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THE STORY OF SATYAJIT RAY'S FILMS: A STUDY

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Abstract :

*Anak tarar magha, tumi ja amar Dhrubatara..
 Amar sadhar bagantatha, tumi ja Golapchara..*

This Bengali song is a tribute to Satyajit Ray in the world of Indian cinema. Satyajit Ray was—and still is—the foremost in all fields: screenplay, dialogue, music direction, cinematography, and film directing. There is no film of his that has not captured the hearts of the audience. *Dui Adhyay*, *Nayak*, *Aparajito*, *Charulata*, *Devi*, *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, and *Pather Panchali* are films that remain evergreen, capturing the hearts of audiences of all ages, just like Charlie Chaplin. One point needs special mention: Satyajit Ray was appreciated by a specific category of audience. This discussion mainly revolves around the stories of Satyajit Ray's films. He established Bengali cinema within India, especially for Hindi cinema enthusiasts, through pure Bangla. Each of his films carried a story or narrative. These narratives spread through rural characters and rustic environments. There is a sense of seniority and maturity in each of his works—without weakness or room for criticism.

Key Words: Story, Physical labor, Handful, Script, Reality, Failure, Third Film, Feudal, Enthusiasm, Emerging, Ingredients, Dearth, Momentum.

Introduction:

In India, in the eighteenth century, literature, art, and culture flourished—and Bengal was at the center of this cultural renaissance. The city of Kolkata emerged as a significant cultural hub. The saying "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow" proves true in many instances. I am unsure how relevant this is in the current social system, but the stream of ancient tradition still flows here in various forms.

In Indian cinema, Bengali cinema holds a strong place, second only to Hindi cinema. Bengali language and cinema are now closely intertwined. In Bengali art and culture, the first name that comes to mind is Rabindranath Tagore. Similarly, the screenplays written and directed by Satyajit Ray are globally recognized. In the realm of screenplay, dialogue, and direction, Ray stands first, second, and third in India. No one else in India's vast film industry has earned such fame. His films have created a distinctive artistic flavor for Indian film audiences—one whose influence has spread far and wide.

Statement of the Problem:

Satyajit Ray is a star in the world of cinema. His filmmaking style is exceptional. Although Ray's films were popular among a specific audience, they were not as attractive to the general public. His Bengali films were particularly loved by some viewers across all age groups. However, the support extended by the government to Hindi films was not observed in the case of Bengali films. Bengali films were not broadcast as extensively in the media as Hindi films were. As a result, Bengali films—unlike Hindi films—could not reach the wider Indian audience. Furthermore, the government's indifference not only impacted Satyajit Ray's Bengali films but the entire Bengali film industry.

Objective:

No work is without a purpose, and similarly, the stories of Satyajit Ray's films carry a noble intention. Many research papers have been written on Ray's films. However, this is my first attempt at researching the stories within those films. While



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studying in junior school, I heard many stories about Ray from my parents and grandparents. But I never had the chance to watch his films at that time.

My wish was fulfilled after watching Teen Kanya following my secondary school exams. Later, I watched Shatranj Ke Khiladi and Aparajito. These films were stories that amazed me. That amazement led to this research. In those films, I discovered many kinds of stories—stories told through dialogue, moving visuals, and songs. There are many more stories within his films, and I tried to experience them all. Numerous emotions are expressed in the films of Oscar-winning Satyajit Ray. I have attempted to highlight the narratives of his films in this research article.

Research Methodology:

Research articles are typically written using three approaches:

1. Reading books from libraries and extracting information.
2. Reviewing ancient documents.
3. Collecting data through field research.

Analysis:

Choosing a story for a film is a complex task. The immense mental and physical effort behind transforming a story into a screenplay—and then taking six months or more to direct the film—is only worthwhile if the story resonates deeply with the director. Otherwise, it becomes a dull routine with no joy or fulfillment, and uninspired, mediocre films are the result.

Abroad, except for a handful of directors like Bergman, Fellini, Kurosawa, Kubrick, or Coppola, most do not select their own stories. Producers or studios usually handle story selection, screenplay development, and director assignment. Even legends like John Ford, Hitchcock, or William Wyler followed this model.

In contrast, in India—especially in West Bengal—many directors choose their own stories and now often write their own screenplays. I have been selecting and writing my own scripts from the very beginning.

I can speak about Pather Panchali—the story captivated me deeply. Despite numerous setbacks and long breaks, my enthusiasm never waned. The key reason was the challenge of portraying the astonishing rural realism described by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay. The poetic beauty and heart-touching events in Apu's story made me feel it was ideal film material. Being immersed in Harihar's family's ups and downs for over two years, I found it hard to mentally separate from Apu, even after the film ended.

Naturally, for my second film, I chose the next part of Apu's story. One of the biggest attractions in Aparajito for me was the Kashi sequence. I was especially focused on the visual appeal of the film. With its ancient ghats and temples, Varanasi has a character that fascinates any cinematographer. The return to Bengal villages and the presence of Kolkata added depth. Overall, the second story's mood differed vastly from Pather Panchali.

The commercial failure of Aparajito was unsurprising. The story's tone conflicted with the audience's expectations. While Apu's detachment from his mother in the allure of the city felt natural to me, it clashed with the idealized mother-son bond audiences were used to.

With Aparajito not doing well, choosing the third film's story became very difficult. In the end, considering Bengali audiences' love for music, I decided to adapt Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay's short story Jalsaghar. The contrast between a declining feudal lord like Biswambhar Roy and the rural Bengal setting offered a refreshing new mood and enthusiasm. I always tried to maintain this kind of contrast.



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Jalsaghar gave me my first opportunity to work with a seasoned professional actor. Biswambhar Roy is not a stereotypical zamindar. Though his coffers are empty, the pride of nobility lives on—another intriguing contrast that enriched the film.

From the start, I avoided formulaic stories where characters exist only to advance the plot. My belief is: character first, plot second. Characters should shape the story structure. That was my aim in Kanchenjunga, my first original screenplay. It doesn't feel like a story being told but rather a discovery of multiple characters whose interactions gradually form a narrative.

Of all my films (excluding children's films), only Devi and Abhijan are plot-driven. But in Devi, the close integration between characters and plot is remarkable. The portrayal of a superstitious 19th-century mind clashing with Western rationality gives the film profound pictorial and thematic depth.

Although Abhijan is also plot-based, it involves diverse characters and tightly focused events. While its elements are popular, it avoids cheap glamor. Few novels in Bengali offer such vivid cinematic potential.

Visual backdrops—like Kashi in Aparajito, Darjeeling in Kanchenjunga, and Palamau in Abhijan—acted as characters themselves. I embraced period settings enthusiastically in Devi, Charulata, and Shatranj Ke Khiladi. Capturing the essence of a bygone era required extensive preparation, especially in choosing appropriate details that didn't feel forced.

For instance, in Charulata, 19th-century Kolkata comes alive through Charu's curiosity and her view of the world outside her window. These details are revealed organically through character and action.

Once the screenplay begins, the original story is set aside. Only the essential inspirations remain. The rest is adjusted as needed. While fidelity to the source may be partial, the psychological and thematic essence is preserved—as seen in Seemabaddha, Pratidwandi, Aranyer Din Ratri, and others.

Story pacing is also critical. In Bollywood-style films, action scenes generate nervous tension. But in films like Charulata, where most of the story happens indoors, momentum arises from character development and emotional shifts. Relationships evolve—Charu-Bhupati, Amal-Bhupati, Charu-Amal—and this inner motion sustains audience interest.

Another important element is story length. Stories that are too sprawling with too many events and characters don't suit a two-hour film. For Pather Panchali and Aparajito, I didn't use the entire novels, only what was relevant. Some characters like Leela in Aparajito or Aturi Daini in Pather Panchali were left out, yet the audience rarely felt anything missing.

After the Apu Trilogy, I avoided stories with long time spans and many characters. I believe that concise stories with fewer characters are best suited for cinema. Unfortunately, good short stories that meet all the cinematic criteria are rare in Bengali literature. Unlike in the West, where many novels and stories naturally lend themselves to film, in Bengali literature, adaptation is often a challenge due to structural issues.

Conclusion:

Satyajit Ray is a shining star in world cinema. His films and their stories are particularly noteworthy. While writing this article on Satyajit Ray and the narratives of his films, many important issues came to light that haven't been thoroughly discussed before.

This article has attempted to explore the visual storytelling, dialogue, character development, and musical direction in Ray's films. However, due to space limitations, many crucial topics could not be addressed. These are left for future researchers to explore further.

Let me know if you'd like this as a formatted document (PDF, Word, etc.) or want a shorter, more academic version.



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