in the 1960s. The film closes on this note of courage – they are sure their Calcutta will soon find them jobs, and hope – as long as they are together, fear and uncertainty are superfluous emotions.

The Calcutta Trilogy

Pratidwandi, *Seemabaddha* and *Jana Aranya*

Pratidwandi (The Adversary) is said to be the first among the three city-centred films

Satyajit Ray decided to make. This celluloid journey that began in 1970 was followed by *Seemabaddha* (1971) and ended with *Jana Aranya* (1973) to peel off, layer by layer, like the skins of an onion, the psyche of youth in an ever-changing Kolkata.

The feature that makes the trilogy memorable is the common thread of turbulence in the city, both in physical, social and environmental terms that critiques the corrupt ethos of corporate firms, and more importantly, the inner struggle it creates within the psyche of the protagonist on the one hand and the conflicts—sometimes real, sometimes imaginary—these create to push the story forward.

All three films were celluloid adaptations of novels authored by two famous Bengali authors: Sunil Gangopadhyay wrote *Pratidwandi* while *Seemabaddha* and *Jana Aranya* were authored by Sankar. But Ray improvised on the original stories according to his own contemporary demands as a scriptwriter and director.



The protagonist in *Pratidwandi*, Siddhartha Choudhury, is forced to give up his medical education when his father dies suddenly and he has to join the swarms of educated, middle-class young men looking for employment. Failing to get a job not

despite being competent and educated, he takes to walking on the city's streets or wandering across to the digs of his two classmates from medical school and ruminating on how he can stop his younger brother from engaging in dangerous Naxalite activism or his sister from engaging in an affair with her boss.

This was a turbulent time in many parts of India in West Bengal in general and Calcutta in particular. Frustration arising from poverty, unemployment and social inequalities led young men like Siddhartha's brother to involve themselves in active and violent resistance, exploding at times into violence against all forms of authority. On one hand, the state of West Bengal and its capital city was the epicentre of much of this 'revolutionary thinking'. On the other hand, the public and private sector were building up a culture of bribes and corruption, with the older generation teaching the youngsters how to 'get ahead in life'.

With issues like rising unemployment, the rise of the underground Naxalite movement appropriated a slew of brilliant students of Calcutta and Jadavpur Universities within its fold, committed to uproot capitalist and/or fascist rule through armed revolution. Alongside, there was an influx of hippies from the West, white-skinned youngsters from the US and European places living a Bohemian life, doing drugs, dancing away on the streets of Calcutta, enamoured with the poverty, the dirt and the debris. In one indoor scene, we find one hippie trying to hear the sound of a *khanjani* (a percussion instrument used mainly in religious songs) through a

stethoscope! It is a fleeting scene but carries its own comment.

Siddhartha has no idea about what direction his life is taking which, perhaps, is a reflection of Calcutta itself, where hippies wander about aimlessly beside an unemployed young man, a well-spoken nurse moonlights as a prostitute, a medical student from an affluent family has no issues pocketing the money someone has collected for charity. We get a glimpse of a time when candidates for an interview have no proper place to sit, though they must wait the whole day for a meeting that lasts for hardly five minutes. The walls of the hall where the candidates are waiting are filled with political graffiti and we learn that the office is shifting to another place.

The only evidence of Siddhartha's rootedness lies in his search for that unique birdcall he heard as a child. He goes in search of it at New Market but he does not know the name of the bird so the search is in vain. That birdcall keeps haunting him at odd times and we feel that this is his escape back to his boyhood days, a sweet memory trapped in his consciousness forever. This strongly suggests that this disturbed Calcutta has lost its touch with Nature and human woes but they can be heard in the small town he moves to when he gets an ordinary job.

The camera wanders across the city, sometimes casually, sometimes idly, sometimes rapidly following Siddhartha's tracks, scanning the public vehicles we see Siddhartha jostling in with the huge crowd, hanging from the slings, squeezing himself in and out of the overcrowded entrance without making even an acquaintance.

The sights and sounds the camera and the sound design capture are often from Siddhartha's point of view while in other scenes, they make Siddhartha the subject of their focus and the audience enjoys both points of view, giving it a chance to draw its own conclusions when Siddhartha leaves Calcutta to go to a district to work as a medical salesman.



Towards the end, at a very crowded interview waiting room with just one functioning fan and seventy-five candidates waiting in the sweltering heat, we find Siddhartha angry for the first time in the entire film. He dashes into the room where the interviewers are seated and tried to explain the need of proper seating for the candidates waiting outside. He is asked to wait. When he comes out and joins the crowd, he suddenly visualises the waiting candidates reduced to skeletons of themselves, with a dry, authoritative voice-over narrating in English the significance of parts of a human skeleton. He emerges from his trance to find the candidates back in their human form. This is the only time we find Siddhartha, normally a very quiet young man, bursting out in anger. His anger is directed not so much on those suited-booted corporate honchos but at the

entire socio-economic system that has effectively reduced one huge mass of humanity to waiting skeletons of themselves and another smaller group fighting to keep them trapped in the skeleton image.



Seemabaddha

In *Seemabaddha*, Ray tries to stick to the inner world of a corporate firm and how it compromises on moral values for the interest of a single individual's ambitious aspirations to climb up the ladder of professional success. The film, adapted from a novel by Shankar, comes across as a first person narration from the voice and perspective of the protagonist Shyamalendu Chatterji, the sales manager of a global corporate firm in Kolkata. Ray takes cinematic license for his film like he often did in the past. The film throws up a sharp, satirical, and insightful look at the corporate culture, upward mobility, and ethical degradation of the elite in 1970s Calcutta.

The Calcutta we see in the film, spanning the decade 1960-1970 is far removed from the masses, or, the low middle class ambience in his earlier films. The camera, the script and the story move in and out of a global conglomerate which is into the manufacture, selling and export of electric light fittings and ceiling fans. We are given glimpses into the factory with 11,000 workers, the sound of the machines assuming a deafening ambience through panning shots

with Shyamalendu's sophisticated voice explaining the visuals.

There is a little of flashback into his past in Patna where he topped the university in his post-graduation and after a short stint at teaching, he lands this job and migrates to Kolkata. He rises up the corporate ladder and is married off before joining to a pretty lady organized by his parents. They have a small boy away at a boarding school who is seen only through framed photos and a letter to his father.

The scenario changes a bit when his wife's sister Tutul arrives for a vacation to spend with her older sister Shyamalendu also takes her to the race course and discomfited at first, she is mesmerized by the races. We get to watch a completely different face of Kolkata – a Westernised crowd of British 'leftovers', Bengali snobs dressed immaculately in Western attire. Hailing from a small-town, middle-class upbringing, Tutul is pleasantly surprised when her older sister takes her around their company flat, spacious, decorated and lavish all through the good offices of her husband's post. But Tutul is shocked when she discovers that Shyamalendu's parents live in an apartment away from these lavish quarters due to "company protocol" as explained by his wife.

Tutul is both witness and metaphor who depicts Shyamalendu's moral collapse when he, along with his colleagues, "manufacture" a strike followed by a lock-out to (a) avoid legal complications arising out of a defect in an export consignment in ceiling fans to an Iraqi client and (b) to ease out his way to the top post in his organization through this well-planned-out and diabolic 'face-

saving' strategy. He wins the coveted post of "director" but at what cost?

The film is enriched not just by the cinematic narration of the story and the marvelous performance of Barun Chanda in his debut as Shyamalendu but also through the two scenes depicting the contrast in Shyamalendu's inner feelings twice. In the first of the two scenes showing Shyamalendu climbing up in the lift the beginning on his way home.

There is a slightly shocking scene at a party thrown by Shyamalendu and his wife at their home. Shyamalendu's parents suddenly arrive unannounced. The younger couple is more embarrassed than the elderly parents. They are shuffled into a side room away from the party crowds as it appears to be a drinking party. This is a critique against a sophisticated, Westernised Calcutta group who find elderly parents minus the modernization an embarrassment.

The play of the camera with light and shade as he crosses each landing, we find an optimistic Shyamalendu full of hope. Towards the end, when he gets promoted as director, he comes home to find the lift out of order and needs to take the stairs to his high-rise apartment. He is very happy as he begins to climb but his feet turn weary and tired towards the end. Is he having second thoughts about his 'success' considering the price that had to be paid by others such as the shot security guard following the strike and the lockout? We do not know and must guess at our own answers to his mental debate.

Tutul is not happy when informed of Shyamalendu's high designation and while the ceiling fan in the drawing room is on, she quietly removes the wrist watch Shyamalendu

had given her, leaves it on the centre table and exits from the frame.



Jana Aranya

Ray's *Jana Aranya* (*The Middleman*, 1975) is a scathing comment on erosion of values arising partly out of a decadent education system and partly out of unemployment and associated corrupt practices encroaching into the lives of the urban middle-class.

As the hero Somnath, along with his friend, goes door to door to search for a woman for the 'reward' of a prized contract, Ray, with his subtle but sharp-edged black humour, cracks the facade of the *bhadralok* Bengali society in Calcutta to expose the incredibly dirty goings-on in girl-running. A tutorial class doubles up as a rendezvous for call-girls, the watchman functioning as a procurer in the evenings. A mother of two young girls who has pushed them into sex work, a husband who drinks and lives off his wife's earnings are actually pimps and middlemen pretending to be 'respectable' and 'honest.'

Ray also offers a critique on the system of disguised prostitution in Calcutta. The first house Somnath and his friend visit to arrange for a 'girl' to service the former's client is Mrs Ganguly. It is a typical middle-class home where we are introduced to this very attractive woman. The home reflects the middle-class status with a small piano in the sitting room

and Sukumar referring to how helpful her new telephone connection has been for her business and for those who seek her services. There is a power cut and we find a candle lighting the room and Sukumar reclining on the sofa, airing himself with a hand-fan. But as she is readying herself, her husband, reportedly a clerk in the municipality, enters, completely drunk and stops her from stepping out for 'business.' He drinks off her earnings, doubles up as her pimp and decides on which assignment she will accept and which she will not. He puts his foot down, not allowing her to accompany the two men 'as she has already been out the previous two days and has a handsome appointment the following night.' He goes on to ask, 'What do we need so much money for?' The two men beat a hasty retreat.

They next visit another home, more lavishly decorated, in apparently a better locality than the former one. The lady has an Alsatian, which was a status symbol during the period in which the film was set. She has two daughters and she has pushed both into prostitution. She seems to have redecorated the well-appointed apartment with 'two rooms, each, with an attached bath' for visiting clients. She laments that a customer has taken one of her daughters to Singapore/Hong Kong and the girl jumped at it but the girl's services are being sold there. However, when Sukumar informs her that the other daughter who is busy servicing a client in her room needs to go with them to a posh hotel, she vehemently refuses to let the girl step out to visit a client.

The third place they visit is a seedy looking coaching class where the watchman is reading from the *Ramayan*. Kawna, now named Juthika, is the sister of Somnath's

friend. She symbolises a world of crumbling morals among the lower middle class on the one hand and the upper class on the other in different ways. She operates as a 'call girl' through telephonic appointments done by the watchman of a coaching class. She is a freelancer and visits her clients instead of it being the other way round. The classrooms of the coaching class is used as a waiting room for girls waiting for a call. The watchman tells Sukumar that Juthika, the girl he has fixed for them, is only three months into the business but her rates have jumped from Rs.50 to Rs,250 within that short time. But she is 'invisible' and belongs clearly to the mainstream; it is clear that she comes from a lower middle class Bengali family, as does her brother, a graduate, reduced to driving a taxi.

Kawna accepts her vocation in a non-sense, matter-of-fact way, refusing to recognise the hero in the changed circumstances of their encounter. She denies that she is Kawna, Somnath's friend's sister and tells him repeatedly that her name is Juthika. She does not stoop to narrate a sob story to evoke his sympathy. She insists that he should not turn the taxi back to where they came from because she says that it will be a loss for both of them. Kawna's prostitution in this film is a bribe in human form for a big contract to be gained by Somnath, the hero, while the 'taker' of the bribe is personified in the diabetic Goenka who marries the polio-afflicted daughter of a rich businessman, showing the other side of the ugly face of corruption. The film denotes a masquerading social and moral universe. When Somnath hands her the payment, she points out that he

is overpaying her but after he insists, she pockets it quietly.

Jana Aranya spells out that over time, the sex worker works as much in the mainstream as she does in her professional ghetto of Sonarpur and HarkataGoli. So, for people living within the mainstream, it is difficult to identify a sex worker simply on the basis of where she lives. The whole city, in other words, is a 'red light area' and is no longer constrained within the limits of a marked ghetto.

All three films denote, in subtle ways, different periods in the social history of West Bengal in general and Calcutta in particular, the mainstreaming of prostitution indicating that sex work is almost as normal as being a nurse, or the wife of a pimping alcoholic or the daughters of an exploitative and greedy mother. The sex worker is neither portrayed as a victim of circumstances, nor an agency between two or more cogs in the wheel of Life or even a worker belonging to an illegal, anti-social trade but as an inevitable and integral part of the ever-changing mainstream.

The 'satellite' workers who earn along the chain of sex work in red light areas are rendered redundant in mainstream prostitution. This covers the tea boys, the small paan-bidi-cigarette shops and flower stalls, the muscle men, the agents, the touts and the madams. This cuts down on the costs of sex work because a family member or in some cases, an entire family does the 'satellite' work!

The climax of *Jana Aranya* suggests that the hero has reduced himself to prostituting his conscience to eke out a livelihood through meagre contracts gained at the cost of procuring a woman for the contractor. He therefore, is as much, if not more, a prostitute than the prostitute he procures for his prospective clients. For example, if Kawna had not been Somnath's friend's sister, would he have suggested turning the taxi around and going back without going to the hotel for the fixed appointment? Is he sorry for the girl? Or, is he sorry for himself? The deal is done and Somnath bags the very handsome contract. But when he returns home, his body language, caught in semi-shadow as he leans against the wall near the entrance, spells out that he is not only a man defeated in the game called life but is also now, a middleman.

Summing Up

The amazing feature of the city of Calcutta as presented and projected in the cinema of Satyajit Ray is that each film reflects a clear picture of Calcutta, the city during the time each film is located. This shows the evolution of the city of Calcutta as well, from the time of *Apur Sansar* to *Jana Aranya*, from the young Apu living in a shanty-like room in old Calcutta through *Mahanagar*, *Pratidwandi*, *Seemabaddha* and *Jana Aranya*. All these refer to times when "Calcutta' had not lost its original nomenclature to Kolkata.

Dr Shoma A. Chatterji is a veteran Film Critic and Author.